SUBMERGED IDENTITIES: GERMAN CANADIAN IMMIGRANTS (1945-1960)

by

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This project explores the history of Germans in Canada: their experiences prior to, during, and after the Second World War. The primary focus of this project will be on the construction of the German Canadian identity in the years after the Second World War. I contend that German Canadian immigrants from the post-war years experienced discrimination and negativity which forced them to submerge their true identities. This submersion has left us with a weak German Canadian culture today—it is one based on the outdated notion of “oom-pa-pa” bands and Schuhplattler dancers. As this culture—and the people who perpetuate it—die off, we are left with a German Canadian culture and identity that is more and more Canadian. This project is primarily composed of a literature review and will use Erving Goffman’s theory on stigma and spoiled identities.
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Waves of immigrants from various parts of the world have changed the face of Canada for centuries. Inevitably, large groups of newcomers are initially seen as “foreign” or “alien,” but with the passing of generations they eventually become accepted as “true Canadians.” Some newcomers seek to assimilate as quickly as possibly while others desperately try to maintain their language, culture, and heritage. Attempts to assimilate (or to avoid assimilation) often affect the way immigrants view themselves and identify with others. In this respect, the experiences of German immigrants who arrived in Canada following the Second World War are unique, due to their designation as “enemy aliens.”

The enormous influx of German immigrants during the 1950s was comprised of more than a half million persons seeking and receiving entrance into Canada (Panthel, 1991).

During the Second World War—and immediately afterwards—

some fourteen million Germans had fled or been evicted from their homes in East and Central Europe and later the Soviet Zone of Occupation. But refugees were not the only ones who had experienced displacement: about half of the German population ... had been on the move during or after the war. Beginning in 1943, some ten million women, children, and older men—mainly people whose homes had been destroyed by bombs—were evacuated from industrial centres to rural areas in the East; from there they had to escape or were deported after 1944 (Freund, 1998, p. 190).

It is not surprising that the experiences of being uprooted and displaced played a major role in the decision to immigrate. One German immigrant explains her decision:

I had no attachments to Germany anymore, because my so called Heimat [homeland] wasn’t there anymore. The place where I was born ... was destroyed, I had no parents, my brother had died during the war, there was nobody close I would leave which would make it [leaving] difficult for me (Freund, 1998, p. 191).

Many chose to emigrate to start “a new life” away from their destroyed, post-war homeland
“in the hope of putting their German identity behind them” (Hochban, n.d., para. 7). In so doing, many began to hide their German roots, culture, and identity—in order to adapt to the Canadian way of life. Was the submersion of one’s German identity the result of discrimination faced as an “enemy alien”? Was it based on shame for the atrocities committed by Nazis towards Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and those with disabilities? Or, was the sheltering of one’s heritage and culture something innate to all immigrants from faraway lands who needed to assimilate as quickly and easily as possible? Hans Panthel (1991) writes: “... it seems to me that there is hardly any of us hyphenated national groups that is so timid, indeed afraid, of getting into the public limelight as we German Canadians of the middle and older generations” (p. 63).

Some theorists have argued that German immigrants hid their “Germanness” because of the shame related to war atrocities—specifically, the Holocaust—and because of discrimination-related biases against these enemy immigrants. As a second-generation Canadian with German heritage, I have great interest in how this phenomenon shaped the following generations in terms of their cultural identity and how they view themselves. In order to better understand where I, a Canadian with strong German roots, belong in the Canadian context, it is necessary to research German immigrants in the post-war period (when my own family emigrated from Germany). I hope to uncover the reason why I am so hesitant to admit my German heritage to people outside the culture and how this has affected how I view myself.

While some theorists have explored the formation of cultural identities and submerged identities, there is little research on the implications of such submerged identities
in the German Canadian community. Many scholars today reason that the German Canadian identity is a rich subject for further research (Sauer 1998; Zimmer 1998; Isajiw 1998; Freund 1998). Some even go so far as to state that “German immigration since the end of World War II [is] a deplorably neglected topic among scholars” (Bassler, 1988, p. 168). There is even less scholarly research available about how the ethnic identity of German Canadians influenced their self-image. Furthermore, another interesting area to study is how German cultural identity in post-war Canada affected the subsequent generations born in Canada. Therefore, the research question that I propose to answer is as follows: What are the implications of the German Canadian identity, constructed in the post-war period of 1945 through 1960, for the German Canadian community today?

This project will explore the history of Germans in Canada: their experiences prior to, during, and after the Second World War. The primary focus of this project will be on a specific group of German Canadians: those who emigrated from Germany between 1945 and 1960. This time period has been chosen to accurately encapsulate the sentiments of post-war Canada. As previously stated, a large influx of German immigrants arrived in Canada during the 1950s. It is thought that the experiences of those immigrants who arrived after 1960 was quite different from those who arrived immediately after the Second World War. Those immigrants who arrived in Canada after 1960 would have already been a part of the collective effort in Germany to come to terms with the past—thus, altering their experiences and self-identification. The issue of “whiteness” and the ability of German Canadians to “pass” into the mainstream society will also be discussed in contrast to other enemy aliens groups such as the Japanese Canadians.
This project is composed primarily of a literature review. There are very few primary and secondary sources from this period to provide any evidence of the German Canadian experience. The absence of a German Canadian voice in literary sources is discussed further. Theoretically, it will be guided by the understanding of postmodern ethnicities. Here, "ethnic identity is acknowledged as complex and multitextured, inherently open, constantly negotiated, layered and contradictory, contextual in varying with time and place, and involving a constant series of borders, crossings, and recrossings across varied frontiers" (Fleras & Elliott, 1999, p. 120). According to postmodern theory, "when ethnic minorities are uprooted because of migration from a homeland, innovative patterns of ethnicity and identity emerge that may be only tangentially connected to those left behind" (p. 120). This (we will see) is the case with German Canadians. Furthermore, Erving Goffman's theory on stigma and spoiled identities will be explored.

This project seeks to accurately reflect German Canadian history. Dealing with topics rarely touched upon in scholarly publications, this project is a fruitful site for exploration and research. The first three sections will provide a history of Germans in Canada from their arrival in the eighteenth century, during the Second World War, and in the years immediately following. An explanation of ethnic identity and the manifestations of such is explored in the next section. Differentiation is made between external and internal manifestations of German Canadian identity. The German Canadian identity is defined in the fifth section. Here, a literature review is compiled consisting of current theories regarding the German Canadian identity. In the sixth section, Erving Goffman's theory on stigma and passing is explored. The German Canadian experience is compared and
contrasted to other groups with ‘enemy alien’ status—namely, the Italian Canadian and
Japanese Canadian communities. Implications of the construction of a German Canadian
identity is explored in the next section. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the
project’s limitations and areas that need further research.

**Section One: History of Germans in Canada (1736-1939)**

Germans have been a part of the Canadian mosaic for hundreds of years. There were
three known settlements in Canada during the eighteenth century—Waldoburg, Lunenburg,
and Hoffnungsthal. The first German settlement was founded at Waldoburg (later called
Waldoboro) in 1736. This community was located on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia
and it consisted primarily of “military families, whose men had assisted the English in the
siege and capture of [the] French stronghold” (Frank & Publicover, 1999). This settlement
was abandoned after several years. It was by no means a permanent one.

The first permanent German settlement occurred in Lunenburg, Halifax around 1750.
Between 1750 and 1752 over 65% of the immigrants who arrived in Nova Scotia were of
German origin (Virtual Museum Canada, 2004). Like Waldoburg, this settlement was
overseen by British military forces. The settlers were recruited from southern and central
Germany, Switzerland and the Montbeliard region of France, and they were deliberately
chosen for their loyalty to the British Crown. These settlers were lured by the promise of
free land. Not only were they granted a town lot, but 30 acre and 300 acre farm lots were
designated to them in areas just outside of town (Town of Lunenburg, 2003).

The third early settlement was founded at Hoffnungsthal (later called Hopedale),
Labrador in 1772. This tiny settlement was mostly a missionary undertaking meant to convert the native Inuits to Christianity. These settlements of Waldoburg, Lunenburg, and Hoffnungsthal were similar in that they all exhibited the following characteristics:

they each reflected a distinctive German presence – where German was spoken, where the church service was held in German, and where an attempt was made to ensure that the children were taught German in school .... [They] constitute the earliest truly German communities to settle in British North America (Artiss, 1983, p. 51).

German immigration continued through the next two centuries in various waves of migration. Until 1820, most of the German immigration into central Canada came indirectly via the United States. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, a new wave of German migration came directly from Europe. One of the largest Germanic waves originated in eastern Europe, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Russia. It was the Canadian Homestead Law of 1872 that attracted hundreds of thousands of Europeans to settle in the prairies. This document promised newcomers relatively inexpensive land. Approximately 7,000 ethnic German Mennonites arrived from southern Russia and took advantage of two large areas of land—both south of Winnipeg—that were set aside specifically for their use (Frank & Publicover, 1999).

Following close behind the Mennonites were Lutheran Germans. Beginning in the late 1880s, many first went to work for the already established Mennonites before moving on to their own homesteads or buying land from other settlers. Hundreds of German towns “sprang up throughout the West with German names like Neu Elsass, Strassburg, Langenburg ... and so on. In Saskatchewan alone, Germans made up 14% of the population in 1911” (Frank & Publicover, 1999).
When the First World War began, German Canadians were impacted greatly. Not only did German immigration come to an abrupt halt at the war’s onset, but [the war] marked an end to the age of innocence for Canada’s Germans. From being a much favoured people within the nation, overnight they were vilified as the enemy. This was a war not just against Germany, but against ‘Germanness,’ and it was no longer possible to be both a German and a Canadian (McLaughlin, 1985, p. 12).

As the war dragged on, the anti-German sentiment heated up. The government passed the Enemy Alien Act which took away many of the basic rights that German Canadians had enjoyed in their new country—specifically, the right to vote and freedom of movement. “German Canadians were insulted, threatened, beaten, discriminated against on the job, their shops demolished, their monuments desecrated; [and] a number of them were interned” (Froeschle, 1992, p. 74). In fact, thousands were interred during the war—under the suspicion of being spies. The first prisoners were interned on November 5, 1914—they were “the first of an eventual 8,579 male internees accompanied by a total of 81 women and 156 children, dependents of these prisoners” (Zimmermann, 2000, pp. 68-69).

German Canadians no longer felt at ease speaking in their mother tongue. The German language was no longer taught in schools and German language church services ceased to exist. The names of entire towns were renamed to erase any German affiliation. In 1916, for example, “Berlin, Ontario ... ceased to exist; it was renamed Kitchener, after Britain’s famous general in the war against Germany. In Western Canada the names of Koblenz, Bremen, Prussia and Kaiser also disappeared from the map” (McLaughlin, 1985, p. 12).

The result of the war can be seen in the 1921 census. Many German-speaking
Canadians were unwilling to admit their German origin—instead, they adopted new ethnic affiliations. “Between 1911 and 1921 the number of Canadians of German ethnic origin declined by 108,892. By contrast the number of Dutch more than doubled from 55,961 to 117,505, the number of Austrians nearly tripled from 44,376 to 100,064” (McLaughlin, 1985, p. 12). McLaughlin (1985) declares:

It has sometimes been said that but for their unfortunate tendency to speak German, Germans would make splendid Englishmen. After the Great War many of them did. The ease with which Schmidt became Smith, Braun became Brown and Biehn became Bean testifies to the assimilation of many German Canadians. Even in Berlin, Ontario, where the German elite had early dominated urban life and where an overwhelming pride in the community’s German identity was the town’s hallmark, observers long noted how a typically ‘Canadian’ community had evolved from a settlement so completely ‘foreign’ (p. 19).

It was not until 1923 that Canada once again opened its doors to German immigration. “Between 1923 and 1929, 18,000 Germans emigrated to Canada per year. By 1930, over 90,000 had emigrated to Canada [and] by 1931, there were 473,544 Germans in Canada” (Gorn, n.d.). German Canadians again became favoured for immigration. They were perceived as

prosperous and hardworking as well as demonstrating a close affinity for British culture and traditions, in particular the monarchy. They were also deemed to have cultural similarities and racial compatibility [with other Canadians]. Generally, they integrated well into Canadian society, an important consideration for the assimilation-minded authorities of the [period] (Schmalz, 2000, pp. 8-9).

During the Great Depression, however, the door to immigration was closed. The next wave of German immigration would not arrive until after the Second World War.
Section Two: The Outbreak of War (1939-1944)

At the onset of World War II, German immigrants were banned from entering Canada. Like the First World War, the outbreak of World War II was felt strongly within German Canadian communities. Many proud German Canadians found themselves discriminated against by being identified with Naziism. "Over 800 Germans were interned and all German Canadians who had entered Canada after 1922—whether Canadian citizens or not—were forced to register as enemy aliens" (McLaughlin, 1985, p. 16).

Schmalz (2000) reports the initial impact of the war’s outbreak on German Canadians:

As of September 4, 1939, one day after Britain’s declaration of war and actually six days before Canada officially joined the conflict, a number of German Canadians were subjected to immediate arrest by the RCMP, herded to various holding centers spread across the country, and guarded by the military. Upon arrival the internees were searched, documented, fingerprinted, and held until a certain number had been brought in, whereupon they were transferred to an internment camp. They were treated like dangerous criminals, sometimes shackled and guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets. As in the first war, they were put in compounds surrounded by barbed wire fences and watch towers (p. 71).

The first such camp in operation was located in Kananaskis, Alberta. This had previously been the site of an unemployment relief project in 1934. Schmalz (2000) points out that the Canadian Press wanted to make the public believe that Camp Kananaskis was a "resort-country camp" (p. 72). He cites one newspaper article published in the Nelson Daily News on March 13, 1940, entitled "German Prisoners Highly Satisfied with the Alberta Internment Camp Life" (p. 72). The article ignored the fact that these German Canadians were torn from their families and were, in effect, being treated as prisoners.
Those imprisoned at Camp Kananaskis were men of various ages and professions. Some were even "... fathers whose sons served in the Canadian Armed Forces, and in one case, a son found himself standing guard over his own father" (Schmalz, 2000, p. 76). Women and children were not permitted to join the male internees—as was allowed during World War I—rather, the Kingston Penitentiary in Ontario was used to house female internees.

The psychological pressure on German Canadians was intense during this period and for "... a number of Canadian citizens of German descent; crass injustices were committed, as is evident in the fate John Hilmer had to endure" (Froeschle, 1992, p. 74). Schmalz (2000) documented the horrific experience of John Hilmer, a German Canadian, who was interned at Camp Kananaskis:

He had been forced to leave behind his wife and five children as of September 4, 1939. Their fate was to become a nightmare. Not only did one of the infants die during the first ten months of the father’s internment (the circumstances surrounding the burial which the father was not permitted to attend turned into a real horror story), but by the end of that period, the mother was torn away from the remaining four children to be interned in Kingston (July 4, 1940) while the kids—the youngest aged one, the oldest seven—were deposited in a Saskatchewan orphanage and not reunited with their parents until September 1945. The fees owed the orphanage were withdrawn regularly from the parent’s remaining funds. As these funds were becoming depleted and the authorities began pressing the parents to agree to the sale of their home to generate ready cash, the Hilmers lived under the genuine fear (even if reality might not have included that possibility) that their children might be given up for adoption. The traumatic experience was but one scar left on the internees and their dependents, the loss of property and assets added another dimension since that loss meant the erasure of their footprints and the traces of their accomplishments in this country (pp. 82-84).

Those interned had their property seized by the Canadian government for supposed safekeeping. The government held onto this property with the apparent notion that it would
be returned if the internee was released. If the internee was not released “the assets might be ‘liquidated and the proceeds either held by him or used to pay for the maintenance of the family, if any’” (Schmalz, 2000, p. 84) – as was the case of the Hilmer family. Many of those interned were eventually repatriated to Germany after the war and tried for years (to no avail) to reclaim their belongings. Schmalz (2000) cites one family that corresponded with the Canadian government until 1961 regarding their property and belongings; unfortunately, they never received any money for their goods before they eventually gave up hope.

Other ethnic groups had a similar fate during the war. Italian Canadians were also deemed “enemy aliens” and were treated as such.

Government measures were so broad and their parameters so wide that they obliterated the many differences existing in the Italian communities. Fascists and anti-fascists, naturalized or Canadian-born persons and newcomers, professionals and illiterates, wealthy business people and the unemployed were equally perceived as ‘enemy aliens’: one was an ‘enemy alien’ if his or her country of origin was at war with Britain and thus with Canada as well. The tens of thousands of Italians affected by such a traumatic experience felt, and rightly so, that they were being unjustly victimized (Principe, 2000, p. 42).

As with German Canadians, the Canadian government enacted provisions requiring Italian Canadians to register and report periodically to designated offices; prohibiting them from leaving Canada without permission ... ; requiring them to agree not to assemble in groups of five or more; and prohibiting them from engaging in activities against Canada and its political stand in the war (Liberati, 2000, p. 82).

According to statistical information, approximately 600 people of Italian origin were interned during the Second World War (Iacovetta et al, 2000; Liberati, 2000; Whitaker and Kealy, 2000). Liberati (2000) determined that ninety-nine of those Italians interned were
seamen from Italian merchant ships and that the actual number of Italian Canadians interned was roughly 500. This figure represented only 0.44 per cent of the total Italian Canadian population as reported in the 1941 census (Liberati, 2000). The number of German Canadians interned during the Second World War was also relatively small. In comparison to the First World War—where over 8,000 German Canadians were interned—the Second World War saw only a fraction of those German Canadians interned. By then, “removing German and Italian aliens would have been unpopular, and hence politically unwise .... To discriminate against the Japanese was all right; to discriminate against Yankee Joe DiMaggio’s parents was not” (Sunahara, 1981, p. 46).

Despite the seemingly low percentage of those German Canadians and Italian Canadians interned, the effects of the internment created great fear within those ethnic communities. “The severity of the government’s measures against ‘enemy aliens’ unfortunately sent the country and Italian Canadians the wrong message—that Italian Canadians had been interned simply because they were Italians” (Principe, 2000, p. 37). Cumbo (2000) argues that “the Italian Canadians’ integrity as ‘loyal Canadians’ came under attack ... resulting in tensions and misunderstandings between them and the host society” (Cumbo, 2000, p. 97).

Also similar to the German Canadian experience, the Italian Canadians suffered severe socio-economic repercussions. Italian Canadians feared for their safety and livelihood (Cumbo, 2000). “Many lost their jobs or saw them threatened on account of their Italian names and ethnic associations .... Those retaining their jobs remained under a cloud of suspicion” (Cumbo, 2000, p. 105). The effects “proved galling to people used to
'minding their own business.' The war made them endure constant ethnic slurs and accusations, as well as the frequent denigration of Italy as a backward and cowardly third-rate power" (Cumbo, 2000, p. 106).

It is well documented that Japanese Canadians suffered greatly during World War II. The experience of Japanese Canadians cannot be compared, however, to that of German Canadians and Italian Canadians.

In the case of the Japanese, measures were taken against an entire group, and not, as with the Italians [and Germans], a small minority. All those of Japanese ‘racial origin,’ most of whom were Canadian-born, were forced to abandon their homes, businesses, and jobs and to evacuate the Pacific coast, where they were overwhelmingly concentrated .... Communities were destroyed and families separated. The possessions of all Japanese Canadians were seized and eventually sold, in a number of cases at relocation. The families of the [German and] Italian internees, for their part, certainly endured economic hardship as a result of the loss of their principal breadwinner. But they were neither dispossessed nor compelled to pay for their interned relative’s upkeep. As well, Italian Canadian [and German Canadian] men of military age could serve in the armed forces, whereas Japanese Canadians were barred from doing so until the final phase of the war, because the government feared that they might use such service as an entitlement for the right to vote. Toward the end of hostilities, Ottawa planned to ‘repatriate’ all Japanese Canadians to their devastated country of origin. But because of a rising movement of revulsion at their treatment and opposition to their forced expulsion, the government ‘persuaded’ only 4,000, half of whom were Canadian-born, to ‘go home.’ The rest were prohibited from returning to the Pacific coast for several years and scattered in several provinces. Nothing remotely similar happened to the Italian [and German] Canadians (iacovetta et al., 2000, p. 122).

Whitaker (1987) argues that the Japanese evacuation was the worst Canadian example of minority repression in the twentieth century and that it was based largely upon anti-Asian prejudice. “Anti-Asian prejudice had always been high in Canada, while Germans—even though they had been the main enemy of Canada in two wars—were, after all
white and European” (Whitaker, 1987, p. 103). Clearly, the privilege of whiteness was evident despite their identification as ‘enemy aliens.’

It should be noted that “[t]he wars have had a detrimental effect, not only upon German Canadian life, but also upon the records created by the community. During both World Wars many German Canadian organizations ceased their activities, some of them never to come to life again” (Grenke, 1983, pp. 96-97). German Canadian organizations were afraid to keep records of their activities for fear of documenting anything that might incriminate them. For this reason, there is very little documentation by German Canadians about their experiences during this time period. In fact, there is also little documentation by German Canadians in the years following the war. The *Volkstimme* newspaper—published by German Canadians in Toronto between 1944 and 1949—is devoid of any reference to the German Canadian experience. There is not one single article or letter to the editor that refers to the German Canadian experience in any of their monthly publications. The existing documentation that does provide evidence of negative German Canadian experiences was only published much later. This evidence was published in the form of autobiographies or academic studies that were completed many years after the fact.

Section Three: The Post-War Period (1945-1960)

After World War II, the Canadian government was reluctant to lift the ban on German immigration which had been in place since the outbreak of war in 1939. Nazi ideology and the horrific crimes that were committed by its adherents did little to improve the image of Germans. Anti-German sentiment was rampant within Canadian society and
many opposed the entry of these recent enemies.

In April 1946 a Gallup poll revealed that 61 per cent of the Canadian public were opposed, not just to Germans, but to any European immigration as such. It was not until August 1947 that a bare 51 per cent of Canadians favoured immigration ‘of the right type.’ On a polled scale of undesirable categories of immigrants in October 1946, Germans ranked third .... (Bassler, 1988, p. 169).

The Canadian government could not help but notice the negative sentiment towards the Germans and they were reluctant to welcome them until some of its allies—Australia, Great Britain, and the United States—did the same. Consequently, the general prohibition on the entry of German nationals remained in place until September 1950.

Post-war Germany faced extensive wartime destruction to its physical landscape. It also faced

the arrival of large numbers of Germans expelled from their homelands in eastern and southeastern Europe. In the greatest expulsion in world history, more than seventeen million Germans were expelled, resulting in the deaths of two million .... Germans suffered from the lack of basic goods and services, but their primary needs were for food, shelter, and clothing (Tolzmann, 2000, p. 344).

A great number of those Germans who were expelled from eastern and southeastern Europe were unable to return home because they now laid outside the four occupation zones (Freund, 1998).

With most of Germany’s economy, trade, housing and morale in ruins and with uncertainty surrounding Europe’s future, there was little incentive to stay on and help in the arduous task of postwar reconstruction. Among the hardest hit by postwar conditions in Germany were the millions of German expellees and refugees who had been uprooted—often violently—from their homes. Many of these recent arrivals felt economically, materially and socially marginalized in the new Federal Republic (Schmalz, 2000, p. 10).

Thus, it is no surprise that many Germans were eager to leave their homeland behind along
with the horrific experiences and memories of the war. After being uprooted, one such emigrant states:

I thought: 'Where does it matter at this stage in my life, what does it matter where I put down roots? Canada is just as fine as Germany, because the part of Germany where I was wasn’t my home either, so what’s the difference?’ I didn’t see any difference in geography. It’s just a matter of making a home .... So there you are, we were refugees, we were quite dislocated and dispersed and didn’t have any contact with school friends or relatives or anything, so I decided: anywhere is fine (Freund, 1998, p. 191).

The Canadian government’s willingness to open its doors to German immigration in 1950 was well received in Germany. A high number of displaced Germans began to consider Canada as a first choice. "Of those granted visas to Canada in the immediate post-war period 60 percent were native Germans, 30 percent residents of the now Polish parts of East Germany and 10 percent were from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Eastern Europe” (McLaughlin, 1985, p. 16).

Nearly three hundred thousand German-speaking immigrants settled in Canada after the Second World War. Between 1946 and 1955, 145,198 immigrants arrived from the Federal Republic of Germany (McLaughlin, 1985). This large influx of German immigration was well planned and organized by the Canadian government. It was “... strongly influenced by the federal government’s economic, manpower and political goals” (Schmalz, 2000, p. 3). Immigration from Germany was made possible by the Canadian government because Canada—as a whole—was experiencing great prosperity.

Unemployment was at an all time low, averaging 4% during the decade, while capital investment and gross national product reached unprecedented levels. Also at this time, the proportion of Canadian-born workers to dependents was decidedly low, a situation which was aggravated by the stunted birth rate during the Depression and Canada’s wartime casualties (Schmalz, 2000, p. 3).
German immigrants had a long history in Canada and had a “well-deserved reputation of success as settlers” (Schmalz, 2000, pp. 8-9) so the Canadian government was willing to accept them. While the government was ready and eager to accept this group, Canadian people were still somewhat resistant to accepting these newcomers who had so recently been enemies.

Broadfoot (1986) sums up the Canadian climate during the post-war years quite nicely. He writes:

Canada in the late Forties and early Fifties was not the nation that we know now. In those days there was open racial discrimination, and if you were not English or French, then you were one of the ‘others’ [regardless of your skin colour or physical characteristics]. In schools, immigrant children were taunted with the words of ‘Dirty DP,’ and there was also discrimination in housing. Newcomers looking for a place to live were often turned away with the words ‘We don’t want Hunkies,’ a racist word that was then an accepted term for an immigrant. Discrimination was most prevalent in the workplace, where immigrants faced a no-win situation. Canadian workers accused newcomers of taking jobs away from them, but most of the jobs that immigrants did were menial, low-paying ones that Canadians did not want. Canadians also complained that immigrant workers undercut them by accepting wages below the prevailing levels but refused to allow newcomers to join unions. Exploitation of immigrant workers was a common practice, and their lack of English and lack of familiarity with Canadian ways made them easy targets. Canadian employers who took advantage of these workers were not considered to be committing a sin; on the other hand, immigrant workers were scorned because they worked too hard (p. 165).

Tolzmann (2000) confirms anti-German sentiment in his study of the German-American experience. According to Tolzmann (2000), “ethnic slurs were common against German-Americans, including such epithets as Huns, Krauts, or Nazis. German-Americans endured these slurs as well as the status loss in the hopes that the anti-German sentiment would not escalate” (p. 336).
The discrimination towards German immigrants is further evident in the collection of stories that Broadfoot (1986) published under the title, “Immigrant Years: From Europe and Britain to Canada 1945-1967.” One German immigrant describes his first experience after getting off the train and meeting with the man who was to employ him for the next year. He writes: “The minute I met him I knew it wasn’t going to work out. He was big and he was mean and he was drunk, and there he was, and little me, and when we got to his truck he told me to get in the back. He wasn’t going to have any goddamned German riding with him in the cab...” (Broadfoot, 1986, p. 175). One Dutch immigrant speaks of her experience as a child who is mistaken for a German in school. She writes:

My parents brought me to Canada when I was seven. The other children in school... picked on my brother and me. They’d call us dumb DPs and dirty names, and I think today that it was because this was just after the war and they got confused between ‘Dutch’ for us and ‘Deutsch’ which is German but has kind of the same pronunciation (Broadfoot, 1986, p. 252).

Ursula Hegi (1997) conducted interviews with many people of German descent who immigrated to North America in the post-war years. Hegi addresses the issue of discrimination and stereotypes in her collection of interviews. She delves into the experiences of eleven German immigrants who came to North America in the post-war years. While the interviewees are all living in the United States, it can be assumed that their experiences were similar to those German immigrants in Canada.

One interviewee, Hans-Peter, immigrated as an eight year old child in 1953. He speaks of his experience in school and of the abuse he suffered for his heritage.

It was the most horrible environment while I was growing up because there was this anti-Nazi thing, and I experienced a lot of verbal and physical abuse. I guess students would let their mothers and fathers know that somebody from
Germany was in school, and the parents would say: ‘Well, he’s a Nazi.’ It wasn’t the kids’ fault—they just seized the opportunity (Hegi, 1997, pp. 140-141).

Hans-Peter also discusses his German identity as he got older. He states:

... in the fifties and sixties, if I was in a restaurant with [my parents], I’d feel horrible because they had an accent. And I’d be thinking: Here we go again. People will look and say: ‘Hey, where are those people from?’ Being German was negative then, a horror, a black cloud (Hegi, 1997, p. 142).

Another participant, Heinrich, immigrated at the age of fourteen in 1953. Upon his arrival to North America, Heinrich lived with his aunt and uncle. He speaks of his earliest awareness of negativity towards Germans:

... they pushed to Americanize me: ‘After three months we want to stop talking German with you, and we want you to speak English only. Some people don’t like Germans over here. When we take out your citizenship papers, we want to make your name as American as possible. We have to Americanize you now.’ I didn’t know any better at that time (Hegi, 1997, p. 227).

Hegi (1997) also explores the attitudes towards Germans as portrayed in the media and film industry. One of the interviewees, Katharina, immigrated with her family in 1957—she was ten years old. Katharina states:

There was a movie theater, and the kids went to the kiddie movies on Saturday mornings. Before the main movie came on, they used to have serials—always about the nasty, ugly, awful Krauts and the Americans. There I sat, and I wanted to fit in with my friends; yet, I kept looking for my father’s face amongst those nasty Krauts on the movie screen. They were always ugly. And they always talked loudly. And they were always mean. And they always died (Hegi, 1997, pp. 274-275).

Another of Hegi’s participants, Ulrich, was eight when he immigrated in 1954. He states:

Growing up in this country, I was exposed to war films that showed the Allies as being wonderful and the Nazis as being ungodly. They always said: ‘Achtung’ and ‘Sieg Heil.’ These old films were pretty stupid and simple.
They were not very helpful because they weren't very historic ... (Hegi, 1997, p. 87).

Tolzmann (2000) also discusses the depiction of Germans in North American—specifically American—film. He writes:

... movie depictions of America's German stock frequently leaned toward the controversial, preferring depictions of Bundists, Nazi spies, and saboteurs in films full of foreign intrigue, in an effort to sell large numbers of tickets and generate substantial profits for film companies. Such images 'fanned flames of prejudice against the German community without providing a contrasting viewpoint representative of the majority of German-Americans of the day' (p. 330).

Film is particularly important to the accumulation of knowledge. "A recent American study of what people knew about the world and how they formed their opinions concluded that television was central to their information-gathering ... ” (Friesen, 2000, p. 202). Thus, film had an incredible influence on what Canadians and German Canadians learned about themselves. Historian, Thomas Doherty, acknowledged this heavy influence in his article, "Film and history: foxes and hedgehogs.” Doherty (2002) states: “the grim truth that Americans absorb more history from the multiplex than from middle school demands that Hollywood’s treatment of the past be considered carefully rather than simply avoided” (p. 13).

Further evidence to suggest the anti-German sentiment in the post-war years is found in The Globe and Mail newspaper. An article from 1959 touches upon the experiences of German Canadian immigrants of the post-war years. It states:

Franz said he was fed up with Canada. He quit his job in a Toronto paint factory, sold his furniture and car, and booked passage for himself and his wife back to his native Germany. ‘Canada is just too rough for us,’ he told friends .... Franz is not alone. Every week a number of New Canadians return
... The largest group of the so-called ‘repatriates’ is made up of newcomers from Germany. (Geiger, 1959, p. 6).

While the article does not explain the reasoning for the mass exodus of German repatriates, one must wonder why so many Germans are returning to their homelands and what made their stays in Canada “too rough.” An article found in The Province on July 4, 1960 cites “unemployment and prejudice against them” as the reasons that so many German immigrants were returning home at “an alarming rate” (p. 28).

Interestingly, researcher Anthony Richmond (1970) conducted a major study in 1961 on post-war immigrants in Canada and found that “among immigrants from German-speaking countries an above average proportion indicated dissatisfaction” with life in Canada (p. 169). While Richmond does not explore this phenomenon further, he does acknowledge that “immigration is a complex social process which has profound psychological consequences for the migrant” (p. 166) and that “the complicated processes of personal adjustment [could not be] investigated effectively by the methods used in [his] investigation” (p. 166).

Broadfoot (1986) states:

Immigrants had come to Canada with the highest hopes and long-held dreams, but found themselves alone in an alien land. They learned that Canadians did not much care what happened to them, and this probably was a major aspect of culture shock. By their very indifference, Canadians indicated to immigrants that they were on their own (p. 58).

While this is true of most immigrants, German Canadians had the unique stigma of being enemies in the recent past. The anti-German sentiment that so many German Canadians experienced had major implications for their cultural identity and those in subsequent
Section Four: Manifestations of Ethnic Identity

In Canada it is somewhat common to reply to the question ‘Who are you?’ in ethnic terms.

Immigrants in the past were sometimes not aware of an ethnic identity when they arrived, seeing themselves only as coming from a village or at most a province, or as adherents of a particular religion. They became ethnically conscious as they were thrust into association with others who shared their language and culture or their physical traits or both, and were accorded a common label and common treatment. But they usually knew of some people from whom they sharply distinguished themselves. More recently, with the salience of ethnicity throughout the world and with the sophistication of many immigrants, people have had an ethnic identity on arrival, and an attitude toward it, either as a burden to be cast off or as a treasure to be passed on to their children. With the passage of time and generations, both the content and the meaning of the immigrants’ ethnic identities change (Burnet & Palmer, 1989, p. 212).

Burnet and Palmer (1989) differentiate between external and internal manifestations of ethnicity. Internal aspects refer to an individual’s feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group. While this aspect is subjective and difficult to measure, external manifestations are easier to gauge. “For white ethnic groups, among the most conspicuous external manifestations have been language, folklore, cuisine, and sports” (Burnet & Palmer, 1989, p. 212). For non-white ethnic groups, the most permanent external symbols of ethnic identity are often physical traits, such as skin colour and hair form. Both internal and external manifestations of the German Canadian identity will be explored further. As language is said to be the best criteria for testing whether or not a community is German Canadian, it will be paid special attention.
Many theorists agree that language is the most important component of ethnicity (Richter; Burnet & Palmer; Artiss).

Languages have been considered to be inseparable from cultures, and linguistic transfer has been deemed to be loss of language and culture. Languages have played a crucial role in many of the white ethnic groups as vehicles for other elements of culture. They have served as means of unifying the groups: people who have spoken regional dialects have, through learning the standard version of their language, come not only to enlarge the number of those recognized as their ethnic fellows but also to identity with linguistically dependent aspects of the high culture of their homeland. Languages have been boundary markers, for unless they are world languages they are exclusive to the group (Burnet & Palmer, 1989, pp. 212-213).

Ruth Gumpp (1995) studied language development in Vancouver's German ethnic population. She specifically analysed the preservation of the German language within the German Canadian community. In post-World War II Canada, Gumpp (1995) found that "German immigrants sought entry into Canadian society and assimilated rapidly in to the Canadian community, apparently abandoning many of their ethnic traits (including language) and affiliations in the process" (p. 75). Gumpp's study was inspired by the considerable language loss in the German population. She notes that by 1971:

only some 18% of the Canadian-born Germans grew up with German as their first language or 'mother tongue' as compared to some 82% among the immigrant Germans. And among the Canadian-born Germans, only 22% with German as their mother tongue spoke German in their own homes, whereas among the immigrant Germans with German as their mother tongue a mere 41% spoke German in their homes (pp. 75-76).

Gumpp queries the explanation behind this lack of cultivation in the ethnic language and she examines this aspect of German settlement during the postwar period. She subsequently argues that the development of linguistic patterns among the German Canadian population was part of the process of assimilation. She states that the phenomenon of language loss in
the German Canadian community "... occurred through three inextricably linked processes: abandonment of the ethnic language at the individual level, lack of transfer of the ethnic language to the younger generation in the family, and finally, as a consequence, reduction of German spoken in Canadian society at large" (Gumpp, 1995, p. 76).

Gumpp states that German postwar immigrants adjusted well to the requirement of the English-dominated environment because they "sought social acceptance by the majority society and were able to blend in with this society" (p. 77). German postwar immigrants identified themselves very quickly with their new homeland, which "offered them a new future, economic opportunities, and relief from the political burdens of the past" (Gumpp, 1995, p. 77).

Gumpp admits that both Canadian-born Germans and postwar immigrants were quick in adapting to the dominant language of English. She cites that "in both 1961 and 1971, the Canada census found over 95% of the German ethnics in Vancouver able to speak English, and only 1% unable to speak either English or French" (p. 77). In fact, "German post-World War II arrivals in the majority had adopted English as their home language; two-thirds of Vancouver residents who had learned German as their mother tongue by 1971 had switched to an English home language" (p. 78). Gumpp cites intermarriage as part of the reason for this rapid decline in language loss. She states that "Germans were very prone to ethnic intermarriage: according to Canada Census data, throughout the postwar period every second male and female person of German ethnicity in the country married outside the German ethnic group" (p. 78). She does not explain the reasoning behind the rapid assimilation to Canadian culture but she does briefly question if overt discrimination is the reason.
Gumpp states that most German-speaking couples preferred to use English even in the privacy of their own home. According to Gumpp, German-speaking parents wanted their children to speak English and they felt that by practising English in the home, this would "[facilitate] the successful integration of their children into the Canadian environment" (pp. 79-80). Interestingly,

[the statistical impression that most German postwar immigrants were making very limited efforts to cultivate the ethnic tongue either for themselves or among their children is confirmed by the comments of contemporary observers of German ethnic life in Canada. At a lecture given to the German-Canadian Cultural Society in Vancouver in 1966, Prof. E. Kluge of Notre Dame University in Nelson, B.C., admitted the great difficulties in maintaining the German language in an English-speaking environment. Yet, he also noted that only a very small portion of German immigrants were even encouraging their children to speak German, and that these were usually Germans who participated in other forms of ethnic life. Similarly, the Commissioner for Language Instruction of the German-Canadian umbrella organization, the Trans-Canada Alliance of German-Canadians, Hermino Schmidt, pointed out in 1967 that German postwar arrivals for the most part adjusted very quickly to the new environment, concentrated on their integration and material success, and displayed a distinct lack of interest in the preservation of their ethnicity (Gumpp, 1995, p. 80).

Beattie and Ley (2001) explore another reason for the loss of the German language among post-war immigrants. The rapid acculturation of German Canadians was "accelerated in the 1950s by the active desire among some to renounce a past that had brought trauma and shame. In some households, family names were anglicized and the German language was not encouraged in the home" (Beattie & Ley, 2001, p. 12). Reflecting on the 1950s, a pastor remembered that

[at that time many parents ... a German husband and a German wife would only speak English at home between each other and to the kids. So basically they denied their mother tongue because they tried to assimilate as fast as they could and sometimes they even denied their heritage because it was bad,
Hitler, Nazis, everything ... it wasn’t fashionable to speak German (Beattie & Ley, 2001, pp. 12-13).

Gumpp also explores the decline of the German language with regard to the public school system’s inability to provide German language instruction to students. As a result of the public school system’s inability to provide German language instruction and the decline of German language usage in the home, there was a small—yet strong—group of German Canadians who wished their children would learn the language. German Saturday schools were established under the auspices of German associations and parishes as early as the mid-1950s. “[C]hildren between the ages of five and sixteen years were instructed in the German language and culture. The schools started to flourish in the late 1950s at the time of greatest influx of postwar arrivals” (Gumpp, 1995, p. 83).

German Saturday schools saw a shift in enrollment by the mid-1960s. The number of students with little or no background in the German language were most prominent at that time. This was usually because “... their parents had ‘unlearned’ their native tongue or because they were sent by parents whose ancestral heritage contained no German traces and who simply wished their children instructed in a global idiom” (Gumpp, 1995, p. 85).

There was a very low proportion of German speakers among German ethnic residents in Vancouver in the early 1950s and Gumpp acknowledges that this “was probably due to Germans having kept a low profile during the Second World War and the earliest postwar arrivals mostly [came] from the eastern European states where they did not necessarily learn German as their mother tongue” (p. 86). By 1961, the census exhibits the highest correlation between German ethnicity and German mother tongue, which can be interpreted as a result of high German immigration in the late 1950s. In 1971, however, the correlation was the
lowest (Gumpp, 1995). Gumpp concludes that:

> [t]he German ethnic population in Vancouver became increasingly less likely to report German as their mother tongue, and in the majority they also chose to abandon the language in favour of English in their private home, where they had complete control over their linguistic behaviour (p. 86).

Gumpp (1995) emphasizes that “German arrivals and Canadian-born Germans for the most part seemed eager to blend into Canadian society as quickly as possible” (p. 88).

However, she does not cite reasons for this. In fact, she states:

> Analysis of census data and the comments of contemporaries indicate that in the post-World War II decades the overwhelming majority of German-Canadians readily adopted English in all spheres of their lives and quickly detached themselves from their ethnic tongue. They not only integrated into Canadian society at large; often, this language shift went hand in hand with the abandonment of other aspects of their cultural traits (p. 86).

The low level of language maintenance discussed by Gumpp is an example of the loss of culture among German Canadians. Richter (1983) suggests:

> Retention of a traditional ethnic language is usually considered the most significant identifying criterion for ethnic groups. Most ethnic groups, therefore, could be defined as ethno-linguistic groups. If an ethnic group has tended to emphasize the maintenance of its language, the loss of that language then will be equated largely with a loss of group identity (p. 42).

It should be noted, however, that language is not the only external manifestation of ethnicity. Whether everyday dishes or haute cuisine, meals also have symbolic meaning. Food is another example of the external manifestation of culture. Meals “are suited to sharing and to becoming part of wider Canadian custom” (Burnet & Palmer, 1989, p. 215). Richter (1983) argues that:

> those Canadians of predominantly German descent who neither speak nor understand German, but who preserve certain customs of their ancestors – e.g. Once in a while cook a typical German dish, and associate with friends of the same background – could be considered German Canadians, although they
might otherwise be fully integrated into the Canadian society. For many such people the German component of the hyphenated compound ‘German-Canadian’ should appear in very small print, the Canadian component, however, in bold letters; but they may still be considered to be members of the German Canadian ethnic group (pp. 46-46).

This manifestation of culture is designated as external although it should be acknowledged that meals are usually consumed in the privacy of one’s home. Further exploration regarding the upkeep of the German cuisine among German Canadian families is necessary. From personal experience, however, typical German foods continue to be the most prevalent dishes served among German Canadian immigrants from the post-World War Two period. Despite the facade of an unhyphenated Canadian family, German foods are consumed inside the home—away from the public’s view.

Maintaining folkloric heritage is another way that ethnic groups can display their ethnic identity. “Folklore has proved to be extremely persistent [and] has great symbolic value ... ” (Burnet & Palmer, 1989, p. 214).

Certain forms of folklore, such as music, dance, and theatre, have appeal to the young. The Multiculturalism Directorate’s study indicated that passing the culture on to children and youth ranked high among reasons for participating in the performing arts .... The folkloric performing arts thus are a means of transmitting some of the cultural symbols of the group to new generations so that social networks are established on an ethnic basis and chances of endogamous marriage are increased (Burnet & Palmer, 1989, p. 215).

The folklore transmitted is often symbolic rather than part of a functioning folk culture.

Burnet and Palmer (1989) argue that “[a] functioning culture changes and adapts. Weeding out Canadian variants in favour of old country forms indicates that the folklore reflects only a museum culture” (p. 215).

Of the minimal German folklore we see today, dance is the most prevalent. The
typical “Shuhplattler” dance groups still perform at Oktoberfest celebrations throughout Canada. This style of dance originated from one specific area in Germany—the southern region of Bavaria—and is not typically seen outside of this region. In fact, this style of dance is outdated and rarely performed in Germany today. According to Burnet and Palmer’s argument that a functioning culture adapts and changes, we can conclude that the German Canadian culture is not presently functioning well. Its inability to change from an old, outdated culture, is evidence of this.

Compared to folklore and cuisine, athletics are less often perceived as expressions of group identity. However, sports and athletics have been an important part of many ethnic groups and they have been transplanted to Canada by early arrivals (Burnet & Palmer, 1989). “Ethnic sports associations and athletic achievements for a long time attracted little notice because they lay outside the North American mainstream” (Burnet & Palmer, 1989, p. 217). The sport of soccer is the most notable example of the German culture with regard to athletics. Its manifestation is seen in soccer clubs today—although specifically German soccer clubs are not prominent.

The primary internal manifestation of ethnic identity is the feeling of belonging. The “emotional umbilical cord with [Germany] can ... be observed among many of the German immigrants after World War II. Although they have refrained from obvious external protestations of their origin, they nevertheless feel a very strong attachment to everything German” (Schmidt, 1983, p. 73). Schmidt (1983) does not explain why those German post-war immigrants “have refrained from obvious external protestations of their origin” but the strong attachment to their homeland and “everything German” is a good example of an
internal manifestation of culture. This will be explored in detail.

Section Five: Defining the German Canadian Identity

There are differing opinions regarding the definition of the German Canadian identity and its very existence. Richter (1983) argues that it is very difficult – perhaps even impossible – to define the German Canadian ethnic group with precision. Richter (1983) states that he:

... would not go so far as to include among the German Canadians a person of German descent who may have a German surname and who may even be aware of his German ancestry who does not understand German – in any of its varieties – and who shares all or most of the attributes of the lifestyle that is ‘typical’ for a given Canadian environment and age group. The fact that Mr. Hinterholzer goes to Oktoberfest every year does not make him a German Canadian in my opinion (p. 46).

Along with having a certain awareness of his or her ethnic identity, Richter (1983) argues that a German Canadian “must have interaction with other members of this ethnic group and must possess and show in his actions and attitudes at least a few of those traits which are commonly regarded as part of the wide range of German Canadian attributes” (pp. 47-48). The examples Richter provides of those attributes include cooking a typical German meal or associating with friends of the same background. For Richter, even those persons who no longer speak German, but who still understand it, can be regarded as German Canadians.

German Canadian identity is also explored in Mathias Zimmer’s (1998) article entitled “Deconstructing German-Canadian Identity.” Zimmer argues that while cultural and ethnic identities are central in the definition of Canadian society, a distinct German Canadian identity cannot exist. He claims that:
Germans have had a 'spoiled identity,' tainted by the historical experience of the Holocaust and National Socialism. Identity is to a large extent based on historical experience ... [and] German history in the twentieth century is extremely difficult to incorporate into the formulation of a German identity, particularly because of the apparent problem of coming to terms with the past (Zimmer, 1998, p. 23).

Specifically, Zimmer argues that German Canadians today are too vast a population to group into one identity. Zimmer's argument is relevant here, in that Germans who immigrated to Canada in the post-war years had socialization experiences that dramatically differed from those who immigrated in more recent years. Specifically, "the earlier generations have been almost completely cut off from the collective effort in Germany to come to terms with the past" (Zimmer, 1998, p. 28). Thus, Germans who immigrated in the post-war years are holding on to the preservation of a German identity that is misleading. Zimmer provides examples of the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes as the Oktoberfest and Schuhplattler—a festival and style of dance that is common only in the Bavarian region of Germany. Here, Zimmer argues that by repeating these archaic cultural notions, a false German Canadian culture is being perpetuated.

Zimmer argues that language is the only thing that binds German Canadians. He does not acknowledge a shared history or a shared identity based on how the rest of society viewed these immigrants. Zimmer admits that further research on the generation perpetuating these cultural stereotypes—those who immigrated in the immediate post-war years—is required. While he argues that a precise German Canadian identity is not possible, he does acknowledge that "a large scale empirical survey on German Canadian identity is required" (Zimmer, 1998, p. 33).

Sauer and Zimmer (1998) argue that German Canadians defy definition. While the
notion of a German Canadian identity is possible, it is difficult to define with precision:

Some choose to become unhyphenated Canadians, in effect severing all ties to their culture of origin. Others are Germans in the privacy of their homes, but Canadians in public. And yet others emphasize and display their cultural heritage. In Canada’s proudly pluralistic society, in which other ethnic groups have a noticeable and colourful presence, German Canadians keep a low profile (Sauer & Zimmer, 1998, p. ix).

Oda Lindner (1998) accepts that a German Canadian identity is possible and, in fact, argues that the German Canadian identity is a product of biculturalism. Lindner explains that those German Canadians “who possess knowledge of two cultural systems can be called biculturals” (p. 41). She argues that the German Canadian identity is the result of “a comprehensive process of cultural merging” (p. 41). In other words, the German Canadian identity that exists today is a direct result of the merging between German and Canadian cultures.

Wsevolod Isajiw (1998) explores the construction of the German Canadian identity in his article “Identity and Identity-Retention Among German Canadians: Individual and Institutional.” Here, Isajiw examines which aspects of ethnic identity are most retained from one generation to the next. He compares Germans, Italians, Jews, and Ukrainians and finds that German Canadians lose their ethnic identity much faster than the other groups. Isajiw queries the reason for this and whether or not this means that the German community in Canada is disappearing. While he admits that further research is necessary, Isajiw indicates that the German Canadian community is still quite viable, specifically for the first-generation immigrants. Isajiw argues:

there are many impressionistic indicators suggesting that the Germans, consciously or subconsciously, submerge their identity. That is, the identity of many German Canadians may be located more deeply in their personalities
and ... persons try to avoid external expressions of it. Instead, they may attempt to compensate by over-identifying with being Canadian ... (p. 80).

Isajiw links the submersion of the German identity to the stigma left by the Second World War that likened any strong declaration of German identity with Naziism. This submersion seeks to avoid stigma and becomes a means of constructing identity whereby “an identity that has been depressed by historical events is restored; this is done by changing its form to the dominant identity, but remaining itself—in a submerged way—by becoming an exemplary identity of the dominant people” (Isajiw, 1998, p. 80).

The construction of the German Canadian identity has been significantly impacted by the experiences of German immigrants upon their arrival and in the years following. Naomi Norquay (1998) explores the stories of immigrants and how these stories are passed down through generations to construct identity. Specifically, Norquay is interested in the role of these stories in identity formation. She states that “the stories both affirmed and challenged officially-sanctioned views of immigration history and immigrant experience, and thereby functioned as both a form of oral history and a pedagogy for interrogating identity formation” (Norquay, 1998, p. 178). Norquay examines the way stories are told and the experiences they contain to understand how immigrants construct their identities and render themselves ‘Canadian’. Specifically, Norquay explores stories of name-changing. She states that “a ‘real’ Canadian identity ... is an Anglo or Anglicised identity. White immigrants needed to have English-sounding names if they wanted to gain the entitlement that goes with a Canadian identity” (Norquay, 1998, p. 182). One such name-changing story is of a German immigrant who changed his name to “avoid any hassle” (Norquay, 1998, p. 185).

Norquay finds a large gap between stories of immigration and what constitute
Canadian identity. She argues that the stories are basically stories of erasure. “They illustrate the way in which immigrant experience can be a dual process of undoing and becoming at the same time” (Norquay, 1998, p. 187). This is relevant to the stories that German Canadians tell of their immigration experience. Norquay’s work provides further evidence that Isajiw’s notion of submerged identities has an enormous effect on the constructed identities of German Canadians.

While these theorists have differing views on the definition of the German Canadian identity, it is clear that a German Canadian identity does exist in one form or another. For Richter (1983), the German Canadian group includes persons who speak the language (or at least understand it) and who interact with others of the same background. For Zimmer (1998), the German Canadian group includes those who have immigrated from Germany and who continue to identify with the culture that they brought with them to Canada – despite this perpetuation of an archaic cultural notion. Lindner (1998) cites German Canadians as a product of the merging between two cultures. Isajiw (1998) states that the German Canadian identity is that of a submerged one – with German Canadians trying to “over-identify” with being Canadian. Regardless of the differing definitions, it is clear that a German Canadian identity does indeed exist and is, in fact, affected deeply by the stigma associated with being German.

Section Six: Stigma

Erving Goffman’s theory on “spoiled identities” is relevant to the construction of the German Canadian identity; “spoiled” is utilized by Goffman to describe those identities with
a negative stigma attached to them. Goffman argues that for the stigmatized, identity is fate—a matter not solely under one’s personal control. “The decision which attributes are recognized as belonging to either society as a whole or a specific group is not up to the stigmatized” (Haselbach, 1998, p. 6). Instead, this is determined by those in society as a whole. Goffman (1963) writes:

While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind—in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity (pp. 2-3).

The negative experiences of the post-war German immigrants have, in effect, created a spoiled identity. The assumed affiliation with Naziism and the notion of being an “enemy” throughout the war, are attributes that make German Canadians different from others.

Haselbach (1998) admits that:

German descent was a stigma in Canadian society. To be of German descent meant that one was under suspicion and somehow co-responsible for the German crimes during both the First World War and the Nazi period. Reason enough, indeed, for treating German Canadians with some reservation and distance! (p. 6).

Goffman (1963) argues that some believe a stigmatized individual is not quite human. To account for this physical or inherent difference, Goffman believes “[w]e construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity” (p. 5). The stigmatized individual then responds to this discrimination in one way or another. Goffman (1963) argues that “… [i]n some cases it will be possible for him to make a direct attempt to correct what he sees as the
objective basis of his failing, as when a physically deformed person undergoes plastic surgery, a blind person eye treatment [and so on]” (p. 9). The efforts of German immigrants to quickly assimilate to Canadian society are relevant here. Some German Canadians changed their surnames, some refused to speak the German language, and yet others quickly changed their lifestyles to eat “Canadian” foods and participate in “Canadian” activities—severing all ties to their German heritage.

Goffman argues that stigmatized individuals constantly need to manage the true information about their identity. “To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; the let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where” (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). The management of undisclosed information about oneself is directly related to the notion Goffman calls “passing.”

Traditionally, the question of passing has raised the issue of the ‘visibility’ of a particular stigma, that is, how well or how badly the stigma is adapted to provide means of communicating that the individual possesses it. For example, ex-mental patients and expectant unmarried fathers are similar in that their failing is not readily visible; the blind, however, are easily seen. Visibility, of course, is a crucial factor (Goffman, 1963, p. 48).

Passing for other groups deemed ‘enemy aliens’—such as the Japanese Canadians—was not possible due to the visibility of their difference (i.e. facial features and skin colour). For German Canadians, passing was relatively easy. Unless one spoke and a distinguishable German accent was noticed, German Canadians could pass with relative ease. Standing in a crowd, German Canadians could blend in with the “normal” Canadian society. They had no distinguishable physical characteristics that marked them as different. Yet, “... he who passes will have to be alive to aspects of the social situation which others treat as uncalculated and unattended. What are unthinking routines for normals can become
management problems for the [stigmatized]” (Goffman, 1963, p. 88). In essence, Goffman argues that “concealment often becomes cumbersome” (p. 89).

For German Canadians, assimilation and passing created a sometimes difficult situation. Goffman helps to explain this difficulty:

It is often assumed, and with evidence, that the passer will feel torn between two attachments. He will feel some alienation from his new ‘group,’ for he is unlikely to be able to identify fully with their attitude to what he knows he can be shown to be. And presumably he will suffer feelings of disloyalty and self-contempt when he cannot take action against ‘offensive’ remarks made by members of the category he is passing into against the category he is passing out of—especially when he himself finds it dangerous to refrain from joining in this vilification (Goffman, 1963, p. 87).

We have seen examples of this in stories documented by Ursula Hegi (1997). In particular, one young German immigrant, Katharina, watched movies that vilified Germans but she “wanted to fit in with [her] friends” so did not challenge the jokes and negativity towards other Germans. These torn feelings are explored further by Hans Panthel (1991):

Historically, we German Canadians always had to pay, here in this country, for the political sins of our kinfolk in faraway Germany, although there were absolutely no efficacious political ties ever left between the German governments and the German Canadian immigrants once they had left German territory. A German emigrant was rather always looked at as some kind of a traitor to the unity of German nationalism if he decided to turn his back to his country of birth and try his luck overseas (p. 67).

On some occasions, Haselbach (1998) argues, “identity seems to be open to deliberation. Personal identity, or identity from a personal perspective, seems to have a voluntary side” (p. 7). Like Norquay, Haselbach (1998) admits that “there seems to be occasions where identity can be chosen, by a decision or by re-narrating one’s story” (p. 7). Here, some German Canadians may chose to over-identify with being Canadian – thus, choosing to negate their German heritage.
The experiences of those post-war German Canadian immigrants proves that stigma and discrimination have shaped their identities. But, was the stigma a result of the atrocities committed by the Nazis in the Second World War? Or, was it because of their status as recent enemies? If we look at the result of the First World War, we see that discrimination and prejudice toward German Canadians was abundant during this time period and in the immediate years afterwards. In fact, German Canadians did not experience this animosity until the First World War began—despite their long history of settlement in Canada. This animosity again became prevalent during the Second World War and was felt in the years immediately following. It is evident that the stigma related to German Canadians is related to their being enemies during the war. However, we have heard numerous stories from German Canadian immigrants that the affiliation with Naziism had a strong effect on the feelings of guilt and shame that shaped their identities. These feelings have weighed heavily on the rapid loss of German Canadian culture and the quick assimilation to Canadian culture.

Bassler (1998) states:

Many German Canadians tried to cope with the traumatic ascription of an enemy alien identity by camouflaging it—in some cases by assuming a Dutch, Swiss, Scandinavian or Russian identity. It is widely assumed that World War I accelerated the assimilation of the older generation of immigrants while World War II and the Nazi stigma caused even newcomers to jettison their German identity. . . . The world wars also imposed a new identity evolving from the experience shared by people of German ethnic origin in Canada and elsewhere of being persecuted as 'Germans' during the war and stigmatized as such after the war. The commonalty of this experience generated a defensive identity comprising most groups and generations of the German Canadian mosaic. Whether they liked it or not, people of German-speaking background have become associated with the historic guilt for Canada's sacrifices in the Great War and the atrocities committed by the Third Reich. Protest against this ascription has been to little avail (p. 93).

The post-war German immigrants "seemed eager to discard an identity maligned by the Nazi
stigma” (Bassler, 1998, p. 93).

Some may argue that the stigma associated with being an immigrant is felt by visible minorities more prominently. I am not debating this point. Rather, I argue that stigma and discrimination felt by the German Canadians was distinct to them because of their stigma as “enemy aliens” and their assumed affiliation with the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime. Haselbach (1998) states:

Ethnic identity is a construction in accordance with a particular social and political situation in a particular place. The fact that visibility is so strong a reference point in the North American construction of ethnic identity does not mean that ethnicity is necessarily constructed along the lines of skin pigmentation. The very ‘visiblity’ needs to be understood as a referred norm of ethnic distinction; thus, it is socially constructed as well (p. 11).

German Canadians tended to lose their native identity more quickly than all other European groups. Panthel (1991) writes:

Our behaviour in this country, otherwise far from being unnoticeable, is low-key for a number of reasons each of which is worth debate. Firstly, it is of course our unsavoury past that each of us middle-aged German Canadians still suffers from, whether we actively participated in Hitler’s war or not. Secondly, we have such a marked talent for disappearing among our Anglo-Saxon cousinry, a circumstance that is probably caused by our historical past as well. Thirdly, after all the turmoil in modern history we long for a life of private retirement. Other reasons point to traits of loneliness in our national character. Although not Anglo-Saxon ourselves, we are closest to that group along with the Scandinavians perhaps, but what distinguishes us from both groups are our collective ... guilt feelings that most of us bear like millstones around our necks (p. 66).

While Italian Canadians were also the “enemy” to Canadians during the war, the Italian Canadians retained their cultural roots, language, cuisine, and strong connections to sport (i.e. soccer). Even today, the Italian Canadian ethnic group is vibrant and visible. It should be noted that the Italian Canadians, in most respects, were unable to ‘pass’ into the
mainstream Anglo-Saxon Canadian society. Unable to ‘pass,’ the Italian Canadians created a viable ethnic community as they banded together in solidarity. “Even today, some ... feel that the story [of their treatment as ‘enemy aliens’] should not be publicized but rather forgotten, because they consider it a blot on their history” (Scherini, 2000, p. 299). But, where is the German Canadian group today? German Canadians, as a group, are somewhat hidden from society. We have seen that the experiences and stigma of being German Canadian has weighed heavily on the submersion of their ethnic identity.

Section Seven: German Canadian Immigrants Today

The immigrant boom from the fifties has left us with an age group which is now in retirement or looking forward to retirement. Those who immigrated as adults are now elderly and many have passed away. The remaining German Canadian immigrants from this time period were quite young when they came to Canada and are less likely to keep up with German traditions and culture. Those German Canadians who arrived as young children do not have such a strong emotional attachment to Germany as their parents. One area where this diminishing sense of national identity can be seen is in the German clubs in Canada. The existing German clubs have started to re-evaluate their priorities.

They are confronted with a large dance floor which they will not be able to use in the future. Instead, their members will need rocking chairs to ease their ailing bones. What this will mean in terms of dying German clubs, nobody has dared to estimate .... If we look at all these changes, a striking conclusion seems necessary: The German value system among the German Canadians is slowly merging with the Canadian system (Schmidt, 1983, p. 74).

The offspring of the German Canadian immigrants have an even lesser attachment to Germany. Zimmer (1998) states that the children of German immigrants “... have become
assimilated to such an extent that the cultural background of their parents has become largely meaningless to them, and is merely a sentimental appendage to a Canadian identity” (p. 30).

Burnet and Palmer (1989) are right in stating:

First-generation immigrants often have cultural and linguistic badges they cannot shed even if they wish to; second-generation immigrants may still have, or feel they have, distinctive marks, but even more commonly have a feeling of being divided or being in transition; members of the third and later generations, unless they have visible characteristics linking them to their ancestral group, have a choice of identifying themselves with that group or simply being Canadian (p. 220).

Despite the almost non-existent ties that the children of German immigrants may feel, there is, nevertheless, often a vestigial attachment to Germanness. One second-generation Canadian writes about her experience of having German heritage:

I know that my father was born in Germany, but this doesn’t seem to make much difference to our family. He doesn’t eat German food, or wear lederhosen, or even drink beer out of tall steins. In fact, I know very little about his German past. When anyone asks me what I am ... I say, ‘Canadian, but my father is German.’ According to my father, Germans make the best immigrants because they blend in, assimilate. Later I come to think of it more as camouflage, a desire to remain incognito, to erase the past. I don’t know what being German means exactly, but I know from an early age that German is something to be ashamed of (Weber, 2001, p. 53).

Weber goes on to explain her awareness that having German heritage means something different from other ethnic backgrounds. She states:

It carries more weight, or at least the weight is different. It means being something that one has to apologize for, to be embarrassed of even. It’s a lesson I will learn many more times. When I’m nineteen and applying to live in a house in Toronto, one of the tenants stamps out of the room and declares that if I am accepted he will be forced to take his showers at the U of T, given that the house has a gas stove in the kitchen. These words sting, as do the words, ‘Yuck, my least favourite people’ (said with scrunched-up face) when I point out an available Master’s student to a friend who is looking for love (Weber, 2001, p. 53).
Weber explains that she feels there is no adequate defence to these blatant discriminations. She states:

The worst part of these attacks is that there is no available defence. What do you say to the Jewish man who doesn’t want to share his living space with a German? And what to retort to the friend who is repulsed by my suggestion, in particular once I’d learned that her own mother was a survivor of Auschwitz? This Germanness is a curse; it is a deep wart that no solvent can lift from the body (Weber, 2001, p. 54).

Most of the time, Weber states, having a German heritage means very little. She states that her family “blend[ed] in with the mainstream far more than the families of any of [her] ethnic friends” (Weber, 2001, p. 58). Clearly, the experiences as a child of German Canadian heritage has shaped how she views herself and how she fits into the Canadian society. Weber’s experience is not unique to her. Many of the offspring of German Canadian immigrants have experiences like hers which shape the identities of the second-generation Canadians as well as their original immigrant ancestors.

Panthel (1991) argues:

A good number of us appear as if we had stolen something recently and were now bent on making never-ending amends. Yes, there exists indeed something like a communal guilty conscience that attaches itself to one’s personality whether one is of the factually guilty generation of Germans or not. And do they—by that I mean the media, television especially—ever rub your national past into your conscience! It often has the appearance as if the entire German people, past and present, were on trial .... I, for one, feel offended when a whole nation, pluralistic as it was, is indicted because the Nazis came to power and acted as they did. Even the huge masses of Hitler’s followers, with all their opportunists and hypocrites among them, do not justify wholesale moral condemnation of the Germans as such in the past, present, and the future (p. 67).
Conclusion

Clearly, the stigma felt by those Germans Canadians in the years after the Second World War has been passed down and carried on by their offspring. As time passes and generations flourish, it becomes easier for those subsequent generations to claim their Canadian-ness and cut any ties to their German heritage. What is left then, is a figurative hole in their identities. Unwilling or unable to claim their German heritage as something to be proud of, the subsequent generations of German Canadians become more and more “Canadian.”

Research shows that the identities of German Canadians who arrived in Canada between 1945 and 1960, were submerged. The effect of stigma, discrimination, and guilt from being associated with the atrocities of the Second World War has been enormous. In fact, it has been so enormous that we have a German Canadian community today that is scattered and fragmented.

German Canadian culture and identity is today based on the outdated notion of “oom-pa-pa” bands and Schuhplattler dancers. The language and traditional cuisine have mostly been lost. German Canadian immigrants from the post-war years experienced discrimination and negativity which forced them to submerge their true identities such that we are left with a weak German Canadian culture today. As this culture—and the people who perpetuate it—die off, we are left with a German Canadian culture and identity that is more and more Canadian.
Limitations and Areas for Further Research

There were some limitations to this project that should be noted. In particular, oral histories through interviews would be invaluable for a project exploring the experiences of German Canadian immigrants. There is little research on this topic available so a widespread study to incorporate interviews would be beneficial. In fact, there are very few publications on German Canadians, in general. While searching various Canadian newspapers from the 1930s and onwards, there were only a handful of articles relating to German Canadians. It was virtually impossible to determine the attitude towards German immigrants at the time because of the lack of articles printed. Furthermore, there were no newspaper articles published between 1945 and 1960 that explored the experiences of German Canadians in that time period. Interviews with German Canadian immigrants would be beneficial to adequately cover this topic; however, it should be noted that many of those immigrants are now aging and many have already passed away. It would also be interesting to interview those Germans who returned to Germany after their initial immigration here. Their experiences may tell an interesting story. While it would be difficult to track down those German immigrants who returned to Germany, this information is important to determine the attitudes these immigrants faced upon their arrival in Canada.

One area available for further research includes the Public Archives of Canada—located in Ontario. The Public Archives has in its holdings several files relating to German Canadian immigrants. These records are located primarily in the files of the Department of Immigration, Agriculture, Defence, and the Department of Secretary of State (Grenke, 1998). These records mainly document the relationship between the German
Canadian community and various governmental agencies.

In 1972, the Canadian government established the Ethnic Archives. Since its establishment, the Ethnic Archives "has sought to locate and obtain records of German Canadian national organizations and the papers of individuals which would portray the German experience in Canada from that community's point of view" (Grenke, 1998, p. 96). The post-World War II records include "files of the Trans-Canada Alliance of German Canadians (MG28V4), the Central Organization of Sudetan German Clubs (MG28V5), and the Canadian Baltic Immigration Aid Society (MG28V99)" (Grenke, 1998, p. 98). Furthermore, the Ethnic Archives has "the Gundermann Family papers (MG30C127) [which] relate largely to Martin Gundermann's experiences as an internee during World War II" (Grenke, 1998, p. 98).

Unfortunately, "the proclivity of secular German Canadian organizations not to retain a record of their activities was given extra impetus [during the war]. This was the case particularly where members of organizations held files which they felt might incriminate them" (Grenke, 1998, p. 97). Whether incriminating or not, files were destroyed or simply not kept. The Vancouver German Club (aka Alpen Club) was contacted for this project but they did not have any files on record—despite their longstanding visibility in the Vancouver community.

Further research in German Canadian Studies is warranted. "Today, German Canadian Studies are still marginalized in the rapidly developing field of high-caliber ethnic studies in Canada. Mainstream ethnic historiography bypasses German Canadians" (Sauer, 1998, p. 227). In fact, "a 1990 anthology, Interdisciplinary Approaches to Canadian Society,
omits almost completely any references to German Canadian endeavours” (Sauer, 1998, p. 227).

“Although attempts to record the development of individual German-speaking settlements date back as far as the 18th century, the idea of writing the history of the German element in Canada on a national scale is a relatively recent one” (Sauer, 1998, p. 228). This project has pieced together a number of narrative and critical fragments to better understand the implications of the formation of German Canadian identity in the post-Second World War period. It is agreed by many scholars that German Canadian studies is an area that warrants further research.
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