



Community Interviews: Part II

By: The Oneida Trust and Enrollment Committee

This series of articles is designed to inform Oneida citizens about enrollment issues. The total number of Oneida enrolled members is expected to decline within the next 10 years. The goal of these articles is to generate community conversations about citizenship and belonging so that we may explore our options.

Sustain Oneida is conducting an ongoing series of community interviews. Oneida citizens, tribal council members, and youth groups shared their ideas about community, engagement and enrollment. To maintain anonymity, responses are grouped together.

5. How big a role does having a home in Oneida play? Being active in tribal government? Knowing/using the language? Knowing the community landmarks? Knowing the history of the Oneida people? The history of the WI reservation? Being born/growing up in Oneida?

The high school middle school groups placed the most importance on being born/growing up in Oneida, knowing the language, and knowing the history. "Having a home in Oneida because you'll be around more Oneida people, and know what's going on." "You know so much of the culture if you know the language." "There are places on the res where people know more or less of culture." "Depends on where you live. There's Three Sisters neighborhoods. Then there's Site One and Site Two: that's straight up res!"

"You follow your mom's clan – different way of being Oneida."

"Language is the most critical issue facing our culture today. Most people will tell you our language is what makes us Oneida. Feels like urban Indians are more susceptible to assimilation and all the mainstream messages of society about Native people. We're seen as historical people."

6. What is the difference between "engagement" and "belonging?" Is there a difference?

"They are similar, thin line. Belonging works two ways. You want to be there and people also want you to be there. Engaging is by choice, belonging just happens. You

earn belonging." "Belonging/engagement is kind of like homework. Belonging you have to do and engagement is kind of like extra credit."

7. What does it mean to belong to a group?

"Can be positive or negative." "Sometimes it's a matter of looking like you belong or not. Like preppy kids in a [Gothic] crowd." "If you look different they treat you different."

"If you have similar beliefs." "There are benefits/pitfalls." "We are learning about WWII in class and it's like the Nazis: belonging was more negative. And sometimes belonging is more positive." "Oneida gangs, I don't really see them and I don't know if they're that bad, but there's a difference between gangs and us here [youth group]." "People talk about "per caps," but it's more about the intangible benefits like the spiritual. When you run out of per caps then what do you have? Where is your spiritual place when you pass on? For me I know where I am going when I pass on."

"I think I don't realize I'm part of a group until I'm out of it. Like when I went to Southwest High School and no one had heard of fry bread or seen Smoke Signals. Gotta teach 'em!" "I think we need an identifying word to know we are in a group - like "Oneida"- to feel that belonging."

"I think there are three types of Indians:

- 1) People who give the Cherokee princess story who don't know anything (some term them "wannabees")
- 2) Uninformed enrolled individuals
- 3) Engaged, going to ceremonies, know the traditions."

"I fulfill the requirements to belong to the Oneida tribe. I've been on boards where I fulfilled my requirement. But I became disengaged with board. For me 'belonging' is meeting requirements, not an emotional connection. Not enough people who are actively participating in the tribe. Engaged in the tribe. Takes belonging to another level."

8. What do you think about blood quantum?

"I get called "black" every day. I'm ¼ white, some look whiter than others." "Some people brag that they have higher blood quantum than others." "If blood quantum changed I wouldn't care, maybe my parents would." "If we continue with blood quantum, eventually our tribe will cease to exist. We are 17,000 people in a U.S population of 300 million. We are tiny. We can't afford to segregate or alienate our membership. We need to engage as much as we can. Using whatever strategy we can. Regardless of where we live." "People say, "One day there'll be no more Oneida." I disagree with that. The whole of Oneida is more than a fraction. These conversations aren't happening in the community much."

9. If not blood quantum then what?

“I agree in preserving blood lines. The tribe should provide incentives to preserve those lines. I don’t think there should be a quantum. Decendancy maybe. But at the same time I want to see blood lines preserved. Provide incentives to those who marry Oneida. Maybe marry someone who is your quantum or higher. I feel the tribe should be developing a better strategy to engage membership that’s off the res. We need everybody we can get to preserve this culture/language.”

10. Other comments you would like to add?

“Enrollment is tough. For me the bottom line - culture, history, people language is amazing. As a people we’ve gone through bumpy roads, those things have damaged us, but now we start reclaiming culture and language. We are in a better place now. I can’t stand the quantum thing. I do my best to learn the culture and live it.”

Stay tuned for the more interview responses!

For more information about Sustain Oneida please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/OneidaTrust>

<https://oneida-nsn.gov/bcc/TrustEnrollmentCommittee/>

For comments or questions please email: sustainoneida@oneidanation.org.