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*The Applied Anthropologist* publishes peer-reviewed articles, commentaries, brief communications, and book reviews on a wide range of topics. The journal's focus is on cultural change and adaptation in the modern world. The journal explores how humans approach, analyze, and develop solutions to cultural, ecological, economic, and technological problems.

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## EDITOR'S NOTES FROM JEAN N. SCANDLYN

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This issue represents the halfway mark of my tenure as editor of *The Applied Anthropologist*. As we move into the second half, I want to share plans for the upcoming three issues of the journal. In the spring issue, 2010, Pennie L. Magee will serve as guest editor for a special issue on community-based and sustainable agriculture. Former Editor-in-Chief Larry Van Horn has graciously agreed to act as book review editor for this issue, bringing back book review treatments in which a series of scholars review selected works with responses to their comments by the book's author or authors. This promises to be a very full and exciting issue. In the fall issue, 2010, Kreg Ettenger and I will edit a special issue looking at critical reflections on participation in community-based projects and research in a variety of settings, returning to a general issue in spring, 2011.

As editor, I am always looking for manuscripts to consider for publication in the journal, and I welcome unsolicited manuscripts on a wide range of topics related to cultural change and adaptation in the modern world. Please feel free to send me a message via e-mail or call me if you would like to see if your manuscript would be appropriate for our journal or simply send me the manuscript [see "Guidelines for Authors" on the inside back cover of this issue]. If a manuscript fits with our publication mission, I send it out for peer review.

In addition, I am especially eager to receive manuscripts based on papers delivered at the annual spring meeting of the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology. Metropolitan State College of Denver will once again host the conference from April 22-25, 2010 on the Auraria Campus in downtown Denver, Colorado. The theme of this year's conference is "Representation: Who is Heard and Who Needs to be Heard?" If you are interesting in presenting a paper, please submit an abstract of no more than 250 words to Kathleen Pickering by mail (Department of Anthropology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1787) or email (Kathleen.Pickering@colostate.edu), no later than Friday, February 26, 2010. For more information, contact Kathleen Pickering by email or phone (605) 441-0271.

Finally, following the practice established by former editor Larry Van Horn, I am looking for authors to write book reviews and book review treatments. By writing a review, you not only have a publication, but the book to keep! If you are interested in reviewing any of the books listed below, please contact me by e-mail at [jean.scandlyn@ucdenver.edu](mailto:jean.scandlyn@ucdenver.edu) or by phone at 303-556-5932. The following are titles for consideration:

*The Road from Frijoles Canyon*  
by William Y. Adams (2009)

*The Ancient Southwest: Chaco Canyon, Bandelier, and Mesa Verde*  
by David E. Stuart [2008]

*Moche Art and Visual Culture in Ancient Peru*  
by Margaret A. Jackson [2008]

*Pottery and Practice: The Expression of Identity at Pottery Mound and Hummingbird Pueblo*  
by Suzanne L. Eckert [2008]

*Man the Hunted: Primates, Predators, and Human Evolution*  
by Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman [2009]

# Community-Based Tourism and the Politics of Development<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Eric Bauer<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*This article examines the negotiation of community-based tourism development in coastal Ecuador. Based on fieldwork conducted in Manabí province and using local development practices as a case study, this article highlights the political dimensions of development practices by emphasizing the role of identity in the negotiation of community-based tourism development. I focus specifically on the intersection of identity and development while emphasizing the politics of development (the strategic use of politics and frames of understanding by local populations during the process of development). Through an examination of community-based development as it is experienced by local actors, I suggest that development can become a form of political capital that can be used as a mechanism for expanding and maintaining a local political base. [community development, tourism, identity, Ecuador]*

## Introduction

**O**n a cool damp afternoon in October 2007, I sat with Don Agustín in his humble home located in front of the beach.<sup>3</sup> It was my last research trip to coastal Ecuador and I was there to find out local reactions to a number of recently completed community-based development projects that had been administered by the *comuna* Macaboa.<sup>4</sup> I have known Don Agustín for years. He is a short man with a thick build. He is almost always impeccably dressed whether working on his boat or attending an important community function. Don Agustín is the son of one of the village's wealthiest men. Despite coming from a family of means, he has little himself. When the weather is willing, he works his fields in *la montaña*, a place that he lovingly refers to as *la loma* (the hill). When the rains do not come, he makes a living from the ocean. In many ways he is the prototypical Macaboano. He is a child of Macaboa and he has spent all of his 60 plus years in the community in which he was born.

"*Es dinero perdido; . . . no se sirve la gente*" (It is lost money; . . . it doesn't serve the people) he said as his face turned flush with anger. Don Agustín was referring to the money that the *comuna* had received for community-based tourism development projects; projects that, according to many, were ill-conceived and that have provided little benefit for the community as whole.

This article examines the politics of community-based development in the coastal Ecuadorian community of Macaboa. Over the past decade, Macaboa has undergone two important

transitions. In 2004, the *comuna* Macaboa gained official recognition as an indigenous community and a shift from traditional economic endeavors such as commercial fishing and diving to a growing focus on tourism development has followed. This shift quickly followed, with the defining moment being the implementation of a World Bank funded community development initiative that emphasized community heritage and cultural identity in the form of *turismo comunitario* (community-based tourism). I situate these development practices within the context of ongoing struggles for local political legitimacy. By looking at the interface of identity, political action and development, I attempt to move beyond idealized notions of community development that all too frequently ignore the internal politics that mediate development practices. I use the case of community-based development in Macaboa as a focal point for the presentation and discussion of the politics of development. The politics of development is here conceived of as the strategic use of politics and frames of understanding by local populations as they negotiate the course of development. The case presented in this article illustrates the interface of development and identity by exemplifying how development intervenes and mediates in the cultural and political negotiation of collective identity.

One of the key issues at stake in development practices is the issue of power; most scholars recognize that politics and development cannot be compartmentalized. In both theory and

practice development is political. My focus in this article is the intersection of development and identity with an emphasis on the negotiation of development through an examination of the contributing social and political factors that influence development practices. It is within this context of understanding the political dimensions of development that I examine the case of community-based tourism development in rural Ecuador. I suggest that by looking at the competing visions of development as presented by the various actors involved, we gain an appreciation for the politics of development. In presenting this case study, it is not my goal to shed a negative light on local political institutions, but instead I intend to utilize the case of community-based tourism development in the comuna Macaboa as a launching point for an expanded discussion of the politics of development.

### **Case Study: Community-Based Development in Rural Ecuador**

Community development has long been a staple of the alternative development paradigm; consequently, it has a storied history within the context of anthropological research. The marriage between community development and anthropological inquiry seems quite natural. Community studies have been a cornerstone of anthropological research since the early days of the discipline. Although the anthropological quest for knowledge has moved away from a focus on the local, community studies still maintain an importance within the discipline. This is especially true when it comes to studies pertaining to economic development.

Understandings of community and community development have changed over the course of the past few decades, as have anthropological approaches to community development. Veltmeyer notes, "community-based or community-directed development – the community development movement – has had a checkered but long history, waxing here, waning there, resurfacing or reasserting itself in different forms, places, and contexts" (2001:27). Despite its persistence as a particular discourse of development and as an area of focus for anthropologists, the notion of "community" remains a point of contention for many anthropologists; for some it is viewed

with outright disdain due to its amorphous nature and the difficulty in defining exactly what constitutes community. In her discussion of community-based tourism development in East Africa, anthropologist Christine Walley questions the practice of using the term "community" by suggesting, "drawing boundaries around groups of people is extremely difficult in practice" (2004:133). While the boundaries Walley refers to have to do with the demarcation of a marine park, the notion of boundaries is not merely physical.

It is equally challenging to draw conceptual boundaries around members of a proposed community. Moreover, for scholars as well as development practitioners, there is often a tendency to formulate an idealized notion of community. With reference to tourism and community, McIntyre, Hetherington and Inskeep define community as "any homogenous place capable of tourism development . . . below the national and regional levels of planning" (1993:1). The mention of homogenous is particularly problematic. Challenges notwithstanding, I find it virtually impossible to avoid using the term "community" within the present discussion and therefore, it is necessary to continue forward while simultaneously recognizing the inherent deficiencies associated with such a term. These deficiencies include: (1) the fact that the "concept of community serves to draw attention away from and ignore the internal class divisions and structural forces operating on individuals at this level" and instead presents an essentialized picture of economic, social and political homogeneity (Veltmeyer 2001: 27-28) that emphasizes unity and sameness over difference (Belsky 1999); (2) the concept of community frames community as a bound social entity when in reality communities overlap, intertwine and are intersected; and (3) the concept of community suggests a sense of permanence and immutability as opposed to recognizing that communities are constantly undergoing processes of change and transformation.

Even though the concept of community is riddled with complexities, I suggest that we can approach community in the following manner. Borrowing from Gupta and Ferguson (2002: 67), we can here conceptualize of community as

consisting simultaneously of a physical space and “clusters of interaction” to which we can attribute certain ways of doing and a sense of social identity and solidarity. In the case of my research in coastal Ecuador a sense of community among local inhabitants comes from an understanding of shared history as well as a connection to place. It is from this point of departure that we can begin to gain a more informed understanding of community-based development.

By definition, community-based tourism involves the host community in planning, developing and maintaining tourism projects (Blackstock 2005). Community-based tourism development corresponds to other forms of community development by striving to engage local populations in development processes by affording them control over development projects (Blackstock 2005). As a form of participatory development, community-based tourism ideally includes “equitable sharing of the control, division, and use of resources and of the ultimate benefits of development in a community” (Anacleto 2002:172). At its core, community-based tourism, or CBT as it is known by development practitioners, strives to engage local actors as active participants in development projects. Even with such an apparently equitable approach to devel-

opment, community-based development regularly fails to recognize how local practices mediate development processes. Building on this discussion of community-based development, I use the case of community-based tourism development in Macaboa to exemplify the politics of development.

### The Comuna Macaboa

The comuna Macaboa was formed in 1976. It includes the villages of Macaboa and Río Piedra. However, despite having access to land, it was not until 1991 that the comuna Macaboa was granted communal title to 2,536 hectares (6,266 acres) of land that extends from the northernmost point of Macaboa to the southernmost point of the village of Río Piedra and inland to an area known as El Oro. Of the approximately 1900 individuals who reside in the comuna Macaboa (1400 in the village of Macaboa and 500 in the village of Río Piedra), fewer than 400 are registered *comuneros* (members of the comuna).

Macaboa is a tranquil village located on Ecuador’s south-central Pacific coast (see Figure 1). The region is decidedly rural and is characterized by rolling hills and dense tropical vegetation in the form of both humid tropical forest and dry tropical forest. Where the rugged hill region

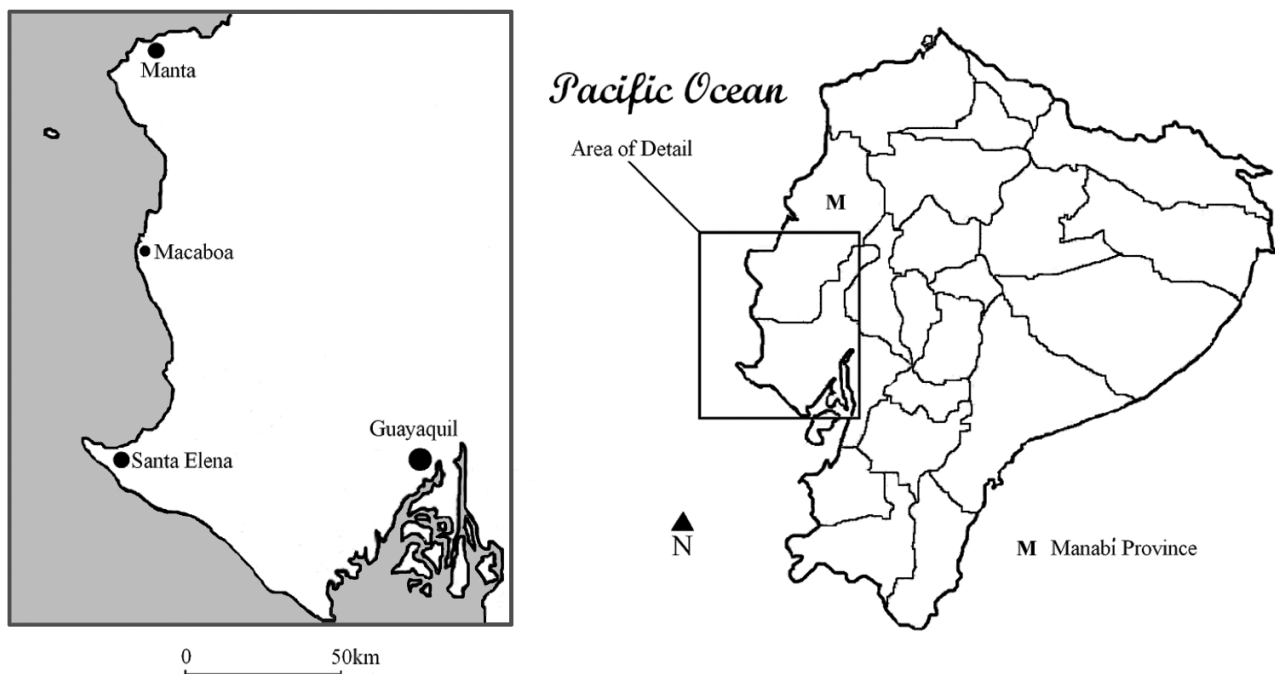


Figure 1: Map of South-Central Coastal Ecuador (Daniel E. Bauer)

of the Ecuadorian coast meets the Pacific Ocean, there are numerous natural bays upon which many of the towns and villages of the area are situated. In Macaboa dirt streets meet the ocean and bicycles outnumber automobiles. On any given afternoon one can witness children playing soccer in the streets while women converse on the stoops of their brightly colored homes and men congregate at the beachfront or at one of the many small stores in town. In many ways Macaboa is a typical Ecuadorian fishing village and *tranquilo* (tranquil) is the word that most residents use to describe the community.

Despite the peaceful setting that largely defines the village the community is not void of political tension. The quest for control of the comuna has led to an internal fission. Since 2002 the comuna Macaboa has undergone a political transition in which development has played a central role. The shift toward tourism development was punctuated by the implementation of a World Bank funded community-based tourism initiative in 2006. During this same period the comuna gained official state recognition as an indigenous *pueblo* or community. Conflicting views of local development fall along political lines and community development has been used to legitimate political claims. As the following case illustrates, tourism development can be understood as a form of political capital in which identity is a commodity that is used to negotiate the course of development. It is within this context that I examine the political dimensions of community-based tourism development.

In the spring of 2005, the comuna Macaboa made plans to begin a broad-based initiative to promote tourism in the villages of Macaboa and Río Piedra. Prior to this time most of the tourism development in Macaboa occurred under the auspices of private development or, on some occasions, cooperative investment in tourism.<sup>5</sup> However, prior to 2005, tourism remained a minor part of the local economy and tourism development in Macaboa is still in its infancy. The community development plan that was proposed in 2005 was different from previous development efforts in that it was a plan to initiate and develop “turismo comunitario” or community-based tourism as opposed to private or cooperative tourism development.

Throughout Ecuador the term “turismo comunitario” has been adopted to describe tourism that is community-based in as much as the perceived benefits of tourism are not for an individual, but for the community as a whole. Turismo Comunitario differs from other types of tourism not only because it is “communal” in form, but also because the dominant ideology behind turismo comunitario is one that attempts to provide tourists with an “authentic” experience living in a rural Ecuadorian community. Tourists are encouraged to stay with local families and to take part in the practices of daily life to the extent to which they are comfortable. In this way turismo comunitario is meant to put the tourist face to face with local culture.

Relating to the growing discourse of ecotourism throughout Latin America, Ecuadorian turismo comunitario relies heavily on the implementation of ecotourism projects, as such projects are often considered to be environmentally and culturally sustainable. While definitions of ecotourism vary, it is generally recognized that ecotourism projects are designed with a conscious intent of environmental sustainability. In the case of turismo comunitario there is an emphasis on ecotourism as a culturally and environmentally appropriate form of development. In my own encounters with development practitioners as well as participating community members, ecotourism was more often than not interpreted as a form of development that utilized the natural environment and cultural heritage as attractions for tourists with a less explicit focus on environmental sustainability. Thus, ecotourism became a concept that could be utilized to promote tourism to potential customers even if local understandings of ecotourism were often vague or ill-defined. It is important to note that this emphasis on the natural environment is not unique to the cultural context of Macaboa. Corresponding to a broader trend throughout Latin America, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Information and Tourism, which was established in 1992, has promoted rural development initiatives that emphasize utilizing the natural environment as a tourist attraction. With this goal in mind, in 2004 the Ministry adopted the motto “*Porque Somos Naturaleza*” (“Because we are Nature”). This

focus on the natural environment has subsequently become an important feature of *turismo comunitario*.

The rhetoric of *turismo comunitario* permeates discussions of rural development strategies in Ecuador and *turismo comunitario* has become such a meaningful yet often misunderstood term that it holds a prominent place in the state-sponsored development discourse. The most significant proponents of *turismo comunitario* are the organizations *Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador* [CODENPE Council for the Development of Nationalities and Communities of Ecuador] and *Federación Plurinacional de Turismo Comunitario del Ecuador* [FEPTCE Plurinational Federation of Community Tourism in Ecuador]. Each organization provides guidance and funding opportunities for development projects within Ecuador's indigenous communities; indigenous communities in Ecuador fall under the administrative jurisdiction of CODENPE. The fact that CODENPE and FEPTCE provide oversight for development in indigenous communities is something that should not be overlooked and indeed is a significant detail.

Prior to 2004, the comuna Macaboa was officially recognized as a *mestizo* or mixed-blood community despite deep historical roots that extend back nearly 5000 years and a continuous occupation that is supported by the archaeological record and historical documents. Internal conflict over the sale of communal land led to a shift in power and to members of the comuna Macaboa to petition the Ecuadorian state for official recognition as an indigenous community. In 2004 the comuna Macaboa gained official recognition as an indigenous community. In doing so the comuna joined 318 other communities that together comprise the *Manta-Huancavilca* (alternate spelling *Wankavilca*) ethnic group. The comuna also gained access to the institutional support of CODENPE and FEPTCE: access that would ultimately prove important for the implementation of various community development projects. In 2006 the comuna Macaboa joined four other comunas to form *Pueblo Manta*. I suggest that gaining official indigenous status provided for a strategic opening that could be used to gain access to development resources.

Thus, the politics of identity became an important component of the development process.

Identity in Macaboa is anything but transparent. Macaboanos recognize their indigenous heritage although they do not necessarily self-identify as being indigenous. Many Macaboanos choose to self-identify as *cholo* (mixed-blood fishers) or *mestizo* while relegating indigeneity to the past in manner similar to what Godreau (2002) refers to as "discursive distancing," representations of collective identity that emphasize temporal and spatial removal from the present by locating "phenotypic and cultural signs 'somewhere else' and in pre-modern times" (283). Complicating this situation in Macaboa is the fact that some Macaboanos stake claim to an indigenous identity that is rooted in the deep pre-history of the region. Godreau's (2002) notion of "discursive distancing" can be applied to the Macaboa case on two simultaneously present and overlapping levels. First, dominant conceptions of indigeneity in Ecuador situate indigeneity geographically and culturally in the highlands and Amazon. Second, for many people in Macaboa, indigeneity is relegated to the past despite its importance in defining ethnic identity in the present. Moreover, it is only within the last decade that ethnic identity in Macaboa has gained considerable significance in the arena of local politics. An increased emphasis on the expression of an indigenous ethnic identity in Macaboa corresponds to a the growth of indigenous politics throughout the Ecuadorian highlands and Amazonian regions, and more recently throughout the Ecuadorian coast (see Álvarez 1999, Bauer 2008, and Bazurco Osorio 2006 for further discussion). In Ecuador, as in much of Latin America, it is common for ethnically indigenous peoples to suppress signifiers of their indigenous identity in favor of the adoption of a *mestizo* cultural identity. Whitten and Fine (1981) refer to this process as *blanqueamiento* (whitening) and suggest that it serves as a master narrative for understanding indigenous/white polarities in Ecuador. Only recently have coastal indigenous inhabitants embraced an indigenous ethnic identity and cultural heritage in opposition to the dominant ideologies of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento*.

## A Longitudinal Study of Community-Based Development

I began conducting research in Macaboa as a graduate student at the same time that the comuna was undergoing the political transition that has defined local politics since 2002. Between 2002 and 2008, I lived and collected data in Macaboa for a period totaling 24 months. My research can be divided into three stages. The first portion of my research focused on documenting natural resource utilization and the local fishing economy. I conducted participant observation and interviewed fishers and divers in order to understand the relationship between identity and economic practice. During the second phase of research I aimed to understand the growth of tourism development in the comuna Macaboa. I paid special attention to private development practices and the growth of an NGO sponsored tourism cooperative. This research was primarily qualitative in nature and data were gathered through participant observation, interviews, and attending meetings of the cooperative. I made numerous research trips to Macaboa between 2005 and 2008 that comprise the third phase of my research. At that time, my research began to shift from a focus on private development and cooperative development to the politics of community-based development corresponding directly to the changes that were taking place in the community at the time; my research during that period forms the basis for this essay.

The data presented here come from two primary sources: (1) participant observation and detailed field notes taken during interactions with individuals participating in the comuna sponsored development initiative, along with notes taken at meetings, reunions and the implementation of development projects and (2) in-depth interviews conducted with stakeholders participating in development initiatives as well as community members who were not involved in the planning or execution of development practices. Follow-up interviews were conducted with individuals after the completion of development projects and these interviews were structured by the use of an interview guide. The qualitative data from follow-up interviews were compared in order to discern patterns in

informant responses. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and all translations are my own.

## Negotiating Community-Based Development

On July 5, 2000 the World Bank approved a loan of \$25,200,000 to be used for sustainable development and the reduction of poverty in rural Ecuador. Funds for the loan were provided by the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and were secured by the Ecuadorian government in June 2002. PROLOCAL (Poverty Reduction and Rural Development Project) funds were to be used for varied activities such as natural resource management, environmental protection, small business development, small-scale farming development and sustainable tourism development.

The community-development plan outlined by the comuna Macaboa consisted of multiple sub-projects including fisheries development, environmental protection eco-tourism and artisanal development. In the spring of 2006, funds were granted for three of the five projects outlined in the proposal. Surprisingly, funds were not granted for fisheries development or environmental protection. Instead, the sub-projects that received funds included *Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Comunitario* (Ecotourism and Community Development), *Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Artesanal Comunitario* (Ecotourism and Artisanal Community Development), and *Implementación de Fincas Integrales en la Comuna Macaboa* (Implementation of Integrated Farms in the Comuna Macaboa). The total monies granted for the three projects exceeded \$150,000.

The sub-project *Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Comunitario* consisted of three related projects that focused on using the natural environment as a tourist attraction. The first phase of the sub-project was the planning and construction of a *sendero ecológico* (ecological hiking trail) in the inland region of Río Piedra. The second phase of the sub-project was the construction of a *mirador* (scenic overlook) on the crest of the southernmost point of the village of Macaboa. The final phase of the project was the construction of a *mirador* in Río Piedra in conjunction with the *sendero ecológico*.

The sub-project Ecoturismo y Desarrollo Artesanal Comunitario included the construction of a *taller artesanal* (artisans' workshop) in Río Piedra. The rationale for building the workshop was to give local artisans a place to work on their own crafts while also providing a space for younger generations to learn local craft traditions through the realization of formal classes. Ultimately, the construction of the community artisans' workshop would allow artisans to increase production and provide a more uniform line of products to the growing tourism market.

The sub-project *Implementación de Fincas Integrales en la Comuna Macaboa* consisted of the construction of two *viveros* (plant nurseries) in the comuna Macaboa. One of the viveros was built in Río Piedra and the other in Macaboa. The purpose of the viveros was to grow traditional plants such as citrus varieties including oranges, limes and grapefruit as well as ornamental plants both for communal use and for profit.

The above-mentioned sub-projects form the core of the PROLOCAL funded development efforts in the comuna Macaboa. All of the projects were implemented in consultation with FEPTCE and CODENPE and executed between February 2006 and February 2007. In the pages that follow, I place community-based development at the center of the struggle for political legitimacy. I pay close attention to local responses to and understanding of community-based development. The majority of the information presented in this section is drawn from my daily interactions with individuals involved in the projects. These individuals include, but are not limited to comuna leaders, project *técnicos* (technical experts) and various individuals who participated in the projects in some capacity. I also present data collected during follow-up interviews that were conducted in the fall of 2007.

In early February 2006, I attended a reunion held in the *casa comunal* to discuss the progress of the various sub-projects. The *casa comunal* is a cavernous building with dim lighting and stale green paint on the walls. It is sparsely furnished and has been for as long as I can remember. There is little appeal to the building other than its capacity to serve as a meeting place for mem-

bers of the community. On this particular day the concrete building served as a cool oasis from the penetrating heat of the afternoon. Prior to the meeting most of the work regarding the projects existed only on paper. I, as well as most of the community, was relatively unaware of what the projects entailed. Approximately 50 individuals attended the meeting and all of them had arrived in order to get a brief introduction to the projects and their potential impact on the comuna Macaboa.

The then-president of the comuna, Roberto Toledo, led the meeting and was assisted by the various *técnicos* who were working with the comuna. Toledo spoke passionately about the upcoming projects and the potential held within each of them. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to provide tangible evidence that the projects were indeed soon to be under way. The corner of the building was filled with various items including plastic tubing, wheelbarrows, barbed wire, shovels and other miscellaneous construction materials. The items were more than their material components. They represented the beginning of the projects and validated Roberto Toledo's authority and power as the president of the comuna. Unlike previous comuna presidents Toledo had made good on his promises. He was responsible for obtaining funds for the projects, demonstrated by the materials that were present at the meeting that day. Thus, the material markers of success gave credibility to Toledo's vision and authority.

Throughout my time in the field I became acutely aware of the close connection between development, identity and local politics as I worked directly with comuna members and individuals who participated in Macaboa's various development projects. The implementation of the numerous community development projects occurred between February 2006 and February 2007. Although each project was separate, they all formed part of the larger *proyecto del turismo comunitario* (community-based tourism project). I provide an overview of the projects in the pages that follow.

Construction of the taller artesanal began in late February 2006. On an unseasonably muggy morning I met Ana Jura, one of the coordinators of the project, as we walked the highway south to

the site of the taller. When we first arrived I was a little taken aback by the location of the taller. It is located on a small hill east of the highway at the north end of the village of Río Piedra. A steep path was carved into the side of the hill and we slowly made our way up the muddy path to the top. I asked Ana about the location and she maintained that the land was “donated” by a comunero. In effect, even though land in the comuna Macaboa is communal, most of the land belongs to individuals in the form of use rights. Therefore land was “donated” back to the comuna by the individual in possession in order to provide a location for the construction of the taller artesanal.

My first visit to the taller artesanal took place only a few days before I was scheduled to leave Ecuador and resume my life as a graduate student. Work on the taller began with the digging of footers for the placement of *pilares* or cement pillars. Construction was scheduled to last approximately two months at which time the taller would be outfitted with the equipment needed for artisans to practice their trade. The rationale behind constructing the artisans’ workshop in Río Piedra was to create a place where local artisans could not only practice their craft, but pass their knowledge on to successive generations. In this way, the workshop would play an important role in the maintenance of important components of the local culture and identity.

The taller was inaugurated in early May 2006. Numerous individuals from the communities of Macaboa and Río Piedra attended the event. The event was not only important because it marked the completion of the first of the PROLOCAL funded projects, it was also important because it established credibility among the acting *cabildo*. In very real terms the opening of the taller illustrated the ability of the *cabildo* to obtain funding for a project and then successfully negotiate the project. The taller thus became a tangible expression of the *cabildo*’s power and authority.

Despite the successful completion of the taller it did not take long for people to demonstrate discontent with the project. I sat with my *compadre* (literally co-father) in a pair of hammocks outside of his family home. We often retreated to the hammocks to avoid the after-

noon sun and to carry on casual conversation about the daily catch, local politics, national news and just about any other topic of interest. On this particular day we spoke about the success of the taller artesanal. During our conversation I recalled seeing a handwritten list of workshop participants posted on the wall of the taller when I had visited earlier that same day. I asked my compadre if he had ever participated in any of the workshops. He told me that he had never attended a class because, “*No es bien organizado . . . y también tengo otros compromisos*” (It isn’t well organized . . . and I also have other obligations). Other individuals whose names appeared on the list, but who claimed to have never or only occasionally attended the classes, gave similar reasons.

Activities in the taller continued on a consistent basis for the first few months of its existence. However, despite the fact that the taller was getting consistent use, strong sentiments of discontent were building among members of the comuna. By way of example I relate the following interaction that occurred during one of the many communal meetings I attended during the course of my research.

In late July 2006 I attended a meeting at the casa comunal in order to discuss the current state of the development projects that were underway. The meeting was sparsely attended, although the individuals in attendance demonstrated a vested interest in the state of the development initiatives. Comuna president Roberto Toledo spoke with passion and confidence about the status of the various projects. At the time the only project completed was the taller. After his brief introductory comments Toledo turned things over to the coordinating técnico (technical advisor) Raúl Vargas. The meeting proceeded in a smooth manner as Raúl championed the success of the taller project. While numerous people nodded in agreement with Raúl, others began to converse among themselves in an air of discontent at which point questions were raised regarding the taller and the participation of youth in the afternoon workshops. A robust middle-aged woman made note of the fact that some people were being excluded from attending classes at the taller. At first the exclusion was blamed on the fact that the youth were not

children of community members who contributed financially to the project. This answer did not sit well with most of the people in the audience and numerous people spoke up with a general dissatisfaction with the rationale for denying access to the taller. One individual noted, "*El proyecto es un proyecto comunitario y el taller es de la comunidad . . . entonces la puerta sería abierta para cualquier miembro de la comuna Macaboa*" (The project is a community project and the workshop belongs to the community . . . therefore the door should be open for whichever member of the comuna Macaboa). A groan of agreement spread through the crowd. The statement was then addressed by asserting that those who were beneficiaries would be given the first opportunity to attend the activities of the taller. When the outbursts became too much for Raúl to address, Roberto Toledo stepped in and relieved him. Roberto maintained that for two classes, 23 students were signed up for the afternoon class and 18 for the night class. He also maintained that the maximum number of students is 25 per session. Various comuneros complained that the maximum numbers were not met yet people were still being turned away.

As I sat witnessing the dissatisfaction associated with the project and its execution, I thought back to one of my previous visits to the taller to visit the children working. Only about eight students were there. When I reviewed the names on the list, I recognized the names of at least five people who I knew had never attended and probably had no intention of attending. Thus, while people had signed up, they were not actually taking up space. The problems inherent in the project were largely due to a lack of communication and a lack of commitment on the behalf of the individuals who had signed up to take the courses and who then decided not to attend the classes.

By the fall of 2006, the taller had fallen into a state of non-use. Even though the project was completed in a timely fashion and a finite number of students received some sort of training, the taller did not appear to provide any tangible benefits to the community as a whole. Thus, while the project was successful in its implementation, it has had little if any longstanding benefit.

The *viveros* (plant nurseries) in Macaboa and Río Piedra shared much the same fate as the taller. Like the taller, work on the viveros began in the spring of 2006. The first vivero was constructed in Río Piedra that spring. Located some four kilometers into the interior of Río Piedra in an area that is normally reserved for horticultural activity, the vivero provided the ideal location for the growth of native plants. The original vivero, constructed in Río Piedra, was completed in the early summer of 2006. The second vivero, located in Macaboa on a piece of property flanked by the casa comunal was completed later that same year. The Río Piedra vivero was originally conceived of as a production vivero. The Macaboa vivero was constructed with the idea that it would be used as a facility for the sale of native plants. In this way the viveros were intended to provide an economic benefit to the communities of Macaboa and Río Piedra. Unfortunately, the *vivero* in Macaboa has received little use since its construction. The vivero in Río Piedra has fared only slightly better. Much like the taller artesanal, the projects were completed but there has been little follow-through on the part of local residents.

Two other projects formed part of the complete effort between PROLOCAL and the comuna Macaboa to promote tourism in the Macaboa region. These include the *sendero ecológico* and accompanying mirador in Río Piedra and a mirador in Macaboa. The sendero has seen limited use since its completion in late 2006. Accessibility to the sendero is difficult even though it is located in an attractive area. Moreover, publicity for the sendero and mirador has been severely limited. When I spoke with Nestor Barrea, a local guide who lives in Río Piedra and who was active in the construction of the sendero and mirador, he maintained that the sendero had received little use since its completion and that it was already in need of maintenance only a few short months after it had been completed.

The mirador in Macaboa is one of the most attractive features of the comuna's push to promote turismo comunitario. It is situated high above Macaboa at the southern point of the village and it provides striking views of the Pacific Ocean and all of the territory encompassed by the comuna Macaboa. Work on the

mirador began shortly after the completion of the taller artesanal and continued throughout the summer of 2006. Unlike the taller, the mirador was not initially conceived of as a project that would provide a direct monetary benefit to the comuna. Instead, the mirador was considered a tourist attraction that would have the potential to draw tourists to the comuna Macaboa.

The crew in charge of building the mirador included members of the comuna Macaboa including cabildo member Antonio Arenas. One of the benefits of the various projects, the mirador notwithstanding, is that all of the projects provided temporary employment for a number of comuneros. In some cases, individual comuneros worked under contract on multiple projects. This was most often the case when the individual was a member of the cabildo. As numerous informants pointed out to me during our discussions about the projects, participation in the projects was often limited to the little more than the members of the cabildo. On multiple occasions informants critiqued the fact that the cabildo allowed the same individuals to be contracted for work on more than one of the projects. Some people even went as far as to suggest that the projects were only executed in order to provide a financial benefit to those individuals who were involved directly (e.g. members of the cabildo).

The construction of the mirador developed very quickly and it was completed in August 2006. The completed mirador is a beautiful structure, but it has no practical use in terms of providing significant benefits to the community. One of the things hindering the mirador is the fact that it is only accessible by way of a fairly treacherous roadway cut into the side of mountain. As such the mirador is slightly beyond the path traveled by most tourists. Shortly after the completion of the mirador the comuna began a second phase that included the construction of a *comedor* (restaurant) and an artisans' shop for the sale of locally produced crafts.

Dissatisfaction began growing in the community after the completion of the mirador. Many people, although content with the mirador as a physical structure, did not understand the rationale for building the comedor and artisans' shop at the same location as the mirador. In the

section that follows I expand upon this brief mention of the dissatisfaction expressed by some community members by examining local reactions to the advent of turismo comunitario projects in the comuna Macaboa.

### **Turismo comunitario Revisited: Local Voices**

I want here to take a step back from addressing the negotiating of community-based development and the projects themselves and shift my focus to a discussion of Macaboa's development projects from a political perspective with special attention being paid to the competing visions of development as expressed by the various individuals involved in the development process. It is of foremost importance to recognize that the shift to turismo comunitario in Macaboa cannot be separated from the political tensions that defined village life throughout my time in the field.

By the spring of 2007, approximately one year into the development projects, it was clear that the expectations posed by turismo comunitario had not been met. If the feelings of many of my informants are at all representative of the sentiments surrounding turismo comunitario in Macaboa, there was a clear if not explicit suggestion that tourism development was a form of political capital that provided political leverage for the acting cabildo and that the success of the projects was paramount for the success of Toledo as the president of the comuna. Toledo took control of the comuna in 2004 following a great deal of political unrest in which he led a popular movement that sought to gain recognition for Macaboa as an indigenous pueblo, which forced the previous leadership from office and drove a wedge into an already divided community. Toledo struggled to maintain support for his agenda, but his focus on community development proved to be an avenue through which political legitimacy could be gained. Toledo's political aspirations were never a secret and he was the target of substantial criticism during his four years as comuna president. For those strongly opposed to Toledo, he was running a corrupt regime that benefited Toledo and his closest confidants both financially and politi-

cally. For Toledo's supporters, he was a revolutionary with strong moral principles and a willingness to fight for his community.

Toledo's success did not go unchallenged despite his hard work and his focus on highlighting local culture through development. Community members voiced their discontent with the projects and Toledo. Some went so far as to suggest directly that community-based development in Macaboa was about nothing more than maintaining political control. Others accused Toledo of corruption and putting his political aspirations above the well-being of the community.

Turismo comunitario became a clear point of contestation by the time I left the field in May 2007. People who had previously supported the projects began to openly question their success and tensions between the community's two factions were at an all-time high. All of the projects had quickly fallen into disrepair and none of them were generating funds for the community. Numerous individuals also made accusations of corruption and fund mismanagement; the types of which are all too common in Ecuador. Some people even went so far as to directly state that the projects were part of comuna president Toledo's attempt to realize his vision of ethnic revitalization for the community. Implicit in the accusation, which was made by a member of the opposition, was the suggestion that Toledo was using the projects to garner much needed support for his own politically motivated interests and that development was used to broker the cultural and political negotiation of a collective indigenous identity. More explicitly, identity became a mediating factor in the process of development. As mentioned previously, the funds and oversight for the development projects outlined in this case study were obtained from CODENPE and FEPTCE. The organizations provide support for Ecuador's indigenous communities and as a consequence aid is provided only to communities with indigenous status. The fact that the comuna Macaboa gained indigenous status in 2004 allowed the comuna to obtain funding for turismo comunitario. Thus, in the case of Macaboa, identity was an important component of the politics of development.

The issue of identity came into question on multiple occasions during my time in the field. Individuals who supported Toledo's development efforts also seemed to generally support his pro-indigenous agenda; whereas members of the opposition, including Don Agustín, dismissed completely the notion of indigenous identity. "*Somos mestizos, cholos, o montuvios pero no somos indios*" (We are mestizo, cholo, or *montuvio*, but we are not Indian).<sup>6</sup> In a radio interview conducted in late October 2007, the same message was broadcast to the listening public as the opposition brought identity to the table in a public display of discontent.

Other individuals made less direct comments about indigenous identity, including the vice president of the comuna under Toledo who maintained that while members of the community do not embrace directly an indigenous identity, it is an important aspect of cultural identity due to the rich history of the region. Another informant maintained that Macaboaños have indigenous roots and it is important to acknowledge their roots. She also informed me that she supported the work of Toledo by stating, "*A veces el president coje el dinero, pero Toledo está usando el dinero para el beneficio del pueblo*" (Sometimes the president [of the comuna] takes the money [for personal use], but Toledo is using the money for the benefit of the community).

The commentaries that I encountered in May 2007 carried over to my final research trip in October 2007. While traveling by bus from Guayaquil to Macaboa I spoke with my compadre about the status of the projects and the local reaction to the projects. He was adamant about the fact that people were not seeing the benefits that they hoped would be gained from the projects. "*Todavía no hay muchos beneficios*" (there still aren't many benefits) he said in a concerned tone.

One of the problems associated with community development is that there is often a gap between "concept and implementation" of community-based development efforts (Stonich 2005:79). This is to say that expectations frequently are not realized because there is a great disparity between rhetoric and practice. The reasons for this can be numerous. In some cases, as Stonich (2005) suggests, the various parties

involved directly in development projects have conflicting goals or agendas. Political conflict became a mediating factor in the case of Macaboa. For community members who supported development and Toledo's political agenda of ethnic revitalization, there was an underlying belief that *turismo comunitario* would result to economic benefits for the community. For opponents of Toledo, *turismo comunitario* was less about development aimed at benefitting the community as a whole and more about supporting a specific pro-indigenous political agenda.

In the case of Macaboa, local interpretations of community-based development become most clear by addressing the reactions of locals to community-based development. In what follows, I revisit some of the conversations that I had with people in order to contextualize local interpretations of community-based development. Informants exhibited a variety of opinions about the overall impact of the various projects. Comments pertaining to community-based development in Macaboa include the following; *"El dinero supuestamente fué para turismo comunitario pero quedó con el cabildo"* (the money was supposedly for community-based tourism, but it stayed with the leadership); *"Nunca ha dado cuenta a la población general. . . . Hizo todo entre ocho o diez personas. . . . Un por ciento se beneficia, noventa y nueve por ciento no recibió nada"* (He never took account of the general population. . . . Everything was done between eight to ten people. . . . One percent (of the population) benefits, ninety-nine percent didn't receive anything); and *"Beneficios a la comunidad . . . no hay muchos"* (Benefits for the community . . . there aren't many). When asked about participation in the projects community members responded in the following way: *"No sabía nada de los proyectos"* (I didn't know anything about the projects); *"No participé primeramente por falta de comunicación...me parece que siempre el grupo de ellos está colaborando juntos. Siempre es sólo un grupo."* (I did not participate first for a lack of communication. . . . It appears to me that the group always works together. It is always only one group).

Even when people did not necessarily agree with the management of funds, they did believe

that the projects had a positive impact on the community. When asked about the impact of the community-based tourism development projects one informant stated, *"Es algo positivo...no cien por ciento pero algo positivo."* (It is something positive...not one hundred percent but something positive) and *"la comunidad se beneficia...es algo bueno porque están haciendo bastante proyectos"* (the community benefits...it is something good because they are doing many projects). For Toledo, the projects were implemented for the benefit of the community. During an interview that I conducted with Toledo at the vivero in Río Piedra he spoke about the importance of the project in the following manner, *"Dejando en claro que este proyecto está manejando por la comuna Macaboa, pero este proyecto pertenece a cien familias, beneficiarios actores, que son justamente miembros, socios activos de la comuna Macaboa"* (Let it be made clear that this project is managed by the comuna Macaboa, but this project belongs to one hundred families, acting beneficiaries who are members, active members of the comuna Macaboa) [author's translation].

A few things are made clear in the statement provided by Toledo. The first is the prominent statement that the project is a communal project that is managed by the comuna. Toledo also notes that the project belongs to the participating members or beneficiaries as they are referred to in the statement. Throughout the course of the projects Toledo maintained a steadfast commitment to the community and he clearly envisioned the development projects as providing benefits for the community despite individual commentaries that indicated otherwise.

Since 2007, the comuna Macaboa has undergone significant changes. Toledo is no longer president of the comuna although he is still an influential figure in local politics. Toledo went on to become vice president of CODENPE and was a candidate for the position of *alcalde* (mayor) of Puerto Azul, the canton to which Macaboa is administratively dependent. The current president of the comuna is continuing along the path laid by Toledo and community-based development is still a central focus for many community members. The community remains divided along political lines.

## Identity and the Politics of Development

In this article I have focused on the negotiation of development in the comuna Macaboa. In doing so, I have paid special attention to broader social and political dynamics that influence community-based development projects. As I have illustrated, development practices are complex and sometimes contradictory. In this section, I want to move the lens back a bit and look at how the case examined in this article relates to broader questions of development and identity.

The case of turismo comunitario in Macaboa presents us with an appropriate context for examining the politics of development with reference to identity. It is no small detail that the growth of community-based tourism development in Macaboa corresponded directly to the rise of indigenous politics in the village and surrounding area. Based on my experiences in coastal Ecuador during both the growth of locally fostered indigenous politics and community-based tourism development, it became clear that the two processes were not mutually exclusive. The rhetoric involved in public and private discussions of development and indigenous identity consistently blurred the boundaries between the two themes. In fact, it was often common for development to be couched in terms promoting “*la historia y identidad del pueblo*” (the history and identity of the village).

As my research suggests, the government institutions FEPTCE and CODENPE are important players in Ecuadorian tourism development and the politics of identity. Both institutions act as organizing bodies for the indigenous pueblos of Ecuador while at the same time acting as two of the state’s most prominent development organizations. The significance of this dual position is that populations that are recognized as indigenous have unique access to the support provided by FEPTCE and CODENPE. If we return to the case of Macaboa, we see that the push for state recognition of indigenous status in 2004 and the subsequent formation of *Pueblo Manta* in 2006 are significant for understanding the politics of development. It is only through the self-articulation of indigenous identity and the subsequent recognition of this identity that the comuna was able to foster relationships with FEPTCE and CODENPE that would ultimately

result in the implementation of turismo comunitario in Macaboa.

Solidifying the position of the comuna Macaboa as an indigenous community and a community that practices turismo comunitario was a legal shift of jurisdiction of the comuna Macaboa from the *Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganaderia* (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock) to CODENPE. Moreover, the establishment and execution of the various turismo comunitario projects can be seen as tangible representations of progress and change that justified Toledo’s position of authority as the president of the comuna. Thus development in Macaboa was not solely about creating changes that benefit the community in social and economic terms. Development became a mechanism through which power is established, exerted and maintained. Escobar (1995) argues in somewhat different terms that development is a Western project aimed at the establishment, exertion and maintenance of power. I suggest that development is concerned with instituting and maintaining power and control, but these directives are engendered not only at the “top” as Escobar (1995) implies. The political dimensions of development are multifaceted and omnipresent and as I have suggested, we can conceive of local political actions that serve to mediate development practices as the politics of development.

## Conclusion

In this article I have tried to illustrate the interconnectedness of the politics of identity and community-based development. My research suggests that development does not exist outside the realm of local politics and local political agendas. Instead, just as development projects can be used to support the interests of national and international donor organizations, they can also be used as a mechanism for expanding and maintaining a local political base. In the case of community-based development in Macaboa, it can be argued that tourism development shared a close camaraderie with political development. The institutionalization of identity in the form of CODENPE and FEPTCE allowed for a unique window of opportunity in which identity and development could be brought together in an attempt to gain political support.

In this article I utilize the case of Macaboa as a concrete illustration of the politics of development while simultaneously suggesting that scholars adopt an approach that emphasizes the political dimensions of development in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with community development practices. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy aspects of the Macaboa case is the transparency with which my informants recognized the political dimensions of community-based development and the ways in which they not only recognized, but expressed their own positions within the development process. The case outlined in this article also illustrates the politicization of identity within the context of development. Most of all, this research sheds light on the complex and often contested nature of development by suggesting that community development entails much more than mere economic change. In Macaboa, local politics are entangled in processes of development and questions of identity often manifest themselves within the context of community development. ○

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology held March 17-21, 2009 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I am grateful to the other panel members and conference participants for their valuable feedback. I also thank the HPSfAA, the editorial staff of *The Applied Anthropologist* and the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and input.

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3. Pseudonyms have been used to protect informant identity.

4. The term “comuna” was originally used in conjunction with Ecuador’s 1937 *Ley de Comunidades Indígenas y Montuvias* (also known as the

Law of Peasant Communes). The law provided legal recognition for indigenous communities through the formation of comunas. More recently the term comuna has come to refer to populations that have access to and administrative control over communally held land. A comuna consists of a five person elected council known as a cabildo and a general membership composed of comuneros (Becker 1999).

5. See Bauer 2007 for a detailed discussion.

6. The term “mestizo” refers to individuals of mixed Spanish and Indian descent. The term “cholo” refers to mixed-descent peasant fishermen. The term “montuvio” refers to mixed-descent peasant horticulturalists of the coastal provinces of Manabí and Guayas.

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# Community Conservation, Alternative Economy, and Holistic Landscapes: Ethnicity and Farm Household Decision-Making on the Great Plains<sup>1</sup>

Michael Brydge<sup>2</sup> and Kathleen Pickering Sherman<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

*Federally imposed political boundaries of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation forced the Lakota to end their nomadic lifestyle and consider other modes of subsistence by 1868. Subsequent federal policies confiscated Lakota lands that were not being used for agriculture and opened those lands to non-Indian agricultural operators. Some Lakota adopted agricultural practices, some worked as farm hands to avoid starvation, while others escaped the assimilative agricultural mandates and continued with traditional natural resource subsistence practices. Despite conflicts with non-Indian homesteaders, some Lakota households practice farming and ranching on the reservation to this day. One question that remains is whether ethnicity and cultural identity influence Lakota agricultural households to make decisions that differ from their non-Indian counterparts. Surveys were administered to seventy-one non-Indian and fourteen Lakota agricultural operators from 2005-2008 to assess agricultural practices, motives and attitudes toward the environment, community values and demographics. An analysis of correlated and closely correlated survey answers from the Lakota and non-Indian subsets reveal significant differences in their attitudes about nature, wildlife and the importance of agriculture relative to wild resources. Differences between agricultural practices, land use strategies, community conservation and economic motives are discussed in this study. [Lakota agriculture, community conservation, Great Plains agriculture, farm household decision-making, environmental ethics]*

## Introduction

Standard economic theory assumes that all actors are rational in the choices they make and that rational actors maximize their utility (Burlington 1962:812). Policy makers often assume that rational actors are motivated by profit maximization and enact economic incentives to entice actors to make desired choices and behavioral changes. Therefore, agricultural policy attempts to create incentives that increase the farm income generated by agricultural operators who adopt the practices that government and society favor (Vogeler 1981; Kroese 2002; Mittal 2002). These economic incentives are often viewed as the only leverage available to influence changes in agricultural practices, even when limited funding means minimal policy impacts on severe ecological, cultural or social consequences produced by the status quo. However, other policy incentives may be created that increase non-economic utilities for agricultural households and allow for greater and more rapid improvements in natural resource conservation, environmental sustainability and carbon sequestration. Ethnicity and cultural preferences may provide examples of

non-economic incentives that might be used to increase the effectiveness of environmental policies.

Though farming and ranching were not traditional means of subsistence for the Lakota, some Lakota on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation are agricultural operators nevertheless. They are influenced not simply by economic incentives, but by traditional Lakota concepts that are integrated into their agricultural practices. By comparing Lakota agricultural household decisions and attitudes with those of non-Indian agricultural households in South Dakota, Colorado and Montana, this study sheds light on whether the ethnicity of agricultural operators alters the efficacy of policy incentives created to encourage conservation measures.

Furthermore, the voices of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples have often been muffled by the dominance of both government policy makers and the capitalist economic system. Literature has shown the connections between government policy and capitalism and the marginalization of indigenous peoples, their forced separation from natural resources and the

ecological devastation which ensued (Weisiger 2009; Tucker 2007; Lynn-Sherow 2004; Chase 2002; Pickering 2000; Iverson 1994; Hall 1991; Cronon 1983; White 1983; Carlson 1981). Despite the negative effects of government policy and free market capitalism, historic archaeology and contemporary ethnographies confirm that many indigenous peoples have a strong physical connection to and spiritual relationship with nature (Suzuki and Knudtson 1992; Nabokov 2007). It is through genuine collaboration between western land managers and indigenous peoples that the movement toward sustainable agriculture and natural resource conservation will flourish into the future (Sherman 2006; Pickering, Van Lanen, and Sherman 2009; Ross et al. 2010).

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to provide evidence that agricultural decision making is influenced by ethnicity and culture, beyond the simple profit motive; and second, to amplify an indigenous voice within the literature on agriculture and sustainability. The overarching hypothesis for this research is that cultural factors influence agricultural household decision making beyond a simple calculation of marginal increases in income. Three specific hypotheses are:

1. Ethnicity and culture influence agricultural practices.
2. Ethnicity and culture influence perceptions of place.
3. Ethnicity and culture influence attitudes about nature.

Considerations of non-monetary aspects, such as community opinions and spiritual reverence, are not adequately accounted for in a cost benefit analysis by agricultural policy makers and are often ignored in neoclassical economic perspectives. The responses to environmental questions by non-Indian agricultural operators of the northern Great Plains are starkly different from responses by their Lakota counterparts in the same region. Lakota differ significantly from non-Indians in relation to their environmental attitudes and conservation practices, including motivations for their agricultural operations,

wildlife conservation and land use strategies, their embeddedness in their local community and local ecosystem and concern for wild plants. By taking cultural and ethnic differences seriously, more effective agricultural policies may be developed that look to non-monetary incentives for increasing conservation practices.

### **Political Ecology: Environmental Impacts of Neoclassical Economics and Agriculture**

A neoclassical economic framework presents nature and natural resources as a commodity with an inherent monetary value within the market economy. Political ecology, in contrast, requires that the environmental impacts of economic practice be included in determining the interplay of political, economic and social factors with the environment (Biersack and Greenberg 2006). According to Steven A. Wolf (2008:203), conventional agriculture is flawed by the inability to measure success without the gradient of profit maximization, where yield is increased by maximizing land utility. From a neoclassical perspective, agricultural operators have fixed inputs (i.e., land base) with which they maximize yields (i.e., wheat per acre) to meet global consumer demands for commodities (Hodgson 1996:383). From a purely economic perspective, produced capital such as soils disturbed by implements, fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides are equivalent substitutes for natural capital, such as naturally fertile soil and an area characterized with moderate to high rainfall. From this perspective, natural resources are non-depletable and non-scarce (Faucheux, Muir and O'Connor 1997:528-529). However, conventional tillage practices loosen the soil and emit large amounts of organic carbon into the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans via water and wind erosion (Smith, Sleezer, Renwick and Buddemeier 2005). The Green Revolution demonstrated how the pace of production with produced capital is unsustainable, both for poor agricultural communities and for the environment, eroding natural resources at alarming rates (Hodgson 1996:382-391; Wolf 2008:203; Zwerdling 2009).

Sustainable agricultural practices are important to maintain a proper balance between the quality and quantity of food production. Accord-

ing to Brian Walker and David Salt (2006), “sustainability is the likelihood an existing system of resource use will persist indefinitely without decline in the resource base or in the social welfare it delivers (165).” Sustainable agricultural practices include, but are not limited to, crop diversification, no-till practices, herd rotation, non-reliance on chemicals (Altiere 2001) and many subsistence practices which minimize ecological disturbance. According to Rappaport (1979:129), religion and ritual were forces that preserved ecological stability. In addition, sustainable, non-Western subsistence systems were dependent on the conceptual structures of these forces (Wilk 2006:151). Sustainability must include a viable interconnection between society, economy and the environment. Thus, sustainable agriculture is not focused solely on economic return, but also on the societal and environmental implications of the practice.

In contrast, standard economic analysis views an increase in profits from industrialized agricultural operations to be adequate justification for increasing harmful inputs (e.g., fertilizers) and decreasing quality of outputs (e.g., low quality beef). Thus economic return is favored over ecological restoration or preservation. Over the long run substituting natural capital with produced capital has resulted in soil erosion, water pollution, soil toxicity and other serious resource depletion, resulting in the loss of billions of dollars annually in the U.S. alone (Glantz 1996; Altieri 2001:31-32; D'Aleo and Grube 2002; Thompson and Turk 2007:242).

### **Lakota Agriculture on the Great Plains**

The vast grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains have been incorporated into the capitalist economy and world market system through agriculture since the mid 1800s. Food produced by agricultural business interests on the Great Plains continues to be an integral part of the global economic system as U.S. agricultural operators sell food to countries around the world. This has an often-ambiguous economic impact on farmers and food security in other parts of the globe, but has provided American farmers with a sense of pride. As one South Dakota farmer stated, “We feed America.” However, agriculture on the Great Plains developed at

the expense of indigenous peoples who once subsisted on native resources on the Plains.

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 formed the Great Sioux Reservation for the “absolute and undisturbed use and occupation” of the Lakota (Hall 1991:3; Utley 1984:232; Kappler 1904). Historically, Lakota hunter-gatherers of the Great Plains subsisted on bison, antelope and deer, along with a variety of wild plants from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River (Fagan 2005:162). They also traded extensively with agricultural communities along the Missouri River like the Mandan and Hidatsa (Hyde 1937; Holder 1970). Their cultural reliance upon *t'iošpayes* (extended families), trade relations, horse acquisition and knowledge of animal migrations, cosmology and other natural guides allowed the Lakota to successfully transition to the Great Plains environment from the Great Lakes region (DeMallie 1994; Marshall 2004:49; Fagan 2005:162). Unfortunately these adaptations were not as useful against U.S. militarization and land policy. The federal government mandated sedentary living and diminished the Lakota's access to hunting and gathering resources by creating a heavily regulated reservation system (Pickering 2000:65). Though the Lakota have preserved much of their cultural traditions, they became increasingly vulnerable to the federal government through the impositions of the reservation system, the annihilation of the buffalo and the forced assimilation of American Indians into mainstream American society.

The General Allotment Act of 1887, or Dawes Severalty Act, parceled out 160-acre plots to individual heads of household, undermining the Native American communal landscape (Iverson 1994:28-29). The continual usage of the term ‘agriculture’ throughout the Dawes Act signified federal expectations for the Dakota prairies. Military might, political dishonesty and economic greed appropriated the prime hunting grounds and spiritual epicenters of the Lakota, but that was not enough. Lands not allotted to Indian heads of household were deemed surplus and then given to non-Indian homesteaders. Allotment rapidly degraded the indigenous land base until the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Other related policies, such as the Burkes Act of 1906, Homestead Act of 1862 and Indian

New Deal Policies supported federal expectations of a market-based agricultural society, disregarding Lakota environmental ethos (Carlson 1981; Hurt 1987; Flynn 1988:8, 62, 92, 94; Roth 2009:45-46).

Lack of agricultural production on allotted lands was the ostensible reason for confiscation of parcels under the Burkes Act of 1906. Meanwhile, non-Indian farmers and ranchers aimed to maximize land utility for commodity production and capital accumulation through agricultural endeavors (Iverson 1994: 18, 25-51). Concurrently, "Dakota land boomers" rallied on the East Coast awaiting land dispossessions (Lazarus 1991:125). Sadly, the federal government fragmented Lakota lands yet again. Fragmented lands were then stripped from the Lakota and sold hastily to white ranchers (Lazarus 1991:125). Federal policy restructured the Lakota's social and environmental landscape in accordance with John Locke's principle. According to Locke, "As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates and can use the product of, so much is his property" (Hall 1991:3; Opie 1998:61; Merchant 1989:305). This ended Lakota egalitarianism and encouraged greater incorporation into capitalist markets (Pickering and Jewell 2008). Manifest Destiny prescribed a spiritual calling to the settlement and development of the Western territory. Politicians and entrepreneurs used this "spiritual calling" to encourage westward expansion. However, economic gain, territorial expansion and irreverence for indigenous people led to agricultural development on the South Dakota Plains.

As the federal government revised and reneged on treaty commitments to provide land, food and supplies, Lakota displaced from their allotted lands sought employment as agricultural workers to protect their families from starvation (Biolsi 1992; Pickering 2000). With aggressive U.S. government encouragement, some Lakota households on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation adopted agricultural production as a means of participating in global and local economic markets. Lakota heads of household learned agricultural skills in order to keep their remaining land parcels that had been designated to them by the General Allotment Act or to raise food for *t'iošpayes*. Peter Iverson (1994)

expresses the importance of this era in his book titled *When Indians Became Cowboys*. Regardless of the reason for adopting farming and ranching, the Lakota used agriculture to express emotional, physical and spiritual views of natural resources as interconnected with all aspects of life, not just economics (Suzuki and Knudtson 1992; Nabokov 2007). Lakota and other indigenous cultures instruct decision makers to directly consider the impact of their actions and reciprocal events on the next seven generations (Suzuki and Knudtson 1992).

### Theory in Practice

A political economy framework was used to assess the differences that ethnicity plays in this study. Political economy, a materialist approach based on Marxism, provides an alternative theoretical framework to the neoclassical economic model (Munck 2000: 6-8). A political economy approach examines the economies of a region relative to the cultural, social, political and historical processes that have shaped that region, as well as the dominant economic interests there (Roseberry 1988; Greenberg and Park 1994; Jennings 2000:8). A culturally relativistic, political economic approach combines the historical context and the human and spiritual interactions of natural resources, separating them from the commoditization of resources associated with market exchange and distribution. When examining indigenous or marginalized peoples within a global context, anthropologists often use a political economy lens to explore ways in which the benefits of the competitive global market system do not extend to the periphery of the world-system, including tribal communities internally colonized by core capitalist nation-states (Hall 1989: 11-23). Nonmarket concepts such as redistribution, reciprocity and house holding are critical components of economic practices on the periphery, but are often ignored in the standard economic cost-benefit analyses (Pickering 2000:44-61; Hall et al. 2000:23). Furthermore, by adding the dimensions of political ecology to this analysis, the political, economic, and socio-cultural forces which dictate the human interactions within the environment (Berkes 1999:165), and holistic understandings of the context and considerations of agricultural

household decision making can be included in one conceptual approach (Somma 1993; Greenberg and Park 1994; Walker 1998; Jennings 2000:5-7).

## Methods

Between 2005 and 2007, sixty-eight non-Indian agricultural operators and two Lakota agricultural operators from South Dakota, Colorado and Montana were interviewed by Dr. Pickering Sherman and her ethnographic research team of graduate and undergraduate students from Colorado State University in a study funded by the USDA. The interviews consisted of a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions focusing on agricultural practices, social networks and environmental attitudes. Potential participants were selected randomly from eight counties through local phone books; participants were then selected through a phone interview and followed-up with a face-to-face or phone interview.

Dr. Pickering Sherman and her ethnographic research team conducted additional research during a six-week summer field season on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 2008. Twelve Lakota and three non-Indian agricultural operators on the reservation were administered surveys in person. Three of these agricultural operators were a targeted subsample from 300 household participants in a longitudinal survey of household economic dynamics on the Pine Ridge Reservation from 2000-2008 funded by the National Science Foundation. An additional twelve agricultural operators were identified by the targeted sample through snowball sampling. Though snowball sampling potentially inserts biases, it is an effective methodology to study difficult to find populations or very small subsets (Bernard 2006: 189-194). With so few Lakota households involved with agriculture in this rural locale, using leads from survey respondents allowed the research team to identify potential survey participants. Potential survey participants were contacted via telephone. If they owned an agricultural operation, a survey time was scheduled and surveys were administered face to face. All of the agricultural operators in both studies were engaged in some form of dry land farming or open-range ranching.

The 2008 Pine Ridge subset and the 2005-2007 subset were asked the same or similar survey questions regarding their agricultural operations, demographic information, attitudes towards the environment, community values and participation in conservation practices. A mixed method approach of qualitative and quantitative questioning was utilized in both surveys to strengthen the analyses. Answers to quantitative questions, administered with a five point Likert scale including Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, were converted to numerical responses. Numerical conversions were utilized to produce statistical means of each respective response and an assessment of statistical significance using independent samples t-test. Qualitative questions were administered to record legitimate and heartfelt responses to the questions. These qualitative responses were used as quotes throughout the study to better understand quantitative answers and the attitudes and emotions of operators towards their operations, the environment, community and policy. Some of the important findings are addressed in the following analysis. To eliminate the possibility of ethnicity being conflated to mask other variables like income, age, education level and acres of land owned, the same statistical tests were run for each variable separately. Of all the possible variables, the most significant factor that emerged was ethnicity.

## Discussion

*Alternative Motives and Traditional Ideas.* Agricultural policy makers assume that increasing farm household income is the critical factor for motivating changes in agricultural practices. For some households this may be true, as one non-Indian farmer explained: "Bankers say Yuma County [is the] hottest county for aggressive farmers. Farm more land, borrow more money and more technology." The prosperity of the community was associated with productivism and access to capital – neoclassical economic measures of success.

However, a cost benefit analysis may not capture the primary reason why Lakota households are involved in agricultural operations. As one Lakota bison rancher stated, "We're not really after the money, that's not our driving

[force].” Lakota agricultural operators are predominantly wheat farmers, cattle ranchers, and bison ranchers. For many of them it is not policy or marginal economic increases that influence their decisions to expand into more sustainable practices. Lakota culture views the natural environment as encompassing animals, plants, *t’iošpayes* (those to be born) and the spiritual forces throughout the natural system. These Lakota perspectives influence agricultural operators towards more holistic and locally integrated operations (Nabokov 2007:50; Pickering and Jewell 2008). For the Lakota, giving back to the community, restoring traditions, restoring the land base and ecological restoration are integrated outcomes that are as motivating as annual household income.

There is an increasing interest in bison ranching on the reservation. Many Lakota families have found ways to reassert their authority over their land through bison ranching. For example, at least three Lakota families with a common land base and common traditional goals have successfully co-managed bison, and initiated the long and delicate process of ecological restoration on their parcels. These families have been able to control decision-making on their lands as they have unified and restored their land base. The ability to use land and restore land from the effects of overgrazing is essential for Lakota cultural continuity. An elder couple who raise bison stated, “We decided a long time ago we would try to bring the buffalo back; the buffalo are more friendly to the land.” Their appreciation for bison is not driven by market economics, but in part by the symbiotic relationship between bison and the land.

Wild grasses that once flourished on the prairie are important food for bison and in effect critical to the reintroduction and viability of the bison’s life ways. The Lakota prefer bison in part because they exist symbiotically with the prairie ecosystem. Bison ranchers are as concerned with contributing to a healthy biotic environment on the reservation as they are with bison profitability. In contrast, many non-Indian agricultural operators were conflicted about changing to greater conservation practices. One Colorado farmer expressed this conflict between his desires and actions when he said, “[I] wish I could go to

grass, but [I] need to make money.”

Bison themselves are a species of special cultural significance to the Lakota. Historically, bison provided sustenance and materials to the Lakota people, as every part of the animal was used for daily, ceremonial and spiritual practices. In Lakota beliefs, the sacred pipe was brought to the Lakota people by White Buffalo Calf Woman. Bison are respected as having their own nation, social organization and natural autonomy (Black Elk 1982).

Five Lakota bison ranchers participated in the 2008 study. As one respondent stated, “We are buffalo people and the money doesn’t matter.” Instead, restoring the land, their family and their cultural traditions take precedence. For example, Lakota bison operators pursued USDA regulations that ultimately allowed for killing buffalo in the field, so the animals could be harvested in a traditional manner, rather than being rendered in a slaughterhouse. In this way, they were able to maintain traditional butchering practices and at the same time they explored new external markets for bison meat. Despite opportunities for mass bison slaughter to meet the growing demand for organic, free grazing meat, the Lakota are more concerned with the sacred and culturally appropriate handling of the animal.

Lakota agriculturalists also mentioned cultural preservation and continuity in addition to ecological resilience when asked about conservation practices on their land. One bison rancher said he applied conservation methods, “For the next generation so the buffalo can grow up, so the bugs can grow up, so the game is always plentiful, I guess you could say.” Conservation methods had nothing to do with the market value of his bison herd, but instead involved the preservation of nature and traditions for the upcoming generations.

While the Bureau of Indian Affairs encouraged Lakota families to lease their allotted lands to non-Indian agricultural operators, more Lakota agricultural operators are now attempting to regain beneficial use of their land. One bison rancher refused to renew his lease contracts with his non-Indian wheat farmers because they continually inquired about using pesticides and they refused to fallow the field

despite his repeated requests. In addition, one elderly Lakota woman commented on Lakota methods for caring for the land. “We try not to do anything other than cut hay. We quit leasing after we figured out what fertilizers do to the land and the air; [we] allow the land to heal itself.” Therefore, the beneficial control of allotted lands is as motivated by conservation practices as by pure economic returns.

Lakota perspectives on agricultural operations reveal alternative motives for engaging in agriculture. Traditional ideas of respect for land, *t’iošpaye* relationships and cultural notions of stewardship all appear in the general responses of bison operators. The next section shows that integration of wildlife into the agricultural landscape by Lakota agricultural operators also distinguishes them from their non-Indian neighbors.

*Land Use Strategies: Wildlife and Acreage Maximization.* Within the capitalist framework, nature and natural resources are commodities with a value dictated by market supply and demand. When income maximization is the sole

motive for agricultural production, land use tends to be limited to active crop production or grazing. Contrary to this neoclassical premise, 78% of Lakota households believed in maximizing land area for animals, birds, and insects to use. In contrast, only 32% of non-Indian households believed in maximizing land area for animals, birds and insects to use (see Table 1).

Of particular interest to policy makers is the response to this land use question when “level of income” is the independent variable. Here, those with the lowest income were most likely to agree that lands should be maximized for wildlife (see Table 2).

Lakota agricultural operators are completely absent from the upper income bracket. These agricultural operators do not regard their land as a commodity to reap a solely monetary profit, but as a natural resource capable of appeasing the owner and local community in spiritual and emotional ways that increased monetary value will not fulfill.

In the Twenty-first Century, Lakota agricultural operators have developed ways of farming

**Table 1:** Attitudinal Questions about Wild Plants and Animals

ETHNICITY BY QUESTION/RESPONSES	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
It is important to have useful wild plants on the farm					
Lakota (N=14)	0	0	0	86%	14%
Non Indian (N=47)	4%	11%	9%	68%	9%
It is important to have wild plants on the farm — even those that aren’t useful					
Lakota (N=14)	7%	29%	7%	57%	0
Non Indian (N=45)	4%	53%	13%	24%	4%
Agricultural crops are more important than plants that are native to this area*					
Lakota (N=14)	7%	50%	29%	14%	0
Non Indian (N=55)	2%	35%	20%	44%	0
I believe that we should try to leave as much land aside as possible for other animals, birds, and insects to use.*					
Lakota (N=14)	0%	14%	7%	71%	7%
Non Indian (N=62)	3%	31%	34%	26%	6%

\*Significant using an independent samples t-test at 95% confidence

**Table 2:** Responses to the question, “I believe that we should try to leave as much land aside as possible for other animals, birds, and insects to use,” based on income.

INCOME LEVELS IN U.S. DOLLARS	PERCENTAGE AGREE
0 - 50,000	91%
50,000 - 100,000	30%
101,000+	19%

and ranching that include Western concepts as well as methods that adhere to cultural traditions and community values. The Lakota have long considered the land sacred for *oyate* (people), land animals, waterfowl, migratory game, and even insects such as grasshoppers that often wreak havoc on agricultural produce. Even the rocks are sacred. A previous study indicated that 95% of Lakota households believed that plants and animals have as much right to exist as humans (Pickering and Jewell 2008). The 78% of Lakota agricultural households that believe they should try to leave as much land aside for wildlife is reflective of Lakota community values (see Table 1).

Several agricultural operators on the reservation keep land in reserve, unassociated from the Conservation Reserve Program, to provide habitats suitable for pheasant, mule deer, turkey and bison hunting. Hunting is a viable source of economic gain within the reservation economy in relation to food production and exchange for many Lakota families. In addition, the art of hunting is still revered among the reservation residents. One bison rancher stated that he conserved land “so we could have it all the time and better quality bucks and better does and stuff like that for the next generation, you know.” Some of the reservation agricultural operators also double as hunting guides to increase their profitability without degrading the natural environment. Though Lakota agricultural operators are integrated within the global economic system, they still consider the affects their operations have on holistic landscapes. Animals, animal habitats and the community play a critical role in Lakota agricultural operators’ decision making.

#### *Local Embeddedness and the Global Economy.*

For Pine Ridge residents, sources of information and decision making of local households depend on local relationships. There are significant differences in how Lakota agricultural households and non-Indian agricultural operators view their duties, obligations and relationships towards the surrounding community. Lakota agricultural operators included in this study expressed deeper obligations to their local community and local ecosystem than their non-Indian counterparts.

Commitments to community and tradition were apparent in a number of Lakota agricultural operators’ practices. For example, buffalo operators were constantly harvesting individual buffalo for ceremonial and cultural events, regardless of whether they would be paid for the animal, because it contributed to the healing and nurturing of the community. A Lakota bison rancher explained the importance of communal giving and restoring traditions when he mentioned distributing meat to the community and elders during business meetings, ceremonies and times of need. In contrast, one non-Indian farmer said he would not give meat to community members because he did not want to create the expectation that he was there to help them out in times of trouble.

Similarly, Lakota agricultural operators expressed greater concerns about the positive impacts their agricultural operations had on their community. The spirit of community remained important for Lakota households, in contrast to a more individualistic and competitive viewpoint among non-Indian agricultural households. Lakota agricultural households often allowed their lands to be used for community-based projects without monetary compensation or other benefits. However, their generosity benefitted the greater community. For example, one agricultural operator donated lands to Oglala Lakota College for a community garden.

There was a considerable difference among Lakota and non-Indian agricultural operators in relation to the people they viewed as most influential in regard to farm operation decisions. Both non-Indian agricultural operators from Colorado, Montana and South Dakota, and Lakota agricultural operators from Pine Ridge

were asked, "Who is the most influential person/group on the reservation/county in regard to farm operation decisions?" For Lakota agricultural operators, 82% claimed that local entities such as family, country folk, the tribal council or the land office were most influential for their decision-making. One Lakota wheat farmer and cattle rancher responded, "I watch a little bit of everybody and put it all together with what I know." The other 18% relied on the federally organized Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). In contrast, only 29% of the non-Indian respondents relied on local entities such as families and the farming community, while 42% relied on federal organizations such as the Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) as well as other corporate organizations and representatives such as banks and chemical salesmen. A non-Indian farmer expressed the importance of non-local entities within their farming community when he stated, "USDA [and the] NRCS office kept farming going, like it or not."

The importance of local relationships to Lakota agricultural operators in regard to trustworthy agricultural information was reiterated by the responses to the question, "Who do you trust the most to provide you with accurate/useful agricultural information?" For Lakota agricultural operators, 77% trusted information from local people such as community members, family and the locally operated Oglala Lakota College. Only 29% of the non-Indian respondents trusted the local farm community, neighbors and families for accurate or useful agricultural information. Though agricultural operations are an integral piece of the global economy, the vast majority of Lakota respondents view their operations as a reflection of the culturally embedded ideas within their local community.

*The Value of Non-Agricultural Plants.* Another interesting contrast between Lakota and non-Indian agricultural operators is what they value within their local landscape. In most Western management regimes, wild plants are deemed as "weeds" with no intrinsic value to the market or to agricultural households. The term "weed" does not necessarily mean a plant is entirely undesirable. J. M. Torell (Whitson et al. 2000:ix) describes a weed as, "[a] plant that interferes

with management objectives for a given area of land at a given point in time." In contrast, Lakota agricultural operators, even those who plant wheat, demonstrate a concern for the intrinsic value of wild plants, both in their qualitative and quantitative responses to the 2008 USDA survey. Their management practices do not emphasize elimination of plants.

The large majority of Lakota and non-Indian agricultural operators in this study earn most of their household income from selling agricultural products through commodity markets. From a neoclassical perspective, concern for profitability within the market economy should outweigh concern for the preservation of locally occurring wild plant species. For example, when one non-Indian farmer was asked whether "agricultural crops are more important than plants that are native to this area," he replied, "Depends on the economy."

For non-Indian agricultural operators, the market economy plays the most critical role in their decision-making regarding the plants they raise on their farm. Only 37% of non-Indian agricultural operators felt that native plants were as or more important than agricultural crops (see Table 1). In contrast, 57% of the Lakota respondents believed that native plants were as or more important than agricultural crops. Similarly, 100% of Lakota respondents agreed that "useful wild plants" are important on the farm, while, 77% of non-Indians thought that "useful wild plants" are important on their farms. Furthermore, within Lakota households, 57% agreed that it is important to have wild plants on their farm, even those that were not "useful." In contrast, only 28% of non-Indian households considered plants on their farm that were not "useful" as important. A non-Indian farmer responded when asked about the importance of having wild plants that were not "useful" on his farm, "... if you're talking about a weed, then I disagree, but if it's natural, then you should try to keep them." This statement demonstrates a lack of knowledge about native wild plants in the area. If the term natural was used in lieu of native, many "weeds" are natural. Though many "weeds" are native plant species with intrinsic value to indigenous peoples, they are nearly worthless on the agricultural market.

In fact their eradication through extra tilling and chemical herbicide applications are costly to farmers operating from the neoclassical premise that wild plants do not contribute to market profitability. Even though the agricultural operators were economically dependent on agriculture, Lakota agricultural operators did not automatically regard crops as more important than native plants. To the Lakota, native plants did not interfere with management objectives, thus they were not regarded as weeds. On the contrary, Lakota management objectives include native ecological restoration and providing environments suitable for wild plants.

Part of this contrast in viewpoint between Lakota and non-Indian agriculturalists can be attributed to cultural values. Numerous plants are vitally important to traditional Lakota spiritual, emotional and medicinal practices (St. Pierre and Long Soldier 1995). The reservation communities' reverence for wild plants is reflected in the attitudes of Lakota agricultural operators towards wild plants on their land. In Lakota households, wild plants continue to play a role in the nutrition, ceremonies and social life of the reservation. *Tinpsila* or wild turnip, also called common breadroot scurf pea (*psoralea eschulenta*), is an example of a wild plant important to Lakota people. During earlier periods of nomadic hunting and gathering, *tinpsila* was a primary staple for the Lakota. Skinned, braided and left to dry, these turnips can be preserved for years and boiled in soups with other wild foods. *Tinpsila* is sought after for household use, community gatherings and ceremonial feasts. *Tinpsila* braids are used as a source of trade within the substantive reservation economy and for extra income in tourist shops and roadside stands along the reservation.

Other plants that are still available as food resources on the reservation include: *hebaka pejuta* or wild bergamot (*Monardia fistulosa*); stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*); *pte tawote* or ground plums (*Astragalus crassicaupus*); *mato tinpsila* or red turnips, also called tall breadroot scurfpea (*Psoralea cuspidate*); *sabiela tatinpsila* or Cheyenne turnip (*Lomatium foeniculaceum*); spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*); *kante* or wild plum (*Prunus americana*); and juniper berries (*Juniperus species pluralis*) (Richard Sherman 2008, personal

communication). Though many of these plants are considered "weeds of the west" (Whitson et al. 2000), they are utilized by Lakota households on the reservation. A previous study revealed that 73% of Lakota households used natural resources for trade and subsistence (Pickering and Jewell 2008:23). Harvesting these plants requires spending time in nature – the sacred Lakota landscape. Supplying traditional food sources to the local community strengthens community relationships, instills cultural integrity and provides healthy food alternatives to Lakota *oyate* (people) in a way in which the monetary profits of neoclassical agricultural practices cannot fulfill.

Some of the medicinal plants widely known throughout the Lakota community include: sweet grass (*Heiropcloe odorata*); women's sage or *peji hota* (*Artemisia frigid*); chokecherries or *canpa hu* (*Prunus virginiana*); wild licorice or *winawizi ci'kala* (*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*); Echinacea or *ica'hpe hu* (*Echinacea angustifolia*); and buffalo berries or *mastince pute* (*Ribes aureum odoratum*) (Richard Sherman 2008, personal communication; Nabhan and Kindsher 2006). For Lakota households on the Pine Ridge reservation, 84% responded favorably to the question, "How do you feel about traditional healing?" More than 80% of respondents in the 2000-2008 longitudinal study of 300 Pine Ridge households maintained that their spiritual beliefs are connected to the way they feel about nature (Pickering and Jewell 2008:8), with a strong belief that animals and plants are interdependent on one and other to survive. This data confirms the importance of wild plant for traditional methods of healing and spiritual fulfillment on the reservation. Lakota agricultural operators fulfill a cultural need by respecting wild plant growth on their properties, while simultaneously providing community access to medicinal plant sources.

Plants also play a key role in local conception of place and history (Basso 1996; Braudel 1980:3; Nabokov 2007). A wheat farmer from a Lakota household delighted in an old cottonwood tree and the connections he had to it as a boy when we toured his property. This tree, growing in a lush canyon adjacent to his farm fields, has no monetary value for the farmer. It provides no direct benefits such as shade from the summer sun or a break from the winter wind, yet his emotional and psychological connections to the cottonwood

supersede any capitalist economic motive of valuing the tree as an income source. This dying tree and others that line the accessible canyon would bring large monetary harvests on the reservation where many residents depend on firewood for protection from the winter cold.

In addition, a percolating natural spring keeps the canyon moist and abundant with plants. One plant in particular dries out during the month of July. Once the flat, transparent pod is removed, seeds remain which provide tastes of garlic and Italian seasoning. These seeds provide no greater means of incorporation into the global market system for the farm household. However, the ability to spice up Italian dishes from a wild plant, just out the backdoor, increases dependence on the intricacies of nature as opposed to market commodities that include arms-length dealing and environmental and social exploitation. This wheat farmer, like many Lakota agricultural operators, took great pride in the amount of wild resources he has preserved on his farmland, subsequently preserving culture and place.

## Conclusion

The Lakota have joined the ranks of other agricultural operators as players within global commodity markets. However, there is ample reason to believe that Lakota agricultural operators use alternative economic concepts and culturally based considerations to analyze their options and make agricultural household decisions. The purely economic cost-benefit analysis is not a traditional Lakota concept and is not regarded as the most important consideration for Lakota household decision making today. Land policies were intended to enforce Native American assimilation through commodity agriculture. Though some traditional Lakota hunter-gatherers adopted farming and ranching, much of their cultural values of community, the environment and spiritual reverence for land and animals persist today. In addition, reliance upon traditional food sources for spiritual engagement, physical and emotional healing, and empowerment is necessary for Lakota cultural continuity. In contrast, the non-Indian responses to the agricultural operator surveys are more representative of the values

assumed in neoclassical economics and underlying agricultural policies within the northern Great Plains.

The Lakota agriculturalists place cultural continuity above monetary value concerning their agricultural operations, decreasing harvest capabilities in favor of havens for wild animals and plants on their lands. Lakota agricultural operators remain locally embedded and their practices reflect traditional community values. In contrast to non-Indian agricultural operators throughout the northern Great Plains, the Lakota place physical, spiritual and emotional significance on non-agricultural plants. To achieve greater sustainability on the Great Plains, policy makers need to expand incentives to embrace alternative agricultural values and practices such as those used by Lakota households. Alternative modes of agriculture and ethnic based decision-making should be evaluated and considered through focus groups comprised of Lakota agricultural operators and policy makers. In addition, further research is needed to assess the implications of Lakota practices on Great Plains ecosystems compared to agricultural operators utilizing a cost benefit analysis. Alternative viewpoints of the Lakota and others must be acknowledged and critically examined to provide a future for agriculture, ecosystems and the local and global communities dependent on food production. ○

## Notes

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# Short-Term Mission Trips and the Enhancement of Cultural Awareness<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Many churches and religious organizations in the United States sponsor short mission trips to various locations around the world. These trips provide opportunities for service and spiritual gain and also for an experience in which missionaries can enhance their cultural awareness and understanding. In this study we used surveys and interviews to collect data on the cross-cultural experience of short-term mission trip participants. We found that participants received little pre-trip preparation and most had insufficient foreign language skills. Missioners liked and benefited from the fellowship and service aspects of the trip but did not indicate that the experience led to increased cultural awareness. [missions, short-term mission trips, cultural awareness]*

## Introduction

One of the main benefits of travel abroad can be increasing one's experience with other cultures by participating in some manner of cross-cultural exchange. The study abroad literature has examined cross-cultural dynamics and found that even short-term study abroad trips may be effective in increasing cross-cultural knowledge and global understanding. Researchers found that the more intensive the pre-trip preparation in terms of cultural studies, background information about the country/people/culture and degree of language proficiency, the more complete and effective the trip can be in increasing cross-cultural knowledge (Martin 1989:249; Boyle, Nackerud and Kilpatrick 1999:202; McCabe 2004; Mapp, McFarland and Newell 2007:47). For example, one university offers a Foreign Studies minor to students, regardless of major, who participate in a study abroad program. The minor includes required coursework in language area studies, cultural studies and intercultural communication. Anecdotally, students who take the course have more successful study abroad experiences, including an increase in their cultural and global awareness (Martin 1989: 42). Another study abroad program included pre-trip preparation meetings that focused specifically on the history and culture of the country to be visited – in this case, Ireland. Post-trip student assessment indicated an overall gain in cross-cultural knowledge, though correlations with pre-trip preparation were not examined (Mapp, McFarland and Newell 2007:43).

The short-term mission trip is similar in

many ways to academic study abroad programs, and their popularity has grown over the past two decades. About 30,000 Americans went on short-term missions in 1979; over 1.6 million North Americans participated in short-term missions in 2006 (MacDonald 2006). Not only do churches of most of the major Christian denominations send groups on short-term missions, but also not-for-profit organizations and for-profit companies offer trips. Mission trip participants visit other cultures and engage in some type of activity, from proselytizing to construction work. One mission leader defines the term mission as "crossing cultural boundaries for the sake of the gospel" (Crouch 2007:32). Aside from work projects and hoped for spiritual benefits, the stated goal of short-term missions is to offer a cross-cultural experience to missionaries which enhances their cultural and global awareness and understanding.

Anthropology has a history of interaction with and criticism of religious mission efforts both within and outside of the United States (Stipe 1980:167; Salamone 1986; Headland 1996:169, 173; Peacock 1996:164-165). In the latter part of the 1800s and early 1900s missionaries in the United States and Canada provided information to anthropologists about Native American cultures and were acknowledged for their knowledge and expertise in cultural and linguistic studies, even publishing in academic journals (Higham 2003:547, 549; Tomalin 2009). More criticism, though, is directed toward established missions and the impact of long-term mission activities on cultures.

A study by van der Geest and Kirby (1992:61-69) provides a synopsis of the “love/hate relationship” between anthropologists and missionaries, culled primarily from professional ethnographers working in Africa (1930-1965), some of whom happened to be both anthropologists and missionaries. While many anthropologists acknowledged in interviews feeling ambivalent about missionaries, among the sixty-three ethnographies analyzed by van der Geest and Kirby, two-thirds never mentioned the impact of missionaries on the cultures represented in the literature (70), even though many of the anthropologists depended on the missionaries for hospitality and information. As you would expect, missionaries often expressed ambivalence about anthropologists (64-66). The most severe criticisms came from African-born anthropologists who contended that missionaries were agents of the larger colonial enterprise (76). While the stereotype may be widespread in the anthropological community, ambivalence toward missionaries seldom receives substantive attention by scholars who focus instead on more pressing areas of investigation.

More recent anthropological studies have taken an interest in the impact of missionaries, not so much as agents of destruction but as agents in the inevitable processes of diffusion and acculturation (Cavalcanti 2005). Anthropological studies that take the mission enterprise into account deal almost exclusively with long-term career missionaries who work through established mission structures. In a field study of Lubavitcher emissaries in Great Britain, Berman (2009:70) focused on the social and personal faith-based rewards of emissary work instead of the impacts on the recipients of the mission efforts. Another study examined Mormon missionaries in Japan and concluded that the slow conversion rate by the Japanese may be in part due to the young American missionaries’ inadequate instruction about Japanese religion and culture before beginning their work (Mullins 2008:569). Our interest, however, is limited to short-term mission activity by North American churches and organizations.

Short-term mission trips are a rather new phenomenon and have only recently begun to be critically assessed. Most of this critical evalua-

tion comes from members of the religious community. One of the main findings is that most short-term missions benefit the participants more than the mission recipients. American missionaries require activities and outcomes, often resulting in “make-work projects.” A Nairobi pastor told a North American “(a)fter you leave, we repaint many of the walls that you painted!” (Crouch 2007:32). Others require hands-on investments with “feel-good” emotional rewards with minimal critical or cultural consideration. On one mission trip, a church group handed out USD \$50 to families in a Honduran village (except single mothers) over the objections of local church workers (Jeffrey 2001:6). Other writers have questioned the overall effectiveness of a one to two week stay, the cost effectiveness of such trips and the degree of pre-trip cultural and language training received by the participants (Jeffrey 2001:6).

The few empirical studies (reported in secular publications) of short-term mission trips have focused on the effects of the mission experience on participants’ spiritual growth and also on cultural identity and culture shock (Moore, Jones and Austin 1987; Tuttle 2000; Walling, Eriksson, Meese, Ciovica and Gorton 2006:154). A more recent study examined the psychological functioning among short-term missionaries and found the participants experienced more life satisfaction as a result of the increased religious support and fellowship on the trip (Bjorck and Kim 2009). In a sociological study of short-term missions, Trinitapoli and Vaisey (2009) found that the overall mission trip was a transformative religious experience for the adolescent missionaries (139). The authors did not examine cross-cultural awareness or long-term effects of the mission experience.

We conducted this qualitative study to gain information specifically about the cross-cultural aspects of short-term mission trips from the participants’ perspective. We were interested in the kinds of advance preparation short-term mission participants received before their departure. We were also interested to learn if having a cross-cultural experience was a reason to go on the mission trip and if participants felt that the trip had expanded their cultural awareness.

## Methods

To collect data about the short-term mission trip experience we used a survey with a non-random sample to include twenty-five area churches and organizations that sponsored short-term mission trips. We mailed hard copies of the survey and emailed electronic versions to all campus ministry organizations at a southern regional state university and to all area churches after calling to explain the project and invite the participation of short-term mission trip alumni. We asked respondents to forward the survey to other mission trip participants. We also conducted face-to-face interviews with self-identified trip participants at local campus ministries and churches. No names or addresses were collected, though we did ask respondents to name their mission group's affiliation. The institutional review board of Southeastern Louisiana University approved the project.

The survey consisted of open- and closed-ended questions. The respondents were instructed to answer as completely as possible with examples and descriptions. We asked about the purpose of the mission trip, its planning and logistical aspects. For example:

What was the purpose of the mission?

How was the mission site chosen?

We next asked about trip preparation, specifically about language experience and training and instruction about the country and culture to be visited. Some questions included:

Do you speak [*insert local language*]? At what level? How would you describe your language skills? Have you had formal language classes (e.g. college Spanish)?

Did you receive language training in preparation for the trip? Explain.

What types of information did you receive about the *country* before the trip? Please describe the information.

What types of information did you receive about the *community you would be working with* before the trip?

What types of information did you receive about the *culture* before the trip?

We then asked about the reasons the participant went on the trip and what he or she gained from the experience. These questions were deliberately open and general so as not to lead the respondents.

Why did you choose to go on the mission trip?

What did you hope to get out of the experience?

What did you gain from the experience?

To analyze the results we focused on common themes in the responses. Individual responses were then analyzed for frequency and co-occurrence using SPSS Text Analysis.

## Findings

One hundred and fifty surveys were distributed and fifty-five mission trip participants completed the survey for a response rate of 37%. We also did face-to-face interviews with ten additional participants who were suggested by local ministers. As a result of forwarded surveys, our respondents were from Colorado, Louisiana, North Carolina and Texas. The ages ranged from 19 to 68, with 77% being under 24 years old.

All the respondents participated in an organized, formal mission trip that lasted between seven and thirty days. The short-term mission trips fell into three categories of sponsorship: churches, third party mission trip providers (companies that organize mission trips for a fee) and university campus ministries. Respondents on church-sponsored trips (59% of total respondents) were affiliated with Christian denominations including Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Southern Baptist and United Methodist. Survey respondents who went on trips organized by campus ministries, such as the Wesley Foundation (affiliated with the United Methodist Church) and Campus Crusade for Christ (an interdenominational evangelical organization) made up 18.5% of the sample. The remaining 22% of respondents participated in third party provided mission trips. All of these trips were sanctioned by the denomination or parent orga-

nization. Recognizing our own biases and the limitations of our small sample, we choose not to examine relationships between individual religious denomination and trip preparation or cultural gains.

The majority of trips were to Mexico or Honduras (60%) and the rest to other Latin American and Caribbean countries. The main purpose of the mission trips fell into four categories: construction, such as building churches, bridges and cisterns; working with children, usually offering a vacation bible school or orphanage assistance; and medical, offering basic medical or dental clinics. Less than five percent of the respondents said the main purpose of the trip was to proselytize. None of these mission trips was sponsored by local churches. During all of the respondents' visits their groups led worship services in the community and activities for the local children.

### Pre-trip Preparation

The participants had little in-depth language or cultural preparation prior to the trip. While most of the short-term mission trips were to Spanish-speaking communities, knowing the language of the mission recipients was not a criterion for trip participation. Over 90% of the respondents did not speak the language of the mission recipients. The majority described their language skills as "none at all" to "I can say gracias and buenas (sic) dias—that's it." Only one respondent mentioned receiving pre-trip language training specifically from the trip organizers.

Information about the country to be visited came from presentations by previous short-term mission groups (particularly for church groups) or from individual research of websites (many mentioned the State Department's site) and travel guides. The information was of general interest to travelers: climate and natural history, safety issues, crime statistics and health information, especially vaccinations needed. Some participants also received information about the prevailing religious views in the country to be visited.

When asked about the types of information they received about the people with whom they would be working, 50% of the participants

responded that they received minimal information. Those who did receive pre-trip information learned about the material needs and poverty status of the community. Some received information about the spiritual needs of the mission recipients, in particular their lack of familiarity with the gospel and the number of 'unsaved' community members. One wrote that the mission participants were instructed that their "(m)ission work will give due respect to local customs, traditions and cultural values when these are compatible with Christian faith." Another respondent often referred to the mission recipients as "the natives."

We asked about the cultural information participants received prior to the trip, and the responses were quite varied. Over half of the respondents (55%) received some helpful information, including suggestions about appropriate behavior and lists of cultural "do's and don'ts." Most of the missionaries' examples fell under instructions such as "do be respectful" and "don't eat food from the street vendor." Nearly 35% of the respondents received no information about the culture. One missionary said his group was told "the best way to learn is to experience it so they weren't given any information beforehand." Another respondent wrote "(we) didn't need information since it was Mexico and all Americans know Mexican culture." And another replied that they "(d)idn't really need to know about the culture because they worked during the day in a Mexican border town but returned to Texas to eat and sleep and they wouldn't have much interaction with the mission recipients." Others reported picking up tidbits of cultural information: Hondurans love soccer or Mexican men can be *machista* and crude toward women.

Many mission participants did receive specific pre-trip information about how to handle cultural differences. These fell broadly under the category of cultural respect, such as how women should dress, what hand gestures to avoid and recommendations about asking permission before taking a photograph. The other main category addressed alcoholic beverages. This was of particular concern of those participants who did not drink alcoholic beverages for religious reasons but may encounter situations such as being offered traditional drinks in the spirit of

sharing. The missionaries were given pointers on how to refuse without being impolite.

Why respondents chose to go on a mission trip fell into three themes. Service was the most common response with 43.8% replying that they went to “serve God” or to “help others not as fortunate.” Over 30% of the respondents cited personal fulfillment as their primary reason for making the trip. Responses such as “I went to benefit my soul” or “for my own spiritual development” were common. Fewer respondents (18.8%) mentioned the cultural experience as a reason to go on a mission trip. One respondent participated to convert others to Christianity.

The responses to what the participant got out of the short-term mission trip were varied. Over 75% of the respondents replied that their short-term mission experiences resulted in receiving a loving feeling, being blessed, gifts of love, gaining a stronger relationship with God and strengthening friendships with other mission participants. About 24% said they gained an appreciation of another culture out of the experience or learned about another part of the world. One respondent benefited most by being able to participate in a worship service in the Spanish language.

Related to the trip benefits were questions about what aspect of the mission trip participants like best and least. Our findings indicate that camaraderie (fellowship) with other missionaries and a deeper relationship with God emerged as the most common themes related to benefits of the trip. A number of themes emerged including working with others, interacting with children and the fellowship with other missionaries. Less than 10% of the respondents found experiencing a new culture the best part of the trip, about the same number of those who reported that the side trips and going to the beach were the best parts.

Three main themes emerged from the question about what missionaries liked least about the experience. Over 50% of the respondents mentioned the working and living conditions in country as the worst part of the trip, in particular no air conditioning and no available hot water for bathing. Language barriers and not being able to communicate was another common theme, as was viewing poverty. One respondent said the thing she liked least about the experi-

ence was that the mission for most participants seemed to be “all about me” and not for the benefit of the villagers.

## Discussion

Although the cross-cultural experience is touted as a goal and a benefit of faith-based short-term mission trips, our results suggest this goal is not being met. Certainly we were not able to measure such factors as person spiritual growth, however, we conclude that short-term mission trips do not produce any substantive growth in the cross-cultural awareness of typical missionaries.

Our results indicate that mission participants received negligible pre-trip preparation in terms of knowledge of the recipient culture. This low level of preparation indicated by our respondents differed from the more specific instruction focusing on language and cultural studies described in the study abroad literature. Also, very few short-term mission participants had sufficient language skills and very low expectations that they would be able to communicate in the local language. Moreover, the exchanges tended to be one-sided: participants without exception felt that they were sharing out of their abundance in material goods, labor and knowledge of the gospel with their underprivileged recipients. But almost no participants reported what they may have gained from their recipient hosts, other than appreciation for what they did for them.

## Conclusions

Short-term mission trips are service-oriented/religious-themed experiences that expose people in minimal ways to cultures and ways of life different from their own. The participants appear to give of themselves and experience personal growth, but in our survey they demonstrate no particular interest or inclination to expand their world-view. Perhaps more extensive cultural study, rudimentary language preparation and exercises in critical thinking pre-trip might yield more substantive cross-cultural experiences. We think too that short-term mission trip organizers may find the pre-trip preparation processes used by successful short study abroad trips beneficial.

It may be too much to expect that short-term mission preparation should include exposure to self-critical analysis by Christian liberation theologians who share the larger spiritual goals of Christians in all cultures but who are also honest about negative aspects of cultural penetration. At least some familiarity with Ivan Illich's famous speech (1968), "To Hell with Good Intentions," and writings of Leonardo Boff in Brazil (Boff and Boff 1987) or Jon Sobrino (1983) in El Salvador would provide grounding for cross-cultural awareness by mission participants. Although its political context of the late 1960s is somewhat dated, Illich's famous speech to an international study abroad conference is still required reading for international service learning trips sponsored by many colleges and universities around the U.S. Bible studies tailored for lay audiences by Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez (1973) and Argentine Methodist José Miguez Bonino (1983) offer straightforward sociological and historical analysis of colonial and modern mission efforts. They point out not only the positive aspects of the diffusion of Christianity, but also the damage done by well intentioned but misguided missionaries and the structures they represent in the dominant cultures.

College students with good cross-cultural preparation are often required to read and discuss the critical theories of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian literacy pioneer who, during a period exile, served as director of education for the World Council of Churches. Before service learning trips to Latin America, we have required our undergraduate and graduate students to read Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano's acclaimed *Open Veins of Latin America* (1973), a blistering criticism of the imposition of cultural and spiritual values by Spain and Portugal in the colonial era as well as in our era by the dominant neocolonial powers, including their corporate representatives, investment bankers, diplomats and missionaries. Graduate students with colonial Latin American research interests are expected to read Ricard and Simpson's *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* (1982).

With so few studies of the effects of short-term missions, we hope that further research will assess their phenomenal popularity as well as the positive and negative effects of short-term mis-

sions on recipient cultures. Our study leaves us with many more questions to ask. It would be interesting to have more demographic data to assess correlations between variables such as education level and increase in cultural awareness. And, the perspective of the missionized individuals in terms of the mission as a cross-cultural experience would be useful. ○

## Notes

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# Multiple Arrivals: Narratives of Hope and Promise among Inner City Youth

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## Abstract

*This paper analyzes the narratives of four young adults, two men and two women, who participated regularly in programs at The Spot, an arts-based recreational center serving inner city youth ages 14-24 in Denver, Colorado. For many young people, The Spot represents their arrival at a place of refuge and support where they can express their hopes and dreams through the creative arts of hip hop, form lifetime friendships outside gang alliances, and interact with adults who acknowledge the marginalization and inequality they face outside its walls. While there, these young people create narratives that link their previous life experiences with their future plans. Given the exigencies of poverty, discrimination and limited opportunities, these narratives are characterized by multiple arrivals and departures and attempts at assembling disorder into an ordered life. Themes of order, progress and transformation drawn from mainstream American culture compete and merge with themes of positive ethnic identity; resistance to racism, sexism and classism; spirituality and anti-materialism drawn from hip hop and street punk culture. Graffiti murals, rap and hip hop music, break dancing, spoken word, and step dancing all serve to organize and explain life trajectories that are marked by incarceration, natural disasters, substance abuse and the search for life partners. Narratives developed through music, poetry, art and conversations with peers and staff also serve as means of rehearsing new departures, e.g., entry into a training program, a move to reunite with family, or the birth of a baby. [narrative, discourse, inner city youth, hip hop, program evaluation]*

## Introduction

This paper attempts to answer the question, “How do people in diverse situations respond when the present seems incongruent with what they had earlier envisioned as ‘the good life’?” Although the combination of personality traits, life experience and family and social network composition differs for each individual, when crafting an account or narrative of their life trajectory, each person draws from narrative structures, themes and images that are more or less shared within the culture at large (Becker 1997). These cultural elements may not be explicitly stated in the narrative. As Cheryl Mattingly (1998) states, “We need not be aware, of course, of the culturally created stories which govern our experiences and actions” (33). Like the themes and images in a novel or poem, the cultural elements in a person’s stories are accessible through narrative analysis. The cultural elements a person chooses and how they combine them reflects how they view or wish to view their position in society. Thus narrative analysis can illuminate the process through which culture provides both opportunities to explore and develop meaning from life’s events as well as constraining and containing that process. Each

of the four narratives incorporates the theme of arrivals and departures, which are associated with significant decisions in their lives. Arrivals and departures are both literal, for example, in Dice’s departure for Mississippi with his family and worldly goods loaded in his van, and metaphorical, as in Jerry’s arrival at The Spot to find a place where he could explore his ethnic identity and discover new possibilities for his future.

I seek to answer this question by exploring segments in the lives of four young adults in Denver, Colorado. Two are women, two are men, and by self-identification two are Black, one is Mexican and one is White. All were born and have lived their lives in poor urban neighborhoods, three in Denver, one in Chicago. Their stories engage us because these young adults wrestle with competing sets of expectations and visions of the good life and their accompanying narratives: the one they see depicted in mainstream media and that they are taught in school or “brainwashed with,” as one of these young men put it, and the visions they see around them of lives that are narrated through the “shadow values” and “streetcorner mythmaking” that Eliot Liebow (1967) and Ulf Hannerz (1969)

described in their urban ethnographies forty years ago. Both Liebow (1967) and Hannerz (1969) described the stories that poor Black men living in Washington, D.C. in the 1960s and 1970s told of their exploits living on the margins of society. These stories glorified hard drinking, gambling, womanizing and “playing the system” as active resistance to society’s pressures to settle down and conform to middle class lifestyles and values. Both Liebow (1967) and Hannerz (1969) argue that far from rejecting mainstream, middle class values, these men embrace their opposite, shadow values, because they lack the economic and political resources to realize a more middle class lifestyle. Similarly, much of the music and graffiti that these young people listen to embraces the values of drug dealers, gangsters and other countercultural or criminal figures.

I met these four young adults through developing a program evaluation of The Spot, an arts-based recreational youth center in downtown Denver, Colorado. In working with these young adults over several years, I have watched them struggle with their desires for a good life that includes life partners, children and steady work that often contrasts with a reality filled with significant disruption and dislocation. These four young adults each resist embracing shadow values, choosing instead to create life stories from more mainstream patterns and narratives. Nonetheless, each young person frames these mainstream elements in ways they see as true to their ethnic and racial identity and personal history. Their decision to regularly participate in The Spot’s programs over several years reflects their intention to negotiate these different visions of the “good life” in the face of significant disruptions in their lives.

Thus their arrival at The Spot also represents a point of departure for their adult lives. One purpose of the evaluation was to experiment with different ways to document and measure outcomes of The Spot’s programs that could not be easily quantified, for example, the role of relationships among youth in a setting with relatively unstructured adult supervision. In particular, I was concerned with how the arts, specifically the arts of hip hop, might present cultural images and themes that youth could

draw from to provide order and meaning to their life stories without feeling like they had “sold out.” Whereas instruction in and participation in arts programs is often highly valued for affluent youth and those engaged in liberal arts education, it can be difficult to secure funding for arts based programs for poor inner city youth. There is almost no literature that examines the interaction between the arts and narrative in assisting young people to attain their goals in the context of youth centers. This article is an attempt to initiate the process of systematically documenting that process.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

In looking at the lives of these four young people, I draw from three theoretical perspectives on how people seek to create order and continuity in the face of disruptive and unexpected life events and the significant role that narrative plays in that process. First is Dice’s disrupted life, as Hurricane Katrina forces him to take a detour on his route to a more settled life in the mainstream economy. His narrative resembles those of the disrupted lives that Gay Becker (1997) analyzes in her book by that title. Becker (1997) argues that although lives are inherently disordered and filled with disruptions, after an unexpected event we are compelled to create continuity through “narratives of disruption” (15). Next are Jessica’s and Tiffani’s narratives of composed lives. These two young women, who arrived at the Spot as antagonists, set against each other by mutual life histories of racial conflict and mistrust, began telling each other their stories and in the process emerged as friends and allies in weathering life’s changes. As discussed by Mary Catherine Bateson (1990), life may be seen as crafted from the materials we are given by our culture and the vicissitudes of human existence: work, love, home and commitment, much as a musician composes a symphony or writer creates a novel. Finally, there is Jerry’s life in which creating a life’s narrative enabled him to assume a more normative adult life. Cheryl Mattingly (1998), through her analysis of storytelling in therapeutic settings, noticed, “that there was a more complicated, interesting, and interwoven relation between telling stories and making practical decisions than I had initially realized”

(3). For Jerry, the arts of hip hop culture are the media through which he narrates a new vision for his future. Underlying and significantly informing each of these lives are the dominant discourses of what the life course should look like, what constitutes a disruption and how to explain and incorporate disruptions normatively as described by Michel Foucault (1977). As Becker (1997) notes, the culturally and, as Foucault would add, historically specific normative discourse of the life course provides both the compulsion to create continuity after disruption as well as the sentiments, images and metaphors we draw from to accomplish this. Thus all four lives – disrupted, composed, narrated and normative – are cultural products. Ethnography is the method by which we can appreciate their unique beauty and collective strengths and limitations.

### **Setting and Methods: The Spot<sup>2</sup>**

In response to several summers of increasing gang-related violence culminating in the “summer of violence” in 1994, Dave DeForest-Stalls, a former Director in Denver’s Department of Recreation joined with others working in youth development projects to form the Com’n on Strong Grant-makers. This group created a safe, gang-neutral urban space where adolescents and young adults could gather in the evenings: The Spot. After a slow start recruiting and retaining youth participants, DeForest-Stalls consulted with local hip hop artists, street youth (grunge punks) and gang members to design programs based on the four elements of hip hop culture: b-boying/b-girlin’ (break dancing), DJing, emceeing and graff (graffiti). The Spot’s philosophy and mission was to “meet young people where they are,” build trust and supportive relationships with staff over time and, through these relationships, provide encouragement and direction to gain life skills, education and employment. Young men and women ages 14 to 24, from all ethnic, religious, economic, sexual orientations and social backgrounds are welcome to participate in The Spot’s activities on a voluntary basis: there is no formal enrollment or membership required. Participants can participate in designing and managing programs through the Youth Council. The atmosphere at The Spot is based on

mutual trust and respect and an open door policy with only a few basic rules such as not bringing weapons (or turning them over to staff while on the premises)<sup>3</sup> and not coming to The Spot high, drunk or carrying drugs or alcohol. One of the central challenges faced by The Spot’s staff members is recognizing and diffusing conflicts and violence and offering young people the opportunity to handle conflict in a respectful, non-violent manner. In 1997, The Spot purchased its current home, a 9,500 square foot two-story building just north of Denver’s central business district in Five Points, the center of Denver’s Black community since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Hansen 2008). Despite the outmigration of many Black families from this area as a result of gentrification (Robinson 2007), at the time of the evaluation, The Spot continues to draw young people from throughout the Denver metropolitan area.

In 2003, the new executive director of The Spot approached me to design an outcome-based program evaluation that would provide data to support grants to fund The Spot’s programs. Although the director was eager to have these data, she was also reluctant to engage in any project that might make participants feel like they were “being the objects of research” or collect information in way that would violate the trust and respect between staff and participants. Thus we agreed that a participatory approach that involved youth participants in aspects of designing and conducting the evaluation in accordance with their level of interest would be the approach most consistent with The Spot’s philosophy and ethos. For two consecutive weeks, Sunday to Thursday evening from 5:30 to 10:30 p.m., I sat in the lobby of The Spot conducting an unduplicated count of participants in the first week and administering a survey to measure outcome variables the second week. I use the first person here for simplicity: I could not have done this work by myself, and there were no funds to hire research assistants. Throughout the two week period of the evaluation, a core group of youth participants, including Jessica and Tiffani, sat in the lobby with me to ensure that we counted every young person who entered the doors and that everyone was asked to complete a survey. The desk in the lobby

became a center for casual conversations among youth and staff and a place from which I could participate in a variety of conversations and observe activities such as the adjoining bball court and music studios. We repeated these two-week data collection periods every six months for the next two and a half years, over which time I had ample opportunity to get to know many young adults and to talk with them about what was happening in their lives.

Although the young people who go to The Spot are a self-selected group, the four individuals profiled here are similar in age, gender and ethnic background to long-term Spot youth. Thus they represent a purposive sample whose narratives highlight key themes that appear throughout the stories of this group of inner city youth. The Human Subjects Review Committee of the University of Colorado Denver approved the evaluation project, including informal interviews, for 2005 and 2006. The four persons whose stories are told here have been given pseudonyms both for their street names and their real names to protect their privacy and confidentiality. The narratives presented here emerged from one-on-one interviews and casual conversations and observations throughout the period of the evaluation. Data were recorded as written transcripts of one-on-one interviews (audio recording was not convenient in the setting) and field notes of observations and informal conversations. Notes were initially coded for both *in vivo* themes that arose from their content and for codes derived from *a priori* theories of narrative analysis discussed below. Specific themes include disruptions, composition, normative values, shadow values and resistance to normative and shadow values.

### **A Disrupted Life: Dice**

Dice is a solid, muscular Black man of medium height who greets his friends with a broad smile and bear hugs, but who can be very intimidating to anyone who crosses him. I got to know Dice when I met with The Spot's youth council to review the first draft of the survey. He was outspoken and immensely helpful in his critique of the survey, helping us to rewrite poorly worded questions, establishing the right level of language and pointing out our sometime

ridiculous misperceptions with humor. At twenty-three, he was getting old for The Spot when I met him in 2003, and staff members frequently reminded him that in another year he would have to either start working for The Spot or stop coming as a participant. Dice was born in Chicago and had come to Denver at sixteen, fleeing from gang-related threats to his life. An active drug dealer, he had a felony record for assault, so becoming a staff member at The Spot was not a realistic option for him. He had completed his GED and expressed interest in stopping selling drugs, but told me that this was difficult because of how lucrative it was and how difficult it was to secure legitimate, mainstream employment with a felony conviction. During the spring of 2005, Dice began to talk about moving to the South where he had extended family that would help him find work so that he could "get a fresh start. I'm getting too old to be dealing drugs, and I don't have a taste for it anymore. But everybody here knows me as a dealer, and it's hard to convince them I don't want to do that anymore. And it's hard to let go of the money."

By late July that year, Dice had managed to scrounge, save, and raise enough money to repair his aging van, load it with coolers of food and sodas, and say farewell as he drove off with his wife and children to start their new life in coastal Mississippi where a job was waiting for him. Barely four weeks later, shortly after arriving in Mississippi, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, and by October he and his family were back in Denver. I saw Dice a few times after he returned to Denver and asked him how things were going. Despite his disappointment in having his plans to resettle derailed by the hurricane and his distress over the financial losses that he and his extended family suffered, he was optimistic and hopeful, determined that this would be, as he said, "a detour and not a roadblock" in his path to securing stable legitimate employment. Each time I saw Dice, though we never had time to speak at length, he told me that he continued to resist the temptation to return to dealing, had a steady job and was making his way slowly toward the life he desired. Staff members corroborated this and the last I heard he has been employed as a bouncer at a bar downtown for several years.

Dice's arrival back in Denver in the fall of 2005, so shortly after his departure for Mississippi, could not have been more unexpected or potentially disruptive to his resolve to start a different life. Becker (1997) asserts that, "[s]tories of disruption are, by definition, stories of difference" (16). Disruption highlights the contrast between normative ideals of what the life course should look like and what a person is able to achieve. Thus they are inherently moral discourses. What cultural images and metaphors did Dice use to give meaning and order to this unexpected return? Throughout my conversations with Dice he relied on the metaphors and narrative line of addiction and recovery to frame his decision. He was leaving his "old life" of drug dealing with its connections to danger and crime, constantly moving from outside normal society to its borders for a life modeled on more normative, middle class values of a job in the legal economy and a lower but stable and legitimate income. He described the old life in terms of danger, violence and risk, but also temptations of quick and abundant cash, reputation and respect reminiscent of the crack dealers Phillipe Bourgois (1996) depicted in *In Search of Respect*. Thus the new life becomes one of sobriety, safety and respect that come from social legitimacy rather than intimidation and money. The recovery metaphor, of course, is based generally in Protestant Christianity, the revival movements of the rural South, and specifically in the story of the Prodigal Son. Framed within a narrative of recovery, Hurricane Katrina is but an expected setback in a road to redemption that is bound to be filled with temptations and challenges. As a disruption created by nature, it is less threatening than a disruption from internal or interpersonal struggle or conflict.

### **Composed Lives: Jessica and Tiffani**

I am sitting in the lobby of The Spot on a chilly, windy and snowy night in early April. Two young women sit on the broken down couch to my right, talking about the upcoming GED graduation, the latest news of friends and the best site for ringtones. "Yeah, we're a matched pair," says Tiffani, her arm over Jessica's shoulder, "She be the White girl, I be the Black." Both have just turned twenty and have known each other

for about eighteen months. They tease and challenge each other constantly, answer each other's cell phones and "have each other's backs" should anyone threaten the other. But Tiffani and Jessica were not always friends; in fact, when they first met at The Spot there was active mistrust and dislike, which prompted a staff member they both trusted to suggest they start getting to know one another. "I thought she was just another dirty White street kid," Tiffani told me. "I thought she was just another hot-headed gang bangin' girl I'd have to fight," said Jessica. At this time Tiffani was living with her grandmother who had a steady job working for the government. They lived in a new house in an outer suburb with Tiffani's younger siblings. Tiffani had graduated from high school the previous year and was considering training as a certified childcare worker. She had a reputation as a fighter with a bad temper. Jessica, on the other hand, had left home at sixteen and had been living on the streets for several years. When I first met her, everyone called her by her street name, Blue. She was thin but wiry and very strong, often high on meth. She was also known for her tough attitude that kept people at a distance, backed by a sharp tongue that might lash out if you did reach out. She had dropped out of high school and was afraid that she wouldn't be able to pass the tests for the GED because of a learning disability.

From these different backgrounds, Tiffani and Jessica built a solid, lasting friendship represented for them by their arrival at The Spot. Jessica supported Tiffani in learning to manage and discipline her anger so that she could resolve conflict with the force of her words and passion instead of getting herself into trouble by fighting. She helped her out in caring for her younger siblings when her grandmother was hospitalized. Tiffani helped Jessica relax, give up meth and trust and connect with people at The Spot. She took Jessica over to the GED classroom to sign up for classes and worked with her on her homework. I speak of Jessica and Tiffani together because their growing friendship led them to move outward and work with a few other young people at The Spot to organize a block party in 2005. Although The Spot began as a coalition among street youth who are mostly White, and

hip hop artists and former gang members who are mostly Black and Latino, by 2000 these groups were somewhat polarized, with The Spot serving primarily Black and Latino youth and White street youth hanging out on the streets or in a faith-based youth center nearby. Staff members had been discussing this with participants at The Spot and together they decided to hold a block party to bring these groups together. Tiffani and Jessica devoted themselves to the project with enthusiasm, helping to raise funds for a dunking tank to dunk staff members, organizing activities and publicizing the event. Their friendship continues to be an important part of each of their lives that provides continuity and support through life's unexpected and expected events. In the past few years, both have had children and separated from their children's fathers, Tiffani is in school to become a corrections officer and Jessica has held a job at a coffee shop for almost two years and moved out of her mother's house to an apartment of her own. They are godparents to each other's children and, as Jessica said, "We'll be friends forever."

Viewing Tiffani's and Jessica's friendship through the perspective of composed lives allows us to see the pattern it creates through their commitment to each other. Bateson (1989) argues that women, "whose whole lives no longer need be dominated by the rhythms of procreation and the dependencies that these created" must still balance conflicting demands and the "discontinuities of female biology" (10). For Tiffani and Jessica, additional constraints are imposed by scarce resources. As Bateson (1989) observes, "... it is particularly tempting to disassemble a life composed of odds and ends, to describe the pieces separately. Unfortunately, when this is done, the pattern and loving labor in the patchwork is lost" (10). Tiffani's and Jessica's arrival at The Spot was the beginning of a life-long friendship neither had imagined or expected; one that sees them through the many changes of becoming adults in an environment when they have few external supports. Because they knew each other's history they can support the changes they want to make and remind each other of the progress they have made and the goals they wish to achieve. I do not want to idealize their friendship. They have had their

share of fights and days and even weeks when they didn't speak to one another. But those rough periods, too, become part of the life they are composing.

### **A Narrated Life: Jerry**

I have come to know Jerry more recently than Dice, Tiffani, and Jessica, in part because Jerry is a "b-boy." At The Spot, b-boys were a group apart, an elite group focused exclusively on their art with a military like camaraderie, discipline and group ethos. They would usually arrive around 6:00 p.m., well after the doors opened and go directly to the studio without a quick hello or nod to whoever was in the lobby. There is an unstated order in the b-room and almost no discussion or socializing. The b-boys are focused on their moves, on practice, on listening to the beat, on observing each other. Jerry arrived at b-boyin' and The Spot through hip hop culture after having a very clear sense of where he wanted his life to go. He recalls, "At thirteen or fourteen I was going to be a gangster, a gang bangin' fighter who represents my 'hood. I was going to be a drug dealer because my father was a dealer, all my uncles were dealers. It's what I knew."

At fifteen, Jerry ran away from his aunt and grandmother, who had been raising him, and lived on the streets for a year and a half. He describes this as a time of great freedom: "I was the freest in my life. I didn't answer to no one; no chores. I wouldn't change it because I wouldn't be who I am if I hadn't been on the streets." Although he had planned on associating with gangs but not becoming a member (because it is hard to leave), he finally joined and then was expelled from a gang when he was seventeen. Throughout this period of his life, unlike most of his peers, Jerry stayed in high school in part because he loved to read and he had some teachers that he greatly admired.

One teacher who asked him about the book he was carrying, *Guerilla Warfare* by Che Guevara, introduced him to a critical view of American history, an alternative narrative to what he had received up to that point – one that took into account racism and social class. "He was the first teacher I met who actually said something negative about Abraham Lincoln." At about the same time, Jerry was chosen for the cast of "Zoot Suit,"

a high school production that received national attention. One of the other cast members, Jason, was a b-boy and introduced Jerry to hip hop culture. His uncle had taken him to The Spot when he was 10 and Jerry remembers loving it: "There was a group of guys in a huddle working on rap and another group in the corner graffin' in black books. It was like a club, there were so many people, alive and hyped with wonderful energy." But his grandmother thought it was a gang hangout so he didn't return. At eighteen, he returned to become a b-boy and also began doing graff and tagging. Jerry says it was the power of hip hop's ideals that grabbed his attention and changed his ideas of where he wanted to go in his life.

B-boys are underground. They don't listen to the radio; they don't dance to make money but to express themselves. They aren't sell-outs. It's about love not the money. Break dancers do it for the fame, the attention, the money. The new kids don't know the history. B-boys listen to James Brown and Latin jazz and rock 'n roll, underground music. Hip hop and rap when it started was about freeing the people from mental slavery but then rap was commercialized and used to oppress them. It's about the freedom and uplift of humanity.

Jerry is one of the most respected b-boys at The Spot. Cirque du Soleil comes to Denver with each new show and works closely with The Spot because of its work with youth through street arts. Jerry has exchanged classes with Cirque performers and attributes many of the elements of the new b-boy style to their influence. In 2006, Jerry quit selling drugs and in 2007, he became an AmeriCorps volunteer at The Spot. He now works for a small, faith-based non-profit agency serving families in Five Points and is working to find new ways to continue working with youth. When I asked him if he had expected he would be at this point three years ago he said, "No way. I made a lot more money when I was 13 selling drugs and now I have a girlfriend and a baby to support. But I love what I do."

As Jerry told me his story, the power of narrative to envision, rehearse, and create change was evident. Mattingly (1998) identifies several key

aspects of narratives. First, narratives concern human action and interaction. Jerry's uncle taking him to The Spot, a teacher engaging him in conversation about Che Guevara and Jason's introducing him to hip hop are critical events in his narrative that serve as turning points in his life. Second, narratives are "experience-centered. They do not merely describe what someone does in the world but what that world does to someone" (8). Jerry's story of early life is shaped by the world of gangsters and drug dealers that surround him and that put him in conflict with his grandmother who is trying to protect him from this world. Although Mattingly discusses narrative in the context of therapeutic settings, her assertion that "therapeutic plots" help patients move from illness to a new reality is manifest in Jerry's discovery of hip hop arts. Through the idiom of hip hop arts, b-boyin' and graff and their philosophy, he began to hear an alternative critical narrative of American history and his place in that history that provided him with a different vision for his future. This new trajectory provided him with a way to express himself in a way that felt authentic, to serve a project larger than himself and not to become caught up in mainstream American consumerism. As he developed and repeated his narrative, pieces of it were realized and he arrived at a new and unexpected destination.

### **Conclusion: Normative Lives**

As I write about these four young adults it is easy for me, a white woman of comfortable means, to idealize and romanticize their lives and the stories that they tell. There is much to critically evaluate in the narratives they share. As Foucault (1977) argues, social conformity, coercion and oppression underlie the cultural discourse of normality. These young adults, by virtue of their location in the social structure, are most likely to be oppressed and disserved by discourses of a normative life course. So we might ask how well do these cultural narratives serve them? As both Jerry and Dice would acknowledge, they have much less money than they did when selling drugs. They have traded quick money for a greater sense of safety and security. Jerry, for one, was very clear that he wanted to be around to raise his infant son, not

in jail as his own father had been when Jerry was a child. Foucault (1977) also says that social change comes from the epistemic margins, from people like Jessica, Tiffani, Dice, and Jerry who stand far enough apart from the centers of power to recognize that the dominant discourses are a form of “brainwashing,” as Jerry would say. Whereas each has found a culturally based framework for making meaning from disruption – recovery for Dice, friendship across diversity for Jessica and Tiffani, and the critical perspective of hip hop for Jerry – they have crafted them to their own needs and desires.

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### Notes

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2. Information of the history of The Spot was written by Dave DeForest-Stalls and appeared on The Spot’s website until 2007.

3. Youth would get the weapon back at the end of the night based on the understanding that the weapon was a survival tool. Firearms were the exception: they were not returned to the young person. A staff member would drop the firearm at the police station without revealing where it came from.

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# *Edge Dancers:* Mixed Heritage Identity, Transculturalization, and Public Policy and Practice in Health and Human Services

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## Abstract

*This study uses grounded theory to explore the lived experiences of mixed heritage individuals through the anthropological framework of transculturalization. Qualitative data resulting from depth interviews of mixed heritage informants are utilized to identify three commonalities in the life experiences of these “edge dancers:” alienation, complexity, and celebration. Results also indicate that mixed heritage individuals use creative agency to “own” their respective identities and strategically manipulate their environments as they perform the social “dance” of identity negotiation that spans their entire lives. We propose a dynamic, emic agency model of mixed heritage identity construction followed by conclusions about how our study and model informs and expands our understanding of cultural change and transculturalization in the anthropological context. From an applied anthropological perspective, we also discuss the implications that this study and the proposed model have for enhancing public policy and practice in health and human services. [mixed heritage identity, transculturalization, cultural change, grounded theory, edge dancers, agency, public policy and practice, health and human services]*

## Introduction

No identity is stable in today's wild, recombinant mix of culture, blood, and ideas. Things fall apart; they make themselves anew. Every race carries within it the seeds of its own destruction (Liu 1998:82-83).

These encounters between Vietnamese multiracials and monoracial members of the Vietnamese American community can be described as a *dance*—the Vietnamese American individual leads with a series of questions, and the multiracial in turn engages the lead with some spins, dips, turns, and even sidesteps (Valverde 2001:133) [emphasis added].

According to Zachary (2000), the mixing of races, ethnic groups, and nationalities in the United States and around the world is a deep change toward which resistance is futile. The impact of this rapid and unprecedented change is an increasingly hybrid world in which people he refers to as “new cosmopolitans” are inheriting Planet Earth, with or without the blessing of the political and cultural elites. President of the United States Barack Obama, actress Halle Berry, and professional football player

Hines Ward, Jr. of the Pittsburgh Steelers are vivid examples of this growing population of “new cosmopolitans.” Fueled by the unstoppable forces of globalization and its natural consequences of increased exposure to diversity, international and interracial marriages, and the inevitable result of mixed heritage children, these “new cosmopolitans” construct themselves actively and perpetually from a fluid menu of dynamic options. Valverde (2001) explores this fluid menu in her ethnographic study of multiracial Vietnamese in the Vietnamese American community. Within a community context of class hierarchy rife with gross generalizations and stereotypes about multiracial individuals, she adeptly documents how multiracial Vietnamese negotiate and create a social space for themselves. The ability of these individuals to maneuver this classification system varies by person and situation, but Valverde (2001) perceptively refers to their performance as “doing the mixed-race dance.” In our current study, we also embrace the metaphor of dance as we explore the lived experiences of mixed heritage individuals in the United States and, ultimately, the implications their emic voices have upon cultural change and public policy and practice in health and human services.

As exemplified in our current study and the resulting dynamic agency model we propose (see Figure 1), the lived experiences of mixed heritage individuals provide a unique opportunity for understanding contemporary cultural dynamics in the context of culture change and acculturation theory (Broom et. al 1967). Specifically, the dynamic agency model we propose provides insight into the cultural dynamics occurring at the individual level--a process referred to as "transculturalization." Originally defined by anthropologist Irving Hallowell in 1967b, transculturalization is defined as "the process whereby *individuals* under a variety of circumstances are temporarily or permanently detached from one group, enter the web of social relations that constitute another society, and come under the influence of its customs, ideas, and values to a greater or lesser degree" (Hallowell 1976:498-529). Hallowell referred to the individuals who had undergone the process of transculturalization as "transculturalites" (1976: 505).

Although it reached its peak in the late 1950's, during the "high period" of anthropological research on culture change, the study of cultural change and acculturation produced one of the largest bodies of literature in anthropology to date. Such scholarship in turn has significantly influenced anthropological thinking up to the present time (Hallowell 1955, 1967a, 1967b, 1976; Bohannon and Plog 1967; Grumet 2003, 2004; and Haviland 2008). Originally defined in 1953 at the Social Science Research Council's Summer Seminar on Acculturation, as "culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems," the process of acculturation can be viewed through the cultural dynamics of integration and differentiation that emerge among the cultural systems that come into contact with each other (Bohannon and Plog 1967:255-286).

A natural evolution of acculturation, the personal cultural dynamics of transculturalization can be observed when an individual becomes detached from their original cultural group and temporarily or permanently becomes affiliated with another group. A seminal example is Hallowell's (1967b) ethnographic study of the transculturalization process between the St.

Francis Abenaki group of Indians and Whites, as well as Blacks, in Quebec, Canada. In Hallowell's (1967b) study, "Indianization" was the specific example of transculturalization. However, the same process has occurred in other parts of the world when individual "transculturalites" are presented with or seek out similar situations. Interracial marriages, for example, typically embody the process of transculturalization regardless of the national context. The mixed heritage informants in our current study embody the next evolution of transculturalization—one that has not been explored to date. This next evolution, marked by the contemporary emergence of a growing mixed heritage population, explores the lives and perspectives of those who are the children of "transculturalites." Therefore, by exploring the personal cultural dynamics of mixed heritage individuals in contemporary United States, we can expand our understanding of transculturalization to examine what happens when an individual who is the social and biological product of two "transculturalites" embraces an identity that is comprised of all of their respective cultural backgrounds without contradiction, then chooses in turn to push or re-define the boundaries of those cultures both consciously and subconsciously.

In the following sections, we first provide an historical overview of U.S. census policy with regard to racial categorization, followed by a review of the existing literature on racial identity development models. After presenting this historical context and a brief overview of existing cultural models in mainstream U.S. culture, we provide a detailed, emic description of the lived experiences of a diverse group of mixed heritage informants. In our analysis of these voices, we identify common life themes shared by our informants and propose a dynamic agency model of mixed heritage identity construction that reveals a pattern of fluid, multidirectional cultural change. We conclude our study with a discussion about the implications our findings have for an expanded notion of transculturalization, as well as the implications it has for public policy and practice in health and human services with regard to mixed heritage persons and the families and communities to which they belong.

## **The Historical Context of Multiracial Identity**

Although racial identification has been a part of the U.S. Census policy since its inception, neither race nor ethnicity is a scientific construct. Quite the contrary, they are socially constructed categories that vary by the society in which they exist and shift considerably over the span of social and political consciousness (Kato 2006, Henriksen and Paladino 2009:1-25). Few factors are more telling of this socio-political construction than the shifting labels that mark the practice of census reporting over time. For example, the original U.S. Census in 1790 had only three racial categories: free Whites (divided by gender), slaves (Blacks), and all other free persons (Indians) (Carnegie Reporter 2001). Every census since then has raised the question of race, but the racial categories employed have been added, dropped and revised based upon the prevailing social and political climate of the time. By 1890, the census categories had expanded to White, Black, Mulatto, Quadroon, Octoroon, Chinese, Japanese and Indian to reflect the multiracial legacy of slavery and the recent influx of early Chinese and Japanese immigrants. To complicate matters even further, "Hispanic" was added as an ethnic category in 1970 even though a person of Hispanic origin can be of any race. To this day, the Hispanic category maintains the distinction of being the only ethnic category explicitly tracked by the census even though ethnicity is a social construct that can be arguably claimed, albeit arbitrarily, by any person (Prewitt 2001, U.S. Census Bureau 2000; Henriksen and Paladino 2009:1-25).

In addition to *Loving vs. the Commonwealth of Virginia*, the landmark 1967 civil rights case that ended all race-based legal restrictions on marriage, recent immigration trends from non-European countries and powerful forces of globalization have created a natural laboratory for inter-group contact that has resulted in a plethora of complex questions for the army of politicians, public policy makers, educators, scholars and marketers who analyze such population trends when making their strategic decisions. The potential demise of racial categories that carefully segregate people into monoracial groups such as White, Black/African American,

Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or American Indian/Alaska Native calls into question a myriad of institutionalized practices that rely upon rigid classifications to design programs, products, and services that target these diverse populations. In contrast, the insistence of the fluidity of race is a social phenomenon more recently exemplified by the activist-driven notion of multiracial categories in the U.S. Census of 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2001, DaCosta 2007).

For all intents and purposes, the ability to check more than one box on the Census 2000 form is pushing the United States to the edge of a multiracial frontier that few people understand and even fewer may be ready to confront. Indeed, when first given the opportunity to check more than one box on the Census of 2000, almost 7 million people, or 2.4 percent of the U.S. population, identified themselves as belonging to two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). Equally important to census data collectors is that the parents or adults of the household, not the children, report the racial identity of their children. According to Kato (2006), one of the most surprising results of Census 2000 was that fewer than half of monoracial parents in interracial marriages reported their children as multiracial. While the propensity of many monoracial parents of multiracial children to deny social reality is somewhat disconcerting at first glance, it is nonetheless important to emphasize that 42% of those who were identified as belonging to more than one race were under the age of 18. Therefore, due to the relatively young age of the multiracial population in the United States, a decidedly different outlook for future census reports is a logical conclusion even by conservative estimates. The likelihood of this change in reporting behavior is even more salient when it is coupled with the fact that multiracial parents in the Census 2000 were much more likely to identify their children as multiracial when compared with monoracial parents in interracial marriages (Hirschmann et. al 2000, Kato 2006). Undoubtedly, all of these factors indicate a potential growth in the multiracial population as this population continues to mature, become parents, and foster a heightened awareness of multiracial identity within their own families and among their peers.

Since the 1980s, this heightened awareness has fostered an increase in political activism among multiracial university students (DaCosta 2007). Such awareness is illustrated by the proliferation of student and community organizations such as the Mavin Foundation, Multiracial Americans of Southern California (MASC), the Association of Multiethnic Americans (AMEA), Hapa Issues Forum, Mixed Media Watch (MMW), Mixed Folks, and Generation MIX, to name just a few. As awareness about and among people who belong to more than one race or cultural group continues to grow, the need to understand the identities and perspectives of this dynamic population grows as well. However, existing racial and ethnic identity models for mixed heritage people have to date been limited in their scope and relevance. In the following section, we provide a review of the dominant models of monoracial, biracial and multiracial identity development.

### **Monoracial and Mixed Heritage Identity Development Models: A Review of the Literature**

The disciplines of psychology, social psychology and counseling have been instrumental in developing a robust and well-intentioned foundation of scholarship on racial identity development. The following section provides an overview of the existing monoracial and mixed heritage (biracial, multiracial/multiethnic or mixed race) identity models that have emerged from this extensive body of literature.

*Earlier Identity Models.* The traditional focus of identity development epitomized in the works of Erickson (1950, 1980) Marcia (1976), and the cognitive structural approach of Piaget (1982, 1985) provides a psychosocial linear stage theory of development that centers on white male middle-class personality development. Issues of power differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation and ableness were not considered in these early models. The researchers' social class, race, gender, and ethnicity were invisible and unconscious because societal norms aligned with their ethnic, class, racial, gender and cultural values, beliefs and assumptions. The ethnic culture of early theorists, "Standard American Culture," was per-

ceived and experienced as a given --as a taken-for-granted culture (Chavez and Guido-DiBrito 1999:39). Standard American culture is experienced then and now as a "culture of no culture" (Perry 2004, Sobo 2009:111). These earlier theorists assumed they dwelled in a "culture without culture" and their psychological development models reflect that assumption.

*Monoracial/Monoethnic Identity Models.* By the 1970s and 1980s, research on racial identity models came into view. Some of these models focused on monoracial identity development. Cross (1971, 1991, 2001) proposed a racial identity development model of African Americans that allows insight into the experience of African American personality development within the oppression of U.S. mainstream culture and institutions. Cross purports with his "psychological nigrescence" concept that the healthy personality development of African Americans involves a resocialization experience in which they "progress" from a lack of awareness of race and its impact on their identity to embrace a positive Black identity. Following the adoption of a Black identity, a respect for their own and other cultures occurs. Thomas Parham (1989) offers a cyclic progression model of African American identity development that is a life-long, continuously changing process. Helms (1989, 1994, 1995) proposed a model of White racial development within the context of White racial superiority and institutionalized discrimination. In Helm's model, healthy identity development involves a progression away from a racist identity to a nonracist one. However, Helms research does not offer the insight into White racial identity development that Delgado and Stefancic attempt in their *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (1997), an extensive analysis of how Whiteness has been historically and culturally constructed to advance White privilege, or others who have contributed to our understanding White identity development (Richard 1996, Fine et al. 1997, Sciarra and Gushue 2003, Hartigen 2005, Jensen 2005, Wise 2005, Howard 2006).

Phinney (1987, 1989, 1990) proposes a model of ethnic identity development that applies to all ethnic groups in the United States. Phinney's model centers on two essential needs: (1) the need for all non-dominant group members to

resolve their experiences with prejudice and discrimination that is imposed upon them from dominant group members; and (2) to resolve the conflict between their two cultural orientations—their U.S. mainstream and ethnic identity cultures. Smith (1991), Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999), and Tatum (1992) each provide insight into implications and difficulties with developing healthy ethnic identity within U.S. mainstream institutions and describe implications for professional practice in the counseling and educational fields. Psychologist W. S. Carlos Poston (1990) treats the limitations of monoracial/ethnic identity models as they are applied to “biracial” persons. He describes monoracial/ethnic identity models as limited because they are static when, in fact, individuals might choose one group’s culture or values over another at different stages throughout life. Monoracial/ethnic models also fail to consider the integration of several cultural identities at the same time. Furthermore, monoracial models require acceptance into the minority culture of origin. Unfortunately, this experience does not necessarily apply to persons with mixed heritage identity. Instead, high rates of rejection and victimization of multiracial/ethnic people within their families, schools and community are commonly reported (Henriksen and Paladino 2009). And finally, another limitation of monocultural models is that they do not specifically address U. S. mainstream culture as one of the cultures that influences identity development in partnership with the other cultural models upon which the racial/ethnic identities of multiracial people are formed.

In addition to monoracial/ethnic identity models, multiracial/ethnic identity models also grew in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s (Sebring 1985; Spickard 1989; Poston 1990; Kerwin et al. 1993; Fromboise et. al 1993; Wehrly, et al. 1999; Phinney and Alipuria 1996; Fukuyama 1999; Wardle 1991, 1992, 2000; Aldarondo 2001; Wilson 1992; Hall 2001). The earliest multiracial/ethnic identity models of Stonequist (1937) and Gibbs (1987) assumed a deficit model of what they called biracial identity. They assumed the identity development of biracial people was problematic because biracial people were marginal in society. Poston (1990) said the

problems incurred by mixed race or biracial people do not derive from having parents of two different cultural backgrounds but from the rejection and discrimination of mainstream culture that causes people to feel marginalized in society. According to his five-stage developmental model, the mixed race person passes through the initial stage of a personal identity during which he/she identifies with U.S. mainstream culture (a “culture without a culture”) because he/she does not have a cultural reference group. Next the person is socially pressured to choose an ethnic group identity. This can be a time of crisis and alienation. The third stage is one of denial guilt, and anger because the person does not identify with the cultural heritage of both parents. The person is not expressive of his/her multiple heritages. The fourth stage is appreciation because the person begins to appreciate their multiple heritages, although he/she may still identify with one of their heritages as a result of group pressure. The fifth stage is integration in which the person feels whole because he/she embraces all of their cultural heritages. As illustrated by these preceding examples, the majority of developmental models, whether describing so-called mono- or multiethnic/racial identities, assume a predictable, linear process that proceeds in stages whereby “healthy” identity development culminates when the person accepts all his or her cultural/racial heritages. In contrast, our dynamic, emic agency model of mixed heritage identity construction conveys more complexity because it proposes a dynamic, multidirectional and perpetual identity construction process. In addition, our model, like contemporary multiracial/ethnic identity models, takes account of the cultural models within mainstream U.S. culture.

*Contemporary Multiracial/Ethnic Identity Models.* Contemporary research on multiracial/ethnic identity development, generally written since 2000, assumes more complex processes and choices of identity. In doing so, it provides more theoretical flexibility than previous racial identity or biracial models have done and embrace the notion that a mixed heritage person can still have a healthy identity if he/she does not accept all of the cultural/racial heritages with which he or she is born. Root (1992, 1996, 2003), for exam-

ple, suggests that racial identity is mitigated by individual personality, phenotype, interpersonal and familial relationships, geographical region, local communities, openness of groups to accept multiracial members, agendas of loyalty and solidarity, immigration processes and the social, economic and political consequences of racial group membership.

The research of McDowell et al. (2005) provides an overview of literature related to being multiracial, a framework for working with a multiracial identity and guidelines about raising multiracial awareness through “critical conversations” in family therapy to overcome the ongoing social invalidation of identity. These “critical conversations” include dialogue, reflection and action and critically interrogate the political, relational and personal aspects of racial identification. In this way, the contemporary models of McDowell and her associates promote broader, multicultural movements in the realm of family therapy.

In addition, McDowell et al. (2005) provide a summary of early identity development models and critique their reliance on a linear, predictable identity development process. They suggest the need for an ecological framework that embraces identity as a concept that is embedded within a sociopolitical context. This context is best understood as part of a more complex developmental process that occurs across the lifespan. McDowell et al. (2005) believe that the “ideal” of multiracial identity construction is the freedom to make active and informed multiracial identity choices, a goal that involves a process of self-emancipation from internalized racial myths and cultural constraints that maintain the hegemony of racial inequality.

In a similar fashion, Renn (2003) contributes to our understanding of the identities of mixed race college students through a developmental ecological lens. According to Renn, traditional ethnic identity models do not fit with the experience of multiracial/ethnic students because multiracial students have variable identities. The extent to which they identify with their mixed heritages is influenced by the context on their respective campuses. Renn’s model relates to our dynamic agency model by providing important details with regard to our inclusion and analysis

of the individual’s culture, ethnicity, positionality and lived experiences as factors in their identity construction.

Other contemporary researchers include Wardle (1991, 1992, 2000), who offers an historical context of mixed race/ethnic experience in the United States. She recommends how to implement programmatic changes in schools by changing teacher training, exploring cultural heritages to increase sensitivity, assessing formal curriculum, reviewing the informal curriculum, revising ethnic and racial celebrations, addressing harassment and promoting anti-bias activities. Pellegrini (2005) offers insight into the need for institutions of higher education to become more culturally aware and competent. As a person of mixed Italian and Mexican heritage, he offers a compelling description of the identity suppression he experienced by professors at California State University, Los Angeles. David L. Brunsma (2005) explores the structure of the parental racial designation of mixed race children and purports that there are complex interrelationships among factors of class, social networks, family structural variables and appearance/phenotype that influence racial identity. The Brunsma model supports our proposed model because it points to the importance of cultural models and the positionality of parents in their perception and designation of their children’s race/ethnicity. Arredondo et al. (2005) present a ten year content analysis of the *Journal of Counseling and Development* and identify that only 1 out of the 102 articles reviewed (1%) referred to biracial counseling issues. Accordingly, their study demonstrates the need for more research of mixed heritage identity and counseling issues. Lastly, Henriksen and Paladino (2009), also from the counseling realm, in *Multiple Heritage Identity Model*, write a practical counseling text based on their personal experiences as mixed heritage individuals in the United States. Their intention is to help counselors to understand the worldviews of mixed heritage individuals. And so, as revealed by these authors in their research on contemporary multiracial/ethnic identity development, the incorporation of more complex processes and choices of identity moves the discussion of identity development beyond the limitation and constraints of earlier research.

However, due to the emphasis upon primarily psychological and social-psychological approaches and perspectives, the application of these models has not been placed in the broader context of social and cultural change at the meso level or the micro level of the individual (transculturalization). Our proposed model addresses this limitation by placing the lived experiences of mixed heritage individuals into the broader context of cultural models and cultural change.

### **Cultural Models within the Context of Mainstream U.S. Culture**

In order to understand the historical and cultural context in which existing models of racial and ethnic identity development take place, it is also important to understand the nature and context of the cultural models that define mainstream culture in the United States. For the purposes of our study, we define culture as the "... acquired knowledge that people use to generate behavior and interpret experience" (Spradley and McCurdy 1972:8). It is a multi-level, dynamic, and interactive phenomenon that encompasses not only a person's assumptions, values, beliefs, explanatory systems and behaviors learned in the family and other basic social groups, but also those learned in organizations and institutions such as schools, work places and media. Macro level culture, a source of "acquired knowledge" that individuals utilize on the micro level, is the broad structure and processes of a culture – such as norms, policies, procedures and sanctions of society's institutions and organizations. Schools, government, workplaces, business organizations, media and churches are also examples of macro level culture within which people live. In our current study, for example, we explore the implications our results and proposed model may have for the myriad of health and human service organizations in the United States. Macro level culture in today's context entails multiple processes of globalization, including international migration, technological integration, shifting national borders, interracial and international marriages, and mixed heritage identities—all of which contribute to the process of transculturalization directly or indirectly and therefore have immediate relevance to our current study. At the meso level, culture exists in the

groups with whom we identify and interact. Each individual belongs to many groups based on their race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, religion, degree of ability, and region of the country. At the micro or individual level, culture manifests in a person's assumptions, values, beliefs and behaviors, which are learned and shaped by power relations in families and other social groups within which people interact.

Our group of informants includes individuals who are middle class, male, female, gay, straight and possess multiple racial/ethnic heritages. While the lived experiences of our mixed heritage informants is the primary focus of our study, it is important to understand that this micro or individual level of culture takes place with an established cultural context. Historically, race and ethnicity in the United States has been defined as monoracial categories viewed from a Black/White binary perspective. This perspective is deeply rooted in the historical legacy of slavery and the related notion of hypodescent, the historical practice of assigning mixed-race children to the race that is considered subordinate or inferior. As a result of the changes in immigration law during the 1960's, the Black/White binary system of classification has expanded to become a Black/non-Black divide that still devalues Blackness. Since they do not fit neatly into any one specific racial/ethnic category, our mixed heritage informants face multiple cultural challenges and complexities within this historical context. Their cultural challenges begin with the experience of invisibility in American society because they do not fit into a single "pure" racial or ethnic category that is defined by the existing racial classification system. The single-race classification system of the United States has served to keep one group dominant (Whites/Europeans) and all other groups separate within their own distinct group. Mixed heritage individuals thus face social invisibility in relation to macro culture and at the meso-level, members of the multiple groups to which they belong commonly reject them (Schartz 1998, Harris and Sim 2002, Nakazawa 2003, Di Consiglio 2004, Herman 2004, Lee and Bean 2004, Jourdan 2006, Henrikson and Paladino 2009). It is within this problematic context, one

that is deeply embedded and maintained throughout the multiple levels of culture, that we situate the lived experiences of the mixed heritage informants in our study.

## Methodology

Since one of the primary goals of this longitudinal study was to gain an emic perspective of the mixed heritage identity experience, we employed two recognized qualitative research methods. Specifically, we conducted in-depth interviews and participant observation as described in the following paragraphs.

*In-Depth Interviews.* In-depth interviews are a data collection method designed to elicit a vivid picture of the informants' perspectives on a given topic, in this case mixed heritage identity. Such interviews are especially useful for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions and experiences. By actively probing informants about the connections and relationships they see between particular people, events, beliefs and other phenomena, the researcher can gain valuable insights into how people interpret and order their worlds. In addition, the nuances in and contradictions to explicitly stated beliefs often emerge unintentionally through the process of in-depth interviews.

According to McCracken (1988), a purposive sample of eight individuals is sufficient to identify the cultural categories and schema that informants use to interpret and order their respective worlds. For this study, we conducted twenty-two in-depth interviews with mixed heritage individuals of varying ethnic and nationality backgrounds during an extended period between 1997 and 2009. One informant was interviewed twice, once at age seventeen and again at age twenty-three. Three informants were second-generation mixed heritage individuals. While this number of interviews far exceeds the quantity deemed necessary for this current study, both the diversity of our informant population and the longitudinal nature of our study warrant the examination of a larger population and the tracking of key informants over an extended period of time. See Table 1 for the demographic background of the informants interviewed. It is important to note the rather diverse range of heritage of the informants in

this study. While in certain research designs the diversity of a sample may be problematic, this is not a major concern in this particular study. As noted above and illustrated in our section describing the lived experiences of our informants, the design of our current study is to explore, through a grounded theory approach, the breadth of cultural categories that define the lived experiences of mixed heritage individuals. Accordingly, we have selected a diverse group of informants for the current phase of our study and intend to expand both the diversity and the depth of experience in future renditions of our longitudinal study.

*Participant Observation.* Participant observation is one of the most common methods of qualitative data collection, but also one of the most demanding and analytically difficult (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). When conducting participant observation, the researcher (ethnographer) becomes the actual instrument of data collection. He or she must secure and maintain relationships with the informants under observation, take volumes of field notes on rather mundane activities and behaviors, and spend weeks or sometimes months analyzing those notes throughout and after the observations are complete. Participant observation is more than mere observation—it requires that the researcher becomes a part of the social world of the informants and participate within it to varying degrees. Eventually, through a process of observation, impromptu, unstructured interviews, and considerable reflection, the researcher can construct a contextualized model of the social system under observation.

Throughout the duration of this study, and still on an ongoing basis, we engaged in participant observation at conferences for mixed heritage student organizations, as well as various social and organizing events for mixed heritage student organizations, community organizations, family gatherings, reunions and other informal meetings of multiple heritage individuals and groups. These observations were instrumental in clarifying the context and salience of cultural categories identified through the depth interview process. They also revealed the cultural relationships between the factors identified in the resulting dynamic agency model.

*Data Analysis.* Depth interview transcripts and participant observation field notes were analyzed using the grounded theory method (Strauss 1987, Miles and Huberman 1994, Charmaz 2005, Corbin and Strauss 2007). Grounded theory is a qualitative research approach that inductively generates a theory from the data. When current theories about the phenomenon under investigation, in this case mixed heritage identity, either do not exist or are not adequate, grounded theory is instrumental in developing a new theory that is grounded in the data.

By definition, grounded theory is a rigorous research approach that involves a systematic coding process from which cultural categories relevant to the phenomenon emerge from the data. The basic process of grounded theory consists of reading the textual data and discovering the categories, concepts and properties of the phenomenon through a systematic process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding is the analytical process of identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the textual data. In this step, the researcher identifies key emergent themes and cultural categories. Axial coding is the process of identifying and building the complex relationships associated with each category by exploring their respective properties, conditions, consequences, interactions and strategies. Selective coding is the process of identifying a core category then linking all other categories to it. The culmination of this rigorous process is the development of a model, based entirely on the data, to explain the phenomenon under investigation.

For this study, we used the grounded theory approach to identify the cultural categories and conditions that shape the identity construction process of mixed heritage individuals. Specifically, verbatim transcripts of in-depth interviews and field notes from participant observations were the primary data analyzed during this process. The strength of this particular research design is important to note. Our in-depth interviews allowed us to hear the emic voices of our informants in ways that surveys could never accomplish. Equally important, our field work and field notes from various participant observa-

tions provided an informed perspective that enabled us to identify and describe the lived experiences of our informants in ways that would not be possible with a more objective, decontextualized gaze. The emic voices that emerged from this rigorous process are discussed in the following section.

### **The Lived Experiences of Edge Dancers**

Mixed heritage informants described lived experiences marked by fluidity, liminality and a dynamic process of reframing their identities throughout life. This lifelong process of identity construction emerged from three distinct commonalities: alienation, complexity and celebration. Informants expressed alienation caused by cultural insensitivity at the hands of family members, other children at school, overly-curious strangers, co-workers and people in the community-at-large. Such encounters with insensitivity were intermingled with the complexities of the mixed heritage experience, marked by liminality, that cultivated broader perspectives on the issue of racial and/or cultural heritage than would otherwise be required. Rather than allowing this inescapable reality to limit their lives and identities, however, such complexities served instead to construct and strengthen identities grounded in the celebration of mixed heritage identity. Throughout their lives, using different strategies for different situations, our informants demonstrated creative agency as they intentionally and skillfully maneuvered a world that sometimes rendered them invisible or problematic. The following paragraphs provide a more detailed explanation of these three interconnected commonalities (emergent themes) as described and lived by our informants. A more in-depth discussion of our informants' creative use of agency follows in the subsequent discussion of our proposed dynamic agency model of mixed heritage identity construction.

*Alienation.* As outlined earlier in this study, the sometimes mortal wounds of existing cultural models, such as racism and sexism, weighed heavily in the lived experiences of our mixed heritage informants. While the weight of these cultural models is also shared by the members of most "monoracial" minority groups in

the United States, the lives of our informants were further challenged by existing societal norms and expectations within and between their respective, multiple heritage groups. As their emic voices reflect in the following paragraphs, our informants expressed great clarity about emotional pain as well as the residual impact of these alienating experiences. As children, informants were able to isolate particular family events or comments overheard, sometimes unintentionally but more often than not with strong intent, that served as eventual catalysts for their mixed heritage identity construction. DaCosta (2007) notes that such interactions within the racial divisions of family relationships are a central feature of a common multiracial experience. As illustrated in the comments below, young informants recall the frequent cultural insensitivity they experienced as mixed heritage children living within the multiple and often opposing realities of their respective dual heritage family cultures. In the first example, a young female informant describes the anger and frustration she experienced when relatives from both her Black father's family and her Japanese American mother's family would use mainstream cultural stereotypes to comment on her dancing prowess, hair and general physical appearance. Her father's family thought she was too Japanese and her mother's family thought she was too Black, but her lived reality was neither *and* both. In the second example, another young female informant of mixed White and Japanese American heritage describes the alienation she experienced at the hands of seemingly well-intentioned White grandparents as they privileged her "White" appearance over the darker phenotype of her two siblings. To make matters worse, the racial privilege she experienced at home was further juxtaposed against the racial ostracism she encountered at school when other children referred to her as a "Chinaman." In the final example, a male informant of mixed Mexican American and Irish American heritage expresses his sense of cultural and spatial limbo as he distances himself from his Mexican American heritage yet is unable to fully connect to his Irish American heritage due to a personal family history that has fostered negativity and isolation.

...I do remember incidents that stick in my mind and most of them were not that good. For example, I remember being at a family function on my mother's side [Japanese American] where I was dancing with my Japanese American cousins. We were all having a great time playing around and dancing and eating until I overheard a comment from one of my aunts. She said it was obvious where I got my dancing genes—from my Black [father's] blood. Now that I look back on it, I realize that she probably didn't even realize that her statement was racist or anything, but I sure was pissed when I heard it. My mother and my father were upset too, but it was just one more example of how I did not fit in there. And my father's family wasn't any better. Always talking about my hair and my "funny" looks. They thought I was too Japanese—even my Dad... (*African American-Japanese American female informant, age 19*)

I experienced a lot of racism [when I was a child]. Many children called me horrible names like "Chinaman" because I looked a little different. I sure felt different. I was different. My sister and my brother [names omitted] were treated even worse. My grandparents constantly reminded me that I was the lucky one because I looked White. My poor sister was a China doll and my poor brother was too dark too—he looked liked a Hawaiian. My [White] grandparents made me feel awful, terrible almost every day. I didn't realize it at the time, but they were the worst of all racists. My parents got married in the 1950s. I couldn't understand how it happened in the first place. I remember looking at my parent's wedding album and remembering how miserable my grandparents looked in the all the pictures. (*European American-Japanese American female informant, age 29*)

I don't identify with my Mexican heritage because my dad was so vile, so filthy...I don't want to be reminded of him and his vileness. That's it. That's why I have not identified with my Mexican part. And as to my mother's Irish heritage, how important was Mom

in my immediate family? My dad belittled everything about her. Everything. He extinguished my mom's existence. How could I identify with her Irish culture in that context? He obliterated her ethnicity with his constant criticism of her and her family. *(Mexican American-Irish American female informant, age 36)*

In addition to the alienation our mixed heritage informants experienced within their respective family structures, they were also targeted and harassed by other children who lived in their neighborhoods or attended the same schools. As exemplified by the following informant comments, it is apparent how strongly the cultural models discussed above have been internalized even by children and young adults who practice their tenets but who may not fully understand the ironic fallacies embedded within such belief systems. The following two female informants talk about their respective experiences in a university student organization and a personal relationship with a young "monoracial" man. In both cases, these mixed heritage informants faced tense situations in which their (racial group) loyalties were questioned or their personal relationship was jeopardized because of the internalized cultural models embraced by the Japanese American student organization members or the boyfriend's "monoracial" White mother. Since both Japanese Americans and Italian Americans have been marginalized in mainstream U.S. culture at different times throughout history and still today, there is genuine irony in the positions assumed by both the student organization and the boyfriend's mother in this case. Perhaps what is more amazing, at least in the case of the mixed heritage student, is that she was able to exercise agency so creatively and independently even in the face of such abject race-based discrimination.

I have just entered adulthood, so I can't really say except for my experiences so far at [name of university omitted]. I joined this student club called Tomodachi – that means "friend" in Japanese – and I thought it was great because I was making all these new friends. One time, however, I overheard two of the JA's [Japanese Americans] talking about me.

It was club election time and these two JA girls were questioning my ability to be in a leadership position for the organization because my loyalties would be "questionable." I quit that club after that and I didn't really fit in with the Black student groups either. People are so ignorant. It is their loss anyway. *(African American-Japanese American female informant, age 19)*

Oh yeah, I remember one other significant experience during my childhood. I was a senior in high school. I had just received my driver's license and wanted to celebrate with my [White] boyfriend. Before that day, I had never met his mother. I had only talked with her on the telephone. She was always very pleasant on the telephone, but that all changed when I showed up at their house. His mother took one look at me and slammed the door in my face. I stood there for almost 15 minutes before I could move. She screamed that my boyfriend was not at home, but she would not open the door. Finally, I returned home. I was hurt and exhausted and depressed. Later that evening, I got a call from my boyfriend. He was at the police station. He got into a huge fight with his mother about me and she called the police on him. I guess she expected a pretty, blonde, blue-eyed girl and was shocked beyond belief when a JAP came to her door. And get this, she was Italian! He and I continued to date for almost six more months, but I guess his mother wore him down in the end. It certainly made me think about who I was and where I really belonged. *(European American-Japanese American female informant, age 29)*

Frequent questions about heritage from coworkers or other people in the community-at-large, most typically presented as a variation of the ubiquitous "what are you?" question, continued to provide alienating experiences in the workplace or elsewhere for our mixed heritage informants. After experiencing numerous incidents of alienation throughout their respective childhoods, most of our informants had already developed sophisticated defense mechanisms to

address such questions with steel resolve as exemplified by the following informant's comments and experiences. What is also apparent in the following comments is the remarkable resilience informants exhibit as they construct their respective mixed heritage identities. In each of the following cases, the informants point indirectly or directly to a learned ability to either ignore or to pity the inability to understand their mixed heritage existence. By co-opting numerous experiences of alienation and using them as a springboard for positive identity construction and re-construction, these mixed heritage informants once again displayed creative agency to emerge victorious against the oppressive dominance of existing cultural models as they are internalized by family members, children, co-workers, and the community-at-large.

... most people think I am either Mexican or Italian, and Mexicans think I am Mexican...99% of the time. For example, Mexicans who don't know me immediately talk to me in Spanish, and when I don't speak to them in Spanish, they say, "You're Mexican aren't you? Why don't you speak Spanish?" Not all say this, but some do. Some show anger that I am Mexican and don't have dark skin. Some White people show shock to think I am Mexican. ... "Where did you get a name like [name omitted]? I say I got it from my dad. . . . When I worked in a retail store a few years ago, I was clocking out and a stock worker named Julio was clocking out at the same time. When he saw my last name on my time card, he looked shocked and asked "Why don't you have dark skin?" He was visibly bothered. He then poked my forearm about five times saying "Why are you so white?" I said, "It is really OK, Julio, my mom is Irish and my dad is Mexican, and my Mexican grandmother was white-skinned too. And looking at him closely in the eyes, I said again "It is really OK, Julio" and then he calmed down. Yes, I get a lot of weird reactions. (*Mexican-Irish-Indian male informant, age 34*)

[People define my ethnicity] incorrectly most of the time. I get tired of it too. I get tired of

hearing "What are you?" I think most of the time people assume I am Black. Then, they really get confused when they see my Chinese American husband. They probably think—what is going on here? Now, wait a minute, is she Black or something else altogether. It just gets tiring, so I try to ignore it most of the time...The constant stares from other people. The stares and the questioning. People just can't seem to deal with my reality. (*African American-Japanese American female informant, age 33*)

I was born in Peru, but my family moved to the United States when I was three. My little sister was born here in the States...We used to go back and forth to Peru (to visit family on both sides) and China/Hong Kong (to visit my Dad's family). . . . I remember once when we were returning from a visit to China and we had to go through U.S. Customs. My sister had a U.S. passport, my dad had a Portuguese passport from Macau, and mother and I had Peruvian passports. . . . They really hassled us. They just couldn't deal with the fact that we were all one happy family. (*Peruvian [Afro-Latino descent]-Chinese-German-Portuguese female informant, 23 years old*)

It seems that there are more challenges in the sense that making people realize that you are not like them like when checking more than one race [on a standardized form]. I would check all that apply, but most people would still just choose one of them. Society sees in monotone, but I am not monotone. I can't be just one single race. I can't separate that inside of myself or mentally. I was raised to embrace all of them not any single one of them. There is nothing that I don't like about being Afroasian or mixed race. It is only other people that just don't get it. (*Canadian Scottish Irish-Japanese-African American-Native American second-generation mixed heritage male informant, 17 years old*)

*Complexity.* While mixed heritage informants often expressed frustration and resignation about the cultural oppression they frequently encountered, they also revealed high levels of

awareness and unusual clarity about the meaning and complexity of their mixed heritage existence. During interviews with informants, they divulged a deep understanding of the metaphysical dilemma their mixed heritage existence conveys to a society so deeply embedded with pervasive, monoracial cultural models and their accompanying baggage. While informants described lived experiences marked by liminality with regard to their multiple heritages, they also acknowledged strength rather than confusion in this position. Furthermore, as they constructed their identities around this position of strength, they actively called into question the existing cultural models and the many ways they are manifested in their daily lives and in their interactions with other people. Social scientists who study the mixed heritage experience also acknowledge this phenomenon in their numerous discussions of how the growing mixed heritage population challenges existing racial cultural models and ideology in the United States (Root 1992, 1996, 2003; Zack 1995; Williams 1996; Leong 1997; Williams-Leon and Nakashima 2001; Winters and DeBose 2003; Lee and Bean 2004; Sunderland 2004; Lezerette 2006; DaCosta 2007). As noted in the informant comments below, complexity (like alienation) has been embraced in a positive manner to inform the process of mixed heritage identity construction and re-construction. From the perspective of our mixed heritage informants, it is other people who have the problem—not them. One young male informant adeptly describes the rich range of experiences he encounters as he travels to the homes of different family members and embraces the rich immersion of food, aesthetics and experiences. Employing creative agency, he then uses these rich experiences to navigate the sometimes alienating and perpetually complex geographies of his mixed heritage existence. One female informant discusses the paradox of race as a cultural model in the United States and how it differs from her more complex reality of being a multinational and multiracial woman. This added level of complexity, a multinational gaze, triggers her need to question her complex identity within a broader context. Another female informant, a university student, reflects somewhat comically upon the “schizo-

phrenia” her parents often fostered as she was growing up, all the while exercising agency by claiming a more complex identity—one that was different from the racial identity of either of her parents.

Only my mother and then the rest of my extended family played a part [in the development of my ethnic identity]. My Aunt’s [name omitted] house has a lot of Japanese things but it is very different from my mother’s version of Japanese and then going to Japan and then going to Alabama to meet other relatives was even more different. All these different family members on both sides living in different places has really exposed me to my ethnic identity—all of it. Absorbing these experiences in different places increased and strengthened my personal ethnic identity. When I went to Alabama to visit African American relatives, I came back with corn-rowed hair. My cousin [name omitted] cooked grits and collard greens and all that Southern Black food. It was delicious and was a different experience from what I grew up with. Mom cooks all that Japanese food but she can’t cook that Southern stuff. I learned a lot. (*Canadian Scottish Irish-Japanese-African American-Native American second-generation mixed heritage male informant, 17 years old*)

... arriving at this label [Afroasian] has been an evolution—I can’t even say when it began. My first recollection is that you deal with the labels given to you—like hypodescent which would say I am African American. When I was growing up it was “Black.” That was the label and I was at a level of awareness that didn’t allow me to critically question the label given to me. I was three when I came to the U.S. from Japan so my entire socialization and education process was in the United States. But, it wasn’t that simple for me. There were a lot of questions that caused me to self-reflect. For one thing, I lived in a military town and all of my friends were half American and half something else. I think that was critical because it raised my questions to a nation-state level not a race level. . .

. I couldn't be just African American because I had a broader context, at a nation-state level of thinking. So, the mere fact that my mother was a Japanese national and most of my friends had mothers who were Italian, German, Korean, or Japanese. . . . "Other" was not about being Black, it was about being a "foreigner" in this post-World War II, post-Korean War era. . . . So my identity was formed around being Japanese and American. Being African American in part was secondary to that issue (*Japanese-African American-Native American female informant, age 46*)

Whenever I made a major accomplishment in school, my [Japanese American] mother would be telling me to be humble and my [African American] father would be telling me to be proud and loud and proclaim it to the world. It is a wonder that I didn't end up being schizophrenic or something. Whatever the case, I always knew I was different. I am not Black and I am not Japanese American. I am both—a different category altogether. (*African American-Japanese American female informant, age 19*)

As revealed through the emic voices of these informants, they consciously acknowledge and embrace the liminal complexity of their mixed heritage identities while using creative agency to strategically negotiate and create a malleable social space to call their own. Through a diversity of experiences, these informants deliberately and continuously embrace, reject, construct, reexamine, and reconstruct their identities in a perpetual and non-linear fashion. The racial script of endless "what are you?" encounters becomes the theatrical stage for identity-shaping performances that transforms the mixed heritage experiences of alienation and complexity into those that fortify a stronger sense of mixed heritage identity (Williams 1996). By negotiating the social space of this performance through numerous creative forms of agency, our mixed heritage informants performed what Valverde (2001) referred to as a negotiation of identities by doing the "mixed-race dance." With each new experience, mixed heritage persons perform a

social dance around the edges of a slowly shifting monoracial and monocultural world that fails to acknowledge the reality of their existence. And yet, with each personal declaration of mixed heritage identity and with each refusal to be categorized by the labels of pre-existing categories (acts we refer to as creative agency), these dynamic "edge dancers" push the reluctant boundaries of existing cultural models beyond their rigid comfort zones and call to question the very foundations upon which they exist. In doing so, they slowly but surely transform U.S. society and shift the binary Black-White boundaries of race and identity as we have known it into a new and hybrid vision of their own—one that acknowledges and embraces their existence within a new dialogue of racial and cultural identities. This startling phenomenon exemplifies the process of cultural change and transculturalization at its contemporary best.

*Celebration.* While acknowledging the inescapable reality of existing cultural models and how the members of a society internalize them, the mixed heritage informants in this study moved beyond such barriers and expressed not only an acceptance, but also a celebration of their multiple heritages. Perhaps sustained by their trademark resilience, informants fused the inherent pain of alienation with the social reality of their respective complex backgrounds to celebrate their mixed heritage identities through innovative family rituals, counter-cultural perspectives on the meaning of racial identity and added value insights in relationships and the workplace. Repeatedly, informants described how their mixed heritage gave them more love, more holidays, more diversity of experiences and more fun. One female informant joyfully describes the recent discovery of the "magic" of her Irish American heritage—a heritage that had been suppressed by her Mexican American father throughout her childhood. Another female informant talks about the "chameleon effect" and how she is able to move creatively in and out of her Japanese and Italian American cultures with considerable ease and grace. Several informants talk about how "special" they feel as mixed heritage individuals and how their complex life experiences have fostered a heightened sensitivity toward their own identities and the

identities and concerns of others. As all of the informant comments below point out, mixed heritage informants were able to identify and seize the cultural power of the mixed heritage experience to dynamically frame the construction and re-construction of their own identities. The creative forms of agency they employed throughout the framing and re-framing process were as varied as their respective heritages would suggest. Nonetheless, the resulting celebration of identity in turn served to challenge once again the rigidity of existing cultural models in ways yet to be understood or explored at length.

It's great [being Afro-Japanese]. It's like a celebration most of the time. I get more holidays, more presents, more love, more culture, more everything just about. (*African American-Japanese American female informant, age 19*)

A part of me really likes being mixed. It gives me a foothold on different perspectives. The best part is that I know there is no right way to be. There are many very legitimate ways of being. . . . Even though it's frustrating sometimes, I guess it is nice to be unique. I am different. That makes me special. It also makes me more sensitive about identity issues when I deal with my social work clients. (*Japanese-Italian American female informant, age 42*)

As a mixed person, I'm not completely immersed in either ethnicity...like, when we have Christmas and other family parties, there are so many races in the family. It is not a Jewish or Irish thing—it is a big bowl of rich diversity. . . . (*Israeli-Jewish American-Irish American-Mexican American male informant, age 23*)

I get to be different, unique. Like when people ask me what I am, that always stands out. Even my best friends . . . still ask me. It makes me different. At my school, there is a group called Racial Harmony for students that is set up by the high school. (Last year the subgroups were Latino, Black, White, Middle Eastern, and Asian . . . this year there is a multiracial group so that made me happy).

We get together to discuss what it means to be in an ethnic group but we [multiracials] were the only group that could really illustrate the true notion of racial harmony so it made me feel special. For example, I got to make a special connection with a teacher because I found out her middle name was Japanese and she has Japanese heritage. It is great to be Afroasian. (*African American-Japanese American female informant, age 19*)

What I like most about my life as a Hapa [mixed race Asian] is that I am able to be true to my ethnic identity, and not have to pass for a monorace just to make binary thinkers happy. I have to be me. . . . (*Japanese-African American-Native American female informant, age 44*)

I now embrace my Irish heritage. I am re-learning, in my current stage of recovery. I am now identifying with something that was always really there..and that was good. He [my Mexican father] verbally assaulted my mom's family—all that was said about the family was as if it was a dirty word. The Irish was completely obliterated, so I didn't know the Irish was there until I found Me. . . . I like how successful my life is becoming . . . how successful my magic is . . . “thank you fairies!” . . . ha ha . . . That's all I can say, that's from the Irish. I'm having a lot of fun working with my Celtic heritage. For the past few years . . . I am having fun for the first time in my life. (*Mexican American- Irish American female informant, age 36*)

Being Eurasian has a definite impact on my friendships. I tend to lean toward open-minded, but marginal people. Something about my friends is always different from the norm. I feel comfortable with them, but I am also very flexible. I have what I call the “chameleon effect.” I can act very Japanese with Japanese. I am always a little more Japanese in Little Tokyo. When I am around Whites, I can be a little more White and less Japanese. I can change according to the environment, because I have always had to do so. (*Japanese-Italian American female informant, age 42*)

## A Dynamic, Emic Agency Model for Mixed Heritage Identity Construction

As demonstrated in the lived experiences of these “edge dancers,” the three interconnected commonalities of alienation, complexity and celebration guide new experiences throughout their lives and provide repeated opportunities for identity construction and re-construction. The perpetual interplay between lived experiences and existing cultural models also reveals high degrees of creative agency among our mixed heritage informants. As noted by Williams (1996:208), they are not mere receivers of the exclusionary social messages they receive—they “get race done unto them,” but they “do race” as well. Additionally, there is a growing body of social scientific research that shows mixed heritage individuals employ innovative coping strategies, what we refer to in our study as “creative agency,” to negotiate their unique social spaces (Root 1992, 1996, 2003; Comas-Díaz 1994; Leverette 1996; Williams 1996; Leong 1997; Winters and DeBose 2003; Sunderland 2004). As illustrated by the emic insights of our mixed heritage informants, these creative responses (agency) empower them to forge identities of their own design that were notably reflexive, non-linear and fluid in nature.

As the following comments demonstrate, the informants in this study describe incidences of “playing the system” with regard to racial categories on standardized forms, linguistic code-switching to take advantage of different ethnic encounters, creative counter-cultural labels for themselves that empower them to “own” their respective identities, and sometimes open recognition of the cultural power and enlightened understanding they possess because of their lifelong experiences as “edge dancers.” With regard to racial categories on standardized forms, several informants are quoted as displaying an open recognition of the advantages and disadvantages of racial categorization, as well as a well-informed understanding of how or why such categories were used in a particular context. On applications for employment, university admission or housing loans, when these informants were forced to “please check only one box,” they either strategically chose the most favorable racial category (in their opinion) or

wrote in an answer of their choice. As noted in one of following quotes, one young male informant demonstrated agency by creating his own mixed heritage label and sharing it with his ethnically diverse group of friends. In fact, quite a few of the informants in our study had chosen unique labels to identify their mixed heritage on their own terms (see Table 1). And, another male informant described his recent realization that being mixed was no longer odd—it was cool and even awesome. Like other informants, he also described how his mixed heritage experiences had fostered a heightened sensitivity towards others since, every day, he “walks a mile in a lot of different shoes.”

Oh, I check the—if the boxes force you to check only one—as many forms do—honestly, I analyze the form for the rationale for asking the question. I then answer in the way that serves me in the most advantageous way. I figure if they are going to use this data to their advantage then I will use it to my advantage. Recently, my husband and I re-financed our home to take advantage of the lower interest rates. One of the questions on the form . . . asked you to identify your racial category. And...the premise was the federal government was investigating discrimination in loan practices. Well, I am pretty well read on issues like that, and so on that form I checked African American. I am playing the system because it plays me. If I know on a form they are looking at discrimination against Asians, I check Asian. And I have no moral dilemma in doing this because I feel I pay the dues of being both African American and Asian and so I should also reap the benefits. (*Japanese-African American-Native American female informant, age 46*)

I check Hispanic [on standardized forms]. . . I know how the system works. To be female and Hispanic may allow me to move up the ladder, so I check that box. For example, at my university [name of university omitted], they wanted me—a female Hispanic Chemistry major. I know how the system works and I can use it to benefit me. I check it because it looks good. As to posing a dilemma? Absolutely not!...It works for me and it works for the system—I was a good catch! (*Mexican American-Irish American female informant, age 36*)

I check Native American because . . . well (1) it may be a preferential factor if I am applying for admission or employment . . . it is usually optimal--may work to my favor and (2) it provides data about who is in their pool of applicants—I think there is value to that . . . the only dilemma is that it doesn't adequately represent who I am . . . by checking that little box. The person reading it may think I was raised on a reservation . . . that is a stereotype that will come to mind—I'm sure! (*Native American-Irish American female informant, age 33*)

[On standardized forms] it matters what mood I am in. I probably check "other" more and write in Mexican-Irish-Indian. Sometimes I have put "Hispanic" and sometimes "Caucasian" [White] because I am very light skinned. But with a name like [Hispanic surname omitted], people automatically classify me incorrectly. (*Mexican-Irish-Indian male informant, age 34*)

Living in Los Angeles always presented different types of opportunities. Whenever I went to get my car fixed or I ran into the janitors in my building, I always spoke Spanish because I didn't want them to think I was whitewashed. It always seemed to help the atmosphere. I also worked as a hostess in a Japanese restaurant for almost seven years while I finished my bachelors and masters degrees at [name of university omitted]. I always spoke English at that place. I knew that if I spoke Japanese, the Japanese men would treat me differently—in a more degrading manner. (*Columbian-Japanese female informant, 25 years old*)

. . . people usually identify me incorrectly. Yeah, they usually think I am Thai or sometimes Hawaiian or Pilipino. There was a teacher in 6<sup>th</sup> grade that kept asking me if I was Thai. Every time he saw me, he would ask me the same question over and over again. It was frustrating, but it was sad in a way. He was very old and a very odd guy anyway. I felt sorry for him sometimes, but he finally gave up asking. . . . I tell everyone that I am Afrochapanesitive and they say "Huh?" Sometimes, I explain the whole thing, but only if I feel like it. Let them figure it out. It's not my problem—it's theirs. My friends don't

care—they are all over the map, like Greekipino [Greek and Pilipino], African American, White, Afroswede [African American and Swedish], Mexican American, Chinese American, Japanese American, Hapa [mixed race Asian]. Who cares! They are my friends. We don't see things that way. We don't understand what the big deal is anyway. (*Chinese American-Japanese-African American-Native American, second generation mixed heritage male informant, 12 years old*)

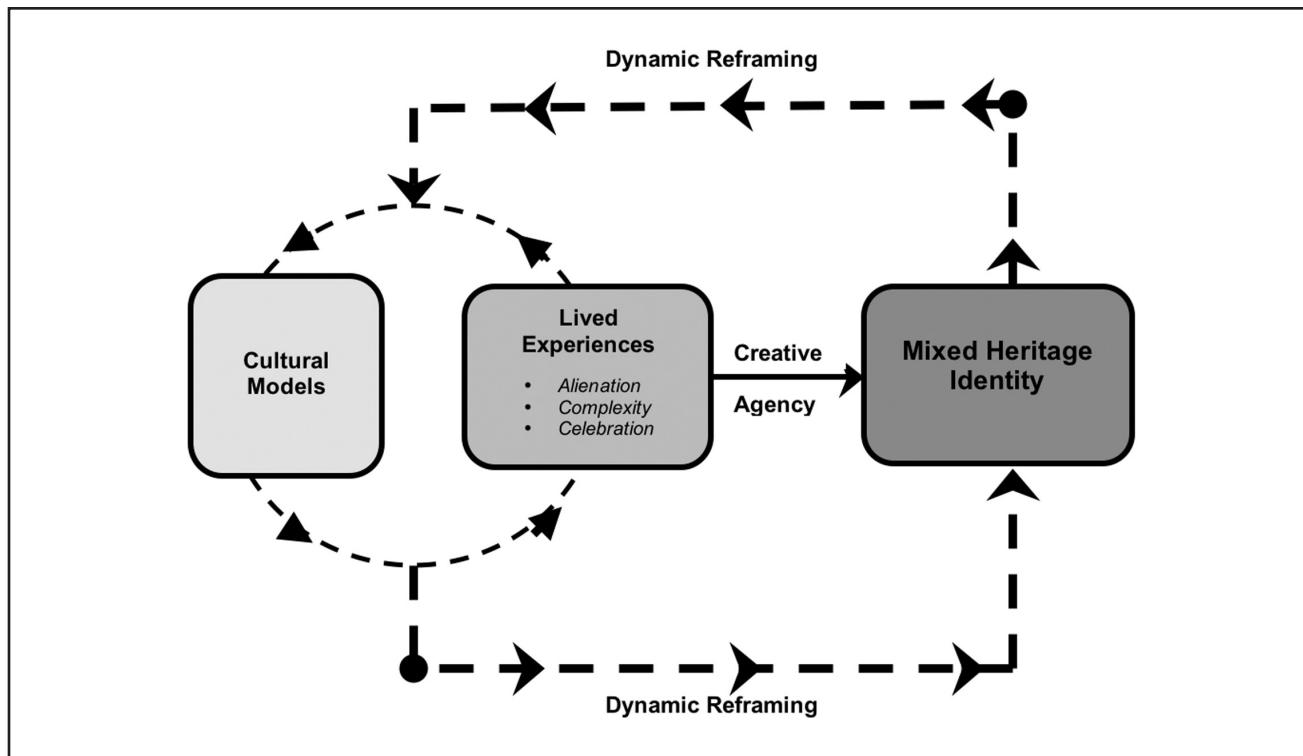
When I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, all of the sudden I realized that being mixed was no longer odd; it was cool. All of the sudden, I was unique, interesting, awesome even. It was a topic for party conversation. Since then, I definitely view it [my mixed heritage] as an asset. Even the bad memories are good ones because they help me to maintain perspective and use my knowledge to my advantage. I apply it to other areas such as homosexuality and gay-bashing or racial bias and stereotyping—it's stupid. It hurts good people and it's stupid. Because of my earlier life experiences [with being multiracial], I can always relate on some level with these other issues. My experiences give me a fresh and unique perspective on life and people. If I didn't have them, I would not have the ability to see or understand so many things the way I do. . . . Everyday, I walk a mile in a lot of different shoes. (*Canadian Scottish Irish-Japanese-African American-Native American second generation mixed heritage male informant, 23 years old*)

In summary, as noted in the above informant comments and depicted graphically in Figure 1, new experiences and relationships throughout life become transformative opportunities to dynamically re-frame earlier perspectives and opinions, as well as to re-construct the respective mixed heritage identities of informants accordingly. The dynamic nature of this identity construction process not only highlights the trademark resilience of these informants in their dance through life, but also points to the invisible power of this process to create changes in the very cultural models that challenge the mixed heritage lived experience in the first place. And

equally important, unlike many of the earlier social-psychological models of racial identity development, our dynamic, emic agency model emphasizes a fluid mixed heritage identity that is perpetually negotiated and re-negotiated over the span of a lifetime in the context of existing cultural models. However, this model is also in direct opposition to those models when they do

not yield expected or desired results. As our diverse group of “edge dancers” illustrate so creatively, the dance of identity construction is neither linear nor static. It is a fluid, multidirectional, and dynamic dance marked by the promising possibilities of cultural change at the individual (micro), group (meso) and cultural (macro) levels.

**Figure 1:** Dynamic, Emic Agency Model of Mixed Heritage Identity Construction



### Edge Dancers: Expanding our Understanding of Transculturalization

Like Zachary’s (2000) “new cosmopolitans,” the “edge dancers” in our study construct and re-construct themselves throughout their lives, intentionally and adeptly manipulating what Zachary refers to as their “identity toolbox.” Armed with their trademark resilience and their enlightened understanding of the hybrid world in which we all now live, the “edge dancers” in this study use these valuable social tools to measure, define, reinvent and reframe themselves, all the while maintaining stable, countercultural identities that defy mainstream categorization. The creative strategies they employed, what we refer to as “agency” (see Figure 1), reveal some of the underlying mechanisms of how transculturaliza-

tion takes place (Hallowell 1967b). In this particular case, as our “edge dancers” construct themselves in the process of “owning” their identities, they also consciously and subconsciously push the boundaries of existing “racial” categories beyond their comfort zone. Even within their own families, “edge dancers” cause a visual and metaphysical disruption of categorization. Family members who are bound to the narrow vision of prevailing racist ideology are forced, sometimes reluctantly and subconsciously, to re-think the meaning and implications of their mixed heritage family members. Even when they choose the path of denial, monoracial family members may be verbally and visually assaulted by the celebration of identity their familial “edge dancers” may display.

In a similar, but perhaps less intimate manner, “edge dancers” also cause disruption in the world outside of their respective family homes. At school, at work and at play their mere presence is cause enough to garner constant curiosity, occasional hostility, and the never-ending procession of “what are you” questions. In these inappropriate and often insensitive questions and behaviors, we see subconscious boundary-maintenance at its best. Needless to say, at least in this case, the boundary that is under threat is that of “race” as it is defined by the mainstream culture. Seemingly innocent social inquiries about perceived mixed heritage, then, can be viewed in a different light as the cumulative discomfort of culture change at the meso-level, as well as the threat of what that could mean when there is a critical mass. This perceived threat, already identified as a contemporary reality, drags mainstream U.S. culture and its accompanying baggage of cultural models to the center of an inescapable cultural crossroads (Krebs 1999, Zachary 2000, DaCosta 2007). And, as a result, the racist ideologies of hypodescent, the “one-drop” rule, and the binary Black/White divide are destabilized, uprooted and opened up for contemporary revision through a new and hybrid lens.

The opportunity for cultural change cannot be underestimated, nor can the significant contribution of mixed heritage individuals and communities. The “edge dancers” in this study not only embody the process of transculturalization itself, but they also expand this notion into the previously unexplored realm of mixed heritage individuals, one of the primary social products of the very “transculturalites” who have been examined in previous studies of transculturalization (Hallowell 1967b). Future studies of transculturalization could further explore the creative agency and strategic negotiation of social identities and spaces that “edge dancers,” unlike their typically monoracial parents, are born to live. By doing so, we can begin to understand the dynamic process of identity construction and reconstruction as it impacts not only the framing of individual identities for “edge dancers,” but also as it impacts the framing of existing cultural models in mainstream U.S. culture.

## **Edge Dancers: Implications for Public Policy and Practice in Health and Human Services**

In addition to providing a previously unexplored gaze into the study of cultural change and transculturalization in the context of the growing mixed heritage community, our study has significant implications for public policy and practice in health and human services. Organizations that provide such services *de facto* implement and embrace existing cultural systems that influence the identity construction process of mixed heritage individuals. Through the emic voices of the “edge dancers” in this study, for example, we identified the common experiences of alienation, complexity and celebration. This wide continuum of experiences and emotions presents many opportunities for stress that can adversely impact the health and longevity of mixed heritage individuals as they perform the perpetual social dance of identity construction.

While public policy and practice in health care impacts the lives of all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, it has been noted that it disproportionately and adversely impacts the lives of racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States (Kronenfeld 2008, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2008, Williams 2007). Health care disparities between the White population and various racial and ethnic minorities in the United States include, but are not limited to critical issues such as access to health care services, quality of health care, lack of health care insurance, lack of childhood vaccinations, lack of immunizations in general and pervasive inequalities in the diagnosis and treatment of chronic and communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, heart disease, asthma, diabetes and AIDS. The research on health care disparities is extensive and fortunately, has now moved beyond the mere documentation of health care disparities to examine the underlying mechanisms and possible interventions to reduce or eliminate them (Nerenz et al. 2006). The importance of policy and practice to address the persistent challenge of racial and ethnic disparity in health care cannot be understated. However, it is also important to collect accurate racial and ethnic data, with all of its inherent flaws, in

order to design and test interventions that will work effectively and in a culturally competent manner (Nerenz et al. 2006).

While health care organizations and providers can certainly collect primary data on their own, much of what is done to design and test possible health care interventions utilizes secondary data from the U.S. Census Bureau. And, since the racial and ethnic categories that are used to collect data for the U.S. Census reflect the prevailing standard of perceived monoracial categories, mixed heritage individuals are subsequently lost in the analysis and design of possible interventions (Tashiro 2001, 2003, 2005). Equally important, as noted by Tashiro (2005), uncritical use of race as a variable in health disparities research can inadvertently reinforce the prevailing ideology of race as a biological construct, when current research has established that race is a socially constructed construct that has changed considerably over time. For example, it is important to remember that existing monoracial categories used by the U.S. Census are in fact multiracial categories themselves since many White/European Americans, Black/African Americans, Native Americans, and Americans of Hispanic origin have mixed race ancestries. The socio-political process that has categorized people into monoracial groups is rarely acknowledged, but important to emphasize since it is a critical component of the ideology of race in the United States and the power relations that ideology is designed to maintain (Tashiro 2005).

It is clear that the use of race and ethnicity when examining health care disparities is problematic. Emerging research in this area also strongly emphasizes the social causes for these disparities rather than biological or genetic ones (Tashiro 2005). Social factors such as emotional stress, geographical context and socioeconomic status, among others, may lie at the very root of these ongoing disparities. Tashiro's (2001) personal account and reflections on being measured for bone density, a factor closely associated with the disease of osteoporosis, carefully considers the issue of baseline bone density scans and the race-based standards that compared her test results with those of other Asian American women. In this case, both her referring Asian

American physician and her attending Asian American nurse visually identified her as Asian American even after she declared the fact that she is half White. Her question in this situation was, "Shouldn't you also analyze the results by averaging them [Asian American and White baseline standards]?" (Tashiro 2001:174). Needless to say, her comments were ignored and her test results were compromised accordingly.

On a different health care issue, and one that does possess a genetic factor, mixed heritage identity is critical in the recruitment of bone marrow donors for mixed heritage patients with leukemia, lymphoma, and other blood-related diseases (Horiuchi 2009, Landro 2009). For such diseases, finding a donor that closely matches the "race" of the patient reduces the risk of the donor and recipient cells attacking each other, thereby allowing the patient to survive the disease. Mixed heritage patients often have complex and uncommon genetic profiles that make it difficult to find acceptable donors. The National Marrow Donor Program, assisted significantly by the Mavin Foundation's MatchMaker program, has been trying diligently to diversify their donor base. To date, however, only three per cent of their donors are mixed race or mixed heritage (National Marrow Donor Program 2009, Mavin Foundation 2009).

In both the routine case of a baseline bone density test and the more critical case of finding a matching bone marrow donor, the salience of mixed race or mixed heritage identity looms large. The mixed heritage informants in our study described numerous incidents of alienation and complexity that may contribute to fluctuating periods of emotional stress tempered by the celebration and positive evolution of their mixed heritage identities. While the informants in our study openly acknowledge these lived experiences, they are rarely incorporated into health care policy or practice. Instead, they are more typically subsumed under the statistical umbrella of monoracial categorization that ignores the complex reality of the mixed heritage experience and relies upon diagnosis and treatment procedures developed for "monoracial" persons. Health care organizations and providers who already attempt to identify the race of patients through first or second-hand visual

assessments of phenotype could instead request self-identification from patients so that “race” could be more accurately assessed for diagnosis and treatment purposes. Indeed, health care professionals should be constantly vigilant about assumptions based upon the appearance of a patient (Tashiro 2003). In service encounters such as these, an error on the part of the health care professional could lead them to rule out important risk factors or to not consider testing for genetically-bounded diseases such as Tay Sachs Syndrome or sickle cell anemia. The results could potentially be life-threatening for the respective patients. In addition to avoiding assumptions based upon phenotype, Ahmann (2005) recommends that health care professionals learn to be more sensitive about family diversity. When a child and parent do not appear to belong to the same race visually, for example, culturally competent health care professionals should not ask insensitive questions regarding “belongingness” that may cause unnecessary comfort for the families of mixed heritage individuals. The alienation expressed by the mixed heritage informants in our study, while ultimately resulting in a process of positive identity construction, is clearly a source of stress that one would hope to avoid in a professional health care setting. Finally, culturally competent practice could include the availability of resource materials in the form of mixed heritage organizations, journal articles, books and other digital and printed resources to help mixed heritage individuals and their families find supportive connections and information within their respective communities (Ahmann 2005).

In addition to the practice-related implications of our study, public policy regarding health care issues should also begin to embrace the importance of a mixed heritage background to improve the quality of care, diagnosis and treatment for health care issues. Hopefully, such efforts would extend to the realm of clinical and epidemiological research much in the same way that recent research in that context has begun to incorporate the issue of gender. In doing so, medical researchers can not only begin to explore the implications of race upon health status, but also can begin to do so in ways that can more closely examine the complexities of race at the intersec-

tion of class, geography, poverty, diet, exercise, gender, sexual orientation and other possible related factors of stress. The practical implementation of such findings could improve the diagnosis and design of medical interventions, as well as the quality of health care for individuals of all races, including those of mixed heritage.

## Conclusion

While previous research on persons of mixed heritage has begun to explore the complex realities of such individuals, the majority of this research has been limited to social-psychological approaches that serve primarily to illustrate the phases of identity development and the specific factors that contribute to these phases. There are notable exceptions to these approaches, however. For example, through extensive field work, Takada Rooks (2001) turns an anthropological lens upon history and community and how it impacts mixed heritage identity among multiracial Asians in Alaska. In addition, Williams-Leon and Nakashima's (2001) examination of the experiences of mixed heritage Asian Americans visibly moves the mixed heritage dialogue beyond the Black/White binary system that typically marks the discussion of race relations in the United States. And taking a critical look at multiracials and the redrawing of the color line in the United States, DaCosta (2007) provides an insightful perspective on the mixed heritage social movement and its powerful influence upon existing cultural models and ideologies on race.

In the current study, we offer an applied anthropological approach that fully embraces the insightful and prolific mixed heritage scholarship to date in the fields of social psychology, sociology and counseling. However, we also move beyond this foundation to address the process and role of transculturalization as it applies to a previously unexplored community—mixed heritage individuals. Through the emic voices of our mixed heritage informants, we identify the common life experiences of alienation, complexity and celebration that can encompass the lifetime of a mixed heritage person and do so in varying ways at different points in time. In our resulting dynamic, emic agency model we introduce the construct of “creative agency” and illustrate how mixed heritage individuals, as they perform their

perpetual and multidirectional “dance” of identity construction, visibly shift and change the seemingly rigid boundaries of race and ultimately power relations in mainstream U.S. culture (see Figure 1).

This contemporary example of cultural change at the meso/societal level and transculturalization at the micro/individual level expands our understanding of these important social and

cultural processes and offers the opportunity for future research to explore transculturalization in this and other cosmopolitan populations more closely. We also employ our dynamic, emic agency model to address the numerous and previously under-emphasized opportunities available for public policy and practice to expand the relevance of how and what we do in the realm of health and human services. As the population of mixed

**Table 1** Informant Demographics

GENDER	AGE	MIXED HERITAGE BACKGROUND	SELF-DESIGNATED LABEL
Female	33	Native American, Irish American	Mixed
Female	26	Irish American, Italian American	Mixed
Female	36	Irish American, Mexican American	Mixed
Female	35	Irish American, Mexican American	Mixed
Female	22	Thai, Laotian American	Asian American
Female	19	West Indian, South Asian, Italian American, Native American	Mixed
Female	19	African American and Japanese American	Hapa or Afro-Japanese
Female	22	West Indian, South Asian, Italian American, Native American	Mixed
Female	23	Peruvian [Afro-Latino] and Chinese-German-Portuguese	Mixed
Female	25	Japanese and Columbian	Haafu
Female	29	White (WASP) and Japanese American	White or Other
Female	33	African American and Japanese American	Afro-Japanese
Female	42	Japanese and Italian American	Eurasian or Amerasian
Female	44	Japanese, African American, and Native American	Afroasian or Amerasian
Female	46	Japanese, African American, and Native American	Afroasian
Male	31	Native American, Irish American	Mixed
Male	12	Chinese American, Japanese, African American, Native American (Second generation mixed heritage)	Afrochapanesitive
Male	15	Chinese American, Japanese, African American, Native American (Second generation mixed heritage)	Asian
Male	23	Israeli, Jewish American, Irish American, Mexican American	Mixed, Middle Eastern or Other
Male	34	Mexican, Irish, Indian	American
Male	17, 23	Canadian Scottish Irish, Japanese, African American, Native American (Second generation mixed heritage)	Afroasian

heritage individuals continues to grow, health and human services practitioners will increasingly begin to encounter mixed heritage clients and families in search of a more complex understanding of cultural competence—one that respects their complex emotional and physical needs and one that no longer renders them invisible. This study of such “edge dancers” and the dynamic, emic agency model we propose is a first step toward helping both public policy makers and service providers expand the direction and scope of public policy, as well as practice in health and human services, in a culturally competent manner for the growing population of mixed heritage individuals and their families. ○

### Notes:

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