Being Indian: The development of ethnic identity in Native American students at Iowa State University

by

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Today's headlines are filled with tragedies worldwide that are based upon ethnic differences. We can see poignant examples everywhere we look, from Bosnia to Malawi, from Northern Ireland to the Amazonian Basin. In our diverse world, ethnic identity seems to be the glue that holds some people together, while ripping others apart.

Ethnic group membership is one of the most important criteria in defining who you are as an individual. "Who are you?" in many parts of the world means "What ethnic group do you belong to?" , "Where do your people come from?"

Ethnic identity is one component from which people can pull strength and develop a sense of belonging and security. Associating with an ethnic group provides a connection to one's past, not always easily achieved in today's world.

In past kin-based societies, determining one's affiliations was almost certain. A person was born into an immediate family that was, in turn, a part of a lineage and/or clan that made up a tribe or people. A person knew unquestionably what his or her position was within the community and how he or she related to all others. This position and identity was accepted and known by all others within that society. A person was securely connected to his or her community by a series of overlapping kinship and residential ties. An individual's identity was affixed to a set of ascribed group identities.

Industrial mass society has taken away the social security that was embedded in small-scale communities. Individuals often are left on their own to

find and maintain their place and position within society. This is very true for many people today.

One way in which to determine these positions is to affiliate with a known group that helps to distinguish your life story from the multitudes of others swarming busily around you. Ethnic classification is an important and appropriate base from which to establish one's identity.

How are these identities developed and maintained, and what criteria are used to choose group affiliation? **My thesis focuses on the exploration of the following two broad questions: How and why do individuals assert their ethnic identity?**

I investigate the answers to these questions by looking at the development of ethnic identity in young adulthood, fully aware that this identity is fluid and has the capability of changing throughout one's life span. This study focuses on a distinct population of Native American college students[1].

Can one ignore the biological element of one's personality, or is it something a person will have to be aware of and deal with for the rest of one's life? How does one choose which group to identify with? Does it have to be "all or nothing"? How does one maintain a balance between the larger culture and the one taught at home? Does one have to do this, or is it only a reaction to external pressures to choose one group or another? These are some of the

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[1] Ethnic terminology is a sensitive and complex matter. In this paper the terms Native American, American Indian, and Indian will be used interchangeably to refer to the descendants of the aboriginal inhabitants of North America.

questions that arise when talking about ethnic identity and which helped to develop the focus of this study.

The objectives of this research are to understand an individual's thoughts regarding his or her own ethnic identity; to determine what processes individuals go through to ascertain group affiliation; to comprehend why individuals affiliate with a specific ethnic group; and to explore what factors influence the strength of identification.

The concept of ethnic identity is not a new one. However, its role has changed in our ever-evolving societal environment. The goal of interaction between ethnic groups is to maintain a supportive and accepting atmosphere. This particular study offers some significant insights into the importance of recognizing an individual's choice of group affiliation, and perhaps provide some guidelines for helping individuals in this endeavor.

Background

At the time of the earliest European contact with North America, there were no "American Indians". The people of this land encompassed distinct cultures, spoke a multitude of languages, and displayed an extensive variety of social, economic and political organizations. In the following 500 years though, American Indians "have transformed themselves from a diverse people with little common identity into an ethnic group" (Trosper 1981:247).

Indians are no more or less real a group than are "blacks", "Arabs" or "Africans". Inherent in these labels, however, is the difficulty of definition. In this paper, I refer to Native Americans as people who are descendants of the

aboriginal peoples of North America. This is not the only way of specifying who belongs in this designation. The federal government defines an Indian as someone who is an enrolled member of a recognized tribe. However, there are tribes that are not federally-recognized and so the enrolled members are not federally-recognized either.

Tribes recognize different levels of "blood quantum". Blood quantum is the degree of tribal blood believed to be held by a person. For example, a person whose ancestral line holds nothing but Northern Cheyenne is considered full-blood. If that person has children with a non-Northern Cheyenne, the offspring will be half-blood. This "dilution" of blood degree continues down. Some individuals will assert that they are 1/32nd Cherokee, or 4/15th Omaha.

The White Mountain Apaches of Arizona and the Uintah-Ouray Tribe of Utah demand a blood quantum of 50% or higher. The Mescalero Apache tribe, like most tribes, requires one-quarter tribal blood. The Citizen Band of Potawatomi in Kansas asks for just one-eighth. Other tribes just require for descent to another recognized member be shown (Jaimes1995:138-153).

There are other individuals who are not tribally-enrolled, but are accepted as American Indian. These could be people who have not been able to produce proper documentation for enrollment, yet the tribal community promotes them as members. It also can include individuals who have no genetic ties to the tribe and yet culturally are considered American Indian. The important commonality here is that the community recognizes this individual as a member.

It is obvious to see from where the confusion of who is Indian comes. Mentioned above are some of the various methods used to define American Indians as a population in the United States. One can be enrolled in an American Indian tribe. A person can declare self-membership, as in census enumerations. The Indian community can recognize an individual as a member. Non-Indians can also define an individual as being Indian. In addition there are biological definitions, such as blood quantum. Finally are cultural definitions which are often subjectively determined such as knowing one's indigenous language or "acting" like an Indian (Thornton 1977:224).

Today "being Indian" has become somewhat of a trendy whim adopted by many non-Indian people. Native Americans see their cultural identities displayed everywhere from art galleries to bookstores. Many people are searching for the mysterious connection with earth and the universe that Indians have been portrayed as maintaining, and therefore the market is overflowing with self-help books on how to learn the secrets of the "Native peoples".

Being inundated with a mass flood of publicly-displayed cultural traits certainly has an effect on an American Indian. At the very least, it makes it more difficult to ignore one's connection to the culture. Many Indian people choose to reestablish that connection after the initial stimulus from a college diversity course or hearing the drum beat on a compact disc playing in a bookstore.

Native American populations are experiencing an increasing political and social assertiveness. The resilience of Indian cultures and the presence of Indian

people cannot be denied. This research provides one source of information regarding this population.

In the pages that follow, the issues raised in the preceding paragraphs will be addressed through the eyes of Native American students at a Midwestern university. The development of "being Indian" will be approached using ethnographic methods in which a select group of these individuals are interviewed during the course of an academic year. Their words and experiences will provide insight and perhaps foresight into the lives of young American Indian people.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following discussion contains a collection of definitions and theories attached to ethnic group identity, ethnicity and ethnic emergence using data from various disciplines. Terms of reference for use in this study will also be established.

The notion of ethnic groups in the United States has certainly been around as long as the country itself. However, after the initial introduction of the concept, fresh exploration of ideas and propositions did not occur again until the 1960s. With the unrest and social upheaval of this time, ethnic groups became a major focus of society. The American melting pot seemingly failed to assimilate most non-whites and a renewed presence of ethnicity and ethnic pride surged across the country.

Resulting from this escalation of interest, the literature filled with a myriad of concepts, studies and hypotheses focusing on ethnicity. Sorting through this immense amount of information can be an overwhelming task. Defining ethnicity was determined to be the most appropriate first-step in organizing this exploration. A simple and universally-accepted definition should be recognized before one attempts to answer the larger questions.

Many people think of ethnicity as something similar to "race", as ethnicity is often used in reference to biological and genetic relationships. Sociologist Richard Alba contends that ethnicity is "first and foremost a matter of ancestry, of self-definition that is both handed down within the family and created on the basis of family history" (1990:164).

Certainly ancestry aids in determining the suitable choices of ethnic group affiliation. But as the reality of interfacing between diverse groups and the resulting dilution of genetic ties to one group becomes more insistent, the fact that ethnicity reaches beyond the scope of biology becomes increasingly more apparent.

Developmental psychologists Mary Jane Rotheram and Jean S. Phinney say that:

> ethnicity is more than ancestry, race, religion or national origin. It patterns our thinking, feeling and behavior. These behaviors include group patterns of values, social customs, perceptions, behavioral roles, language usage and rules of social interactions that group members share...which occur with and without awareness (1986:11-13).

This interpretation fits the most consistently with the scope and goals of this study. It is understood that ethnicity encompasses biology, race, ancestry and the more abstract concepts of group values, rules and worldviews.

The acknowledgment of this more inclusive definition is important because it allows for ethnic choices. Ethnic identity is far from static or pre-determined exclusively by genetic ties, especially when an individual is biologically connected to more than one reference group.

Fredrik Barth is an anthropologist well-known and respected for his pioneering work concerning ethnicity. He is generally the person attributed with first asserting that ethnicity can be chosen, changed or maintained (1969).

Choosing one's ethnicity means affiliating with a specific ethnic group, as well as behaving and believing in ways consistent with the overall personality of

the chosen group. What differentiates an ethnic group from any other point of reference? That is the next important distinction to be made.

Barth defines an ethnic group "as largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values realized in overt unity in cultural forms, makes up a field of communication and interaction, has a membership which identifies itself and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order" (1969:10-11).

Barth characterizes an ethnic group not only as a biologically-determined segmentation, but also as dependent on the cognitive faculties of its members for recognition as a social group. Essentially, Barth is saying that an ethnic group cannot be made up only of individuals holding similar genetic backgrounds; there must be acknowledged behavioral characteristics that set them apart from others. He states an ethnic group is primarily a social group whose participants use traditional or create new cultural traits to define themselves. He also points out the declaration of belonging to an ethnic group by an individual is almost always related to social or economic interests (1969).

Sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan agree with Barth on the economic importance of these groups. They published the results of studies done on various ethnic groups in New York City. They see ethnic groups as being culturally distinct and then trying to attain the necessary means to keep this identity. Since politicians can hardly deny an ethnic group their requests without the risk of being branded as racist, these groups are effectively used as pressure groups (1971).

Glazer and Moynihan explain the development of ethnic groups in the United States as a phenomenon that was created by the different groups' historical experiences, cultures, economic situations and skills. As these peoples continued to live in the United States, their old cultures faded and were replaced by new cultures affected by all the earlier mentioned things, and also their new experiences (1971:10-11).

Anya Royce, another anthropologist, defines an ethnic group as:

> a reference group invoked by people who share a common historical style, based on overt features and values, and who, through the process of interaction with others, identify themselves as sharing that style. Ethnic identity is the sum total of feelings on the part of group members about those values, symbols, and common histories that identify them as a distinct group (1982:18).

Emphasized throughout these definitions is the importance of shared behaviors and obvious displays of cultural values. What separates a "culturally-shared behavior" from just "similarities in doing things"? Richard Thompson, a sociologist, suggests "ethnic behaviors" are based "on cultural or physical criteria in a social context in which these criteria are relevant" (1989:11).

Which behaviors are considered most important? Sociologist Wsevolod W. Isajiw looked at 27 definitions of ethnicity used in journal articles and academic papers. The five elements he found used as criterion most often were common ancestral origins, identical culture, religion, race and language (1974:117). The question then is whether these characteristics must be recognized by observers or by the participants, or both.

Royce asserts that this debate is not important since the people within the group use one set of standards, while the outside people use only overt behaviors

to determine the memberships into those specific groups (1982:32). She notes that these criteria are further compacted down because only the cultural features understood by members outside the group are used in order to assign other individuals to their appropriate category. This might explain the different interpretations of ethnic identity (1982:31).

Alba counter-argues that ethnic identity must not be only considered from the perspective of the individual in the ethnic group. He asserts that unless it is looked at in other terms besides just self-concept and "inner orientation", ethnicity will not have a true social form, it will stay only an abstraction (1990:75).

The overwhelming consensus appears to be that the only relevant ethnic group alternative is the one chosen by the individual whose ethnicity is in question. Anthropologist George Devos contends that ethnicity is defined by a sense of belonging to the group based on the individual's own analysis of his or her observable behaviors (1975:17). Psychologist Nimmi Hutnik adds that ethnicity is "not so much a product of common living, as a product of self-awareness of one's belonging in a particular group and one's distinctiveness with regard to other groups" (1991:19).

Anthropologist Fred Plog agrees by adding that ethnicity is a classification based on perceived differences in national origin, language, religion and/or physical components (1980:294). The individual who places himself or herself into a specific group is the one, then, whose perception is important.

The terms "ethnicity", "ethnic group" and "ethnic identity" thus have been defined. A general understanding of what comprises these ideas has been

developed. Ethnicity encompasses biology, race, ancestry and the more abstract concepts of group values, rules and worldviews. An ethnic group is a set of individuals who share similarities in these various components and are recognized as such by themselves and by society. Ethnic identity is the individuals' designation of affiliation. Now that the supposedly simple task of establishing definitions has been achieved, the more substantial questions revolving around the how and why can be approached.

Logically, an individual must be aware of ethnicity if a rational choice is to be made. In studying children's development of an ethnic identity, Rotheram and Phinney (1986) state there are four distinct elements that must be understood in order to develop a clear concept of identity. Although their study had to do with children age 3-12, anyone, regardless of their age, going through this process needs to be aware of these concepts.

First, one must have an understanding of one's own ethnic group and also of the other ethnic groups. The ability to differentiate between the groups must be established. This is called ethnic identity and ethnic awareness. Second, one must be aware of the label used for one's own group--an ethnic self-identification. Third, one must be aware of one's ethnic attitudes. The individual should explore the feelings they have about the various ethnic groups including their own. Finally, the individual has to know and understand the behavior patterns specific to an ethnic group (Rotheram and Phinney 1986:11-13).

Sociologist Andrew Greeley believes that specific ethnic characteristics are passed on to children through the socialization process. A child learns his or her

ethnic roles through their relationships with parents, siblings and other relatives. The important part of this, according to Greeley, is that this transmission is often done on an unconscious level and therefore parents must try to be more aware of this part of their responsibilities (Greeley 1972:8).

Ethnic identity choice does not necessarily begin or end in childhood or adolescence. People of all different ages are going through this quest. One common trait found within these people seems to be that of vulnerability (Royce 1982:188). Even when the choice seems to be clear, the individual must affirm and reaffirm this choice in order for it to remain an important part of their identity.

Choosing group membership seems to be a reaction to external stimuli, i.e. how other people see you physically and behaviorally. Perhaps ethnic identity is not only for oneself, but also to justify why one chooses to behave in a particular manner. Affiliation with a group which holds similar behaviors and attitudes as oneself serves as a method of confirmation of the self. This allows an individual to behave in the manner he or she wishes with justification from group ideology and practices.

Psychologist Nimmi Hutnik contends that the process of ethnic identification may be different for minority groups than majority. Hutnik asserts that for the ethnic minority the process of attaining and maintaining ethnic identification is complicated by the fact that their group holds an inferior status to the majority group (1991:65).

There is still some underlying reason though that people continue to make these choices. Why is ethnic heritage and the correlating membership to a specific group so important to so many individuals?

William McCready, another sociologist, maintains that the importance of ethnicity are not "external social issues" that people can discuss objectively, but rather "they touch and involve each and every one of us individually". He adds that ethnic heritage is a significant part of today, not just an element of the past (1983:xviii). Devos puts it very succinctly "to know one's origin is to not only have a sense of provenience but also continuity" (1975:364).

There is also a human need to affiliate with others, especially those that maintain similar behaviors and beliefs. This satisfies the need to reaffirm one's belief system and also validates one's behaviors and whole self. People choose a reference group to evaluate their own existence. If an individual is in a group where most other members act in a similar fashion, then this encourages the continuation of the behavior and also makes it okay. An ethnic group, in this sense, can be looked at as an extended family or tribe (Glazer and Moynihan 1970:18).

Ethnic identity involves group membership. In young adulthood one often looks externally to determine if one's behavior, looks, attitudes, interests, and so forth are appropriate. The reference group one chooses to identify with may give a base from which one develops as a person.

Ethnic identity gives a sense of past, a sense of belonging to a history that surpasses one individual's experiences. It seems to give a cumulative expression of who and what one is and who and what one is to become.

Now that the concepts of ethnicity and ethnic identity have been discussed thoroughly in general terms, let us focus on the specific application to the chosen study group. The main question I want to discuss seeks to examine the appropriateness of the chosen study group. In short, is it valid to consider Native Americans as an ethnic group according to the declared definitions?

American Indians are certainly an "ethnically plural population" (Nagel 1996:7). The grand notion of American Indians is comprised of hundreds of politically varied, geographically separate, linguistically independent, and culturally distinct communities. It is popularly assumed that an Indian is an Indian is an Indian, but tribal affiliation remains an "enormously important legitimizing and affirming aspect of all native ethnicities" (Nagel 1996:viii).

This diversity challenges the validity of studying "American Indians". Are we not lumping together several different ethnic groups? Can generalizations be made that span tribal and community boundaries? These are very important considerations for this study. Despite the variations however, there is an overwhelming sense of "we" when talking to and about American Indians.

It is important to note that historically a pan-American Indian culture or pan-American Indian ideology does not exist, but some common psychological concepts have emerged in people assigned to this designation. Psychologist

Manuel Ramirez formulates a three-part discussion involving consistency throughout the various American Indian cultures.

First, he remarks on the notion of "the person as an open system". Each individual is an integral part of the environment and universe; this relationship is a two-way exchange of experiences. The interactions with others help to achieve harmony in the community and also teaches sensitivity and openness to the environment.

The second commonality among Indian cultures is the idea of community identity and responsibility to the group. There is a very strong sense of community, and a correlating theme of "I am the people".

Finally is the notion that an individual achieves the full development of abilities and skills through self-challenge. "Endurance of pain, hardship, hunger and frustration is used to encourage the development of the individual's full potential" (1983:20-22).

These three points do not alone substantiate the argument to align all American Indian cultures into one mass group. The most important criteria is the acceptance of this notion by the people who themselves fit into this designation.

For instance, the American Indian Movement (AIM) widely projects a pan-Indian membership, as it believes each Indian holds a collective fate and interest with other Indians. This inclusive method increases the political strength of this activist group, which helps energize their stance. Although tribal designation is extremely important to Indian people, it is realized that sharing common histories,

experiences and possible futures is substantial enough to justify the objective of doing a collective study to achieve generalized conclusions.

It is also important to note that any group of people, no matter how consistent the life experiences, show variability within that group. Generalized conclusions are just this: a way to organize the prevalent outcomes found in research, knowing that there will be exceptions and variations.

Theoretical Issues

The question of why ethnic identity develops is certainly a theoretical one. An important theory proposed by sociologist Edward Shils (1957) provides a basis for this study on ethnic identity. Shils suggests that the reason some individuals choose to assert their ethnicity is because humans are generally social beings who need intimate, interactive, and deeply personal relationships with other humans for appropriate developmental progress. This explanation has been labeled the primordial sentiments theory of ethnicity.

In a critique on various theories of ethnicity, Richard Thompson explains the primordial sentiments theory as asserting that "expressions of ethnicity fulfill the human psychological need for identity, that human beings, by their nature, have a basic primordial need for group affiliation that is best satisfied by the maintenance of an ethnic identity" (1989:11).

I subscribe to this theory because it explains why the need to affiliate exists. No one wants to live life alone, everyone wants to belong somewhere and one's ethnicity provides an avenue to those close relationships. People want to be around other people, especially people who have common life histories, stories,

morals and cultural situations. They reaffirm their identity. Belonging to this group validates this part of who they are.

Clifford Geertz provides a corollary to this theory that adds more substance to the basic idea of a social impetus behind ethnic group affiliation. Geertz proposes that ethnicity is a socially- and historically-produced primordial tie. People are expressing their ethnic nature because the social context in which they live somehow has made their ethnicity a relevant aspect of their life (1973:259-260).

Pierre Bourdieu's "theory of practice" addresses the question of *how* ethnic identity develops. It focuses on the existence of a subtle and unconscious coherence of cultural characteristics, norms and "dispositions". These are produced by "objective conditions of existence", or the basic tasks and interactions that must be accomplished on a day-to-day basis (1977:72-73).

These characteristics become habitual and distinct. They form an integrated pragmatic logic that is reproduced in every ordinary task, social action or material representation (Yates 1989:249-254). This structure surrounds younger generations and serves to enculturate them with like-perception. In the end the integration of common dispositions provides the basic foundation from which ethnic behaviors are recognized (Yates 1989; Hodder 1986:72-73; Bentley 1987:28).

Bourdieu calls this "totality of dispositions" habitus (1977:72). The habitus lies in the subconscious, where it is intermediate between underlying structure and external practice (Hodder 1986:71). It forms a conceptual order that subliminally produces regular practices and representations without constant reference to

overt rules or conscious justifications. Within individual circumstances, habitus dictates which behaviors are right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, or Indian or non-Indian (Burley 1992:34).

This theory helps to explain how an individual discriminates culturally-appropriate behaviors. A key point of habitus is that it lies below the level of conscious thinking. Even though it was initially created by manifest behaviors reinforcing themselves, it ultimately becomes "just the way we do things". This is meaningful because it offers evidence for the idea of "nurture" in developing one's ethnicity. Individuals learn what behaviors are appropriate for their social and cultural group.

These theories are integral to this study. The primordial sentiments theory of ethnicity aids in answering the question *why* ethnic identity develops, and the theory of practice assists with the question of *how*. The specific correlation with the research data will be addressed in the analysis and discussion.

The period of development chosen to study is validated by another theory important to this study. Erik Erikson, a world famous developmental psychologist whose work with the question of identity has spanned four decades, sees identity as the individual's attempt to define himself or herself as a unique person. This search depicts a basic human need which occurs as the primary task of adolescence (1968). The young adult is attempting to establish himself or herself as a separate individual while at the same time maintain some connection with the meaningful elements of the past and accepting the values of a group. He asserts that in the process of self-discovery, the individual determines a sexual,

moral, political, religious and vocational identity that is relatively stable, consistent and mature (1975). I would suggest that ethnicity is also one of the important reference groups chosen at this time.

Different definitions of ethnicity have been outlined resulting in the understanding that ethnicity encompasses biology, race, ancestry and the more abstract concepts of group values, rules and worldviews. The essential idea that ethnic identity is flexible and allows for choice has been established. The meaning of "ethnic group" has also been achieved, including the validation of the use of American Indians as such. The fundamental components that constitute ethnicity have been emphasized, along with basic theories of how ethnic identity develops. Finally, proposals for reasons individuals choose to affiliate with an ethnic group were also explained.

As shown, the notion of ethnicity and its meaning has been the concern of several disciplines. This literature review has tied together some of the fundamental assertions from the various academic areas, resulting in an organized background necessary to hold in order to move onto the study at hand.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The research described here occurred at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. It began in March 1996 and ran through September 1996. The data were collected from one-on-one ethnographic interviews comprised of open-ended questions. I was the sole investigator in this study, and conducted interviews with twenty Native American ISU students.

This group of twenty students was made up of thirteen females and seven males. The ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-three, with the average individual being twenty-one years old. The tribes represented in this group span across the entire United States.

Names were obtained from the university's registrar office, as each person had voluntarily identified himself or herself as being of Native American descent on his or her university records.[2] It is important to the goals of this study that the respondents be self-identified as belonging to this group because it is then a matter of their own personal choice and is not a designation imposed upon them by general definitions or external opinions.

As previously mentioned, one of the precepts for having a clear concept of identity is ethnic awareness. This means having the ability to differentiate between one's own ethnic group and others. A person who asserts his or her participation within a specific group shows an understanding of this notion (Rotheram and Phinney 1986:11-13).

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[2] In order to obtain the names from the registrar's office, my research topic and methods (Human Subjects Form) had to be approved by a board of Iowa State University faculty and staff members.

The total population of American Indian students, both graduate and under-graduate, at ISU at the initial time of investigation was fifty-four. In order to achieve the goal number of twenty, all fifty-four names were placed independently into a covered receptacle. Twenty names were then pulled out, along with five alternates.

These individuals were then contacted via the telephone to inform them of the study, request their participation and also set up times for interviews. All respondents were willing to participate. The interviews were conducted in the respondent's home or in a private place somewhere on the ISU campus. It was important to have a private place without the possibilities of interruption to allow for a relaxed atmosphere for the conversations.

I concentrated on college students for several different reasons. First, being in a university-setting made students a very accessible group. Second, going to college is typically the first time individuals are separated from their natal group for an extended duration, and therefore an ideal time for their own individual perceptions to develop. Being away from familial support is a period when an individual has the opportunity to reaffirm or deny his/her own differences. Fourth, young adults are typically exploring other identity issues at this time and therefore the notion of group affiliation based upon ethnicity is assumed to be familiar to them.[3]

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[3] As mentioned in the theory section of the literature review, the period of development chosen to study is validated by Erik Erikson and his work with identity development (1968, 1975).

I chose to focus on Native Americans for several different reasons. First, I wanted to concentrate on minority groups in my study. American Indians fit this category because they are a culturally distinct population set apart in various ways from the dominant population.

Another reason is based upon the fact that most Native Americans in the United States have a heterogeneous ancestry. It is very difficult to find an individual who can trace his or her bloodline through one tribe only, particularly in Ames Iowa. It is also very common for the Native ancestry to be mixed with non-Indian heritage. In some ways this creates the situation discussed earlier in which the individual ends up making a conscious choice to emphasize one group more than another.

The pressures of participating in a minority group versus the dominant group are intriguing. What makes a person choose to follow a road that may be more difficult, less popular and/or less understood? The desire to identify with one ethnic group must be powerful enough to decrease the influence of the other groups, particularly one that has as reinforcement the prevalent images of the dominant society. Certainly there are people who have Native American heritage who choose to disregard this part of their ancestry and focus on other groups. However because the participants in this study already identified themselves as Native American this situation was avoided.

Another reason for looking at Native Americans was a personal one. I am part-Ioway Indian and have throughout my life been faced with the very issues I want to study. I am not looking for the answers to my own personal questions, but

rather my own struggle has made me aware of these issues and of their importance. I believe that Native Americans maintain a very precarious position in today's society and it is extremely important to find more information that can be used to strengthen and understand the issue of identity.

The validity of using Native Americans as an ethnic group has been addressed already throughout this paper. However, it is important enough to warrant further discussion here. It is certainly recognized by this researcher that American Indian cultures are varied and diverse. Tribal affiliation is extremely significant to Native people. However, it is credible to speak of the pan-Indian ethnic group today particularly because of Euro-American homogeneous treatment and images of Native Americans.

Euro-Americans have exerted a lot of time and energy over the last 500 years into devising a consistent collection of beliefs and social circumstances around Indian communities in North America. In fact, the Bureau of Indian Affairs[4] maintains an attitude held toward American Indians which knows "no local cultural uniqueness and that blindly applies uniform federal policies with little regard for diversity among native communities" (Foster 1991:17).

The continuities of treatment by external forces doubtlessly create similarities in reactions, and therefore similarities in manners of coping and adapting. These similarities can manifest themselves in the ways an individual feels about and chooses to assert his or her ethnic identity. Because this is the main

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[4] The BIA was established in 1820 within the U.S. (Continental) Office of War. It is now part of the Department of the Interior. It symbolizes the federal obligations of treaties and other agreements held between the federal government and the Indian communities.

focus of my research, it is justifiable to apply the interpretation of ethnic group to Native Americans.

I developed the open-ended, structured interview schedule based around the main issues that the literature addresses as key to ethnic identity development. These include spirituality, language, biology, family and cultural affiliations[5] (Isajiw 1974:117). A definition for each of these concepts was established and then conveyed to each of the respondents so that it was clear what was meant.

Spirituality was used to refer to a person's belief system concerning the spiritual world and one's perception of a higher being. Language referred to that used by the person's indigenous affiliation group. Biology concerned the genetic and hereditary ties to a specific group. Family affiliations designated connections with significant people usually living in the same household, but also including peripheral individuals. Connections to non-living people were also included in this category. Cultural affiliations referred to the exposure to various cultural activities, traditions and customs.

The interviews consisted of a list of questions regarding the individual's opinions on ethnicity, his/her perceptions on ethnic identity and how this might develop, and the individual's personal experience concerning being Native American.

The duration of the interviews spanned from one to three hours. All questions were asked of each respondent. There were also supplementary questions asked depending upon the course of the interview. These questions

were meant to either address specific topics brought up in the answers of the respondent, or to facilitate further discussion when it was appropriate to expand on a subject. The supplementary questions were a very integral part of the interviews, as they also allowed for expansion in areas that were deemed most important by each individual respondent. They granted the freedom to attain details about a topic the respondent wished to address more completely.

Once the raw data was obtained, a brief analysis was done while writing up the interviews. This involved not only the recording of what each individual talked about, but also the context and manner in which it was said. The answers were also organized into a format which corresponded with the five ethnicity components: spirituality, language, biology, family affiliation and cultural connection. This mode of structure allowed the data to be easily accessed for the final discussion.

Participant observation, a common anthropological method, was also employed. The purpose of participant observation is to allow the researcher to not only observe, but also partake in daily and ritual activities, which hopefully creates a more complete understanding of the culture.

The context and application of participant observation in this study may be a little different than the typical "when in Rome do as the Romans do" . As mentioned before, I am part-loway Indian. I have been aware of this all my life, and because of this I have been a lifetime participant of the culture I have chosen

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[5] In the original article the descriptors were common ancestral origins, race and religion. In this paper they became family connections, biology and spirituality.

to study. The activities that a researcher might have undertaken to understand American Indian cultures more, such as powwows or religious ceremonies, are things that I have been involved with throughout my life. In this aspect my experience is almost the epitome of participant observation. This connection has allowed me to better understand what my respondents are saying, what types of questions to ask and in which manner to ask them, and perhaps most importantly, assured the people I interviewed that I have non-judgmental compassion for their life experiences. This reciprocal understanding and immediate rapport enabled the interviews to be sustained on a relaxed conversational level.

Although my personal experience allowed for a certain type of insider perspective, it was also mandatory that a level of objectivity be maintained. Part of the anthropological training received as a researcher teaches one to step in and out of several roles. It is possible to be aware of one's own subjective experiences and yet still remain objective when handling other individual's responses. Each person has his or her own story to tell, and although there may be similarities, different personalities and behaviors work together to create unique situations. It is these unique situations that allow a researcher to maintain that sought-after level of objectivity.

Twenty students, who identified themselves as American Indian to the Iowa State registrar's office, were asked to tell the stories of their personal experiences and thoughts revolving around ethnicity. Questions were developed to inquire why they felt a connection to their Indian heritage, and also to discover which behaviors helped to manifest this identity. From these data, conclusions were

drawn to answer the research questions proposed at the beginning of this paper: how and why do individuals choose to assert their ethnic identity?

CHAPTER IV. DISCUSSION

Being an anthropologist and an ethnographer means getting to know your data and your respondents personally and intimately. The interviews you conduct with these people are not just one-way transmissions of information. Every question asked, no matter how minute or benign, can and does affect the interviewee and the way in which he or she now thinks about the topic at hand.

The double-edged question that I set out to answer when embarking on this research odyssey was *how* and *why* does an individual assert his or her ethnic identity. In this section I will dissect the question into its two parts in order to provide the clearest possible discussion.

It became rather obvious while reading the write-ups of the interviews that my focus on those five components of ethnicity (Isajiw 1974:117) had over-simplified the concept of ethnic identity. Spirituality, language and family affiliations were good at explaining how the respondents reaffirmed their individual identities, but they were lacking when it came to the why question.

I was happy to find, however, that more often than not, the supplemental questions asked during my conversations did offer more thorough answers. Examining the interviews showed recurring themes and eventually brought me to my main conclusion about why these people chose to identify with a particular group.

Cultural Person Model

The most common impetus mentioned for becoming interested in identifying with a particular ethnic group is what I call the "influence of a cultural person". This generally involves a family member, but can also be a non-relative. Normally as a child, the respondent was exposed to the culture through either the intentional or non-intentional actions of one or more persons. The child was impressed and looked up to this person, often attempting to model[6] the cultural person's behavior. The child was aware of the connection between the respected person and the culture and therefore chose to affiliate himself or herself with the culture in order to emulate this person.

Marcie* talked proudly about her grandmother and the influence she has on her perception of the world. "I see how happy my grandma is to do things the way her grandmother did them, and I want to feel that too." Another respondent commented his father took him to powwows when he was young to expose him to other Indians. "It was a bonding thing, and I'm happy to do those things now because it still makes me feel close to him."

Kerry, a first year student, told me about her grandparents writing books and telling stories about life on the reservation and the Indian way of life. She remembers feeling proud of her grandparents and of her other relatives. Kerry's aunt was also a big influence on her identification with the Indian culture. She is

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[6] An integral part of social learning is modeling, the process whereby people pattern their behavior after that of specific others.

* All names have been changed. Priority has been given to maintaining the privacy of the informants and so identifying information, such as tribal affiliation and age, will be kept to a minimum.

an advocate for American Indian rights, and in this way Kerry hopes to emulate her.

Pat emphasized his mother's family teaching him about his heritage. As an adult, he thinks he has continued this affiliation because it makes his mother happy that he has chosen to "honor her relatives in this way."

This honor was talked about by several of the respondents. Cara respects the beliefs of her kindly grandparents and so therefore feels identifying herself strongly as a Native American is the right path for her to choose. "My grandfather always said be thankful you are Indian; be proud of what it offers you." Cara says that if she were to deny her American Indian heritage, she would feel as if she were denying her grandparents.

Although the cultural person is usually someone the individual is exposed to as a child, it was also mentioned that someone has influenced the respondent in this way as an adult. For example, Kerry also discussed the effect that exposure to other American Indian students on campus has influenced her interest in pursuing her identity. Especially important to her has been her involvement in a particular American Indian organization on campus. "Being around other people my age who were so interested in their heritage made me that much more enthused about my own." These cultural persons did in fact effect her initiative in strengthening her identity.

Anti-Modeling Model

The second most common reason extracted from the interviews was closely related to the first, but at the same time very different. I refer to it as "anti-

modeling". This occurs when an influential person in the respondent's life presents a very negative image of the ethnic group. "Day in and day out my father ranted about how awful the Lakota were," a female respondent told me. "I would do anything to not be like him, and so I became more Lakota."

Often the respondent had an unfavorable relationship with this person, as in the above case. However, also mentioned were attempts to prove to the person that the ethnic group was not bad because the respondent cares so much about that person's opinion and life experience. Frank said that he wanted to show his father it was a positive experience to participate in powwows and to read about his history so that his father did not have to be embarrassed about being American Indian anymore. He took on the responsibility of teaching his father about the culture so that they might be able to enjoy it together.

A close corollary of the anti-modeling rational occurs when the ethnic group is not put down or referred to in a negative light, but simply not referred to at all.

"I didn't know I was Indian until I was in sixth grade when we had to do a family tree," Brian told me. After constant badgering, his parents finally put an end to all of the questions in a harsh manner. Brian resents not learning about his heritage from his parents, particularly his father, as the blood comes through his line. After he left high school and home he made it his objective to pursue his Native American heritage and has done so quite passionately. Even today he says, seven years later, "we just don't talk about it at my parent's house."

Personal-Identification Model

The third most common motive for choosing to identify with a particular group can be described as being different from others, or simply the "personal-identification model". This is experienced most often for the first time when an individual comes to college, but it also can occur in elementary, middle or high school. Usually what happens is that another individual questions the respondent about being different, or in this case, being Indian. These are personal questions directed at the respondent and his or her family specifically.

"When I came to Iowa, I became aware of being Indian. Others pointed out that I was different. It was an affirmation of my Indianness." This quote comes from a woman who was raised with very close ties to a reservation and whose family is very confident in its ethnic identity. It was only when she came out of her very Native American environment did she realize she was different. Being American Indian is now something she feels a responsibility for and so has made more of an effort to understand that part of her. When she came to Iowa, she was asked, "Why do you feed the spirits before you eat?" Her only explanation was because that is what she had seen her father do all her life. Suddenly that explanation seemed inadequate and she then went back and asked her father, "WHY do we feed the spirits?"

Another reservation-raised respondent talked about this notion as well. Dan has begun to ask what being American Indian is all about only since he came to Iowa. "Back home this identity issue was a moot point, it's only become prevalent since I'm being questioned from the outside."

Mitch said that he has always known that he is an American Indian, but it had become secondary to him. There has been a resurgence of his Indianness since he has come to college. This is the first time he has ever had to "defend" his heritage. He has asked himself and his family questions that he had before taken for granted that he knew the answers, but in reality did not.

Phil's experience also corroborates this point. His mother taught him as a child how to perform tasks that he assumed all mothers teach their children. It was only after coming to college and his exposure to other people has he had to put what he calls an "ethnic label" on any of these behaviors. He feels his mother was not directly teaching him about his heritage, as that idea was not reinforced during the lesson, but was simply teaching him the way she accomplished tasks. Unexpectedly, he is having to explain why he behaves certain ways, which has helped him to assert his ethnic identity.

Spokesperson Model

The least common explanation for the declaration of ethnic group affiliation, but one for me which holds special concern, is designated as the "spokesperson model". This is when an individual is asked to provide information on how all members of his or her ethnic group feel, act or think. This is different from the personal-identification model because the questions are directed at the group as a whole, and not just on the individual's personal experience.

The spokesperson inquiry generally occurs in a classroom setting, but it can also sneak up on a person in a meeting or some other academic engagement. Unfortunately the instigator of the questions is usually a professor or some other

leader who means well and wants to provide an emic voice to the topic at hand. However, what they generally end up doing is putting a student on the spot to become a spokesperson for the various tribal groups and multitudes of American Indians across the country, which is obviously an impossible task.

Liz gave the example of a course she took at Iowa State. The professor was talking about stereotypes and the conversation winded its way around to the debate over the use of Indian images and names for sports team mascots. Instead of asking her what her personal opinion was, the professor asked Liz to kindly reveal to the rest of the class how American Indians felt about the issue. She felt uncomfortable responding and also felt as if the professor had singled her out as the "other", something she did not want to be. However, something she considers valuable resulted from this. Liz took that experience as motivation to find out what other Indians actually did think about the issue of Indian mascots so next time she would be better armed. In this way, she learned more about her heritage and was then more capable of asserting her ethnic identity.

Teri is a student in a department where the graduate students are constantly preparing questionnaires and personality tests. Because she is the only Native American easily accessible to the department, she is unceasingly being asked to take the tests and answer the questions. She feels very unsure of her heritage when she is asked by people to talk about it or as what she calls the "token Indian test-taker". These situations have pushed her to become more aware of her heritage and take it as a serious responsibility. Teri says she is thankful for that, but still gets frustrated when others expect her to be an "Indian expert".

The cultural person model, the anti-modeling model, the personal-identification model and the spokesperson model are the reasons mentioned in the interviews for why people choose to affiliate with an ethnic group. An individual's experience did not always fit completely into one section or the other, and often there was a combination of reasons for the initiation of ethnic identity development.

These four divisions of why ethnic identity develops have something in common, which brings me to the conclusion to this part. All of these models originate from somewhere other than the individual him/herself.

This does not mean that there are not internal reasons for following these models. Each individual dealt with his or her experiences in his or her own unique way and acted upon them in this unique way as well. However, the initial motivation stems from outside influences. Therefore my thesis statement for why ethnic identity develops is this: **External factors are the stimuli for Native American Iowa State college students to identify with their American Indian heritage.**

The remaining part of my research question addresses the matter of *how* people assert their ethnicities. Once again, I refer to the five components of ethnicity consistently mentioned in the literature. Spirituality, language, biology, family and cultural affiliations have been shown to be the critical areas in which ethnic identity is shaped (Isajiw 1974;117). As was mentioned in the methodology section, the interview questions were specifically developed around these five components in order to test the reality of their influence in this specific population.

Can the behaviors of American Indian people at Iowa State asserting their ethnic identity be assigned into these distinct categories?

An analysis was done based on the number of positive responses to each category along with the emphasis placed upon it by the respondent. The following discussion is not an attempt to arrange the components in order of their importance. Each category holds a different amount of consequence to each individual. However, commonalties will be extracted from the various answers and existing themes will be exposed.

It is important to note that a brief exposure to these varied domains is not enough to effect one's ethnicity a great deal; therefore, it is necessary that the individual hold an active role in a category for it to be considered as having an effect on his or her ethnicity. It is also significant to realize that these five separate categories do not stand alone, there are considerable overlaps and interactions that cannot readily be dismissed. However, due to the segregation in the literature, they will be addressed here as separate entities.

Language

Language was described as being originally spoken by the affiliated indigenous group. It was addressed in the interviews by basic questions such as "What language is used primarily in your home?" and "What language do your grandparents speak when communicating to each other?", as well as more subjective questions such as "Does someone need to speak the indigenous language in order to be considered a full member of the group?" or just "How important is it for one to know his or her indigenous language?".

The responses to this set of questions illustrate an important dilemma facing most Native American groups today. Language preservation is a vital part of maintaining the potency of American Indian cultures. However, in reality, more and more indigenous languages are being lost. Each of the respondents speaks English primarily; only a small number speak more than a few catch phrases from their indigenous language. However, each individual stresses the importance of knowledge of the indigenous language in solidifying and strengthening one's ethnic identity.

Nora very eagerly wants to learn more than the few words of her indigenous language she already knows, but she realizes she will probably not ever completely master the language as she no longer lives at home where it is commonly spoken. Speaking the indigenous language helps "to identify who you are to strangers." She was exposed to the language a lot when her grandmother was still alive. Her grandmother would speak her indigenous language to Nora and her siblings as children, if they didn't know what she was saying her grandmother would insist that they "figure it out" for themselves. Her grandmother also spoke to her grandfather in her indigenous tongue but he would then answer in English. "It's a white man's world", he would say.

Pat does not speak any of his tribal language. He is not familiar with it at all as his mother felt it was best to speak to him only in English as a child. He feels badly about not knowing that part of his culture. He says that a person does not need to speak the language in order to be affiliated with an ethnic group, but "it must add a lot to the feeling of identity." Pat, like most of the respondents,

portrays an individual who believes that language acquisition and maintenance is important to his American Indian culture, but does not think that not speaking the language lessens his sincerity in being Indian.

Kerry was another individual who feels it is not mandatory to know the tribal language to be a member. However, she believes that it is extremely important and that a person can probably not truly understand what it meant to be Indian until he or she knows the language. Language shows "how my ancestors saw the world."

Knowing one's indigenous language is ideally an integral element of creating one's ethnic identity. However, in the case of these American Indian students, learning and using the language is often obstructed by the lack of appropriate teaching environments. Not one of the students would say language is insignificant, but it is not reasonable to expect people to deposit serious importance on an area in which they are greatly lacking skill. The lowering of the importance of language in ethnic identity is a case of the reality of not knowing it.

There was one respondent who could not emphasize the importance of knowing one's language enough. Roy has made a concerted effort to learn his tribal language. He now has a small vocabulary and can maintain a brief conversation with other indigenous speakers. Roy asserts that until he learned his language he never felt completely comfortable as an Indian. Once he acquired some basic knowledge of the words and syntax and could communicate in the words of his ancestors he knew for the first time in his heart that he was Indian. "It is something that no one can question, and no one can take away." Apparently,

the more of the language an individual knows, the more important it is as a factor in ethnic identity.

Only one out of the twenty individuals interviewed specifically chose language as a way to assert his ethnic identity. Without exception, however, all respondents believed in the strength of language as an important avenue to understanding indigenous culture.

Spirituality

Spirituality in this study refers to a person's belief system concerning the spiritual world and one's perception of a higher being. It was first determined what forms of spirituality each individual practiced, if any. Once it was known if the spiritual orientation was an organized church or an individual belief system, the questions were tailored to address each specific situation.

For example, if a respondent declared he or she was Catholic, went to mass every Sunday and followed the traditional Catholic values and rules he or she learned in confirmation classes, then they were asked if Catholicism reinforced their Indian identity. I also asked if there were other ways in which the individual related to the spiritual world that were more in accordance with his or her tribal traditional ways. If someone felt they did not practice any form of spirituality, I asked if this somehow conflicted with being Native American. If an individual participated in traditional tribal spiritual ceremonies, the importance of these activities was then addressed.

It is important to understand that when addressing spirituality in these interviews, it was made clear that the questions revolved around specific tribal

traditions. However, individual respondents' notions of American Indian spirituality were also accepted as being valid, even if they did not particularly correspond with a tribal belief. The importance was not so much in determining how much each person knew specifically about his or her tribe and then validating his or her ideas, as it was in finding the extent of which the concept of spirituality played in a person asserting his or her ethnic identity.

The most perplexing aspect of this area is in dissecting the elements of spirituality. The respondents who identify themselves as having strong spiritual connections based on indigenous ideology found it difficult to point out specific tasks, since their spirituality encompasses the totality of who they are. Because this research is concerned primarily with the effect spirituality has on an individual's ethnicity, it did not focus on the specific rites or actions in which people participate.

Each of the respondents had been baptized in an organized religion when they were children. None of them were active participants in tribal spiritual ceremonies. However, many of the individuals did talk about the importance of spirituality in everyday life.

Nora's father and mother believe in spirits and the spirit-world. This belief was transferred to Nora and is one she actively holds today. She feels all things have spirits and believes in the importance of respecting them. This is a belief she identifies strongly as Indian and one by which she feels connected to her family. She also remarked on the importance of realizing that humans are a part of the

whole circle and not "over" any other beings. She has a respect for nature and all living creatures that comes from her grandmother's teachings.

Several of the other respondents also expressed having a respect for nature in a spiritual way. Kerry feels the most at peace when she is outdoors and able to be close to nature. She strongly believes this is her heritage showing through. She says being outside is when she feels "the best".

Another of the respondents said that although she was baptized Catholic and has followed the Catholic religion all of her life, she feels it is important to "respect the beliefs of my grandparents". She does not know a lot about specific Indian traditions, but she values them and believes they are genuine because she respects her family.

For the most part, these individuals were not overly consumed or concerned with religious or spiritual activities. Because most of them were not raised and entrenched with these spiritual beliefs as children, spiritual actions are not as prevalent in their lives as may have been thought.

Each individual did have some notions of what "Indian spirituality" is. These ranged from knowing about sweat lodges and burning cedar, to very stereotypical mystical images. Apparently, being Indian is not the key to escaping stereotypes about indigenous people. None of the respondents strongly pursue spirituality as a method of asserting their ethnicity.

However, it is accepted that spirituality can encompass everything a person does, thinks, and/or feels, and therefore can be difficult to pinpoint and define. This difficulty of definition could perhaps explain the lack of intensity

surrounding the spiritual activities of the respondents. Most probably, though, the main reason for the deficiency in spiritual activity as an ethnic assertion is due to the lack of enculturation to Indian beliefs as children. As mentioned, all respondents identified themselves as belonging to the typical American churches and therefore these would be the belief systems learned up to this point in their lives.

Cultural Affiliations

Cultural affiliations refer to the exposure to various cultural activities, traditions and customs. Questions relating to this topic included asking about participation in powwows or traditional ceremonies; knowledge of or exposure to material culture; and understanding or awareness of tribal worldviews, beliefs, and/or values. It is necessary to determine whether these ideas are just something that the respondent had been exposed to in passing, or are things that have created an awareness in the person of their origin and their importance.

When discussing spirituality, most of the respondents had not been immersed in their indigenous culture as children. This can create a distance between what is real and what is seen in books or movies. The effect is sometimes individuals have a difficult time in distinguishing what are popular notions of pan-Indianism and what are characteristics specific to their own tribe. This holds just as true for cultural aspects. However, a handful of the respondents told about skills they were taught or images or concepts they were exposed to that have created an awareness and a desire to learn more.

One woman spoke of learning how to bead a little as a child from her grandmother. She continues this today by making earrings and small items. This is not only a hobby to her, but also an important way that she is able to reveal she is Indian and knows something about the way "Indians do things".

Several people have been to powwows, but only a small amount said that they had actively participated. One woman talked about dancing and listening to the drum as very "invigorating" to her. She feels thankful that she has a "culture" to give her a base. Being outside and feeling the drum and hearing the songs help her understand what it is to be Indian. "These are such important things."

Kerry also spoke about feeling a reinforcement of her connection to her Indianness when she is at powwows. She describes an "emotional preparation" and a "connection" to the people participating in the ceremonies at the time, and also to her relatives that came before her and saw and experienced the same thing. Being around other Indian people and learning about her culture make her feel "more confident about being Indian".

These examples show that some of the individuals in this study do use cultural characteristics to define their ethnicity. It is not an overwhelming number of respondents, or the key area to anyone. However, it is an area that is rich with cultural information and one that people understand is important to understanding one's identity.

Family Affiliations

Family affiliations indicate connections with significant people usually living in the same household, but also including peripheral individuals. Connections to non-living people are also included in this category. This designation is closely related to the notion of biology, but because of some significant differences will be addressed briefly on its own. The primary contrasts occur because family affiliations can also be with non-related people and biology generally refers to genetic membership in a group.

Family affiliations are key in telling people how to assert their ethnicity. For instance, a person can turn to his or her mother and say "I am Indian because my mother is Indian" and can then duplicate mother's behavior as a way of "acting correctly". This reinforces the previously discussed idea of the cultural person model and its influence on why people choose to affiliate with a specific group.

Because of the overlap with the definition of the cultural person model, many examples from the interviews reinforcing family affiliations have already been stated. The family affiliations are generally the channel through which connections are made to the other components of ethnicity. For instance, it could be from a relative one learns about the language, or about tribal traditions.

"I've seen my dad build bark wigwams and my grandmother tan hides", a woman said. Even though these are not skills that she holds herself, the fact that a close relative is able to perform them gives her a sense of pride and connection to the culture. Knowing that these are tasks her ancestors have done for many years

gives her a sense of continuity and so has helped her "establish my place, I know where I belong."

Biological Connections

The last component is also the one most often mentioned and most strongly emphasized. Biology concerns the genetic and hereditary ties to a group or categorization of people.

In this study, every individual holds blood connection to his or her specific Native American group. Blood is the base attachment from where the rest of identity grows. Therefore, biology is the only component in which each individual in this study actively asserts his or her ethnic identity.

The strength of the influence of biology varied among the respondents. Most felt that it was integral to establishing a connection to any ethnic group. There were, however, two individuals who maintain that although blood is how they know they are Indian, it is possible to be culturally Indian without any genetic ties.

Jill said blood is an important criteria because it gives a person that "initial connection", but more important are a person's actions, behaviors and thoughts. "When you are young it's okay to say you're Indian because of your blood, but as you get older it's not enough to tell you what being Indian really means."

Nora felt that blood is not that important in determining one's Indianness; it is the way in which one leads his or her life. She was raised close to her reservation and strongly feels that being Indian means living a certain way, and blood ties are not enough. Although she identifies herself as Indian, it has only been through her

desire to learn the language and her participation in cultural activities that her identity is reinforced.

On the other hand, Frank asserts that blood is very important to belonging to a group. "Even if you don't do anything else, the blood is always there. Even as it gets thinned out over generations, one drop is all that's needed to be connected to the people." Cultural exposure was also important to him, but biology creates the desire to learn about the culture. Mitch strengthens the point simply by saying, "You can act like an Indian, but you can never BE Indian without the blood."

Biology is not an area in which someone chooses to participate, but it is a choice whether or not to disclose the information about one's heritage. In this way, it is an area used for each respondent to affirm their individual identities.

This discussion of the five components of ethnicity has illustrated one primary point: **Native American students at Iowa State University do not actively assert their ethnicities using language, spirituality, cultural affiliations or family connections. Biology is the one area in which the respondents all participated.**

What exactly does this mean and why does this group of individuals not follow closely what the literature asserts? Two different explanations are suggested here.

First, the study population needs to be considered. Iowa State is not a natural magnet for American Indian students. It is not located close to a large population of Indian people, nor does it offer strong cultural support. Students do not choose to come to Iowa State because they are American Indian. They come

here because they live in Iowa, or they are interested in engineering or agronomy or some other strong academic department. The fact that the respondents are Indian is secondary. These are typically not individuals who have been immersed in their indigenous culture and therefore do not have strong ethnic ties.

The second explanation is a result of not having much time to pursue ethnic identification. In almost every case, these individuals have been faced with the choice of group affiliation only since their separation from their natal environments. As this has occurred only in the past few years, enough time has not passed to allow for a strong reinforcement of identity. They are still in the stage of exploring and learning about their cultures. None of the five components were deemed unnecessary by the individuals, they just have not been able to attain much knowledge up to this point. Perhaps if a person was to speak with these same individuals in ten years, a stronger identification with and more active participation in the five components would be found.

The preceding discussion of the data successfully answers the research questions of this study. A theoretical model of external stimuli has been developed to explain the reasons *why* people choose to affiliate with an ethnic group. The external stimuli are divided into four separate categories.

The cultural-person model emphasizes the effect of an important person in the individual's life. The individual is exposed to the culture through this person and often attempts to model the behavior to feel connected to the cultural person.

In the anti-modeling model, the individual rebels against the negative disposition displayed toward the culture by a family member. This results in the individual actively pursuing this part of the ethnic identity.

The personal-identification model addresses the individual's behaviors and ethnicity being questioned by outsiders. In trying to answer these questions, ethnic identity is asserted.

Finally, the spokesperson model refers to the situation in which the individual is asked to be a representative for an entire group of people. In doing so, ethnicity can be affirmed.

The theory of external stimuli for ethnic assertion helps to support and is supported by the primordial sentiments theory of ethnicity. As explained, this theory states that human beings are generally social and need intimate and interactive personal relationships with other humans for appropriate developmental progress. It is also asserted that these ties are created in part by social context making ethnicity relevant.

The external incentives for ethnic identification are a result of an individual becoming aware of the differences in his or her life or heritage versus the dominant society. Ethnicity becomes relevant to these American Indian students at Iowa State University because other people ask questions, make assumptions and have opinions about what it is to "be Indian". When a person is confronted with the realization that he or she may be different, a natural reaction is to find others who are similar. Modeling behavior is also a manifestation of wanting to belong. Identifying oneself with a specific person or group of behaviors is the

result of wanting to maintain relationships with that person or with persons displaying those behaviors. Ethnic group affiliation is a way of supporting one's shared identity.

The question of *how* ethnicity is asserted is also addressed in the discussion. The primary way for the respondents to reinforce their ethnic identity is through biological connections. They know they are Indian simply because they are, and at this time that is enough to substantiate the choice of group affiliation.

The low emphasis on the other categories of ethnicity is due to the deficiency in the opportunities to learn specific cultural characteristics. It could be argued that these individuals have not yet achieved the needed guidelines to determine culturally-appropriate behaviors and actions. The theory of habitus helps to explain this argument.

As discussed earlier, habitus refers to the subconscious conceptual order that dictates which behaviors are culturally-appropriate. This structure enculturates young people with cultural characteristics and norms. This integration of common dispositions provides the organization for recognition of ethnic behaviors (Yates 1989; Hodder 1986:72-73; Bentley 1987:28). If this structure has not been created in an individual as a child, it will be more difficult as an adult to discern and exhibit appropriate behaviors.

The basic assertion is these individuals cannot be expected to intensely manifest ethnic types of behaviors if they have not been indoctrinated in them. As these individuals mature and gain the capability to create their own learning

environments, it is possible that the level of activity in the areas of language, spirituality and cultural understanding will increase.

An important conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that blood ties are strong enough for a person to use as the primary connection to an ethnic group. Biology allows an individual to walk through the door to be Indian, however, it is dependent upon language, spirituality, family connections and cultural affiliations to determine how far a person will enter.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

This paper has introduced and outlined a study conducted at Iowa State University focusing on the development of ethnic identity in American Indian students. Twenty Native Americans were interviewed to determine why they felt a connection to "being Indian", along with the behaviors asserted to reinforce this identification.

Answering the question of why did not prove to be too difficult. The responses generated from the interviews created an overwhelming emphasis on outside influences as the initial impetus. The specifics varied, and in order to clarify them, a theoretical organization based on the external stimuli was created. Four descriptive models were established to support the external stimuli theory.

The cultural-person model emphasizes the effect of an important person in the individual's life. In the anti-modeling model, the individual rebels against the negative disposition displayed toward the culture by a family member. The personal-identification model addresses the individual's behaviors and ethnicity being questioned by outsiders. Finally, the spokesperson model refers to the situation in which the individual is asked to be a representative for an entire group of people.

The exploration of the ways in which these individuals chose to assert their ethnic identity was a more daunting task. The first obstacle to be overcome was defining some of the five components of ethnicity.

It was not difficult to ascertain a definition for language, biology, or family affiliations. It was not so easy ,however, to provide the concise characteristics of

spirituality, particularly Native American spirituality. The task of determining one model Native American religion or spirituality is simply impractical and unrealistic. There are similarities between tribes in certain beliefs and worldviews, and perhaps some common themes flowing through Indian spiritual cultures. However, it is far beyond the scope of this paper to attempt an integration of those ideas.

As a method of dealing with the difficulty of developing one encompassing definition, it was decided that spirituality would be defined according to the respondents themselves. If a behavior held spiritual significance for an individual, then it was respected as such by the interviewer.

Similar difficulties were confronted when discussing cultural affiliations. It is not easy to designate ethnic behaviors if most of the exposure to one's culture has been minimal. One respondent remarked, "Since I'm Indian, everything I do is Indian." This statement can be accepted as true, but it seems as if the deficit in traditional cultural exposure has again manifested itself in a lack of understanding. At times the lack of knowledge was frustrating, but that in itself became a crucial finding in this study.

The importance of biology among the American Indian students interviewed for this study was clearly established. Language, spirituality, cultural affiliations and family connections play a much smaller part in ethnic assertions by the respondents. This is hypothesized to be due to the lack of immersion in the native culture growing up and/or as a young adult. In some instances, biology is the only real connection achieved by the respondents.

Talking with these individuals was enlightening and also troublesome. The initial curiosity of wondering if other Indian young people struggle to accept and assert their identity was replaced with a question of who is ultimately responsible for the cohesion of a culture.

Some of the individuals had a stronger sense of connection and more exposure to cultural characteristics than others. But that certainly seemed to be the exception and not the rule. Most of the people interviewed did not have any difficulty in expressing what the initial impetus for exploring their American Indian heritage was, but the levels and intensity of that exploration proved to be weak in regard to the ethnicity components found in the literature. No one can fault these young people for their lack of understanding of cultures and worldviews. In a few of the cases, no one can really fault the families for perhaps giving up part of their identity on the course to creating a place for them and theirs in this society.

Certainly cultures change, and perhaps today's society is creating a new type of Indian: blood Indians. Individuals who are without a doubt genetically linked to the group of Native Americans, but perhaps are deficient in cultural understanding. The dependence on blood ties as the primary element of ethnicity in Native Americans on Iowa State's campus can only support this notion.

Much has been written about who is Indian, and what behaviors or characteristics are Indian. Perhaps it will never be fully defined or understood. Perhaps it is not up to academia to determine how to categorize a people. Perhaps it truly is only up to the people themselves.

Pulitzer Prize-winning Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday asserts that an Indian is

> someone who thinks of themselves as an Indian. But that's not easy to do and one has to earn the entitlement somehow. You have to have a certain experience of the world in order to formulate this idea. I consider myself an Indian; I've had the experience of an Indian. I know how my father saw the world, and his father before him (1990:7).

Definitions of who is Indian are as varied as the people who develop them. The individuals interviewed for this thesis come from a multitude of backgrounds and diversified experiences. The one common thread that runs through each of their lives is identifying themselves as Indian.

As sure of this assertion that these individuals seem to be, one cannot help but feel that there is a lack of understanding and of knowledge. Yes, each of these persons is Native American, but what this means to them has not yet fully developed. Perhaps in time these individuals will begin to understand more deeply their own heritage and be able to teach their children not only about what it means to be Indian, but also what it means to be Lakota or Chippewa or Pueblo.

APPENDIX

Ethnic Identity Interview Schedule

This is the interview schedule used for this study. It is important to note that although these specific questions were asked of each respondent, supplementary questions were also used depending upon the course of the interview. Therefore, the complete data gathered for the study would not be obtained by solely using the following questions. They will, however, give an overview as to the type of questions asked of each individual.

What is your ethnic background?

How do you identify yourself? (e.g. do you identify yourself with one group more than another?)

What is the ethnic background of your parentes?

If married, what is the ethnic background/identity of your spouse?

What are the most important criteria/variables for establishing one's ethnic identity?

What are the criteria for being a _____?

How does your family identify itself?

How do other members of your community identify your family?

Does your family reinforce your ethnic identity? How?

How does your family and kin group feel about its ethnic heritage? (proud, ashamed)

Does your family participate in any traditional ceremonies or customs?

What religion does your family practice?

Do your parents follow any traditional religious practices?

Do your grandparents follow any traditional religious practices?

What language is used primarily in your home?

What language do your parents use when communicating to each other?

What language do your grandparents use when communicating to each other?

How often is non-English used in your home?

List the members of your household and their relationship to you.

Do you live in a primarily "ethnic" community?

What languages do you hear spoken commonly in your neighborhood?

Are the majority of your friends members of your ethnic group? Of other ethnic groups?

What was the first language you learned to speak?

What other languages do you speak?

Do you participate in any traditional ceremonies or customs?

What activities do you perform that are in sync with being a _____?

What religion do you practice?

Do you follow any traditional religious practices?

Do you look like a _____?

How do others perceive your ethnic identity?

Have you ever experienced prejudice based on your ethnicity?

Does being _____ make you different from other people? Why?

How do you know you are _____?

How do you feel about being _____?

Do you consider yourself more or less ethnic than other people? Why?

Does your ethnicity vary depending upon which group you are in? For example, are you more _____ when with other _____ or when with non-group members?

Are there times when you feel more "ethnic" than others? When?

Have you always considered yourself _____? Has this ever changed over your lifetime?

Do you act differently among your ethnic group than you do among non-members?

How important is it for a _____ to practice traditional religion?

How important is history in keeping your ethnic group cohesive?

What does a _____look like?

Does biological background play a role in determining your ethnic identity? How much?

How important is physical appearance when identifying a fellow _____?

Can an individual be considered _____without having any genetic/blood/biological ties to the ethnic group?

Does someone need to speak _____ to be considered a _____?

What does it mean to be a _____?

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