

Oral History Reimagined: Emerging Research and Opportunities

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A volume in the Advances in
Religious and Cultural Studies
(ARCS) Book Series



Published in the United States of America by
IGI Global
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA, USA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com>

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Pack, Sam, author.

Title: Oral history reimagined : emerging research and opportunities / by Sam Pack.

Description: Hershey, PA : Information Science Reference, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "This book explores new approaches to oral history"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019052987 (print) | LCCN 2019052988 (ebook) | ISBN 9781799834205 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781799834212 (paperback) | ISBN 9781799834229 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Oral history--Methodology. | Navajo Indians--Interviews.

Classification: LCC D16.14 .P33 2020 (print) | LCC D16.14 (ebook) | DDC 907.2--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019052987>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019052988>

This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Religious and Cultural Studies (ARCS) (ISSN: 2475-675X; eISSN: 2475-6768)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material.

The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: eresources@igi-global.com.



Advances in Religious and Cultural Studies (ARCS) Book Series

ISSN:2475-675X
EISSN:2475-6768

Editor-in-Chief: Nancy Erbe, California State University-Dominguez Hills, USA

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Preface

This book breaks new intellectual ground by pioneering an innovative way of conducting oral histories through its integration of numerous individual oral histories into a unified biography of a Navajo family with whom I have been closely associated for more than three decades. Oral histories of Native Americans presently litter the academic marketplace. The University of Oklahoma Press, for example, lists dozens of titles in their American Indian biography and autobiography section. The University of Nebraska Press has so many selections that they found it necessary to create an entire “American Indian Lives” series. I find the vast majority of these titles to be greatly problematic. The traditional method of composing the oral history as a flowing narrative is not only morally dishonest but also intellectually inadequate because it conveys the false impression of a chronologically timeless and uninterrupted soliloquy.

Published oral histories are highly processed, constructed, and reified. Questions have been removed, entire sections have been reordered, and redundancies have been deleted. After the multiple stages involved in transforming a narrative oral into an inscribed text, the final product bears little resemblance to the original transcription of the interview. Indeed, like those deceptive weight loss ads, the “before” and “after” versions differ dramatically. By focusing only on the final product, oral histories ignore the other two components in the communicative process.

As such, I have devised a way to (re-)insert the producer and process into the research equation by revealing the circumstances of engagement between narrator and editor. Every oral history in my manuscript consists of four distinct tiers: (1) profile; (2) transcription; (3) commentary; and (4) the participants’ response. Each narrative is first introduced by a brief but thorough description of the nature of the relationship between the individual and me. An edited transcription of the interview follows. Next, my commentary provides contextual information as well as a clarifying perspective that

Preface

attempts to “fill in the holes” caused by missing historical, social, or cultural background information. The main purpose of the commentary is to offer the reader the point of view of a different voice that can say things in a different way than the voice of the person telling his or her story. By providing both a transcription and a commentary, the reader will be able to critically compare my assertions against the informant’s account and vice versa. The final tier of every section will feature each of my informants commenting on the previous three tiers. Within anthropology in recent years, there has been interest in reversing the academic perspective by using native epistemologies to critique our own assumptions, thereby resulting in a more radical democratization of knowledge that simultaneously de-privileges our academic inquiry while helping to recover ideas and practices from historically marginalized points of view. The result is an ethnographic narrative that is multivocal, conversational, and co-constructed.

This study also benefits from an impressive diversity among the five members of the family who are the subjects of the narrative. There is a wide variation in age, sex, education level, socio-economic level, and degrees of assimilation among the individuals even though they are all part of the same family: (1) Grandma Elsie, the family matriarch who, as a monolingual Navajo speaker and rug weaver, is the most traditional of the five; (2) Delbert, an unemployed silversmith who has battled alcoholism his entire adult life; (3) Ella, the middle-aged mother who has had to raise ten children mostly alone; (4) Regina, the first college graduate in the family (she majored in anthropology) who is employed as an archaeologist for the tribe; and (5) Chucky, a tri-racial high school student and budding basketball star. They range in age from the teens to the seventies, represent three generations, and provide a balance of male and female voices. By juxtaposing these narratives, and then weaving them into a culturally defined historical frame, a story emerges that is not only the history of one Navajo family but also a piece in the larger history of the Navajo.

Those who have collected oral histories on their own know that it entails much more than pressing the “record” button on the tape recorder. Because communication is a symbiotic process that requires both a sender and a receiver, researchers cannot arbitrarily eliminate their presence—especially when *what* is said is invariably contingent upon *who* it is being said to. Historically, editors have employed what I call a “ventriloquist approach” in their oral histories. By essentially speaking on their behalf, they have rendered their native subjects as little more than exotic puppets.

This book demonstrates the potential of the oral history to serve as a new way of writing vulnerably about the “other” by not only refusing to hide ourselves as authors but by sharing equal billing in a dialogic encounter with our informants. If it is true that all truths are not only partial but positioned, I believe that a reflexive ethnography in the form of a reciprocal exchange between researchers and informants constitutes the logical extension of reflexivity in anthropological research. My ultimate goal is a balance that dissolves the distinction between the ethnographer as theorizing being and the informant as passive data, that reduces the gap between subject and object, and that presents both ethnographer and informant as having active voices thereby providing curious readers with a fresh and engaging perspective of looking at “them” looking at “us.”

Chapter 1

Introduction:

(Re-)Inserting the Producer and Process Into the Research Equation

ABSTRACT

The individualistic orientation of life histories has long been hailed as an antidote to the generalizing tendencies of ethnographic research. However, the life history method is not without problems of its own, as the author explains by referencing some of the most well celebrated life histories and so-called “autobiographies” in the anthropological corpus. The traditional method of composing the life history as a flowing narrative is not only morally dishonest but also intellectually inadequate because it conveys the false impression of a chronologically timeless and uninterrupted soliloquy. By focusing only on the final product, life histories ignore the other two components in the communicative process. In this opening chapter, the author emphasizes the need to (re-)insert the producer and process into the research equation.

The tendency to generalize has historically plagued anthropology’s depiction of the “other.” Pronouncements of homogeneity purport the singular (“the native”) as being representative of the whole. Generalization, the characteristic mode of operation and style of writing of the social sciences, can no longer be regarded as a neutral description. When the anthropologist generalizes from experiences with a number of specific people in a given community, he or she tends to flatten out differences among them. The appearance of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3420-5.ch001

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an absence of internal differentiation makes it easier to conceive of a group of people as a generic entity who do this or that and believe such-and-such.

A healthy distrust of representing peoples as coherent entities has emerged in recent years, and ethnographies written from feminist standpoints and other critical positions now commonly argue that essentialized representations obscure members' diverse experiences (Frank, 1995). Feminist anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (1991), for example, has advocated what she calls "ethnographies of the particular" by focusing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships (p. 149). This methodological turn to the individual in anthropological studies corresponds to postmodernism and the much-ballyhooed "crisis of representation." As a result, the lived experiences of individuals have seized the academic spotlight. In a culture that is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, it is important to understand how individuals construct their own sense of self and world given their particular, dynamic, and complex lives. If we want to know the unique experience and perspective of an individual, there is no better way to understand this than in the person's own voice.¹

ORAL HISTORY AS METHOD

As a research method, the term "oral history" refers to an oral account of the experiences in an individual's life, told by that person—typically in the form of discrete stories in a linked narrative—to a researcher. According to Lawrence C. Watson & Maria Barbara Watson-Franke (1978), it is "any retrospective account by the individual of his [or her] life in whole or part, in written or oral form, *that has been elicited or prompted by another person* (p. 2; emphasis mine). An autobiography, in contrast, refers to a person's self-initiated retrospective account of his or her life.

Oral histories are hardly new as the method has been utilized as a source of information about the human condition in social science research for almost a century. Anthropologists regularly used oral histories to ascertain shared cultural meanings, the insider's view of a community, and the dynamics of cultural change (Langness & Frank). However, this method has generally occupied a marginal role relative to more established ethnographic techniques such as participant-observation and structured interviewing. Consequently, the individual has been reduced to a rather insignificant role as ethnographic writing often fails to capture the sense of self embodied in the autobiographical accounts of their informants and instead produces accounts of the "other."

The only way to protect the “self” from the “other” is through a first-person account. Oral histories are especially valued for their ability to capture the “native’s point of view.” No less an authority as Claude Levi-Strauss has asserted that oral histories “allow one to perceive a foreign culture from within, as a living whole, rather than as a set of seemingly conflicting norms, values, roles, rituals, and the like” (cited in Bertaux, 1984, p. 232). The oral history method holds considerable potential as a way of recovering hidden histories as well as reinstating the marginalized and dispossessed as makers of their own past. As a method of looking at life as a whole and as a way of carrying out an in-depth study of individual lives, the oral history stands alone.

ORAL HISTORY AS PROBLEMATIC METHOD

All of this promotion should not suggest that the oral history method is not without its problems. Although oral histories provide the illusion of an unmediated relationship between narrator and audience and of an authentic voice speaking to one reader at a time, they should not be viewed purely as vehicles for the delivery of uncontaminated facts about the past (Browder, 2000). The key here is that the voice invariably belongs to a member of a minority group and the intended reading audience is composed primarily of middle-class white people. There is an implicit understanding that the narrator is not telling his or her own story as much as the story of a people. Expected to serve as the representative voice of their people, narrators (and, more importantly, their editors) must often conform to their audience’s stereotypes about their ethnicity.

Indeed, most oral histories permeate with the distinctive air of a travelogue. Always told in the first person, they are usually as much about the journey of the writer/collaborator as they are about the natives’ experiences. By becoming a part of the narrative, the author operates as a kind of proxy for the race and class biases of the reader. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1998), a Native American scholar, criticizes the oral history method for being essentially anti-intellectual. She asserts that “the writer almost always takes sides with the ‘informant,’” with the result being “a manuscript that will satisfy any voyeur’s curiosity” (p. 123).²

LIFE NOT LIVED LIKE A STORY

The unavoidable dilemma intrinsic to the oral history approach is entrenched in converting a life into a story. Is life narratively structured or is a story imposed on the structure post hoc? I would contend that it is the latter. In contrast to the title of Julie Cruikshank's (1990) book, life is *not* lived like a story. Stories arbitrarily impose a narrative structure that simply does not exist in the way people recount their lives. Episodes in memory are cinematic and events are not expressed in the linear, step-by-step fashion espoused in these books. Since life anticipates narration, it could be stated that stories falsify or reify experience.

Regardless of good intentions, critics have argued that the accounts of outsiders are fundamentally biased because they hail from very different cultural traditions from those who they are representing (DeMallie, 1993). The logical solution, then, is for documents to be written by native peoples themselves. To borrow the anthropological idiom, autobiographies or native-made texts represent the truest emic perspective.

The form of writing generally known to the West as "autobiography" had no equivalent among the oral cultures of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. Although tribes, like people everywhere, kept material as well as mental records of collective and personal experience, the notion of telling the whole of any one individual's life or taking merely personal experience as of particular significance was "in the most literal way, foreign to them, if not also repugnant" (Swann & Krupat, 1987, p. ix). Strictly speaking, therefore, "Indian autobiography" is an oxymoron.

Instead, Native American autobiographies are generally collaborative efforts, "jointly produced by some white who translates, transcribes, compiles, edits, interprets, polishes, and ultimately determines the form of the text in writing, and by an Indian who is its subject and whose life becomes the content of the 'autobiography' whose title may bear his name" (Krupat, 1994, p. 30). The majority of Indian autobiographies were actually written by whites in the form of "as-told-to" autobiographies.³ Concerns about editor/narrator relationships have led many scholars to erase the distinction between autobiography and biography in this literature (Brumble, 1988).

LEFT HANDED

To be sure, there is something strangely disconcerting about reading a title like “A Navajo Autobiography” yet seeing the by-line attributed to somebody besides the subject of the autobiography. *Left Handed: A Navajo Autobiography* was recorded by a husband and wife team. Walter and Ruth Dyk collected the autobiographical data during the years 1934-35 except for the last chapter that was recorded in 1947-48. The life experiences, however, derive from three years at the end of the 1880s—almost fifty years earlier. According to Walter Dyk (1980), Left Handed could “remember conversations directly, word for word,” (p. x) but I doubt his memory was so good that he could recount day-to-day activities in specific detail from a half-century earlier.⁴

This volume comprises the second part of Left Handed’s autobiography. The first part, *Son of Old Man Hat*, recounts his life from birth to the time of his marriage at age 20. This compendium—all 571 pages of it—treats just three years in the late 1880’s. The narrative, needless to say, is extremely detailed. Walter Dyk was interested in mundane behavior rather than the descriptions of highly dramatic episodes which characterized other elicited autobiographies. He therefore asked Left Handed to “relate whatever he could remember of his life, leaving out nothing, however trivial” (Dyk & Dyk, 1980, p. xvii). Left Handed proceeds to describe his feelings toward members of his family, his relations with his wife, his preparations for the hunt, his “affairs,” his hogan building, his gaming, and, finally, his wife’s unfaithfulness and their resulting separation.

Walter began editing this volume himself, but due to a long illness, he was unable to finish the work. After his death in 1972, Ruth continued the editing using her husband’s guidelines: “add nothing and leave out only minor experiences, repetitious episodes, and recurring passages...so that the edited version differs in no essential way from the first telling” (Dyk & Dyk, 1980, p. xviii). The problem here, of course, is what constitutes “minor” and who determines it? Moreover, although repetition disturbs the Western ear, for many indigenous peoples, repetition serves as a rhetorical feature in oral narrative (Brumble, 1988). In addition, editors like Ruth Dyk always order the material chronologically even though this distorts the sense of time implicit in the narratives. The end result is that the edited version differs *substantially* from its original telling.

ANTHROPOLOGIST AS VENTRILOQUIST

Historically, anthropologists and other researchers have employed what I call a “ventriloquist approach” in their studies of indigenous peoples. By essentially speaking on their behalf, they have rendered their native subjects as little more than exotic puppets. In his article “Here Comes the Anthros,” Cecil King (1997) expresses the frustration of being imprisoned by anthropologists’ words:

We have been redefined so many times we no longer quite know who we are. Our original words are obscured by the layers upon layers of others’ definitions laid on top of them. We want to come back to our own words, our own meanings, our own definitions of ourselves, and our own world....Most important, we want to appraise, critique and censure what they feel they have a right to say about us (pp. 117-118).

Within anthropology in recent years, there has been interest in reversing the academic perspective by using native epistemologies to critique our own assumptions. Dan Rose (1990), in particular, urges a more radical democratization of knowledge that simultaneously de-privileges our academic inquiry while helping to recover ideas and practices from historically marginalized points of view.

The state of scholarly research and writing on Native Americans was the topic for an anthology titled *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (1998). A persistent theme echoed repeatedly by the ten native scholars is the need for Indian voices to finally be heard. According to Donald L. Fixico (1998), more than 30,000 manuscripts have been published about American Indians and more than 90 percent of that literature has been written by non-Indians. These scholars recognize a fundamental contrast between how Native American cultures and histories are interpreted and portrayed by non-native academics and how Indians see themselves and their past. One native scholar, Angela Cavender Wilson (1998), asserts that as long as history continues to be studied and written in this manner, the field should more appropriately be called “non-Indian perceptions of American Indian history” (p. 23). *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (Burgos-Debray, 1983) appeared to be a step in the right direction.

RIGOBERTA MENCHU

In 1983, a Mayan Indian from Guatemala narrated her autobiography in which she described an early life of indentured servitude under the rule of European-descended colonials and included horrific accounts of witnessing the murder of family members at the hands of the military. *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (Burgos-Debray, 1983) won a Pulitzer Prize and became a staple in college classrooms. The book's publication transformed Menchu into an overnight sensation and attracted worldwide recognition for her cause, culminating with the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize.⁵ Her story was so compelling that Menchu became the revolutionary movement's most appealing symbol and she was anointed as the poster child for the struggles of all indigenous peoples.

Sixteen years later, David Stoll (1999) revealed in his controversial book, *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, that the story was not true—at least not completely. While Stoll was interviewing other violence survivors in her hometown, he stumbled upon a conflicting portrait of the village and the violence that destroyed it. Among the more significant discrepancies, the author found that most peasants did not share Menchu's definition of the enemy. Although the book describes guerillas as liberation fighters, Stoll's (1999) sources considered both the soldiers and the guerillas as threats to their lives (p. 8). Contrary to the image she paints of herself as an unschooled peasant, Menchu's childhood was in fact a relatively privileged one as she even attended two prestigious private boarding schools operated by Roman Catholic nuns. Moreover, since she spent much of her youth in the boarding schools, it is extremely unlikely that she could have worked as an underground political organizer and spent up to eight months a year laboring on coffee and cotton plantations, as she describes in great detail in her book (Rohter, 1998). She did lose members of her family but fictionalized or sensationalized their deaths for shock value. A younger brother whom Menchu says she saw die of starvation never existed while a second, whose suffering she says she and her parents were forced to watch as he was being burned alive by army troops, was killed in entirely different circumstances when the family was not present (Rohter, 1998).

The reason Menchu's story achieved such credibility and notoriety is that the notion of native people as innocent victims dispossessed by colonialism seemed so familiar. Like Adam Sandler's movies, the names may change but the plot is always the same. Stoll (1999) believes that some of his colleagues were offended because they had unwittingly fallen into the trap of idealizing

indigenes to serve their own moral needs. Similarly, what makes *I, Rigoberta Menchu* so attractive in universities is also what makes it misleading about the struggle for survival in Guatemala: it lulls readers into believing that they are gaining a closer understanding of Guatemalan peasants when they are actually detracted by mystifications wrapped up in an iconic figure (Stoll, 1999).

Stoll's revelations appeared to render Menchu's so-called autobiography another classic example of the ventriloquist effect: an outsider anthropologist speaking through a native to further her own agenda. For her part, Menchu deferred all of the blame to the anthropologist who edited the book, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, by claiming distortion of her testimony: "That is not my book... It is a work that does not belong to me morally, politically, or economically" (Stoll, 1999, p. 178).⁶ Of course, Menchu had no qualms about accepting all of the accolades,⁷ the countless speaking engagements,⁸ and the considerable wealth⁹ that came as a direct result of the book.

BLACK ELK

Before Rigoberta Menchu, there was Black Elk, one of the first Indian voices to be heard—or so it seemed. His life and though first came to public attention in 1932 courtesy of John Neihardt in arguably the most well-known Native American life history, *Black Elk Speaks*, and another favorite among university professors. The Black Elk portrayed in what Vine Deloria, Jr. called the "Indian Bible" in the preface to Neihardt's classic text has become the paradigm of the pre-modern Native American. Neihardt's Black Elk is depicted as solely a nineteenth century figure—born when the buffalo still roamed the plains and conquered by the heartbreak at Wounded Knee in 1890. However, Neihardt focuses only on the first twenty-four years of Black Elk's life and neglects the last sixty. The general public is made unaware that Black Elk spent most of his life in the twentieth century and even less know that he was a devoted Christian for almost thirty years before he ever "spoke" to Neihardt.

Black Elk Speaks (Neihardt, 1979) consists largely of first-person narratives that portray Sioux life as it existed during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Black Elk shares his boyhood memories, early adult experiences, village and family life, and traditional religious rituals. With the rapid encroachment of whites, these pre-modern days are romantically portrayed as a precursor to the downfall of the Sioux as a self-sufficient people. The book ends with the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee and the infamous "death of a dream" speech:

And so it was all over. I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there (Neihardt, 1979, p. 230; emphasis mine).

These are the most frequently quoted words in the entire book. Unfortunately, according to Clyde Holler (1984), they were never uttered by Black Elk.

Neihardt chooses to end Black Elk's life story at Wounded Knee despite the fact that he was only twenty-seven years old in 1890! Readers are presented with a timeless portrait of an old and feeble man, suspended in nostalgia and melancholy and hermetically insulated from the modern world. *Black Elk Speaks* is a literary work that interprets Black Elk's life as a tragedy that symbolizes the larger tragedy of Native Americans. Perhaps more than any other, this book demonstrates how Indian autobiography is a post-colonialist literary form that has been predicated on defeat and disappearance. As Stoll demonstrated was the case with *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, organizing scholarship around simplistic images of victimhood can be used to rationalize the creation of more victims. Neihardt took many personal liberties by making substantial changes to Black Elk's testimony. He glaringly omitted certain passages, added some, and blatantly altered others. For Neihardt, Black Elk served as a passive, malleable icon to be shaped at his mercy in order to reinforce popular pre-modern perceptions of the "noble savage." Instead of "Black Elk Speaks," a more fitting title would have been "John Neihardt Speaks Through Black Elk."

REFLEXIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

Oral history interviews are highly processed, constructed, and reified. Questions have been removed, entire sections have been reordered, and redundancies have been deleted. With refreshing candor, Sands demonstrates the multiple stages involved in transforming a narrative life into an inscribed text. In the appendix to her book, she includes the original transcription of the interview, her editorial changes, and then the published product (Rios & Sands, 2000). Like those deceptive weight loss ads, the "before" and "after" versions differ dramatically.

Clifford & Marcus (1986) call collaborative autobiographies “fictions” (p. 5), not in the sense of being false but as monologues made from dialogues. Those who have collected oral histories on their own know that it entails much more than pressing the “record” button on the tape recorder. Because communication is a symbiotic process that requires both a sender and a receiver, researchers cannot arbitrarily eliminate their presence—especially when *what* is said is invariably contingent upon *who* it is being said to.

The notion that only the native’s point of view carries validity reflects a recent trend towards anti-colonialist sentiments. However, the oral history as monologue reduces the anthropologist to little more than a transmitter. By conveniently eliminating half of the communication equation in oral histories, anthropologists have also been practicing a methodological sleight-of-hand. The only honest alternative, it seems to me, is to acknowledge our particular role in the process. Specifically, I am advocating the fundamental necessity of incorporating the author’s voice and emotional reactions into the ethnography. The first place to start is by including the ethnographer’s questions in the final product.

After all, the content of the interview is guided by the researcher’s choice of questions rather than narrator’s sense of retrospective. Often, what is being said is entirely dependent upon what is being asked. The resulting narrative is a product of the particular questions asked (or avoided), the timing of these questions, as well as what (and how much) the informant simply forgets or—in the case of particularly sensitive areas of discussion—chooses to withhold in the telling.

The inclusion of questions into the text is not such a novel approach. In fact, question and answer interviews with celebrities have become increasingly common in mainstream magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*, *Playboy*, and *Rolling Stone*. However, the difference between these interviews and their academic counterparts is that the former rarely divulges the identity of the interviewer and, even then, the reader does not know anything about the person or the nature of his or her relationship with the celebrity they are interviewing. To my knowledge, this methodological technique has never been attempted with published ethnographic narratives.

Of course, anything this innovative is sure to meet with initial resistance. Some criticism will surely be expected, as certain readers are sure to find such extreme “navel gazing” annoyingly self-absorbed. Indeed, Bruner (1993) warns that there is a danger in putting the personal self so deeply back into the text that it completely dominates and, as a result, the work becomes narcissistic and egotistical.¹⁰ The challenge is to return the ethnographer to the text but

not to the extent of squeezing out the object of study. The ultimate goal is a balance that dissolves the distinction between the ethnographer as theorizing being and the informant as passive data, that reduces the gap between subject and object, and that presents both ethnographer and informant as having active voices (Bruner, 1993).

The ethnographer can engage in a dialogue with the informant, just as there is a dialogue in the field between persons. Appropriately, the word “interview” can be broken into two revealing parts: “inter” is the root meaning “between” and “view” means outlook or perspective. An interview is literally an *inter-view*, an exchange of perspectives between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest. Instead of the linear, one-way, top down model typical of most oral histories, I prefer the circular and reciprocal approach of dialogue.

Not coincidentally, Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) theories focus primarily on the concept of dialogue. According to him, a dialogue consists of three elements: a speaker, a listener, and a relationship between the two. It should be our goal as researchers to weave all three elements into a cohesive study. Thus, the oral history can serve as an experiment for a new way of writing vulnerably about the “other” by not only refusing to hide ourselves as authors but by sharing equal billing in a dialogic “I-Thou”¹¹ encounter with our informants. Ien Ang (1996) has similarly called for a radical contextualism: “I must know on whose behalf and to what end I write...that is, our stories cannot just tell ‘partial truths,’ they are also, consciously or not, ‘positioned truths’” (p. 78). If it is true that all truths are not only partial but positioned, I believe that a reflexive ethnography in the form of a reciprocal exchange between researchers and informants constitutes the logical extension of reflexivity in anthropological research.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SELF AND THE PERSONAL SELF

In his essay “The Ethnographic Self and the Personal Self,” Edward M. Bruner (1993) calls the tendency for ethnographers to segment one from the other an exercise in futility: “The idea of a scientific, supposedly objective, ethnographic report that left the individual observer out of the account is not only a cliché, it is an impossibility. Every ethnographer inevitably leaves traces in the text” (p. 2). Ethnographers generally keep anything of a personal nature out of the final manuscript as a protective mechanism for fear of compromising scientific integrity. However, according to Bruner (1993),

to divorce the personal from the ethnographic is to create a false dichotomy because data are not independent of how they were acquired. Thus, in this next section, I expose how my personal self has irrevocably influenced my ethnographic self.

This book is based upon my experiences conducting research among members of the Benally¹² family, a matrilineal network of clan related kin. In support of my doctoral dissertation in anthropology, I spent three years doing fieldwork on the Navajo reservation where I investigated the crucial role television plays in the formation and contestation of social and cultural identities. However, this anthropological relationship was preceded by a personal relationship with the Benallys that spanned over a decade.

There is an old joke that a typical Navajo family consists of a mother, father, children, some sheep, and an anthropologist. I suppose this is true in my case as well, but I must add that I was considered a member of the family long before I ever thought of becoming an anthropologist. In fact, I have maintained a continual presence on the reservation for so long that other Navajos not only assume that I am from there but identify me as an actual member of the Benally clan.

I first visited the reservation during the summer after my freshman year of college. This was a very disillusioned time in my life, and I was looking to get away and do “something different.” Through a friend, I found out about workcamps, which were Peace Corps-type programs that provided room and board in exchange for manual labor. It sounded perfect. After doing a little research, I learned that many of these camps were located on Indian reservations. Based on the proximity and type of work, I signed up for a construction project on Hopi land. A few days before I was scheduled to leave, I called the coordinator to confirm my travel plans and was told that the project had been cancelled. The only camp available was a gardening project on the Navajo reservation. I was not too keen on gardening—in my youthful bravado, I thought of it as a hobby for old ladies—but I had already slotted the time and did not have anything better to do. So off I went.

From the moment I arrived, I felt strangely comfortable. Such a reaction is extraordinarily rare since I usually do not adjust well to new environments, especially one that is so different from any place I had ever known or seen. Yet I noticed that these Navajos and I shared certain similarities. The first was the most obvious: we looked alike. As a Korean-American, my Asiatic features often “pass” for Navajo.¹³ Indeed, the other members of the camp (all of whom were Anglo) as well as the Navajos who came to greet us initially assumed that I was Indian.

Unlike my co-workers who tried to befriend the locals right away, I proceeded with my customary reticence. I did not know at the time that Navajos, like me, consider gregariousness from outsiders to be inherently suspicious. Whereas my proclivity to avoid eye contact and refusal to engage in frivolous conversation is often perceived as standoffish by mainstream standards of proper social conduct, my aloofness was perfectly understandable and even validated by our Navajo hosts. Once we got to know each other, I realized that we also found the same things funny. While my acerbic style of playful teasing usually elicits stern looks from politically correct social circles, they thought I was hilarious. In general, I believe the main reason the Navajos accepted me but kept my Anglo co-workers at a safe distance was because I never tried to be accepted.

DUAL CITIZENSHIP

I know better than most what it is like to be on the other side of the “anthropological gaze.” Based on the mistaken impression that I am Native American, missionaries have attempted to convert me, tourists have asked to take my picture, benevolent minded professors have offered me special benefits not available to my peers and, in one instance, an anthropologist actually tried to recruit me for an interview. In all of these instances, each of the perpetrators treated me in a very distinct way difficult to describe. With their overly polite manner of speaking, exaggerated enunciation of words, and friendly body language, I can best compare this treatment to the way adults speak to mentally challenged children. Upon discovering that I am not Navajo but “just another Asian,” I invariably witness the dramatic transformation from obsequious respect to betrayed insouciance.

There was one memorable instance in particular. I was invited to speak as a guest lecturer by Dr. Oswald Werner at his Ethnographic Field School.¹⁴ Sponsored by Northwestern University, this field school has operated every summer for many years under the guidance of Dr. Werner, a Northwestern anthropology professor and preeminent Navajo scholar. After my talk, I was approached by one of Dr. Werner’s teaching assistants who had just completed her dissertation. She inquisitively asked me a litany of questions related to my research and then offered suggestions and encouragement.

I interpreted her interest as academic curiosity. Then she asked me where on the reservation I was from. Once I informed her that I was not from the reservation and, furthermore, that I was not even a Native American, her

whole attitude and posture towards me changed in an instant. Suddenly, she lost all interest in my research and in me as an individual. But it did not end there. On the following day, she overheard me “correcting” one of the Navajo participants and she went ballistic. What followed was a passionate lecture about *never* rebuking “our cultural teachers.” It mattered little to her that it was the Navajo participant who had asked me for clarification.

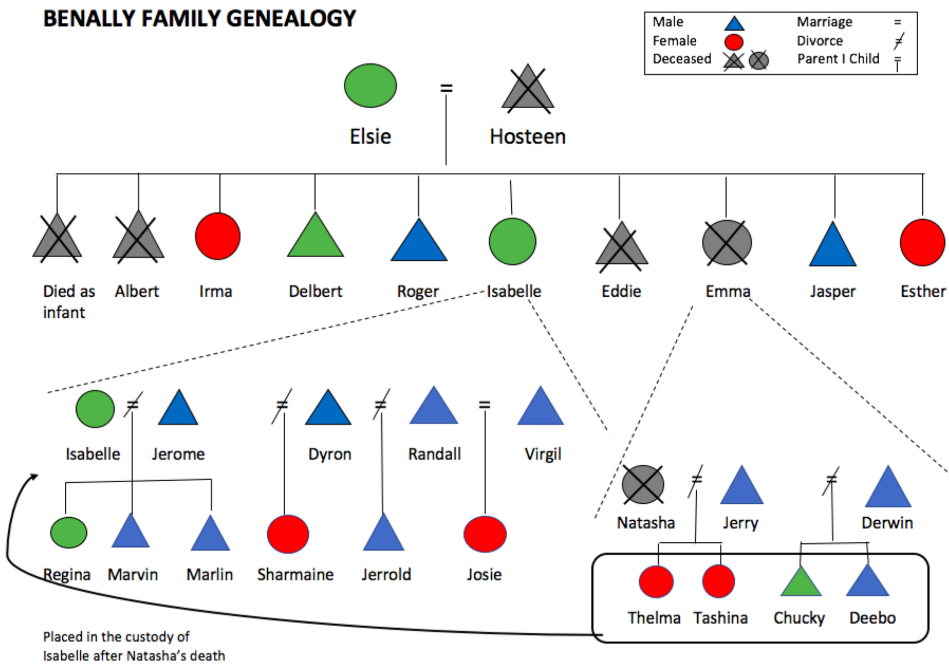
INTRODUCING THE BENALLY CLAN

This study takes place in a community on the Navajo reservation located approximately twenty miles north of Gallup, New Mexico that I will call “Sage Springs.” The relative proximity of Sage Springs to the border town means a higher degree of acculturation than more remote and isolates areas of the reservation. However, the community is still traditional enough that some residents still speak no English and many families continue to rely on a sheep herding economy. The family with whom I conducted this research remains steeped in Navajo traditions as well in that they will call on the services of a medicine man rather than a doctor when somebody falls ill. They also actively participate in peyote meetings. Thus, the delicate balance between acculturation and traditionalism renders this location an ideal site to examine the contestation of identity.

The Benallys are a well-known family in this area of the reservation. Locals refer to the dirt road leading into the community as “The Benally Road” despite the fact that it is the only pathway for numerous families living in Sage Springs. Hosteen Benally, the family patriarch, was a prominent figure known throughout the reservation as a police officer and then as a politician. In more recent years, the Benallys have garnered a reputation for their basketball prowess as both male and female members (including both of my research assistants) were the stars on their respective high school teams. A family genealogy is shown in Figure 1.

Introduction

Figure 1.



My study benefits from an impressive diversity among the five members of the family that I have chosen to participate as key informants (highlighted in green). There is a wide variation in age, sex, education level, socio-economic level, and degrees of assimilation among the individuals even though they are all part of the same family: (1) Grandma Elsie, the family matriarch who, as a monolingual Navajo speaker and rug weaver, is the most traditional of the five; (2) Delbert, an unemployed silversmith who has battled alcoholism his entire adult life; (3) Isabelle, the middle-aged mother who has had to raise ten children mostly alone; (4) Regina, the first college graduate in the family (she majored in anthropology) who is employed as an archaeologist for the tribe; and (5) Chucky, a tri-racial high school student and budding basketball star. They range in age from the teens to the seventies, represent three generations, and provide a balance of male and female voices. By juxtaposing these narratives, and then weaving them into a culturally defined historical frame, a story emerges that is not only the history of one Navajo family but also a piece in the larger history of the Navajo.

Each oral history consists of four distinct tiers: (1) profile; (2) transcript; (3) commentary; and (4) the participants' response to all of these. After an

introduction to the individual and a brief explanation of the nature of our relationship, the next section will consist of a oral history narrative presented in the form of an edited transcription of the interviews. This will be followed by my comments and analysis of the data. The final component of every section will feature each of my informants commenting on the edited transcription and my analysis thereof. I also believe that it is of fundamental importance to reveal the circumstances of engagement. In this capacity, each oral history narrative will be introduced by a brief but thorough description of the nature of the relationship between the participant and myself.

Historically, those who have collected oral histories have utilized the information merely as a supplementary source of data that clarifies other interests, such as the testing of theories (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1978). When oral history material is included, authors usually choose to allow the manuscript to speak for itself. Yet the narrator does not provide explanatory theoretical paragraphs to make sense of the material and, on the contrary, usually does his or her best to disguise it. This fact makes it necessary for the researcher to play an active role over the material by fashioning the necessary concepts and making the required connections in order to piece the oral history together.

A oral history requires interpretation. My commentary provides additional information as well as a clarifying perspective that attempts to “fill in the holes” caused by missing historical, social, or cultural background information. This space also imparts me as the researcher with a stage to share my own insights and experiences related to the individual. Essentially, the main purpose of the commentary is to offer the reader the point of view of a different voice that can say things in a different way than the voice of the person telling his or her story. By providing both a transcription and a commentary, the reader will be able to critically compare my assertions against the informant’s account and vice versa.

EDITING CRITERIA

As I have already demonstrated, the vast majority of oral histories are highly constructed by their editors. A classic example of their decontextualized nature is Oscar Lewis’ *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (1961). A statement from the book’s preface clearly illuminates Lewis’ tendency towards creative editing:

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In preparing the interviews for publication, I have eliminated my questions and have selected, arranged, and organized their materials into coherent life stories. If one agrees with Henry James that life is all inclusion and confusion while art is all discrimination and selection, then these life histories have something of both art and life. I believe this in no way reduces the authenticity of the data or their usefulness for science (1961, p. xxi; emphasis mine).

Contrary to what Lewis may believe, his “mix and match” style of editing most definitely and irreparably compromises the integrity of the original telling. Indeed, the traditional editing process consists of leaving out the interviewer’s questions, creating sentence and paragraph structure, discarding extra things, adding missing things, and reorganizing certain sections to keep common subject matter together (Atkinson, 1998). Spradley (1979) contends that most oral histories are heavily edited by the anthropologist and estimates that only 60% of the narration is actually in the narrator’s own words.

Unlike traditional oral histories, the narratives included in my research are not organized into a chronological order—unless that is the way they were told.¹⁵ The transcriptions resulted from at least a dozen interview sessions over the course of a year and generated, on the average, over 300 pages of text for each participant, which then had to be condensed into approximately thirty pages. Obviously, any time 90% of the original draft is removed, possibilities for distortion are ubiquitous. In editing the monolithic transcripts, my main concern was to maintain the guiding spirit of the individual telling the story rather than the researcher writing it up.

The criteria that I employed revolved around the “readability” of the text. First, I removed most of their favorite colloquialisms such as “you know” and “so anyways,” among others. I also eliminated digressions and redundant statements. I made minor grammatical changes such as corrections in syntax, keeping tenses consistent, and making sure the pronouns agreed. Other than these simple guidelines, I minimized altering any of the participants’ words by preserving the flow and character of the participants’ testimony without injecting too much of myself in their words.

When compressing their responses, I avoided substituting more descriptive words or phrases. I also retained the order of their narrative by not “cutting and pasting” various sections. Rather than intermittently trimming away a statement here or there, I removed entire sections that I deemed to be of the least value for the purposes of this dissertation. As the author, it is my responsibility to walk the fine line between preservation and pollution. There are certain unavoidable pitfalls involved in transforming a narrative life into

an inscribed text, and every collector/editor of oral histories must reach his or her own compromise. In my case, my proclivity for “raw” data does not mean that I prefer it uncooked. The unexamined life may not be worth living, as the Socratic saying goes, but the unedited life is not worth reading.

INTERVIEWING STYLE

I am not a big proponent of interview guides or other so-called “proven” ethnographic strategies. Early in my graduate studies, I read (and re-read) the literature regarding the “proper” ways of conducting interviews but then eventually realized that I could communicate with my informants more effectively by simply being myself. In fact, altering my “style” may potentially undermine the nature of our relationship and cast me in a suspicious light by making me look like an anthropologist!

There is an awkwardness associated with interviewing somebody you know well. A major disadvantage of my familiarity with the participants of my study is that not only do I already know the answers to most of the questions that I ask, but my informants know that I know the answers. Consequently, there is usually a dearth of elaboration as they see no need to explain beyond basic replies. When I feel that they may be leaving out key information, I will inquire as in “What about such and such?” These prompts can certainly be interpreted as leading questions. By including my questions as part of the text, I make myself vulnerable to these types of criticisms.

Besides lies of omission, I was surprised to encounter so many instances of lies of commission where informants would blatantly lie to me. Of course, I always brought their dishonesty immediately to their attention in a manner perhaps unnecessarily aggressive. Some readers may consider my confrontational, or even combative, interviewing techniques more appropriate for counter-examining a criminal on the witness stand than questioning somebody from a culture where outspokenness is perceived as barbarian.

Professor Richard Chalfen, my graduate school mentor, surely had this in mind when observing and critiquing my videotaped interviews for a consulting project we had worked on together. He was seemingly taken aback by the manner in which I appeared to verbally accost my interview subjects. Anticipating my future dissertation fieldwork, he advised that such an approach would “not be appropriate” when interviewing Navajos. Reflecting upon his own experiences with the Navajo Film Project, he remembered Navajos as an extremely reserved people who would not respond well—if at all—to my

overly aggressive mannerisms. He feared that I would be viewed as culturally insensitive, which might create disastrous implications for my research.

This is where my study departs from most of its counterparts. My participants are not “informants” in the traditional sense of the term because I have known them for so long in a non-anthropological context. Moreover, our close ties have been reinforced by my no-nonsense personality. I have *never* subscribed to the sycophantic tendencies of certain colleagues who choose to endear themselves to their informants for the expressed purpose of establishing rapport. Besides, it is not in my nature to be overly friendly. My informants understand that there is a certain way I typically interact with people—all people—in spirited conversation. In fact, they have come to expect it.

ETHICAL DILEMMA

After more than thirty years, I know a lot about the five individuals whose lives form the basis of the present study—perhaps *too* much. Initially, I believed this familiarity would serve as a tremendous advantage and result in my completing this dissertation quickly and smoothly. It turned out, however, to be much more of a handicap than a benefit. In an article titled “The Paradox of Friendship in the Field,” Joy Hendry (1992) describes the difficulties she experienced as an ethnographer carrying out research in Japan when she turned one of her close friends into an informant. A well-established manual for ethnographic research positively warns against turning friends into informants largely because of the confusion of roles that is thought to arise as a result of each side having preconceived ideas about what the relationship should involve (Spradley, 1979).

Most of what I know about these five individuals was based upon a personal relationship forged over years of trust and not under the pretext of conducting research. Throughout the writing, I constantly faced the dilemma of not only what to include but, more importantly, what *not* to include. As a first-year graduate student in anthropology, I remember reading an article about the Hopi filmmaker, Victor Masayesva Jr., in which he stated: “Refraining from photographing certain subjects has become a kind of worship” (Rony, 1994, p. 20). At the time, I recall skeptically thinking that this sounded like a typically “Indian” thing to say, indicative of the way some cross-culturally savvy Native Americans communicate with non-Indians.¹⁶ But it was not until I figuratively stepped into Masayesva’s moccasins that I understood

the deeper meaning and rationale behind not disseminating certain types of information.

Although it is obviously advantageous for me to incorporate experiences, observations, and statements to substantiate or refute informant claims, I cannot help but to feel that I am betraying their trust by revealing what was intended to be “off the record.” Jean Briggs (1978) experienced a similar dilemma about writing a personal account of her life in a small Eskimo camp during the two years she lived there:

The problem is, of course, to reconcile two mutually conflicting obligations. On the one hand, I feel a responsibility to contribute to scientific knowledge and to report honestly to the scholarly community the results of my research. On the other hand, I feel that I am equally responsible to the Eskimo, who have welcomed and nurtured me during my visits and that, in return for their hospitality, I ought to avoid making statements that they might find embarrassing or that would create tension in their interpersonal relationships (p. 202 cited in Bentz, 1997, pp.124-125).

Should I include information told to me in confidence that clearly contradicts what the informant recited to the tape recorder?

Marilyn Bentz (1997) answers with a resounding “no” in her article “Beyond Ethics: Science, Friendship, and Privacy.” She even takes it one step further and recommends eliminating oral histories altogether because they “violate the friendship and the spirit of the human relationship that binds the anthropologist and his or her subject” (p. 121). Bentz (1997) contends that it is simply not ethical to use oral histories or even to report specific incidents from individual lives if such information has the potential to prove embarrassing. Informants, after they have formed a personal relationship with the researcher, may provide information they would not want published. The only guarantee of ethical reporting, according to Bentz (1997), is handing informants editorial control in terms of having the discretion to eliminate any information they do not want revealed.

In the end, I decided not to let interpretive issues take precedence over ethical ones.¹⁷ It is always more important to be fair to the human being providing the information than it is to get more data. At the same time, however, I have refused to succumb to politically correct pressures and shy away from the controversial and unpopular. I have tried to balance these opposing forces by maintaining the delicate equilibrium between my responsibility as a social scientist to report the “truth” as I know it and protecting the rights

and privacy of my informants. Readers can determine on their own whether or not I have succeeded.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Anthropologist Paul Radin (1920) concurs: “For a long time most ethnologists have realized that the lack of ‘atmosphere’ in their descriptions is a very serious and fundamental defect, and that this defect could only be properly remedied by having a native himself give an account of his particular culture” (p. 383).
- ² Cook-Lynn (1998) is adamantly critical of the publication of all Native American personal narratives not only because she sees them as stolen intellectual property but because they undermine the integrity of Native American expression and mislead both non-natives and natives alike about Indian identity: “Though I’ve referred to the ‘informant-based’ Indian stories as ‘life-story’ works, I would like to suggest that they are offshoots of biography, a traditional art form in European literature. Ethnographic biography is not an Indian story at all and does not have significant ties to the interest bodies of Native literary canons produced culturally and historically” (p. 121).

- 3 Without qualification, all “as-told-to” autobiographies are induced texts. In David Brumble’s (1988) *American Indian Autobiography*, the author of the definitive bibliography of Native American autobiographies asserts: “It would never have occurred to these people to sit down and tell the story of their lives whole” (p. 4).
- 4 The recording process was exacerbated by the fact that Dyk could not speak Navajo and Left Handed could not speak English. As a result, Philip Davis (a Navajo) served as an intermediary between the two men. Left Handed would speak for a minute or two, Philip would then translate, and Walter would transcribe the translation—hardly an accurate means of recording, to say the least.
- 5 It was no coincidence that the award coincided with the 500th anniversary of the European colonization of the Americas.
- 6 Menchu elsewhere accuses Burgos-Debray of substituting other persons’ life stories for her own (Stoll, 1999). Yet in another book titled *Crossing Borders*, Menchu asserts precisely the opposite by maintaining there that she had full and final authority over her book (Rohter, 1998). Needless to say, the controversy exacerbated any relationship between the women, which was already strained by a disagreement over publishing royalties. Menchu even excluded Burgos-Debray from the Nobel campaign.
- 7 In addition to the Nobel Peace Prize, Menchu was showered with honorary doctorates (Stoll, 1999).
- 8 Stoll (1999) reports that Menchu had to choose from more than 7,000 invitations.
- 9 The Nobel Peace Prize includes a \$1.2 million purse for each recipient (Stoll, 1999).
- 10 Judith Okely (1992), a vocal advocate of inserting the “I” into ethnographic monographs, responds to such charges: “Self-adoration is quite different from self-awareness and a critical scrutiny of the self. Indeed, those who protect the self from scrutiny could as well be labeled self-satisfied and arrogant in presuming their presence and relations with others to be unproblematic. Reflexivity is incorrectly confused with self-adoration (p. 2).
- 11 The reference here is to Martin Buber’s (1958) *I and Thou* wherein the author describes how personal dialogue can define the nature of reality. According to Buber, human beings may adopt two attitudes toward the world: I-Thou and I-It. The former is a subject-to-subject relationship defined by mutuality and reciprocity while the latter is a subject-to-object relationship defined by separateness and detachment.

- 12 I have changed all names of family members in order to conceal their identity.
- 13 Choong Soon Kim (1977), also a Korean anthropologist, experienced a similar solidarity with his Cherokee informants: The cultural similarities between the Cherokees and rural Korean peasants particularly struck me. Eerie feelings of *deja vu* crept over me when I spotted a woman carrying a child on her back and a dipper made from a gourd hanging on a wall. For a few moments, I was back in a Korean peasant village... (p. 69).
- 14 I had originally hoped to be a student at the field school but could not afford the \$5,000 tuition. I met Dr. Werner at the Navajo Studies Conference the previous spring and explained to him my financial predicament. He initially offered me a scholarship on the spot but rescinded it after I informed him that I was not Navajo. As a consolation, he graciously invited me to all of the meetings as an honorary participant.
- 15 Although nearly all of the oral history narratives I collected were told within a very loose chronological frame, starting with the participant's earliest memories and moving toward the present, there was little specificity with regards to the order in which particular events occurred and, in most cases, only fleeting reference to the historical context in which the events took place.
- 16 A classic example is when Indians inform tourists (or anthropologists) that they cannot be photographed or recorded on audio or video for fear that these devices "will take away our spirits."
- 17 Gary Witherspoon (1975) adopted a similar approach in his classic study on Navajo kinship: "Wherever the mutual trust and respect of friendship conflicted with anthropological interests and goals, my friendship with the people took priority over anthropological concerns" (p. xi).

Chapter 2

Grandma Elsie

ABSTRACT

By all appearances, Grandma Elsie is the prototypical traditional Navajo matriarch. She is a monolingual Navajo speaker. She has lived in the same house for over 50 years without basic amenities such as electricity, running water, or telephone. She has woven rugs since she was a child, and the proceeds from the occasional sale supplements her monthly social security checks as her only sources of income. Indeed, her way of life does not markedly differ from the way all Navajos subsisted a century earlier. This chapter introduces Grandma Elsie.

PROFILE

Grandma Elsie may remind those familiar with the Navajo Film Project of Sam Yazzie, the Navajo elder whose often cited query regarding the welfare of his sheep still resonates as an ethical mandate for all researchers. David MacDougall (1992), however, correctly asserts that academics have been (and still are) blowing the question way out of proportion: “That famous remark of Sam Yazzie, the Navajo elder, to John Adair and Sol Worth...is not some sage indictment of exploitative academic practices but an acknowledgment of differing cultural practices (p. 34 cited in Chalfen, 1997, p. 290). It is all too tempting to fall into this essentializing trap, whereby she is no longer a living, breathing individual but, by virtue of being relegated into a “savage slot” (Trouillot, 1991), is turned into an icon.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3420-5.ch002

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In order to prevent readers from attributing their own preconceptions to the text, I want to dispel any romantic notions from the very beginning. The details from a recent event should suffice to jolt readers out of their hypnotic haze. Being widowed for more than two decades has not prevented Grandma Elsie from making clandestine romantic rendezvous—or “booty calls”—to her late husband’s cousin, who lives nearby. However, “Little Tom,” as he is known in the community, apparently found another mistress on the side, a much “younger” woman in her early fifties. One day, during a heated argument, he decided to parade his new girlfriend in front of Elsie in an attempt to make her jealous, at which point, this demure septuagenarian proceeded to whack her nemesis over the head with a two-by-four. My purpose in sharing this embarrassing episode is to demonstrate that the actual lives of most contemporary Indians—even so-called “traditional” elders—are closer to *The Jerry Springer Show* than *Dances with Wolves* (Wilson & Costner, 1990).

Nature of Relationship

Of the five participants in my study, Grandma Elsie is the one with whom I am the least familiar. This is due primarily to the language barrier. My limited competency in Navajo is no match for her “old school” dialect.¹ Over the years, we have managed to communicate with simple hand gestures or the aid of a nearby interpreter but, most often, we just exchange smiles. We always kindly greet one another with a “*Ya’ateeh*” accompanied by the customary Navajo handshake.² She refers to me as “son” in appreciation of a home cooked meal or a ride to the store as much as any kind of perceived kinship bond.

During my early years on the reservation, Esther (Elsie’s youngest daughter) told me that her mother predicted that I would make a good father and have lots of children based on her observations of me playing with the kids. On numerous occasions, Grandma Elsie has expressed her gratitude to me for doing things for her that her own children and grandchildren have never done. For instance, Jasmine’s (her granddaughter) husband and I were the only ones willing to endure the summer heat and build her long-awaited hogan. In addition, I have brought her gifts of food whenever I visit. I am also the only one who takes her out to eat at the restaurants in town. But I was most surprised to learn that I was the first person who had ever inquired about her life. “Nobody ever asked me,” she said.

For obvious reasons, my interviews with Grandma Elsie proved to be the most logistically difficult. Because of the aforementioned language barrier, I required the services of a translator. The clearest choice was her son, Delbert, not only because of the comfort level associated with his being a close relative³ but, more pragmatically, because he is unemployed and usually has nothing else to do. An added advantage was that I had already interviewed Delbert, so he was familiar with the process. I envisioned that the interaction between parent and child would be similar to how Susie Benally taught her monolingual mother, Alta Kahn, to make films (Worth & Adair, 1972).

As it turned out, however, having Delbert serve as a translator included as many liabilities as benefits. Besides asking useful follow-up questions, he would also frequently take the liberty of replacing my questions⁴ with leading ones of his own. He additionally dispersed his own opinions, insights, and comments throughout the interview. In fact, I was not aware of the degree to which he controlled the pace and direction of the interview until the entire transcription was translated into English.

Finding somebody to translate the completed interviews turned out to be a more difficult task than I had ever anticipated. The person not only had to be fluent in Navajo but also possess a reasonable command of English as well. Even in a city like Albuquerque with a sizable Navajo population, there was a paucity of those who fit the bill.⁵ I hired—and subsequently fired—several individuals who were motivated more by a quick and easy payday than providing a thorough and comprehensive translation.

Just when I was about to lose all hope, I found the ideal candidate. Harold Redhouse works as a Navajo language instructor at an Albuquerque high school. Unlike his predecessors who routinely missed appointments without any notification, Mr. Redhouse is an extremely trustworthy and responsible individual. Very meticulous and precise when it comes to translating Navajo into English, he always struggled to find just the right word. Indeed, it was not uncommon for him to spend well over an hour translating only a half page of text. Because translations are inherently complex, they require some degree of artistic license by the translator. Each language has its own peculiar grammatical devices and idiosyncrasies. What is easily expressed in one language, by virtue of its own grammatical composition, is often difficult or impossible to phrase in another.

Asad's (1986) notion of "cultural translation" addresses issues beyond literal translation of languages. According to him, all good translations attempt to reproduce the structure of an alien discourse within the translator's own

language (p. 156). This process is intrinsically problematic, as Pannwitz (1969) points out:

Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English...The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue” (pp. 80-81 cited in Asad, 1986, p. 157).

Thus, cultural translation is inseparable from the unequal power relations that inscribe and dictate it.

As such, I have decided to include not only my questions but also Delbert’s translations in the transcript. In previous life histories involving a narrator, translator, and anthropologist, only the perspective of the first appears in the final manuscript. Including the triumvirate of voices demonstrates that the final product was the result of a three-way dialogue rather than a soliloquy.

TRANSCRIPT

ASK HER IF SHE HAS EVER BEEN INTERVIEWED BEFORE.

Has anybody ever asked you questions about yourself?

No.

Has Jasmine or Regina ever interviewed you in any form for school?

No.

HAS SHE EVER SHARED PARTS OF HER LIFE WITH HER KIDS OR GRANDKIDS?

During your lifetime, since you were born, from your grandchildren to other family members, have you ever talked about your life with them?

Never.

[TO DELBERT] IS THAT REALLY TRUE?

Just different parts, not thoroughly. Only when something comes up, such as an event, she goes back and she remembers what happens. So, basically, she just talks about that single event, not going into depth as far as how she was brought up and things like that. Nobody has ever asked her.

HOW DOES SHE DESCRIBE HERSELF?

How do you think about yourself? From long ago back into your lifetime to the present, what kind of woman do you think you are? Is your life back then important to you since you were placed on this earth? Being poor and experiencing various hardships with life, how has that affected you? Explain about your life to him from your own standpoint.

Residing at that place called *Kinnaazhoozh* (House that Collapsed), I lived with my maternal grandfather and a maternal grandmother and I used to have an older sister and a brother as well as a younger brother. But I never knew my mother and I never saw her and never knew when she died. During those days when I was growing up, my older sister was around along with my grandmother. We used to go around together a lot in those days. And then after that, my grandmother and grandfather died. I still had a father during that time who left to White Rock and met another woman. I never knew or saw my mother.

Mom, hold on a minute. From the time you were brought up, tell me about how you lived. The question that was brought up earlier about your life being a good thing to you about how you lived your life, tell me specifically about that in a more meaningful way. He's not asking you about grandmothers and grandfathers and so on or how you grew up. The question is being asked of how your life was being given to you and meaningful to you personally. Talk about why it was worthwhile for you to be born.

Yes, I certainly think that I was born for a reason. From the time I was brought to this world in a poor state, from that point on I continued here and met your father and had ten kids from him. Upon thinking about that, it was very worthwhile and important. Yet, I never saw my mother but I'm thankful she bore me. Even to this time now, it's been very good. Now I have many

children and many grandchildren and great grandchildren also. I am really grateful about that.

Upon thinking about yourself, some men and women always carry on more about their story privately, keeping it to themselves and focusing too much on the sad parts. It's too one sided. There's no relationship to the story. Do you think you are leaning more to the sad parts? Are you a happy and friendly person?

Yes, I am that kind of person. I am usually talkative with other people when they approach me, and that is a good thing.

ASK HER TO TALK ABOUT HER CHILDHOOD. DON'T INTERRUPT...

Now talk about yourself from birth about what you said earlier and include your grandfather, grandmother, and your mother too.

It was said that I was born at *Kinnaazhoozh*, which is near Toadlena,⁶ during the time that my grandfather, grandmother and older sister were living. But my mother was unknown to me. Nobody ever talked about her. Even my older brother didn't know about her or how she passed on. After she died, my dad moved to White Rock and found another woman. I don't know. I was a really young child at that time when I was abandoned and became an orphan. There were four children but my older brother and older sister passed on. From then on, I met my late brother and older sister who were residing at the mountain. I was told to stay around in the area. And that was when the late Charlie Damon family was living there in tents herding sheep. One day I wandered inside their tent and was introduced to the people inside and someone said, "Look here, younger sister, you need to meet this woman (Damon's wife) in this group who happens to be related to you clan-wise as a mother and these people are also related to you." They said that we would all go back home to a place called *Toyei* that's near Standing Rock for about one month

WHY WAS SHE AND HER YOUNGER BROTHER SEPARATED?

How come Uncle Joe didn't go with you?

After my father left, another individual already knew Joe really well and he asked him to live with him. It was better for Joe to be with him because he could go to school.

WHY DIDN'T THAT MAN TAKE HER AS WELL?

What was the reason for not taking you also?

Maybe he didn't like me.

WHAT WAS HER LIFE LIKE LIVING WITH THE DAMON FAMILY?

After your dad left, was it a good thing that you went with the Damon family?

Yes, they were really good to me. They weren't mean people. But that guy, Tsenabilnii Nez (her mother's younger brother), his family was really mean and they treated me bad. His boys were very mean to me, and they would hit me when we were herding sheep. My clothing was made of flour sacks, and my shoes were made from cowhide. That's how I grew up. People just ordered me around. They used to hit me and whip me. And they were sure mean people. They used to wake me up before dawn by pouring water all over me. I wasn't capable at that young age of waking up so early. In the early dawn, I was told to build a fire. This treatment still continued even through the winter season. I wasn't fed properly. I was only given Navajo tortillas and coffee for meals. I remember being told to go herd the sheep with a donkey and these mean boys would poke the donkey in its private area, forcing it to buck me off. And they would force me right back on and do the same thing again. One time when it was snowing, these boys told me to gather all the horses but they all ran in different directions. So I got mad and hit one of the horses with a rope and the horse kicked me in the chin. I think most of those boys are deceased now. I don't really know what happened to them.

HOW OLD WAS SHE WHEN SHE LIVED WITH NEZ?

What was your age when you lived with the Nez family?

Somewhere around ten years old. I spent a year with that family. I couldn't handle it anymore. One morning, I decided to run away in the early morning while everybody was still asleep. I went to my sister's place in Blue Mountain

but she wasn't home so I went to the house of another woman and asked her where my sister was. This woman told me that my sister moved to *Libahtahdi* (Grey Mountain). She invited me to stay at her place and start my journey the following day. So I agreed to stay at her house overnight. The next morning, that lady gave me directions to my sister's new house. So I continued and followed her directions all day. After arriving at my sister's place, my older sister came out and met me. We cried together for a long time. My sister said, "Stay here, younger sister." After staying awhile, we decided to move back up to the mountain to where Charlie Damon lived and I left with the Damon family by myself. Since then, that's how I survived. They provided beautiful clothes for me and were very hospitable to me for a period of twelve years. Nobody was mean to me during that time. While I was living at *Toyei* with the Damons, I learned that my older sister passed on.

WHY DOES SHE THINK THESE BOYS—HER COUSINS—WERE SO MEAN TO HER?

Do you know why they were treating you so bad?

Yes, they treated me that way but I don't know why. One day, Nez came back from a sing⁷ and the boys blamed me for some missing sheep. In turn, he became angry after he got the news. While he was still on top of the horse, he charged at me and used the rope to whip me. I've been whipped a lot of times.

DID SHE EVER TELL HER UNCLE ABOUT ALL THE ABUSE WHILE HE WAS AWAY?

Didn't you ever tell Nez about what was happening when he was away?

No, I never told him. If I ever told him about the mistreatment, I was scared that those boys would beat me up again. They threatened me that they would hurt me if I ever told about what was going on. Maybe he knew, but he never did anything about it.

[TO DELBERT] IT MUST HAVE BEEN PURE HELL FOR HER.

Shit, man, that's what I'm saying. Most of my siblings don't even know what was going on while she was growing up. And they think they're having problems. What she went through, man, I wish those guys were still living.

DID SHE EVER CONFRONT THESE BOYS WHEN SHE BECAME OLDER?

Did you see those two boys who abused you lately?

Not so. I never saw them again.

What about the girls?

Yes, I know they were living in the Naschitti area but they are now deceased.

You didn't approach them when they were living and identify yourself?

No, never. One of the girls recognized me but she didn't say anything to me. I wish that I could have been brave enough to face them again and say, "Let's see if you have the guts to hit me again." But they're gone now.

DOES SHE STILL HARBOR HATE IN HER HEART AGAINST THEM?

Do you have any sort of bad feelings against them for what they did to you?

A long time has passed. I have overcome it. All that stuff is in the past. It has no effect on me now. No thoughts or feelings whatsoever. Yes, I know all that has happened but what can I do now that they're gone? I've never thought about revenge or getting back at them. Maybe because the Damons were such nice people that I never had time to think bad feelings against them. Then I met your dad, and that was the turning point and a great step forward.

That's how she is. She's a great woman. She doesn't hold grudges.

* * * * *

DID SHE EVER HAVE ANY KIND OF RELATIONSHIP WITH HER FATHER?

How did you get along with your father?

He did not ever come around to see me. I don't think he has ever cared much about me personally. For me, I really wanted a relationship with my

father, but I didn't know where he lived. I think he had some more children, maybe six. Since we have lived here, he has only visited maybe a few times.

Tell me more about what you said about my grandfather when he reappeared in your life.

When my dad returned, he had very poor eyesight and could not see far. I asked him why he let me be abused by that Nez family. "Why didn't you come for me at that time?" I said to him. He told me that Nez's wife prevented him from retrieving or even seeing me. That lady was a very jealous and stubborn individual.

DOES SHE HOLD ANY GRUDGES AGAINST HER DAD FOR ABANDONING HER?

How did you feel about my grandfather in terms of him turning away from you? Did you have any sort of hard feelings against him?

Nothing. He never came around to see me.

I'm asking you whether you held feelings against him.

No, not at all. Although I needed my father, he was never there for me or never bought me anything, not even candy. So what can I do? Nothing.

Mom, how many years did you live with the Charlie Damon family?

Twelve years.

While living with the Damon family, was your life easier or better?

Yes. From that family, I learned to do household chores and how to weave a rug and how to prepare foods—everything about the care of a home was taught to me. That's how I started my life.

HOW MANY PEOPLE IN DAMON'S FAMILY?

Charles Damon had a wife, right?

Yes, and they had three boys and I believe two girls.

WERE THEY ALL NICE TO HER?

Was that family abusive to you in any manner?

They were very good people and kind to me. They had a lot of livestock (over 100 head of sheep) and their house was in a very nice area with many trees that he planted and irrigated. He was a rancher and worked outside all the way until sundown.

What about cows?

They had cows and two donkeys but no horses.

DID THEY ACCEPT HER AS PART OF THEIR FAMILY?

While living with the Damon family, were they accepting of you as if you were one of their children?

Yes, my mother was very good to me. She was of the same clan so we were very closely related. She never mistreated me at all. She had lost her mother also at a very young age.

WHAT WAS A REGULAR DAY LIKE FOR HER WHEN SHE WAS LIVING WITH THE DAMONS?

What was your daytime work at that time when you were living with the Damon family? Was it only household chores?

Yes, my work was only around the house. Sometimes, I hauled things around and tended to the sheep, too, when my older brother was not around. On the weekends, we also hauled things around to sell such as pop, candy, and hamburgers. This is where I first learned to count money.

WHAT DID SHE DO FOR FUN? DOES SHE HAVE ANY HAPPY MEMORIES OF HER CHILDHOOD?

When you were living with the Damons, can you remember any fun times that make you chuckle to yourself? Sometimes people do that when we're alone and think about the past.

Sure, we had chuckle times. My mom and I would be weaving and telling funny stories and laughing.

WHY DIDN'T SHE EVER GO TO SCHOOL?

He's asking about school but I know you never went to school, right?

At that time, the late Nelson Damon (Charlie's son) advised me to care for my mother and not go to school. He knew people from the boarding school used to drive around and look for kids to take to school, but he didn't want me to go. Someone came around in a vehicle a few times for me, but Nelson Damon made me hide so that he could not find me. My younger sister didn't go to school either.

DID CHARLIE DAMON'S CHILDREN ATTEND SCHOOL?

Do you recall if anybody in the family had schooling?

Yes. I remember they were already in school when I came to that family. All of the boys and one of the girls finished school.

DID SHE WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL?

Was it your wish to go to school also?

I do wish that I had gone to school. I knew that I was supposed to go to school, but I didn't because I obeyed what was told to me by my older brother and my mom. At times, I think that I should have been more rebellious and just run away to go to school. I regret not going to school very much.⁸

BUT SHE WENT TO CHURCH, RIGHT?

Is it true that you attended church? Was it a long robe church (Catholic) or short robe (Protestant) church?

It was a Protestant church near where we lived. We would go to that church regularly on Sundays as did everybody in the surrounding community. A Rehoboth pastor would be there along with Leonard Haven, who was an interpreter that brought the sermon into the Navajo language for those who couldn't understand English.

DID SHE BELIEVE WHAT THE CHURCH WAS TELLING HER?

Did you believe the ways of the Christian's teachings?

Yes, I believed both the traditional Navajo way and Christian teachings. Charlie Damon's mother was also that way.

DID THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH EVER SAY THAT THE TRADITIONAL BELIEFS WERE WRONG?

Were you ever approached by the Christian side and told that our ways are not good?

Yes, they told us that but we still held onto our beliefs, both sides.

IS THAT TRUE TO THIS DAY?

To the present day, do you still believe in both sides?

Presently, I only believe in the Navajo ways. I no longer go to church any more, only when I was living with the Damon family. I never went back after I left and met your dad.

WHO DOES SHE PRAY TO?⁹

Well, do you still pray occasionally?

Of course, I do! I pray, pray, pray always. That never leaves me.

Who do you pray to then?

To my god. There's only one god that we pray to for our needs.

* * * * *

HOW DID YOUR MOM MEET YOUR DAD?

How did you come to know my dad?

While I was living at *Toyei*, Charlie Damon had a lot of sheep but there was not enough food out there to graze because there was no grass. So we decided to move the sheep to a green meadow place near our relatives. A family called the Shirleys lived nearby and also there was a building there where Charlie Damon started selling things like flour and other goods. After settling there, that's when I met your dad.

How did you see each other? By horseback?

We had cattle and I used to take the cows to the well. I knew him before he went to the military.

Do you mean the armed forces or the police?

The regular military. But I knew him at *Toyei* and we used to see each other at the squaw dances. He knew that I took the cows to this well and that's where we would meet each other. After that, we would just leave and go our separate ways. He would always say to me, "Let's be together" and "You better run away and be with me." (laughter) So one day, I took the cattle to the well and left them there, and I went to the place where he was working on the road with three other guys and met him. Then he said, "Let's go back together" so we went to his house. I stayed with him from then on.

From that point, you never returned back to where you were living?

No, I never went back.

So you ran away from home again?

Yes, I ran away to your dad's place. About a month later, I was herding sheep and the police came around and told me that Charlie Damon and his wife filed a court action at Fort Defiance against me. He gave me a paper to appear in court. Everybody appeared at the court that day: your (paternal) grandfather and grandmother, Charlie Damon and his wife, everybody. The judge asked me "Why did you run away from your mother?" and "How old are you?" I told him I was twenty-four. "Is this your real mother?" he asked me. "No, my mother has died a long time ago. These are the folks I go around with," I said. Then my mom asked the court to pay for all the gas she burned to come back and forth to court. But the response from the court was no. The judge asked the other party how long I had been living with them and they said twelve years. Then the judge said to me, "You were just living with these people, right?" I said yes. The judge responded to the other party: "But she is twenty-four years old now and she is responsible for her own decisions. Since she has spent so many years with you and put up with a lot, she should have been the one to file a court complaint against you." The judge said that we have the right to be together and the court joined us together in marriage right then and there in front of everybody.

ASK HER TO TALK ABOUT HER MARRIAGE WITH YOUR DAD.

After joining together with my dad in marriage, how was it with both of your lives?

After our marriage was settled, that's when my life began. From our house, we moved to Phoenix.

Was it fun going down to Phoenix?

Yes, it was. Frank and Reyna took us down there where my mother (in-law) and the rest of the family worked as migrant workers picking potatoes, corn, and carrots in the fields. We started to reside there (in Phoenix). While we were living there, your father found a job as a foreman supervising a lot of men. I stayed home and sold food to the workers. But in the summertime, we moved up to Grants and then back to Phoenix in the wintertime. We moved around like that for many years.

So you guys liked being together?

Yes. We had no arguments. But at one time, my mother (Damon's wife) said to me, "What do you see in him¹⁰ and what in the world are you going to do with him because he jumps from woman to woman who are above you, both richer and better looking than you are, and he leaves all of them behind? This will also happen to you one day and you're just going to wander around by yourself. But there will always be a home provided for you here." But I thought to myself, "To hell with what these people are saying to me." That ought not to be said. She's trying to put me in the same category as these other women.

HOW DID SHE KNOW THIS ABOUT YOUR FATHER? DID HE HAVE A BAD REPUTATION?

How did she find about his reputation for running around with different women?

I don't know how she knew. But he convinced me that he would never leave me. He told me that he was going to give me a house and to forget what people say. When we first got together, we didn't even have one chair or one table or not even a coffee pot. But after working, we were able to buy some furniture and a stove. We even had two vehicles, a truck and a car. The pick-up was used for hauling things around at work.

HOW DID YOUR MOM FEEL ABOUT YOUR DAD'S WOMANIZING?

So about my father, going from woman to woman, what did you think about that?

I just thought, "Let things be the way they are." Most men do that anyway. As long as he treats me special and loves me very good.

SHE NEVER FELT JEALOUS TOWARDS THESE OTHER WOMEN?

Were you jealous about his other women?

I was never jealous. It's not worth it to be jealous! "Jealous" is not in my vocabulary.

SHE DIDN'T EVEN FEEL ANY RESENTMENT THAT HE WAS SUPPORTING OTHER WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN SINCE THAT MEANT LESS FOR YOU GUYS?

Did you have any type of feelings against him for supporting Dorothy and her kids? Even though the food he put on their table meant less food for our table?

Not so. I never said anything to him about that. He brought food to them but he still provided food for us, too. He never turned away from us. He went home to Dorothy after working, but their house was close to here. When they were at work, they would bring Marilyn and Michael over here for me to baby-sit. That's when I first found out that he had other kids.

HOW DID SHE FEEL WHEN SHE FIRST FOUND OUT THAT HER HUSBAND HAD KIDS WITH ANOTHER WOMAN?

When Marilyn and Michael first appeared to you, what did you think at first?

Seeing them, it occurred to me that this relationship had been going on for a long time. Since he had another family, I told him to fix up a nice home for them and provide for them. That's what I said. So he built them a hogan. Dorothy was the one who was real jealous. Whenever Dorothy and him would get into an argument, she would tell him to "go run off to that old sidekick lady of yours."

WHAT WAS IT LIKE FOR HER AFTER YOUR DAD PASSED AWAY?

After my dad died, how much did it bother you?

I really felt devastated about his passing. About one month before he died, Dorothy became very mad at me and she moved back to her mother's house. That's when he told Dorothy, "Well, I'll go ahead and move back because you're never going to see me again." Up to this day, I miss him and I still think about him. When you marry a man, he does things around the house like fix holes and work outside in terms of maintenance. That's one thing I miss about him. There's no one around who does that for me anymore. I used to be a hardworking woman. If I was still young, I would do those things myself but I can't anymore.

BECAUSE HE WAS SO CONTROLLING, DID SHE FEEL COMPLETELY
HELPLESS AFTER HE DIED?

*After the passing of my father, how did you think you were going to care for
yourself and all your kids? Or did you think that you couldn't make it alone?*

Of course I was worried about the care of the kids and the whole situation.
Now what? What am I going to do now? But my kids reassured me all the
time that I can do it. That's the only thing I had to keep me going on with
life and it's like that to this day and knowing that I have a lot of kids and
grandkids helps me.

TELL HER TO TALK ABOUT HER RELATIONSHIP WITH HER KIDS.

In your relationship with the kids, how do you put up with us?

First, I really love all my kids. When a week passes by and I don't see them,
I wonder about where are they and how come they don't bother to visit me.
That feeling of loneliness makes me think about the passing of your father
and my brothers and sisters.

WAS IT HARD FOR HER WHEN YOU GUYS LEFT FOR BOARDING
SCHOOL?

*While we were going to school at Tohatchi, what were your thoughts about
us being away from you?*

I constantly worried about the kids leaving the house and going to school.¹¹
It concerned me but, at that same minute, I thought "Why am I worrying
about that for?" I tell myself that everything is okay. I think they're all doing
well wherever they are. For myself, I'm trying to stay strong and keep my
mind on other things so that I will not worry this way.

DID SHE EVER CONSIDER NOT SENDING YOU GUYS TO SCHOOL
SO YOU COULD STAY WITH HER?

*Did you ever think that we should not be attending school when we were
away from you?*

I thought that way, but your father always believed that you kids needed an education to make a future living. He felt it was very important that kids should be in school and not just roam around and do nothing. "Let them finish school," he said. He told me not to worry about the kids.

WHY DOES SHE THINK THAT SHE IS CLOSER TO SOME OF HER KIDS THAN OTHERS?

The question that I'm about to ask you is difficult for him to ask: how do you relate to the kids and favor some and not others? What about the younger sister who lives nearby? How do you feel about that situation? Some of the kids help you out with money or with chores such as painting the house and some don't. People favor kids who do that. I think he knows about that so that's what he's asking about. Who are you interested in and who are you not interested in?

That's right, I agree with that. They (Isabelle and her family) don't say anything to me when I visit. They hardly pay attention to me. The communication is only among themselves. So I just don't bother it.

So they just don't help you?

One time, something had to be fixed inside the house. Irma and Esther pitched in money to fix the damage because they had jobs. That's the only time I can remember that they helped. I wish somebody would paint the house.

How do you relate to that situation? Are you used to it?

The kids mostly communicate in English, and it's hard for me to understand. Without understanding, that's one of the reasons I don't go around to visit them. Since they don't involve me, that's what makes me want to leave. But I'm more comfortable with you, Esther and Irma because you guys speak Navajo and tell me what's going on and what you guys are into.

What's the main reason why you leave? Is it because money is involved?

I think maybe they want me to be by myself, like they're over there and I'm over here. Maybe they think, "Let her be the way she is." They don't pay attention to me. They don't think about my needs. I don't go ask them

for anything. I don't want to ask them for any help. They're old enough and smart enough to be concerned about me.

* * * * *

TELL HER TO TALK ABOUT HER WEAVING.

While you were living with Charles Damon, how did you learn about weaving?

My mother showed me this way and that way while she was weaving. That's how I learned. From then on, I learned on my own.

How do you come up with the designs for your rugs? Did they show you how or was it from your own ideas? Like the moon, the sun, lightning?

The designs I weave are my own. Never would I weave lightning.¹² I can weave anything out of my own designs. My main designs are of the yeii.¹³

HOW DOES SHE SELL HER RUGS?

During those days at the trading posts, you would sell rugs, right? They would be really expensive, right? But nowadays, the rugs aren't sold for much anymore.

Yes, I agree with that. A long time ago, it was a lot of money but now a rug is only twenty bucks. When I was living at *Toyei*, my grandmother, mother and me weaved a hundred rugs. We weaved three rugs a day. I don't know how much the rugs sold for because my grandma and grandpa are the ones who sold the rugs and I never received any money. They never gave me any money for doing all that work, not even a dollar for pop. I never asked them for any money.

DOES SHE KNOW HOW MUCH THE TRADERS SELL THE RUGS FOR?

When you sell a rug at a trading post, do you know that the trader will turn around and sell it for a lot more money?

I don't know.

TELL HER!

The traders get a lot of money for the rugs but we get only a little. For the silversmith, it's the same way.

I don't know that I've been cheated. It doesn't bother me at all. Whatever they do, it's up to them.

Now that you know you're being ripped off, don't you feel that you've been cheated?

No, I don't feel cheated. A rug that we sell will always be twenty dollars whether you're cheated or not. I just thought that all rugs were twenty dollars. On account of that, I'm not really interested in weaving anymore.

You don't go to the trading posts to sell your rugs. You only sell to individuals who want rugs by request, right?

Yes.

You don't sell them in Gallup?

No.

DOES SHE WEAVE ONLY FOR THE MONEY OR BECAUSE SHE ENJOYS IT?

When you're weaving, is it just for money or because you're interested in it?

Weaving is for feeling good personally. It's a way to express who I am. It gives me something to do. When you're sitting around and doing nothing, you don't think anything good about yourself. It builds good character.]

WHAT IS HER OPINION OF WHITE PEOPLE?

What do you think of the White man whom we all know comes along with a lot of deceit and dishonesty?

I hardly ever see any White people around.

What about their presence on the reservation and all the changes they have in mind for us such as boarding schools and trading posts? Do you think it is worth it that they are living around us?

It's half and half. Maybe some of them are useful to us and some of them don't do any good.

WHEN WAS THE FIRST TIME SHE REMEMBERS EVER SEEING A WHITE PERSON?

A long time ago, while you were being brought up, when was the first time you saw White people?

During the time I was living in the Naschitti area, I saw a lot of White church people around there. I don't remember how old I was. I don't count that.

How did you think about them when you first saw them, such as their appearance? Were you curious about them or were you afraid of them?

I was a child at that time. I just wondered who those people are and what are they doing here. They were just around. But they never spoke to me and I never spoke to them.

What do you think about them being here both now and back then?

They're just around. I never think anything about them. That's it. I don't understand them. I don't talk to them. They don't talk to me. So I just let them be.

HAS SHE EVER HAD ANY ANGLO FRIENDS?

When the missionaries were around, did you ever try to communicate with them? Did you pick up any English words? Were they like a friend to you?

I used to pick up a few words by hearing the missionaries at that time but after I stopped going to church, I forgot it all.

WHAT ARE HER FEELINGS ABOUT PEOPLE OF OTHER RACES?

How do you feel towards other races such as Blacks and Mexicans? We see a lot of them in Gallup where they have businesses and they take advantage of us.

I just think they're around. I have no thought about it. I don't know.

What about the Blacks? How did you feel when Ella married somebody from that race?

All I know is that she was in school (Navajo Community College) and she met him. The only thing I didn't like about him was that he was always a troublemaker, and I didn't like that.

What do you think about other Native American people? Do you feel like you get along with them better or is it that you feel better towards the White people?

I can relate with other Native Americans but not the White people because I can't speak their language and I don't understand how they think.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HER TO BE NAVAJO?

This is going to be a difficult question to ask you. We are called Navajo so being a Navajo, is it valuable to be called Navajo in any way? What is it that you think about yourself being a Navajo? Since we live in this area and we are all Navajos, how do you feel about that? Along the lines of learning the traditional ways of being a Navajo, does this mean a lot to you?

Yes, it is essential¹⁴ to me. I understand the Navajo ways and the language even though I have a hard time hearing any other languages. Also my kids are Navajo, and that is good to me. I wish my grandkids and my kids also would learn how to speak and understand Navajo. I don't like that they mainly stick to the English language. If they really understood Navajo, then I could communicate with them and, in return, I can teach them what being Navajo is. That's the reason why I can't communicate with them the way I want to. So now it's just going to waste.

WHAT WOULD SHE TEACH THEM SPECIFICALLY ABOUT BEING NAVAJO?

How would you teach your grandkids if they knew Navajo? What would it have been like?

I would teach them various things such as weaving rugs and the stories behind that, the Navajo traditional ways and the traditional ceremonies, the old stories, how to make traditional food, this and that. The Navajo ways are important.

I ALWAYS HEARD THAT SHE DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ANY OF THE OLD STORIES.

Where did you learn these things that you're talking about like the long time ago stories?

My mother (Damon's wife). She was the one that taught me about this and that, including how to make traditional Navajo foods such as paper bread. Other than from her, there was nobody.

DID SHE TEACH THESE THINGS TO HER CHILDREN?

Concerning us kids, what have you told us about the old stories of emergence?

Who is going to tell me about the emergence? Who was there to tell me about those things? I never did teach you kids anything because nobody asked. Except for Esther, she is the only one who knows how to make corn foods and other Indian meals. She is the only one who asks so I teach her. The other ones don't even ask.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT BEING NAVAJO COMPARED TO ANY OTHER RACE?

With us being called Navajos, what is the most valuable aspect about being Navajo?

(pause) I feel it is very essential to know the language and the Navajo way of living. I don't know about any other way of living.

ASK HER TO GIVE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A NAVAJO?

What is it about being Navajo specifically? As Navajos do ceremonies, weaving, speaking the language, squaw dances...which one of those is important to you for being Navajo?

The language.

Are you still Navajo even if you can't speak the language? What about your grandchildren?

I don't know. (laughter) Maybe they're not true Navajos.

* * * * *

ASK HER TO TALK ABOUT HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED DURING HER LIFETIME, PARTICULARLY REGARDING HOW PEOPLE TREAT ONE ANOTHER. HOW DID THE CHANGE HAPPEN, WHEN DID IT HAPPEN, AND WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

The question now is pertaining to us. From the time we were born, we lived together as a family in one home. We used to eat together and sleep together and shared things as a family. But now we are not close to one another like before. You see that we live apart from each other. Some of us speak English and some of us dress differently. We have disagreements with each other. What do you think about that? What caused it?

When you guys were little, you kids weren't that way. We lived as a family together as one in the same house. But as time went on, they moved away from us and we started separating from each other. I don't know why this situation happened. Maybe people are just sick and tired of one another. That's why they live apart.

Do you think it's because of the boarding schools?

You kids went to school, but we still remained together as a family. You finished school and there was no problem. You still helped each other. Even though you kids lived away from the house, we were still close. But after

you guys got married, everybody started becoming isolated from each other. Once a few of you started living apart, everybody else followed. That's when people started getting selfish. They don't share things anymore.

WHEN I FIRST CAME HERE, THREE FAMILIES LIVED IN THIS HOUSE BUT EACH FAMILY ATE SEPARATELY. THEY EVEN KEPT THEIR FOOD HIDDEN IN THEIR OWN ROOMS. THEY WEREN'T ISOLATED. THEY LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF. ASK HER ABOUT THAT.

Upon coming here for the first time, he noticed that Irma, Isabelle, and Esther all lived in this house. Why didn't you all put your food together to share? Also, they had their own food stashed in their rooms. One family eats, then another, and then another. Why?

I know. Isabelle does that at her house to this day. I don't know why. Maybe it's because of stinginess. Food at our house is open for everybody to eat. But Isabelle kept her own food hidden in her room. Regina would come in here (the kitchen) and cook something and then take the food back to their room. I never knew why they did that. We're not that way in our household.

HAVE YOU TALKED ABOUT THIS WITH ISABELLE?

Have you ever confronted Isabelle about this situation?

I never asked her why she's that kind of person. I'm afraid she might say something harsh back to me. So I don't bother her. She's just stingy. She has always been that way. Whenever it's time to eat, she always chases the other kids out of her house. They're not allowed to eat.

HOW DOES IT MAKE HER FEEL WHEN SHE GOES OVER THERE AND EVERYBODY IS EATING AND NOBODY OFFERS HER ANY FOOD?¹⁵

At times when you go to their house during dinner, why is it that they don't offer you any food?

They don't say anything to me. I would think they would say, "Have some food, mother, come and eat with us." They never ask those kinds of questions to me like if I have eaten lately or if I am hungry. That is why I just leave.

How do you feel about that?

I always think to myself why do they not have loving and hospitable thoughts for me. Don't they think, "Grandma is here. Why don't we give her something to eat? Why don't we give her something to drink?" Why don't they think that way? That makes me think back to a long time ago when your grandmother comes to you, they would invite you to eat. But I just don't bother it.

HOW DID SHE LEARN TO SHARE WHEN SHE WAS RAISED BY A FAMILY THAT DIDN'T GIVE HER ANYTHING?

A long time ago when you were being raised, how was it that sharing was taught to you?

To this day, why are you looked at as a type of person who is friendly and willing to share with others?

It is very hard to be in a situation when someone does not offer you any food and who does not share anything. For me, I'm different. I offer people who visit a cup of coffee or whatever I have. That's how I am. I'm a caring person. That was instructed to me a long time ago. You should offer anybody who comes to visit you a cup of coffee and that person will leave happy. That is what my mother used to tell me.

Why are some of your kids not friendly in that same manner?

I know they're not that way. They're not aware of being friendly. I don't know why. Probably they are thinking the Anglo way. Whenever I make traditional Navajo food, they don't even want to eat it. But they sure love to eat ready-made American food (fast food)! A long time ago, we used to eat whatever we grew. Maybe greediness is part of it.

HOW DOES SHE FEEL ABOUT THE GAP BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS?

From the time you were brought up in your generation to my generation and the generation nowadays, there's a gap between each one of them. For the last one, these kids wear big wide pants. What do you think about the changes from your time to now?

In my time, the White man used to pass out clothing—pants, coats, and so forth—which were too big for us. It was mainly for the boys. I remember my older brother used to receive clothes from the school. Nowadays, the foods are different. There is so much more variety now than in my day. The food we ate is what we grew such as corn. In order for you to eat, you had to grind things up. A lot of things like flour and coffee were scarce back then. Nowadays, we see it everywhere in the stores. When you guys were growing up, everything seemed to be good. There was enough food for everybody, good schooling, and the clothing provided for you was the right size. Nowadays, it seems worse now. Kids are wearing clothes that don't even fit them anymore. It's good to wear clothes that fit you. It's different now. Kids don't listen, they don't understand, they do anything they wish, they're rebellious. There's no discipline. In your era, you were a more behaved generation. You kids would listen and understand things. No problems were reported about you at school. A lot of kids nowadays want to be girlfriends and boyfriends at a young age. Back in our day, no one would ever do that kind of thing. And now race doesn't matter anymore. There's a lot of mixing between different groups of people. I don't like it, but what can I do?

WHAT ARE HER PREDICTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE NAVAJO PEOPLE?

What are your thoughts about what lies ahead for the Navajo?

I don't know. I guess our lives will continue for however long we are living. Our language will never die out even though a lot of English is spoken. Our traditional ways will not end. Everything will continue. Our Navajo way of living will always continue for future generations. All these changes will never affect the Navajo way of life. I've been hearing about all these changes for many years but none of it has changed who we are. The Navajos will live forever.

Grandma Elsie

But you know the young kids are speaking only English. How do you think our Navajo language will not die out?

I heard that Window Rock is offering Navajo language classes. I imagine that some can learn it in school. The Navajo ways are also being taught. There will always be somebody willing to learn.

* * * * *

We forgot to introduce ourselves: our clan, our affiliations, and who you are as a person.

Elsie Shorty is what they used to call me in those days when my dad was still living. I was born for *Tachiinii* (Red Streak Running into the Water) and my dad is the same clan. His name was Joe Shorty. My main clan is *Tsenabilnii* (Person Among Us With Rock). I never knew my paternal grandfather. According to my older brother, my paternal grandfather's clan was *Bitahni* (Under His Cover, Folded Arms) clan. That's who I am as a person.

WAS ELSIE HER GIVEN NAME?

At the time you were born, was your name Elsie?

A long time ago, I was called Asdzaani Bah (A Woman Warrior). Afterwards, when my dad had to fill out a family card (census card), I became Elsie Shorty.

Who gave you that name?

The Charles Damon family started calling me Elsie.

**HOW DOES SHE WANT TO BE REMEMBERED BY HER CHILDREN
AND GRANDCHILDREN AND ALL FUTURE DESCENDANTS?
WHAT DOES SHE WANT THEM TO KNOW ABOUT HER?**

You have many children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. How will they remember you?

Nothing probably. Nobody asks me about anything. Personally, I really love everybody. That's what kind of person I am. My own children, I really cared for them very much while I was raising them. I'm always there for them.

I'm talking about your grandkids. What will they remember about you?

I don't know. Nobody tells me anything. That's what I always think. Normally, you would expect children and grandchildren to say "Mom or grandma, this is what we think about you." Nobody says that kind of statement to me. (pause) The only thing I hope they remember is that I gave them love. Yes, that is how I feel about my kids and grandkids.

THIS IS HER CHANCE TO EXPRESS HERSELF. WHAT ELSE DOES SHE WANT TO TELL THEM?

Now is the opportunity to talk about you as a grandmother because this will be written down. Tell everything about yourself of all you want to be known. As the second-generation grandchildren are here and more will come, what do you think they will remember you for? Does your mind think that far into the future?

I don't know, my son. I can only think to a certain point in time. No, they don't really appreciate anything about me. Sunshine is the only one who asks me about traditional Navajo medicine. I don't know how everybody else will remember me because everything has turned into the Anglo way. Our culture will soon be extinct.

DIDN'T SHE STATE EARLIER THAT THE NAVAJO CULTURE WAS GOING TO LIVE FOREVER?

Way before when we were talking about the Navajo language and ways, you said that the Navajo ways were never going to end. But now you are saying that the Anglo way is dominating.

It is turning more towards the Anglo way. For me, I will continue with the Navajo way of thinking. But that will end when I'm gone. I don't know what the kids will remember about me about after that. There's no one asking questions about me being their grandmother. I can't even speak to them because they don't understand Navajo.

IF SOMEBODY DID ASK ABOUT HER, WHAT WOULD SHE SAY?

How would other people think about you? What will they ask you?

I just don't know. (laughter) You are really right, my little one. Sunshine and Shawna are the only ones that understand Navajo up to a certain extent and can relate to me. The rest of the grandchildren, like the ones that live over the hill, they don't understand Navajo. So when one comes over, we don't understand each other. It's just *hola*¹⁶ to me.

But how do you want to be remembered by them? If they should ask about you one day, your answer could be there for them on paper. The recorder is right here and available to listen to you for anything you want to say.

Yes, that is how I think. I wish the grandchildren could speak and understand Navajo. I want them to learn more about the Navajo ways. But when they come around, they don't ask me any questions. I have three daughters. I wish they would ask me more about what kind of mother I was so they could pass that on to their daughters. But they don't ask me about that, so I don't know how they will remember me. Now I feel like this is how things will be until I die. All my grandkids and second-generation grandkids can remember me a little bit of how I was even though they couldn't understand me. Sunshine wanted me to teach her to weave so I set up a loom for her but, to this day, it's still standing there. She says she wants to learn things from me, but she always blames her job for being too busy.

WE'RE JUST GOING AROUND IN CIRCLES.

These things that will be recorded are things that need to be said. These things will live on even after you pass away. Suppose one of the grandkids knew Navajo and wanted to know something about you, what would you tell them or teach them?

Probably nothing. Nobody hardly comes around.

Just think about it. I mean, for instance, if somebody came over and understood Navajo, what would you teach them or say?

There's a lot of things they could learn from me but they just don't know. There are things that I know that I would like to pass on to them. I would try to teach them whatever I know. If not, then it's not.

WHAT WOULD SHE TEACH THEM SPECIFICALLY, SAY TO SUNSHINE?

Didn't you say that Sunshine understands Navajo? What if she approached you now, what would you tell her?

Things that I know. She really wanted to learn to weave and how to prepare foods like blue bread and blue corn mush. That's what she used to say to me that she was interested in. But she hardly comes around, maybe only on Sundays.

DOES SHE THINK THE CULTURE WILL BECOME EXTINCT BECAUSE THIS KNOWLEDGE IS NOT BEING PASSED DOWN?

So if we don't learn the basic teaching, do you think the Navajo life will disappear?

I guess so. It will all die.

HOW LONG BEFORE THIS HAPPENS?

When do you think the culture will disappear? How many years?

I don't know. There's no way of knowing. Maybe in the next two generations, but I don't know how long it's going to be. The Navajo culture may not die out because, from what I hear on the radio, Window Rock is educating the young ones about Navajo language and there's the Navajo Medicine Men's Association. Maybe it will go on forever. I don't know.

WHAT DOES SHE SEE AS THE MAIN THREATS TO NAVAJO SURVIVAL?

Concerning the Navajo culture, what are the main dangers for it to die out?

Our own people who used to talk Navajo, they're not around anymore. Now the influences of the schools have taken over. They're going in that direction. They no longer want to learn about the ceremonies. They just don't know what it is. Marrying outside the Navajo may be another reason. They don't believe in the Navajo way. It doesn't click for them.

DOES SHE CONSIDER TELEVISION TO BE A THREAT?

What about television? What do you think about it?

It's not worth it. You just look at it for a little awhile and then you don't care for it anymore. But the kids, they really look at it a lot. That's the reason why they don't think anymore. They only care about what's on the television. They follow what they see on there. There are so many unusual varieties of what is happening in the world. That's why kids are not in their right minds these days.

HOW DOES SHE FEEL ABOUT TELEVISION PERSONALLY?

What do you think about television? Are you interested in it?

No, I'm not interested in it. That's the way I felt from way back. I just look at it for a little while and that's it. A long time ago, we never had such things as television so that's why I don't care for it.

WERE THERE EVER TIMES THAT SHE WISHED SHE HAD A TV?

From the time television came into existence, have you ever wished that you had one?

I just wondered if sometime in the future I might have a television. I thought I would own one. But in order to have a television, it takes electricity. That's the main problem.

When your dad was still living and we had electricity, we could have gotten one but we could never afford it. We both agreed that we would have a television but we didn't.

Why didn't dad get a television when we had electricity?

He didn't buy one because he said it would make the kids go crazy.¹⁷ Instead of doing chores outside, he said that you kids would just be sitting here watching TV.

ASK HER TO DESCRIBE THE VERY FIRST TIME SHE REMEMBERS WATCHING TV.

Mom, when was the first time you watched a television?

Who is going to keep track of the days? (pause) For us, we never had one but other households owned them. It was a long time ago when Isabelle first moved into her trailer that I saw the TV for the first time. I looked at it but didn't understand any of it, so I never thought much of it. When I watch television, it is in English so I don't understand what they're talking about. Also, I can't hear it very good.

ISABELLE ONLY MOVED INTO THAT TRAILER TEN YEARS AGO. SHE NEVER WATCHED TELEVISION BEFORE THEN?

Have you ever watched TV anywhere else at someone else's house?

Never. Pearl used to have a TV at her house and you kids always used to go over there to watch TV. But I never had any thoughts about going over there to watch TV.

HOW OLD WAS SHE WHEN SHE KNEW THAT TELEVISION EXISTED?

At what age were you when you first understood about television?

I remember that a TV had existed when your dad was living. At one time, we went to a movie while we were living in Grants. We would be there for a little while and then we would leave.

Did you hear anything about TV then?

I only heard that Pearl had a TV at that time.

What about before that time?

Way back, I never heard about television. They just came about recently.

WHAT KIND OF MOVIES DOES SHE REMEMBER WATCHING?

When you went to the movies with my dad, what kind of movies were showing?

I don't know. It was just a picture to me. I just sat there and watched. Your dad was the only one who knew the name of the movie, and he used to tell me what was happening.

What did he tell you? Was the movie about war or was there kissing involved?

Romantic kissing movies were the only movies we saw. I really hated it. Your dad said that these were really good shows and he was interested in it. But for me, I had no interest in that.

What about Indians and cowboy shows?

We never watched those. We only watched the shows your dad chose.

What about dancing movies?

Yes, we watched those, too, even though they were in English.

So what did you think about all these movies?

To me, they're no good.¹⁸ Those dancing and kissing movies are not for me. I don't like what they do.

WERE THERE ANY MOVIES SHE ENJOYED WATCHING?

Think back for a moment about which movies you have seen that you liked.

From way back, I never had any interest. Never.

HOW OFTEN WOULD SHE GO TO THE MOVIES?

How many times did you go there?

Once in a great while. Maybe once a month or so, we went there when we had nothing else to do. Your dad wanted to go more often and would try to convince me to go but I didn't want to.

WHAT WAS SHE THINKING WHEN SHE SAW THESE MOVING PICTURES ABOUT A WORLD SO DIFFERENT FROM HER OWN?

Back when you guys were going to the movies, did you realize there was anything different? Sometimes, movies will portray people of different races such as Black people or Mexicans and so forth. Movies usually show scenery of different areas not like here on the reservation. What did you think about those?

I just viewed them like they were made that way. They were a picture to look at. I didn't have any thoughts about it. I never had any desire to own any of those things in the movies.

What about those movies that showed different sceneries overseas?

I noticed that those places and people were different but it never had any meaning to me. Your dad used to try to explain it to me, but I had no interest in it. I notice that the pictures are very beautiful to see. People like what they are seeing because the television shows different sceneries and different cultures and people dancing. For me, I really don't care about television. I don't think about owning one or even to sit there and watch it. I view it for a little while and that's it.

EVERYBODY ELSE HERE ENJOYS WATCHING TV AND MOVIES.
WHY DOES SHE THINK SHE IS DIFFERENT?

Other people really enjoy watching TV and movies. Why are you not interested in these shows?

I just never liked it from way back. I didn't go to those places. I just watch what's showing for a little while. It's not worth watching it.

Why do you suppose you are this way? Did you learn this from your mother?

No, this is just the way I feel myself.

HERE WE GO AGAIN. LET'S TRY IT THIS WAY. THERE HAVE BEEN MANY TIMES WHEN I HAVE SEEN HER WATCHING TV AT ISABELLE'S HOUSE. ASK HER TO TALK ABOUT THAT.

At times, you go over to Isabelle's house to watch TV. What is that about? Are you just bored?

I only watch it when Isabelle tells me there is something important showing such as what is happening in Window Rock or Washington. I'm not interested in it, but I just watch it anyway. They also have shows on TV where they are winning money. They grab a wheel and pull it down. They win all sorts of things on there. I wish I could win something like that! I watch that show.

WHAT OTHER TYPES OF SHOWS DOES SHE ENJOY?

You like those money shows. What else do you like to watch?

That's the only one I like. I also like to watch political shows based in Santa Fe. And those mountain scenery shows where people are fishing or there are wildlife. I like those, too.

DOES SHE HAVE A FAVORITE TV CHARACTER?

Is there someone you see that you like?

I know those people on TV are crazy. They kiss a lot, and they dance too much. I don't go for those kinds of shows. I like the money shows because they have a mixture of people like Blacks and Mexicans winning money.

What about Native Americans?

There's hardly any Native Americans on television.

WHY DOES SHE THINK THERE AREN'T MANY NATIVE AMERICANS ON TV?

Why are there no Native Americans involved in shows?

I don't know. Maybe they're not around where they make the shows. Maybe they're all over here on the reservation.

OF THE INDIANS SHE HAS SEEN ON TV OR IN THE MOVIES,
HOW DOES SHE FEEL ABOUT THE WAY THEY HAVE BEEN
PORTRAYED?

Do you like the way Native Americans are shown on TV or do you think they are all fake?

There may be some Indians who are not Navajo but it's hard to tell. Nobody explains those things to me. There's too many Anglos in those shows. The only Navajos I have seen on TV are on the council meetings in Window Rock.

You knows those Anglos are dressed up as Indians, right? What do you think about that?

Do you mean the ones where they are fighting the cavalry men? Yes, I thought they were Anglos. I like those kinds of shows.

That's what I asked you about beforehand! You keep telling me that you didn't like those kinds of shows and now you're saying you do.

I've seen those shows but not often, only once in a while. Those shows portray a lot of killing. It's not worth looking at that. They always killed a lot of Indians and poked fun at us to make us look like we're no good. I know it's not worth it. If there was a real Native American involved in that show instead of a White man pretending to be Native American, I would like that much better. But I just watch it anyway.

There was a movie¹⁹ made over here once upon a time. Do you remember that?

You mean the one where they were riding the horses? That was all right.

THEY MADE A MOVIE HERE? ASK HER TO TALK MORE ABOUT
THAT.

Some Navajos were involved in that movie. They were riding around the tipis. But they weren't being like Navajos. Navajos don't live in tipis or wear feathers.

And they were naked, too!

So what did you think about the movie when it was made here?

I liked it while they were making it. I went with your dad to watch them film the movie. But when it came on the screen, I didn't look at it. The reason why it's not good is because they are just showing themselves and killing each other and all the horses are running into each other. I guess they just like to put those kinds of things into it. To heck with it.²⁰ They should put only good shows on the TV and not show things that are not *ya'ateeh*.²¹

The way they were dressed in the movie, it was understood that there were supposed to be Navajos but they dressed them like other Indians. What do you think about that?

There was a lot of nakedness. The men were only covered on the bottom part. The women, they wear long skirts like the Navajo. They were just being hauled around in the wagons. The wagons looked awfully old. I didn't know whether they were Indian or White. I just look at it like they're all Whites.

FROM WHAT SHE OBSERVED, DOES SHE THINK THAT THE INDIANS WERE PORTRAYED ACCURATELY IN THE MOVIE?

When you used to see the picture being made, did it remind you of how it was a long time ago when we were at war with the Whites?

Maybe that's how it used to be. The movie made me think that the fighting with the Whites was only happening in this area. Nobody ever told me about these things. Who in the world was there to tell me about the past? Maybe that's the way things happened back then. I don't know.

IN GENERAL, DOES SHE BELIEVE WHAT SHE SEES ON TELEVISION TO BE REALISTIC?

When you watch a show, you see people are doing things such as kissing or the show where people are winning money or a show like the one we've been talking about where people are killing each other. Do these things seem real to you?

Yes, I think that's the way the world is going on these days. I believe what's happening on TV is what's really happening.

ASK HER TO BE MORE SPECIFIC.

What in these shows seems most realistic?

All of the fighting and shooting one another. I think that's what's going on in the world. In the picture show, you see it and it's over with. But you turn on the news and you see that the same kind of killing is happening everywhere.

DOES SHE THINK THERE'S SO MUCH VIOLENCE ON TV BECAUSE THERE IS SO MUCH VIOLENCE IN THE REAL WORLD OR IS THERE SO MUCH VIOLENCE IN THE REAL WORLD BECAUSE THERE'S SO MUCH VIOLENCE ON TV?

When you view the violence on TV, does it make people copy those same things to each other because they see it on TV?

I think someone is taping all that violence that is really happening and then putting it on TV.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT SHOULD NOT BE SHOWN ON TELEVISION?

What should not be viewed? Do you think certain things should not be shown so our children cannot copy it?

When they purchase bad movies, they copy what they see. They like to watch the karate movies and then they start kicking each other. That is not good. But if something relating to learning was offered, kids would benefit from what they see and they would be more mature in knowing right from wrong. Then things would be different these days.

How do you feel about the kissing movies?

That's also bad! I don't agree with those kinds of shows. Kids are attracted to shows like that and they pile up to watch those shows.

Is that what makes boys and girls mingle together in a sudden way resulting in pregnancy and don't finish school?

I agree with that. A long time ago, there was no television. During those days, kids were well taught and they never did those things. But kids nowadays, boys meet girls at a younger age. When they're alone, they put in a movie and bunch up²² in front of the TV and start laughing and screaming.²³ My personal feeling is that this is not good for kids.

DOES SHE REALLY BELIEVE THAT KIDS ARE SO EASILY INFLUENCED BY TELEVISION? HOW MUCH DOES TV AFFECT BEHAVIOR?

Kids that are growing up who are watching all this fighting and kissing, are they copying what they see?

Yes. They are learning from it, too. They are not learning what is good but only what is bad. There may be a few kids who know better, but there are a lot more bad kids than sensible ones. Christians are a little bit better because they're told not to do things like that. But they're also told to say no to Navajo culture.

HOW DOES SHE THINK TELEVISION AFFECTS ADULTS?

What about men and women? What do they think about what they see on TV?

I don't know if women think the same things about what they see on TV. Whether women these days like it or not, I don't know. Especially women who have kids, I wonder if they don't like kids who don't listen. Maybe the parents are to blame for allowing their kids to watch TV. They're not strict about what their kids watch. They themselves like to watch TV all the time.

HOW DOES SHE FEEL ABOUT ALL OF ISABELLE'S KIDS HAVING THEIR OWN TV IN THEIR ROOM?

Over there at Isabelle's house, all the kids have TVs in their rooms. What do you think about that?

That's right. Each of the kids watch whatever they want, like those kissing, dancing, and fighting movies. I don't approve of it because that's how they are. But I can't really say anything.

WHY DOES SHE FEEL LIKE SHE CAN'T SAY ANYTHING WHEN SHE IS THEIR GRANDMOTHER?

Why is it that you don't say anything when there is something you don't like?

Because if I speak up against a problem, someone will turn around and say to me "You didn't buy it" and "It's none of your business."²⁴

WHEN SHE DOES WATCH TV, IS THERE USUALLY SOMEBODY THERE TO EXPLAIN TO HER WHAT IS HAPPENING?

When you watch TV, does anybody tell you how it is?

Nobody says anything. The only person is Isabelle at times. She tells me about what is going on within the Window Rock tribal council and overseas. On the other hand, nobody else says a word to me. They are too busy watching TV.

REGINA TOLD ME THAT SHE USED TO WATCH SOAP OPERAS WITH HER.

Regina and Esther are always watching kissing shows. Is that what they always do?

I don't know. I never went with Esther to sit there and watch it with them.

IF NOBODY TRANSLATES FOR HER, HOW DOES SHE UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING?

How do you know about what they are saying on the TV?

I don't hear their conversation. I don't like to watch those shows they put in because I don't understand it.

Grandma Elsie

You're always watching TV. I'm asking you how you understand what is going on.

I just sit there and look at it. While watching it, I see the same type of thing that I don't like. So I just leave.

ASK HER TO ESTIMATE HOW MUCH TELEVISION SHE WATCHES.

How long is it that you like to watch TV?

Just for a little while. I walk around over there and then I come back. Roughly for maybe three minutes. That's it. Sometimes, even when Tashina is the only one around, I don't stay there. One minute and then turn around.

Is that an everyday routine?

Not very often. I don't really go over there at all since there's hardly anybody ever there. Sometimes, it may be as long as two days that I don't go there. There's no one to talk to over there.

WHAT DOES SHE LIKE TO DO WITH HER FREE TIME?

So what is of interest to you since you don't like to watch TV?

Nothing. I used to love to weave when I was all alone. I also do chores around the house. That's the only work I do. Afterwards, I just sit outside and gaze out there.

DOES SHE THINK NAVAJOS WOULD BE BETTER OFF IF TELEVISION NEVER CAME HERE?

Since we are called Navajos, would we be better people if TVs did not come to the reservation?

I believe it would have been good and we would think in a better way if there was no television. People are different these days because they are so in tune with television and they think about television too much. Way back, we never had television. Even now, I don't have one. We could still communicate and there's nothing wrong with that.

Is the radio a lot better?

Yes, the radio is better than TV. The radio gives a lot of news about happenings. They communicate in Navajo.

DOES SHE THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING OUTSIDE OF HERE?

Since you say you don't like TV and you don't understand English, do you think television is good for people who can understand English?

I guess they like it because they learn what is happening throughout the world. If you don't understand English, it's not worth it to watch it.

WHAT DOES SHE THINK LIFE WOULD BE LIKE HERE WITHOUT TELEVISION?

If television never came here, do you think that would be good?

Yes, it would have been good for the Navajo people if it never came. To this day, everybody is up to no good, especially the younger kids. For us old folks, we're too old for those things. For me personally, I don't like television because I don't understand it. That feeling goes back a long time. If it wasn't for television, our people might be a lot closer.

ASK HER IF SHE THINKS TELEVISION HAS PLAYED A ROLE IN THE CULTURAL SHIFT FROM TRADITIONAL COMMUNAL LIVING TO THE PRESENT LIFESTYLE OF NOT SHARING?

A long time ago, we used to all live together and shared everything together. Now, families live apart from one another and they have become greedy. Do you think television has caused these problems?

In those days, it was true that we all shared as a family. We were used to each other. Now I believe that television plays a big part in people living away from each other. And so it's because of TV that people are separated. Things that they show on TV, that's the reason why we live apart from each other. Because I don't have electricity, my kids moved away from me so that they could have electricity. Maybe the reason they don't visit me is because

I have no electricity. They would rather watch TV than come to see me. TV has caused damage to families.

When you watch TV, you always see nice cars and nice homes. Do you think people who watch TV wish they could have those things?

I believe so. They wish they could be this way and live this way. When people get to buy nice things, they don't like to share what they have. They all have TVs in their rooms and live separately. They stop associating with each other and start becoming greedy. That's why when they come to visit, they only stay for a little while and then say "Let's go."

IS THE WAY NAVAJOS WATCH TELEVISION DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE?

The last question I'm going to ask you is if you think we as Navajos watch TV in a certain way unlike how Whites and other Native Americans watch TV? Whites watch TV as a family and they have rules about it. But do you think we watch it without supervision?

If you have children and there's TV involved, parents should have rules about how long they could watch TV. After that, they should have their kids do something else around the house. If you just let a child keep watching it, that's when things go wrong in families. I believe that's the way White families are with their kids. They only watch TV for a little while and then they have to do their chores. For us, we don't do that. There's no limit. All I know is that as soon as Navajo kids come through the door, all they do is turn on the TV and keep watching it. We're overdoing it.

I WAS TALKING MORE ABOUT THE WAY NAVAJOS UNDERSTAND TV.

How do we view television through our Navajo way of understanding? Do we understand television differently? Do we care about what we watch?

If you watch television all the time, then you know what you are watching. There are some good shows to get education from. I don't think they understand that at all. They just look at it to see it. That's it. We Navajos don't know how

to understand the usages of TV. We just look at it and take it for granted. These other nationalities learn how to watch TV and make use of it.

COMMENTARY

“Endeavor to persevere!” -Lone Watie in The Outlaw Josie Wales (Daley & Eastwood, 1976)

Like one of her Navajo rugs, Grandma Elsie’s narrative follows an unpredictable and often wavering pattern. She will interweave her statements by rarely responding to questions directly, although the answers usually emerge later. Needless to say, such a meandering approach renders her narrative style frustrating to follow and difficult to comprehend. Her tendency to resist the conventions of Euro-American autobiography is typical of elderly Native American narrators. In fact, Kathleen Sands (2001) describes such acts as “narrative resistance,” which she defines as “an inevitable but rarely examined outcome of the personal cross-cultural exchange” (p. 137).

Historically, being an Indian grandmother occupies a privileged role in native society. As the cultural torchbearers, Indian grandmothers are responsible for passing down tribal traditions to their descendants. In addition to the usual biological connections, Indian women become grandmothers through culturally and tribally defined roles. For Navajos, clan membership is the primary determiner of relationships and responsibilities. In this matrilineal society, a grandchild shares lineal descent with a maternal grandmother but is “born for” the paternal clan. The lumping together of collateral kin (aunts, uncles, cousins) with lineal kin (parents, grandparents) results in a classificatory system that removes the distinctions of collateral relatives (Schweitzer, 1999). Thus, a woman classified as a grandmother accepts responsibilities and rights towards all clan grandchildren.

Likewise, a woman’s behavior is a widely recognized dimension of a Navajo grandmother’s status, which includes her demeanor during the early stages of her life as well as her interactions with her grandchildren. A woman must *behave* like a grandmother, according to cultural mores, to be *regarded* as a grandmother (Hedlund, 1999). As Witherspoon (1975) observes:

For those who follow American and European cultural beliefs, according to which “real” or “true” kinship is limited to those human beings who are

blood relatives, it must be pointed out that Navajo define kinship in terms of action or behavior, not in terms of substance (p. 21).

Thus, “grandmothers” may be understood as those who behave as grandmothers should, whether or not they actually have biological grandchildren of their own.

Because Navajo society is not only matrilineal but also matrilocal, the Navajo grandmother is both literally and figuratively the center of the family. It is around the mother—and more specifically, around the maternal grandmother—that the family establishes residency. The essential female role in Navajo society emphasized living in close proximity to and maintaining supportive relations with one’s clan relatives.

After the mother-child alliance, the relationship between grandmothers and their grandchildren was described as the “strongest bond” in Navajo culture (Shoemaker, 1989, p. 3 cited in Hedlund, 1999, p. 53). Indian grandmothers are almost universally engaged in childcare and childrearing. The extent to which grandmothers are involved in raising their grandchildren depends on the circumstances of the child’s family as well as the physical and financial capabilities and willingness of the grandmothers. In Grandma Elsie’s case, she has played a significant role in babysitting virtually all of her grandchildren and, more recently, even several great-grandchildren. Esther, Elsie’s youngest daughter, continues to drop off her five children at her mother’s house every weekend and for several months during the summer.

Whether children are being raised on a long-term basis, fostered for a few weeks, or just watched for a few hours, Indian grandmothers continue to exert a significant influence on the young. In whatever circumstances grandmothers care for grandchildren, they carry on a tradition that has roots deep within their cultural pasts. Drawing on the values they had been taught as well as on what they had learned through personal experience, Navajo grandmothers taught their children and grandchildren about “good thinking” (*ya’ateeh ntsaakees*) and “forward thinking” (*naas ntsaakees*) (Benally, 1999, p. 26). Their teachings focused on establishing and maintaining a good life, one in which you have everything you need and one in which family, relatives, and neighbors live and work together in harmony.

Their roles in the enculturation of children have always been important, but today their participation in the welfare of future generations may be especially crucial. Weibel-Orlando (1990) argues that, faced with issues of cultural survival, the effect of enculturation on grandchildren is directed toward promoting and maintaining ethnic identity (cited in Schweitzer,

1999). A grandmother's understanding of Indian identity is an invaluable perspective that she is able to pass on to her grandchildren. Grandmother-as-culture-transmitter may be one of her most significant contributions to the perpetuation of native communities.

However, this has not always been the case. The social climate of the first half to two-thirds of the twentieth century was not congenial to being Indian, and many Indians grew up either ashamed of their heritage or unwilling to acknowledge their native ancestry. Understandably, then, some Indians ignored the teachings of their parents and grandparents until it was too late to learn. Now, as today's tribal elders, they lament their lost heritage. Even worse, they do not possess the traditional knowledge to pass on to their own children and grandchildren. But even those elders who are not tribal sages should still be respected for their life experiences.

More recently, the tide has turned. The current positive regard for Indian elders is due in part to the resurgence of ethnic identity begun during the Indian Renaissance of the 1970s (Schweitzer, 1999). Young men and women, encouraged to be proud of their Indian heritage, have turned to their elders to learn more about tribal beliefs and customs, about being Indian. Jasmine, one of Elsie's granddaughters, has approached her grandmother on numerous occasions and expressed her desire to learn how to weave and cook traditional foods. Regina, another granddaughter, has similarly embraced her native heritage upon reaching adulthood, but everything she is learning about Navajo traditions and ceremonies is being taught to her by her co-workers. She feels resentful that she never learned these things from her grandmother.

Given the rapid onslaught of influences from the dominant society, Grandma Elsie's reluctance to embrace her role as cultural transmitter seems all the more befuddling. Her de facto "don't ask, don't tell" policy implicitly subscribes to a circular logic. While Grandma Elsie continually insists that the reason she has never shared aspects of her life with anyone is because nobody has ever inquired, perhaps the reason that nobody has ever inquired is because of the fact that she has never shared aspects of her life with anyone. The conundrum is mutually perpetuating.

Elsie's own children do not know the details of her childhood or early adulthood. Delbert spends the most time with her, yet even he did not know how his parents first met. When Elsie told this story for the first time, Delbert's genuine curiosity was evident by his litany of self-initiated questions. He admitted to me later that he had never heard most of the things that Elsie revealed in the interviews.

In Grandma Elsie's defense, it should be noted that the Navajo way of teaching is through demonstration rather than lecturing. Children learn by observing and copying as Navajo grandmothers typically "teach" their grandchildren by example. Hedlund (1999) tells of a young Navajo woman who learned everything from her grandmother by watching and imitating: "Her grandmother never 'taught'...her directly" (p. 70). Likewise, Elsie learned to weave by watching her adoptive mother, just as her own daughter, Isabelle, learned to weave by watching her.

Moreover, Grandma Elsie lacks much cultural knowledge to transmit in the first place because of her upbringing as an orphan. Her mother died, her father abandoned her, and she was separated from her siblings. All alone, she was initially taken in by relatives who brutally mistreated her. Elsie reports that she received better treatment from the Damon family, but it appears like she was looked upon as little more than an indentured servant. It should come as no surprise, then, that Elsie does not possess the character traits attributed to Navajo women.

Edward T. Hall (1994) remembers Navajo women of the 1930s as being "strong and tough, often a match for a man in a fight" (p. 116). He shares an anecdote of one young man who had mistakenly thought he had outsmarted both his wife and girlfriend only to find both women waiting for him after he got home: "One had a pick handle and the other had a club. You wouldn't believe what they did to that man" (Hall, 1994, p. 116). Hall's portrait lies in sharp contrast to Grandma Elsie, who was powerless to even voice objection to her husband's blatant indiscretions with a multitude of other women. In fact, she maintains that she never felt jealous: "'Jealous' is not in my vocabulary." Once Elsie learned that her husband had an additional set of children with another woman, instead of getting angry and seeking retribution, she advised him to build them a new home. She was so accepting of the arrangement that she even agreed to baby-sit for Dorothy's kids.

Individualism

Contemporary grandmothers' lives have been shaped and directed by events that have occurred over time within the tribal community and in the society at large. As a result, grandmother roles reflect the trend towards modernity. The ways in which women see and perform their roles as grandmothers have evolved, and new roles for grandmothers have appeared. So whereas a traditional Navajo grandmother focused on increasing her herd of sheep as

a way of ensuring the welfare of her family, her granddaughter—a modern grandmother—stresses the importance of education and wage labor. These changing attitudes and patterns of thinking are reflections of the transformations that have taken place in Navajo culture, in part as reactions to specific historical events and outside influences.

Women born before the turn of the twentieth century grew up when government influence was minimal. Since the turn of the century, the traditional Navajo lifestyle has undergone dramatic changes. The influence of the dominant culture on Navajo life grew rapidly during the early decades of the century as trading posts opened all over the reservation and as agency towns became established, bringing government in the form of boarding schools, hospitals, and jails (Benally, 1999). This Anglo influence was perceived as generally positive by the Navajo, ensuring increased protection from enemies, providing access to material goods such as farm implements and wagons, and opening new markets for handcraft such as handwoven rugs and jewelry (Page & Page, 1995). Simultaneously, however, there was an expansion of rules and regulations that served to restrain and reshape social behavior.

By the third decade of the century, sweeping economic and social reforms were enacted across the reservation, and the pace of change multiplied significantly. By far the most traumatic of these government-mandated reforms was forced livestock reduction. The stock reduction program was designed to bring livestock numbers balance with the available rangeland as well as to improve the quality of the remaining stock.²⁵ With the imposition of grazing areas and the limitation placed on the size of flocks, it was no longer possible to maintain a subsistence economy based on herds and fields. In 1931, Navajos earned about half of their individual income from livestock; twenty-five years later that percentage had dwindled to less than ten percent (Iverson, 2002). Flocks are now small and provide only a fragment of personal and community income. Concomitantly, the economy has changed from a pastoral-agricultural base to one primarily derived from wage work and welfare.

For the women who came of age during the post-stock-reduction era, the concepts of “good thinking” and “forward thinking” mentioned earlier acquired new meaning. Although these women—now grandmothers—continue to stress the importance of family and the maintenance of supportive kin ties, they also emphasize the need to attain an education, to secure a job that will provide a steady source of income, and to provide one’s family with a “modern” way of life that includes a rectangular home with running water and electricity as well as a vehicle for transportation needs (Benally, 1999). They have resigned themselves to accepting that the future will be focused

in the urban areas and that young people are likely to move away from the reservation—and, by extension, their Navajo culture—in order to “get ahead” in the world.

These changes, however, have come at a tremendous cost. Lured by the opportunities outside the reservation, many of the younger generation have left their parents and grandparents behind. Those who remain generally have too many problems of their own to be bothered to check on their relatives regularly. Consequently, a significant number of elderly Navajos on the reservation live alone in isolated areas, abandoned and neglected. There is no one to help them cut firewood or haul water, no one to repair their homes or oversee their medical care, no one to help them get up when they fall.

Schweitzer (1999) describes the conflicting sides of growing old in Native America as the “paradox of aging” (p. 18). On the one hand, cultural mores dictate a rich and supportive environment for the elderly by providing multiple roles and prestige amid family and tribal networks. On the other hand, demographic and statistical data indicate depressing hardships facing elderly Indians. Indian elderly face conditions that have been described as “double or triple jeopardy”—old and a minority, or old, a minority, and poor (Jeffries, 1972 cited in Schweitzer, 1999, p. 13). Aging difficulties and disabilities generally begin for the Indian population earlier than for the general population. Indeed, census data have consistently shown a shorter life expectancy, a lower level of education, higher rates of unemployment, lower income, poorer transportation, more chronic health problems, and a higher percentage of deaths related to disease for Native Americans relative to other ethnic groups.

The most flagrant conditions and long-standing problems faced by Indian elderly include health care,²⁶ housing, and transportation (Kunitz & Levy, 1991). Underlying the unmet needs of Indian elderly are chronic conditions that affect the Indian population as a whole. The lack of money necessarily translates into the lack of food, fuel, and proper housing. Many of the chores young people normally would do if they were home such as patching roofs, carpentry, and general repairs are not being done. The result is a serious deterioration of seniors’ housing.

All of these problems have contributed to a general ambivalence towards grandmothers. While grandmotherhood is generally recognized as important in the structure of Indian families and in the functioning of the tribe, families and communities do not always provide a supportive and caring milieu for their elderly (Schweitzer, 1999). Some grandmothers, particularly those who are frail, are treated badly. The lives of frail elders in contemporary Indian

societies become more fragile when alcoholism and drug abuse are present. These conditions render culturally prescribed positive behavior toward the elders, whether they are frail or healthy, difficult or impossible. Family and tribal factionalism adds further disruption. Indeed, perhaps it is unrealistic to expect the problems of the elderly to be alleviated when families and communities are not functioning properly.

The economic shift from horticulture to wage labor has also entailed a cultural shift from communalism to individualism. In particular, the emphasis on individual success at the cost of group welfare has disrupted familial bonds. Navajos traditionally had a strong tradition of extended families living together and mutual cooperation between kinship groups. Once children became primarily socialized by boarding schools, however, they grew up estranged from their siblings, parents and grandparents.

Anthropologist Karen Ritts Benally collected the life history of Helen Claschee during the summer of 1984 when she was approximately 100 years of age. Although the elderly woman's body was frail, her mind was still very alert, as evident in the following passage where Helen decries the individualistic spirit that has overcome the Navajo people:

I wanted to show on record that we're still all related. We cannot say, "Move away. This is ours. This is yours. This is how much is mine." We cannot say these things because we are all so related that it is impossible to say, "No, you cannot live here." It was all shared....People are intertwined, like weaving. If some start pulling at the threads, like some of those people who are pushing are, they may pull the whole fabric apart. I see that in the future there's going to be a lot of people saying no to their relatives. And I just want to make sure that people who are related will learn that they have to share (cited in Benally, 1999, pp. 30-31).

This sentiment for preferring the sharing spirit of the past is echoed by Helen's granddaughter, Lilly George, who has become a grandmother herself:

During our younger days, people helped one another a lot. It was just a general practice they had. In the old days, even if a stranger came to the house, we would feed them and give them coffee. People aren't like that anymore. I think it's the trend. All over it's like that. Families would rather be responsible for their own immediate family these days, not for their relatives. This probably has something to do with the current economic situation. People still get together for holidays and for special events. But they don't help each other

like they used to...No one feels compelled to assist others any longer (cited in Benally, 1999, pp. 48-49).

During our interviews, Grandma Elsie expressed the same lamentations practically verbatim. Here, she sadly describes her feelings about never being offered food by her daughter and her grandchildren:

They don't say anything to me. I would think they would say, "Have some food, mother, come and eat with us." They never ask those kinds of questions to me like if I have eaten lately or if I am hungry. That is why I just leave. I always think to myself why do they not have loving and hospitable thoughts for me. Don't they think, "Grandma is here. Why don't we give her something to eat? Why don't we give her something to drink?" Why don't they think that way? That makes me think back to a long time ago when your grandmother comes to you, they would invite you to eat. But I just don't bother it. It is very hard to be in a situation when someone does not offer you any food and who does not share anything. For me, I'm different. I offer people who visit a cup of coffee or whatever I have. That's how I am. I'm a caring person. That was instructed to me a long time ago. You should offer anybody who comes to visit you a cup of coffee and that person will leave happy. That is what my mother used to tell me... They're not aware of being friendly. I don't know why. Probably they are thinking the Anglo way.

Grandma Elsie explained that hospitality was a primary social obligation whenever somebody came to visit. This sentiment was conveyed in the statement "*Cooni holye*," which literally translates as "Here it is, this is for you." People did not ask their guests if they wanted something to eat or drink but just provided it. According to my Navajo translator, Harold Redhouse, welcoming somebody in this way identified yourself as a relative. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, such generosity has largely become a relic of the past as the penchant for stinginess among contemporary Navajos has reached epidemic proportions.

Cultural Authenticity

For Grandma Elsie, the issue of cultural authenticity is really a non-issue. In fact, it was difficult for her to articulate what it means to be Navajo because she has no frame of reference with which to compare. Elsie lacks any competing standards of normalcy for the simple fact that she has never known anything

different. She also asserts that she does not even know any non-Navajos, claiming that she “hardly ever sees” members of other races. One of the few times she comes into contact with Anglos is when she sells her rugs. While weaving is often associated with traditional cultural values—particularly the “old ways” of subsistence—it is actually a conglomeration of foreign influences and marketed, distributed, and tailored for Anglo tastes. Ironically, the “Navajo rug” is something that Navajos themselves seldom use.

For at least the past three centuries, Navajo weavers have produced cloth by hand on their upright looms. Tools and basic techniques were initially borrowed from neighboring Pueblo peoples during the seventeenth century. Traditionally women’s work, weaving was accomplished at home and integrated into the daily round of domestic activities. Well into the nineteenth century, the weaving of wool blankets and garments was maintained both for domestic use as well as for regional and intertribal trade (Hedlund, 1999).

By the end of that century, however, dramatic changes began taking place within the craft as Navajos faced the growing economic, social, and political upheaval of Anglo expansion. The idea for rugs was initiated by cowboys, who found that the blankets were perfect for the cold night on the range—if only they were bigger. Looms increased in size to accommodate these needs. Traders immediately recognized an opportunity to turn the heavier blankets into larger sizes as rugs. Weavers no longer sold to native clientele as the production of blankets and garments was rapidly replaced by the making of rugs and other decorative items geared to a commercial Anglo market. As such, styles and materials changed in response to the outside market’s tastes.

Increasingly motivated by the prospect of financial reward, weaving became more a source of revenue and less craftwork. The prices received for a rug generally depend on the relative technical quality of the weaving and the visual appeal of the design and may range from \$10 to \$200 per square foot (Hedlund, 1999). Although some weavers receive sizable incomes from their work, most—like Grandma Elsie—are small-scale operators whose rugs contributes relatively small amounts of monetary return. Elsie claims that she only received twenty dollars for each of her rugs.

Besides supplementing income, weaving plays a recognizable role in producing and maintaining a positive status for older women and helps provide a pathway to successful aging. The behavior and values associated with weaving embody much of what grandmothers represent in Navajo society.²⁷ Even those who do not actively practice the craft themselves nevertheless associate it with the ideal Navajo woman’s identity (Hedlund, 1999). Through weaving, grandmothers’ social responsibilities and cultural roles become

symbolically manifest and pragmatically maintained in contemporary Navajo society (Hedlund, 1999).²⁸

Between Two Worlds

Twentieth century Native American grandmothers have experienced significant historical changes over the course of their lifetimes. Their lives are necessarily characterized by cultural persistence and adaptation to change. In the early twenty-first century, Indian grandmothers encourage the honoring of traditional ways but show how to accommodate to an ever-changing world, blending traditions and transitions into pathways their grandchildren consider and perhaps follow (Schweitzer, 1999).

Of course, adaptability to change has always been considered a trademark of Navajo culture. Contemporary Navajos live in an increasingly complex world in which they must navigate between numerous powerful—and sometimes competing—cultural systems. There is no denying that changes in the modern world have altered the lived experience of Navajo people. In recent years, Navajo elders, educators, and tribal administrators have come to believe that they must talk about the Navajo philosophical system in order to educate Navajo people in how best to use it as a means for coping with contemporary problems (Schwarz, 1997). In an effort to understand who they are as a people, where they come from, how their world works, and where they are going as a nation, they have objectified, dissected, and analyzed that which was formerly only experienced.

The content of the grandmothering role is a reflection of economic and social changes over time. Although both traditional and modern grandmothers would agree that they want their grandchildren to make a good living, the specifics regarding how one should accomplish this varies. While traditional grandmothers sought to strengthen family bonds through an emphasis on the land and the sheep, modern grandmothers emphasize the need for a good education and steady employment, recognizing that the economic underpinning provided by the traditional way of life is an option for only a few because of a rapidly expanding population, a limited land base, and few jobs available on the reservation (Benally, 1999, p. 50). Although they know that the economic necessity of obtaining stable wage work is likely to result in either temporary or long-term separation of members of the kin group, modern grandmothers take a pragmatic approach in advising the young.

Navajo culture has been undergoing considerable change in response to both internal and external pressures. Families throughout the reservation acknowledge significant changes in their lives and those of their children. Nuclear families are increasingly estranged from the extended family, and especially from the older generation. Many children live apart from their grandparents and are not exposed to the traditional activities of their elders on a regular basis. Young adults, even if they live on the reservation, are often involved in outside schooling and employment that take them away from their extended families and leave little time to participate in kinship obligations.

Today's generation of grandmothers struggle with the ongoing tensions between the old values and new. Grandma Elsie, for example, complains how younger generations not only speak English but also think in the English way. She notices that her grandchildren are reluctant to visit. After staying for only a little while, they are anxious to return to their homes and back to the "modern world." Kids are also not listening to their parents. In her view, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, violence, drugs, and other social ills are all the direct result of alienation from their cultural roots.

Interspersed throughout her narrative are references to changes that Grandma Elsie has observed during her lifetime. The relative ease with which she discusses or casually mentions certain events or different ways of doing things belies the profound transformations in Navajo culture in just the past half-century. Elsie appears to be comfortable with both the old and new, albeit a bit begrudgingly. While she values the continuities in Navajo culture, she also realizes that Navajos must adapt to necessary changes. Indian women have always been forced to be flexible, resourceful, and tenacious in facing struggles for survival and growth in constantly shifting circumstances (Bataille & Sands, 1984). By drawing on her ancestral past for traditional values and spiritual stability, Grandma Elsie sees herself not as someone occupying the margins of two cultures but as someone taking pride in her ability to draw effectively on traditional resources.

As Navajo culture continues to change and evolve, the usefulness of traditional knowledge, and of the grandmothers' roles in embodying and transferring that knowledge, must be constantly reevaluated (Hedlund, 1999). On the one hand, modern Navajo society places less and less emphasis on traditional life and values, which have been replaced by an emphasis on formal education, jobs, and off-reservation priorities such as the pursuit of material goods. On the other hand, revitalization has occurred in the form of increased appreciation for those elements of Navajo heritage that, while perhaps no

longer economically expedient, still function as social and religious markers and ethnic identifiers.

As Navajo culture continues to slip away, the struggle to preserve important aspects has increased. For instance, there is growing evidence that many young Navajo women in their twenties and thirties are learning to weave for the first time, at later ages than women from earlier generations.²⁹ These women recognize weaving as an integral part of their culture and heritage that they would like to maintain. Some have discovered that their artistic efforts may be highly rewarding financially³⁰ as well as personally. Skipping a generation, many of these younger women now look to their grandmothers rather than their mothers for guidance in the craft (Hedlund, 1999).

To some, this may be a case of “too little, too late.” Grandma Elsie herself is uncertain of the future outlook of her people, as she oscillates between optimistically declaring that “the Navajos will live forever” and, just a little later, pessimistically predicting that “our culture will soon be extinct.” A significant reason for the latter outlook, according to her, is the harmful juggernaut called television.

Television

Among my informants, Grandma Elsie has the least experience with television by far. Since she does not have electricity, she has never owned a TV set—nor, she adds, has she ever felt the desire. The only time she watches TV is when she visits her daughter’s house and, even then, her viewing is limited to “only three minutes.” Elsie continually insisted that she had “no interest” in television but later admitted that she is a fan of game shows and enjoys watching cowboy and Indian movies (which she had denied earlier). According to my own observations, Grandma Elsie watches more television than she claims.

Unlike newspapers, magazines, or books, visual media does not require literacy. As George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976) have observed: “With virtually unlimited access, TV both precedes literacy and, increasingly, preempts it” (p. 42). Likewise, in his research among the Warlpiri of Central Australia, Eric Michaels (1994) agreed with what other researchers working in nonliterate indigenous enclaves have recognized: “Electronic media have proved remarkably attractive and accessible to such people where often print and literacy have not” (p. 81). He argues that contemporary media technology has been more readily adopted by traditionally oral indigenous cultures than

written forms of communication because it more easily supports oral narrative forms (Michaels, 1994).

I wanted to determine whether this tendency to skip the literacy stage and jump directly into the visual also applied for Grandma Elsie. Through a series of informal reception studies, I checked to see if she could understand plot, character development, and visual conventions (i.e., dream sequence, flashbacks, etc.) to the point where she would be able to anticipate different plot events and predict logical outcomes as a story line unfolds. As far as I could tell, she could not. Grandma Elsie adheres to a literal interpretation of what she is seeing. In essence, she believes that what she is witnessing on the television screen is actually happening in “real” life: “I think someone is taping all that violence that is really happening and then putting it on TV.”

Does long-term viewing strengthen family relations or alienate people from one another and increase perceptions of social distance? Marshall McLuhan (1967) predicted that the rise of electronic media would result in a “global village” wherein citizens from around the world would become “irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other” (p. 24 cited in Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 337). During the intervening years since McLuhan made his now famous proclamation, mass media have certainly become global in nature. At the same time, however, the promise of a global village remains largely unfulfilled. While McLuhan’s vision suggested an even playing field occupied by equally influential actors with equal access, media ownership has become increasingly concentrated so that, today, only six multinational conglomerates dominate the mass media industry (Bagdikian, 2000).³¹

Indeed, the globalization of mass media has been neither democratic nor egalitarian. Rather, proponents of the opposite view argue that by enabling self-sufficiency, technology has engendered isolationism. In an article titled “Television Meets the Stone Age,” Edmund Carpenter (1971) contends that the introduction of mass media to a group of New Guinea tribesmen irrevocably transformed them from a cohesive village into a collection of separate and private individuals. For centuries, the rich and poor intermingled with ease and wealth was rarely displayed outside the home. Today, outward displays of affluence are ubiquitous. The culprit for the ensuing social divisiveness is all too familiar: American television and films.

There are those who suppose that Native Americans have also not been left unscathed by their introduction to mass media. No less an authority than Vine Deloria, Jr. (1997) has declared that connecting Indian reservations with electricity has had irreparable consequences:

And this electronic network has fundamentally changed Indian behavior. Instead of spending the winter evenings listening to stories of the elders, children now gather around the VCR and watch the same movies that their Anglo counterparts in Boston and Los Angeles are viewing (p. 212).

Grandma Elsie agrees. She blames television for causing individualism: “It’s because of TV that people are separated.” The electronic intruder is responsible for the alienation that separates family members as well as greed for the accumulation of wealth and possessions that precludes sharing and generosity. Elsie believes that everybody would have been better served if the divisive and destructive force called television never came to the reservation.

However, the global spread of mass media signals neither the simple elimination of local cultures nor the inexorable rise of selfish individualism. A “one size fits all” approach to cultural production and consumption simply does not apply. According to Kottak (1990), TV is neither necessarily nor fundamentally an isolating, alienating instrument. Instead, its role in promoting or hindering social interaction depends on the culture it enters. Viewing habits are fundamentally social by reflecting the specific histories of different groups. For Navajos, television does not cultivate an individualist mentality as much as it simply reinforces pre-existing conditions. Although always an easy target, TV is not to blame for isolating people from one another. Television does not take Navajos apart but *keeps* them that way.³²

RESPONSE

Grandma Elsie has always struck me as a very shy person. Although her reticence is typical of most Navajo women, it is also undoubtedly compounded by her upbringing as an orphan. I was initially hesitant to ask her to participate in my study because I had heard about her abusive childhood, and I did not want to stir any painful memories. To my surprise, she was actually quite willing to talk about her experiences, and the only reason that she has never shared her story before is because “nobody asked.”

There is a common perception that elderly natives are reluctant to share personal aspects of their lives with strangers, especially anthropologists. Greg Sarris (1993), a Pomo novelist, quotes tribal women elders’ admonitions about talking to outsiders: “Be careful what you tell” (1993:82 cited in Sands 2001:140). But this is not always the case. Anthropologist Maureen Schwarz (1997) describes how, at the conclusion of her interview sessions with Navajo

elders, younger family members thanked her for asking their grandmother or grandfather questions (p. xvi). One grandson mentioned that he had never heard the stories his grandmother told because “no one in the family knew or thought to ask about them” (Schwarz, 1997, p. xvi).³³

In many cases, anthropologists may be the only ones interested in learning what the old men and women could teach them—subjects which the narrator’s own children and grandchildren could care less about. This is the reason Indian informants sometimes came to regard their anthropologists as surrogate sons or daughters. Atkinson (1998) believes that when you ask for people’s stories, and they tell you what matters most to them or they tell you the meaning of what has happened to them, a “sacred moment” is shared (p. 65). He proceeds to cite the Japanese story, “The Tale of Genji,” in which the title character states, “Because you have listened to my story, I can let go of my demons” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 65). While such feelings of liberation may not have applied to Grandma Elsie, I do believe that giving voice to something in story form often makes that thing recognizable as well as understandable to the teller. Indeed, defining one’s story can also be knowing it for the first time.

Although she was not particularly intent on recording or preserving her life story, Grandma Elsie expressed a sense of “relief” after the interviews were completed: “I wanted to share my experiences and what I went through growing up, but nobody wanted to hear it.” The language barrier impeded direct lines of communication with most of her grandchildren. Relief also came from knowing that her story would continue as a living heirloom that would transmit her understanding of her world to future generations in a language that they could understand.

In keeping with our agreement, I provided Grandma Elsie with a copy of the interview transcript in a sturdy binder. Later, I inquired if she had shared the story of her life with her grandchildren. She answered that she did not know where she put the binder. So I furnished her with two additional sets. A few more weeks passed, and she told me that nobody was interested in reading the document. I asked her if she informed anybody of its availability. In typical fashion, Grandma Elsie replied: “Nobody asked.”

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Grandma Elsie also slurs her speech because she does not have any teeth, which, needless to say, makes her even more difficult to understand. Even some of the translators that I first hired had a hard time deciphering what she was saying.
- ² Unlike Westerners who generally prefer a firm grip and a vigorous up and down motion when shaking hands, Navajos gently clasp their hands together sans any type of movement as a social greeting.
- ³ Maureen Schwarz (1997) similarly found that conducting interviews with elderly Navajos using a younger relative as a translator was effective: "Having family members act as translators worked well because they were familiar with the consultant's speech and could usually understand and translate regional variations in dialect or antiquated phrases" (p. xvi).
- ⁴ This was also true during the reception study following the "world premiere" of the Navajo films at the Pine Springs chapter house when the translator, William Morgan, repeatedly changed John Adair's questions to the Navajo viewers (Interviews of film audience at Pine Springs July 25, 1966).
- ⁵ Another unforeseen obstacle was the fact that many prospective translators warily lost interest once I informed them that I was an anthropologist. I had simply taken for granted that Navajos considered me one of "them," and it was a sudden jolt to my consciousness to realize that strangers did not automatically grant me diplomatic immunity. A few were downright guarded and even suspicious about the prospect of divulging cultural information to an "outsider." At one point, I became so exasperated by having to plead my case that I exclaimed, "But *I'm* different!"

- 6 Toadlena is located near Newcomb, New Mexico, which is approximately sixty miles north of Sage Springs.
- 7 According to Delbert: “Nez was a medicine man. He would often be away for five days for traditional sings. While he was away singing, his boys would gang up on her and abuse her. Nez had three wives and they really abused her. I can’t remember how many kids there were, maybe five boys and five girls.”
- 8 Delbert reveals that his mother has expressed the desire that she could have attended school many times. In particular, she wishes that she could understand English so that she could communicate with her grandchildren or read a newspaper.
- 9 Delbert commented that this was a “stupid question.”
- 10 Damon’s wife actually refers to Elsie’s future husband using a pronoun that refers not to a person but an animal such as a dog.
- 11 Delbert remembers seeing his mom cry whenever they had to return to school.
- 12 According to my Navajo translator, Harold Redhouse, any representation of lightning is a cultural taboo as it represents death.
- 13 The *yeii* refer to the Navajo holy people.
- 14 The phrase Grandma Elsie uses here, “*t’aa akoneehee*” refers to fortuitous circumstances. For instance, if a person was traveling in snow, he might say “It’s a good thing (*t’aa akoneehee*) I had chains in my truck.”
- 15 Just a week before this interview took place, Isabelle had a first birthday party for her infant daughter—and did not bother to invite her own mother.
- 16 “*Hola*” is the Navajo word for “I don’t know.”
- 17 Her exact words were “*doo adahalyaa da*,” which can also mean “out of the ordinary,” “abnormal,” “immature,” and “naughty.”
- 18 According to my Navajo translator, “*too baa’ih*,” can also mean “dirty,” “filthy,” or “ugly.”
- 19 The movie was *Hallelujah Trails* starring Burt Lancaster. Delbert claims that they were all involved as extras, and he remembers how all of the kids would congregate around a van where they distributed free food and refreshments to the locals.
- 20 My Navajo translator informs me that “*nichxoo*” can also mean “don’t touch it,” as in something dirty or disagreeable.
- 21 “*Ya’ateeh*” is the customary Navajo greeting but, in this context, it means “harmonious” or “peaceful.”

- 22 The word Grandma Elsie uses here, “*shijee*,” refers to sheep who are closely gathered in a corral.
- 23 Such boisterousness is also frowned upon because of the social prescription against showing one’s teeth and laughing out loud. For traditional Navajos, to be well mannered is to be reserved.
- 24 The phrase, “*doo nideet’i da*” literally means “it’s not connected to you” as if the connection is by a rope.
- 25 Mandatory livestock reduction caused damage to every other aspect of their lives as well. According to Witherspoon, the sheep herd is a symbol of the life, wealth, vitality, and integration of the subsistence residential unit (1975, p. 87).
- 26 As the major health problems for Indians shift from infectious diseases to degenerative diseases, the need for long-term care of elders assumes prime importance (Schweitzer, 1999, p. 15).
- 27 Weaving falls under the almost exclusive domain of older women. Informal surveys have shown that at least half of adult weavers on the Navajo reservation are over 45 years of age, with many in their late fifties and sixties (Hedlund, 1999, p. 59).
- 28 Families and entire communities express pride in having members who weave, despite the fact that this sort of pride is not a conspicuously indigenous or traditional value itself. Although no longer uniformly practiced, weaving is still acknowledged at individual, household, community, and tribal levels as an important and useful activity for women.
- 29 In contrast to the mid-twentieth century emphasis on middle-aged and older weavers, a growing number of younger women have become interested in the craft since the 1970s—which, not coincidentally, coincides with the Indian Renaissance.
- 30 Moving beyond a sense of weaving as an integral part of the ideal Navajo woman’s role, some of these young women perceive weaving as a means to professional status as Native American artists (Hedlund, 1999). Needless to say, this future generation of grandmothers and weavers may conceive of their roles in considerably different ways than their own grandmothers do.
- 31 The “Big Six” include: Vivendi’s Universal, Viacom’s Paramount, AOL Time Warner’s Warner Brothers, Disney, the News Corporation’s 20th Century Fox, and Sony. In addition, the industry giants also own two of the leading “independent” film companies, Miramax (Disney) and New Line (AOL Time Warner). An even bigger monopoly exists in the music

industry where only five companies account for the vast majority of U.S. music sales: Vivendi/Universal, Sony, AOL Time Warner, Bertelsmann, and EMI (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003, p. 35). By frequently purchasing or merging with their competitors, the largest media companies continue to grow in size and reach. This process of conglomeration and integration fuels the “rich get richer” ethos of the media industry.

³² In his dissertation titled *Making Media Fit: Short-Term Adjustment to a New Communications Technology in a West Javanese Village*, Duncan Holaday (1984) explored how new communications technology was made to fit the existing social system in the village.

³³ Such ambivalence is certainly not limited to Native Americans. Convalescent homes throughout this country are filled with “disposable” elderly of all racial and ethnic backgrounds who have many wonderful stories to tell but nobody interested in listening to them.

Chapter 3

Delbert

ABSTRACT

Delbert has battled the plague of alcoholism for most of his adult life. The death of his younger brother and faithful drinking partner to cirrhosis of the liver would have seemed to serve as a wake-up call. Not only did it not curtail his behavior, he showed up drunk at the funeral. Alcoholism has cost Delbert his family as well as an untold number of jobs. When the author first met him over 30 years ago, he had already abandoned his wife and three children and moved in with his mother. Although he has cohabitated intermittently with several girlfriends since, his primary place of residence remains his mother's house. Not surprisingly, Delbert has also struggled with chronic unemployment. The few odd jobs that he manages to find never last very long because he either quits or gets fired. Although he occasionally earns money through silversmithing, Delbert subsists day-to-day mainly through freeloading off of his mom and girlfriend(s). His desultory lifestyle is both exacerbated and fueled by a lack of hope. This chapter introduces Delbert.

PROFILE

When I first met Delbert over thirty years ago, he had already abandoned his wife and three children and moved in with his mother. Although he has cohabitated intermittently with several girlfriends since, his primary place of residence remains his mother's house. Not surprisingly, Delbert has also struggled with chronic unemployment. The few odd jobs which he manages to find never last very long because he either quits or gets fired. Although he

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3420-5.ch003

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occasionally earns money through silversmithing, Delbert subsists day-to-day mainly through freeloading off of his mom and girlfriend(s). His desultory lifestyle is both exacerbated and fueled by a lack of hope.

Nature of Relationship

By all accounts, Delbert is a very affable individual. Inebriation renders him particularly affectionate, when he is prone to giving hugs—often while dressed only in his underwear. Our friendship can be characterized as jocular, and we communicate like two guys in a locker room. We usually spend our time together trading jokes, the vast majority of which are sexual in nature. Although Delbert is almost twenty years my senior, he refers to me as his “brother.” Sometimes, this fictive kinship is expressed genuinely but is more often stated in the context of asking for a favor, as in “Can you give me a ride into town, brother?”

One day, Delbert decided that it was time to bequeath me with an “Indian” name—which I suspected was part of an effort to butter me up before making another request. The name he chose was “*shinaai*,” the Navajo word for “my older brother.” Perplexed, and a bit disappointed as I was expecting a more earthly moniker such as “Little Elk” or “Kicking Weasel,” I asked Delbert why he chose that particular title. His response was very revealing in terms of how he viewed our relationship. Delbert stated that although I am much younger than him in chronological years, he considers me to be his older brother because I am “smart.” However, he was not referring to my many years of schooling or perceived level of intelligence but to my pragmatic wisdom, evidenced by my unwillingness to become seduced by substance abuse or “dirty women.” As he so eloquently put it: “You have your shit together.” (Sure enough, this impromptu naming ceremony segued into a suggestion to go out to eat—on my dime, of course—to celebrate the occasion.)

Since I have known him, Delbert has expressed the desire to change his ways and get his “shit together.” As his friend, I have tried to help him in whatever capacity I can, whether it be “loaning” him money for “school supplies” or giving him a ride to a job interview. He has left me hanging every time. Other members of the Benally family call me foolish for being so gullible, as they have learned to take his pipe dreams with a heavy dosage of salt or even open contempt. Despite their warnings, I wanted to give Delbert the benefit of the doubt.

Inevitably, for one reason or another, his promises never come to fruition. I must confess to sharing others' feelings of frustration, especially when he did not appear for our scheduled appointments. Since he is not reachable by telephone, it is virtually impossible to locate him. Word of mouth is equally ineffective because no one knows his whereabouts when he is "running around." Whenever I finally did manage to track Delbert down, he would either be drunk or hung over. There have been numerous instances where I have decided to abort an interview rather than succumb to his extortionary tactics of purchasing alcohol for him so that he can get rid of his hangover.

Delbert was not one of my original choices for interview subjects but a last-minute replacement. Many times, I have regretted this decision and seriously considered dropping him as an informant. I am glad that I did not because Delbert turned out to be a great informant as well as a good friend—when he is sober.

TRANSCRIPT

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING INTERVIEWED?

This is not the first time that I went through something like this. Because we used to go on trips—arts and crafts trips—throughout the States. We had TV people coming around and interview us one by one about our culture and how we got started in arts and crafts, specifically silverwork. So we sat down with them and we talked on TV, radio, and what have you.

WHERE WERE SOME OF THE PLACES THAT YOU APPEARED ON TV?

First of all, back in the latter part of the '70s, we went down to Texas. That's where we got on TV and we were in the papers. We had people interview us, like I said, about arts and crafts, our culture, where we're from, and they asked us about our family, things like that. There was myself and my late brother Albert—he's the one who introduced me to jewelry work. He's been doing it for about three years before I got into it because he was out of school and he went into it while I was still in high school. I didn't take any courses in jewelry. He's the one that more or less taught me. So him and then there was Sonny Jim—that's when he was married to Irma—and then three of my other sisters: Isabelle, my other sister Marilyn, and then we had my older sister. She's living in Luepp, Arizona right now. She's a teacher.

Her name is Juanita. And then her husband, he's Crow. Of course, we had to dress up real traditional. And the girls, they were wearing the traditional clothes. They had their hair done the traditional way, and they were wearing velveteen dresses and they had concha belts, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, what have you. I was silversmithing so I wasn't dressed up like a traditional man here on the reservation. I was wearing a concha belt and that was about it. My older sister, Juanita, her husband was dressed up in his traditional outfit with the war bonnet and the buckskin clothing. We went to Houston first and we spent at least two weeks there and we promoted Indian jewelry. It was at a picture framing outfit. Then from there, we went to San Antonio. And then from San Antonio, we went to Austin, Texas. And then from there, we went to Dallas, Texas. Those were the four places we hit.

WERE YOU INTERVIEWED AT EACH PLACE?

Oh, yes. We were interviewed and, like I said, we were in the papers. Throughout the day, we sold jewelry, silversmithed and, then for leisure time activities, we went out and looked at one of those places like the Alamo in Houston. We had a good time.

WAS THIS THE ONLY TRIP LIKE THIS YOU'VE BEEN ON?

This was about the only trip that we've been on. We had told each other that we're going on another trip, but it never happened. I don't know why, maybe because we lost money.

JUST SO YOU KNOW, DON'T TALK TO ME LIKE YOU'RE BEING INTERVIEWED BY A TELEVISION OR NEWSPAPER REPORTER. DON'T PUT ON A SHOW FOR ME. IN OTHER WORDS, I WANT THE *REAL* DELBERT, NOT THE "NAVAJO SILVERSMITH" DELBERT. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

Uh-huh.

OK, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?

Well, I think I'm a smart individual and I'm glad that my mom and my dad raised me to be yourself and to respect others and to respect your culture and your language. I learned that, and I learned that the hard way.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

At that point in time, I used to be abused a lot, verbally and physically.

BY?

By my parents.

BOTH OF YOUR PARENTS?

Uh-huh.

REALLY? I CAN'T IMAGINE YOUR GENTLE MOTHER WHACKING YOU!

Yeah, she was like that. When we were young, we could never sleep as long as we wanted. My dad always used to come around and get us out of bed and tell us to get up and get ready for that particular day. We really didn't have the time to enjoy living like these kids nowadays are. They get up and turn on the tube and all that. It wasn't like that at that time. It was hard-core not only for me but also for my sisters and brothers. We learned the hard way. And then, of course, they really wanted us to go and get our education. So I don't think I had an easy life growing up. It was hard not only for myself and my family, but all the people I knew that I went to school with. They had that same experience. So growing up I didn't have very much fun, but I had to get used to it. I couldn't change it. We used to take care of the sheep and livestock. Even during the summers, when we got off school, we used to go to the sheep camp and prepare sheep for the next months when we were at school. And at school, they used to treat us the same way, too.

TELL ME ABOUT WHAT SCHOOL WAS LIKE.

First of all, I went to school at Twin Lakes. They used to have a day school there. It's just like a boarding school. We lived there and, of course, the people that worked there, they were treating us the same way that we were being treated at home. They were pretty harsh, you know, they'd get after you.

WOULD THEY HIT YOU?

Oh, yeah, even the teachers. At school and at home was basically the same thing. Nothing changed.

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED?

I must have started when I was about six years old. I went to school at Twin Lakes for a couple of years. Then, when I turned eight, I went to Tohatchi boarding school. I stayed there for about six years. After I finally graduated from there, then I went to high school at Wingate, which was another boarding school.

WHAT WAS AN AVERAGE DAY AT BOARDING SCHOOL LIKE?

You get up in the morning and you wash up. The people that work there, they expect you to get out of bed, fix your bed...just like a military sort of thing. They were after you all the time, looking over your shoulder, seeing if you did anything wrong, and things like that. We used to go to breakfast, come back, brush our teeth, go to school, come back in the afternoon, and then just have free time for a couple of hours until supper time. You go to supper and come back. Then you watch TV for awhile. Say if you do something wrong or you get into a fight or you're marking on the wall or something like that, they'll punish you for it. They'll make you stand in the corner or they used to give out what they call demerits. If you do something wrong, they give you two demerits or three demerits. What it means is that you have to work off those three hours before you have leisure time activity.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO TO WORK IT OFF?

You have to scrub the floor with a toothbrush or even mop and sweep up the whole bedroom, you know, just clean up the place. If you do something minor, they just let you stand for maybe a couple of hours. But if you do something wrong again, they give you two more or three. I think some of the people that used to work there, they'd give them to you just to be satisfied.

DID YOU GET A LOT OF DEMERITS?

Not that much. I used to really look out for myself. I'd rather be playing basketball or football or something like that so I sort of looked out for myself.

I HEARD THAT YOU WERE KIND OF A TROUBLEMAKER IN SCHOOL.

Well, uh...(laughter) At one point, I used to pick on guys. When someone gets into a fight, I'd go out there and start picking on somebody, "Hey, you wanna fight?" The boys were looking up to me being a tough guy. Especially some of my relatives—they were younger than I am—whenever they'd get into a fight or something like that, they used to come up to me and say, "Delbert, this guy's picking on me." I'd say, "OK, tell him I'll be waiting for him outside."

SO YOU WERE THE SCHOOL STUD, HUH?

More or less, yeah. They looked up to me because, you know, I was sort of a big guy. Of course, I used to be outstanding in sports. I played softball, I was in track and field, I played basketball. So I was an outstanding person, I guess you could say. And I know some of the guys didn't like it. And the girls, they used to write me notes. I used to write them back on a daily basis. So I guess I was an outstanding type of guy, which made me feel big and all that. But I sort of grew out of it after getting into high school. I participated a lot in sports, and I did pretty good in sports. We used to go to tournaments. Even the schools around here that we used to play against, these guys respected me for the way I played.

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU ENJOYED BOARDING SCHOOL.

I got used to it. Of course, if I go back home, it'd be the same thing anyway so I might as well just take it.

THERE REALLY WAS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING AT HOME
AND BEING AT SCHOOL?

Maybe to a certain extent. When you're at boarding school, you learn how to care for yourself like taking baths and washing your clothes and doing chores, sweeping, stuff like that. I learned that while I was in school, and I used what I was taught when I went back to living with my mom and dad. I learned a lot so there was that difference. I'm not talking about being mistreated and all that. I got used to that. It was nothing big. But as far as learning how to live and how to speak English and how to use your table manners and don't eat with your arms up at the table at the same time, I was taught.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE THAT HELPED YOU?

I think it was good. I think they were trying to teach us how to live in a public environment.

THAT'S NOT HOW YOUR ANCESTORS LIVED.

I know that, but then that's the point. I didn't learn that from my parents or my grandparents because they had their own style. For me, I learned it from school. At that time, I remember thinking, "Good thing that I'm learning it because I'm going to have to use that throughout my life." If I learned the old style, how my parents and grandparents ate and all that, I'm not saying that that was no good. I'm just saying good thing that I learned both sides. When I go home, things are different. When I'm at school, things are different. So I basically used the two different types of living.

IT WASN'T DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO GO BACK AND FORTH?

No, I don't think so because my dad was educated and he was into politics. People looked up to him. My mom, of course, she never went to school. But my dad used to talk to us in English so transferring from one type of living to the other wasn't so hard. My dad was going into the city sort of life because he was a politician and he adjusted to that. He was a role model so I was thinking that I want to be like him one of these days. So that means I have to go out and start living the white man's way. So I was sort of looking towards that way because I didn't think of myself as just staying home and herding sheep all through my life. I was thinking that I want to get educated and be like my dad and any other person that is way up there like a councilman. So basically that was my goal.

HOW OFTEN DID YOU GO HOME?

Maybe about once or twice a month depending on what's going on. Like I said, it wasn't so hard. To begin with, I learned how to live traditionally.

HOW DID YOU LEARN?

Basically, I learned how to talk Navajo. That was my first language. My dad wasn't there for us all the time because he had different women he was

living with. So basically we were living with my mom. She used to teach my sisters how to weave and what have you. Of course, us guys learned how to chop wood, bring water. We never had the time to watch TV.

DID YOU HAVE A TV AT HOME?

No, we never did. We used to do chores. We sometimes go visit our aunt and play with our cousins. We used to herd sheep, come back, rest up, next day do the same routine all over again. We basically ate mutton, potatoes, and then coffee or sometimes tea. We never had pop. When we used to go out and herd sheep, we'd bring back traditional tea and we had my mom boil that for us. We used to have canned milk. We didn't have no fresh milk at that time. Sometimes we had cereal when we were lucky. So when I'd get back home from boarding school, what I learned growing up, it was still in me. It wasn't that hard for me to adjust to both cultures. It was easy for me. I don't know how my other siblings were, but I would imagine they were the same way as I was. We learned traditional ways. We used to attend ceremonies. When the medicine man came around, we used to stay up all night assisting the medicine man. We respected that also. So basically when we came home, we knew what to expect. And then going back to boarding school, the adjustment wasn't that hard.

DID YOU LOOK FORWARD TO COMING HOME?

Always. Because my mom was there for us. And that's where you call home. The reason why I sure wanted to see my mom personally was because we were so close since she was the only one who was there for us. I could see that when we were going back to school, she would sit there and cry. She did everything in her power to care for us. She even did our laundry by hand. At that time, they didn't have no Laundromat. That's when we used to haul all our dirty clothes to the water where it's at right now. She used to give us haircuts just to make us look nice when we went back to school. She used to iron our clothes. She wanted us to look nice to have people respect us. She did everything for us. That's the reason why I still respect her to this day. She always had that love for us. I know she really was down when my siblings passed on. She really was hurt because she had all the love for us and, to this day, she still does. So that's the relationship I have with my mom and that's the reason why I hardly stay here (at my girlfriend's house). I want to be with her because she's getting old. I want her to have that feeling that

I still have that love for her because I just don't want to leave her by herself. I want to be there for her to show that I care for her, and that I want her to spend the rest of her life knowing that I love her.

DO YOU TELL HER THAT YOU LOVE HER?

Yeah, I do. I hug her and kiss her on her cheek. Sometimes I pray in front of her. I pray for her just to show her that I love her. I tell her, "Mom, why don't we sit down and pray." Not only her, but I pray for all my siblings. One of these days, I know she's going to pass on and then it's going to really hit me hard. I don't know how my other siblings think at this point in time. I know they love their mom but I wish they could be there for her, especially my sister, Isabelle. She just lives over the hill but she hardly comes over, maybe once every couple months or something like that. Not only her, but Thompson's always there but he doesn't really... sometimes I think he doesn't really care one way or the other. I think Irma and me are the only two that really do care about my mom.

TALK A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT YOUR DAD.

My dad? I think that he was a mean guy. (laughter) He was a mean dude. He used to...he didn't really physically abuse us but verbally he did. And then he used to be a role model, I guess.

IF HE WAS SUCH A MEAN GUY WHO ABUSED YOU, WHY WAS HE A ROLE MODEL?

I think he wanted to teach us to be tough mentally and physically. He didn't want us just to go out there and start living like some of these other people are: homeless and no education, all the negative issues. He wanted us to be up there where he was, with a better education, have self-respect, and things like that. He wanted us to earn a living. He knew that living was hard and he didn't want us to have a hard time trying to live our lives in this world. He probably knew that it was going to be hard to the point where it is like nowadays. So he wanted us to be up there to compete. He didn't want us to be homeless and be alcoholics and be like that but be up there.

WHAT ABOUT HIM MADE HIM A ROLE MODEL?

People used to respect him. They looked up to him because of the way he talks, the way he dresses up because he used to always wear suits. People used to look at him and say he's a celebrity or something like that. I think that's the reason some of the people that worked at my school didn't really care for us. There always used to be jealousy because of my dad.

YOUR DAD WAS PART BLACK. DID YOU GET TEASED FOR THAT?

Back in boarding school, yeah. I used to get upset and get in fights. Who wants to be called names and all that? So I'd get mad and beat up guys and tell them, "Hey, if you put me down, then I'll put you down for sure to make you understand that I'm still a human like everybody else."

DID YOU LOVE YOUR DAD AS A CHILD?

Oh, yeah. At that point in time, I didn't know that his feelings were just like I described. But now I think that he loved us.

AS A KID, DID YOU FEEL LIKE HE LOVED YOU?

No, uh-uh. I figured he was doing that just to be mean. When he got mad, I used to hate him. But when all these celebrations came around like Christmas and Thanksgiving, he was always there for us.

**HOW DID HE WORK THAT OUT SINCE HE HAD SO MANY KIDS?
WOULD HE SPEND THANKSGIVING WITH YOU GUYS AND
THEN CHRISTMAS WITH MARILYN AND THELMA'S FAMILY?**

He used to consolidate everything with my mom and Thelma's mom. He even used to take both wives out to eat and travel together at the same time.

**BUT HE HAD MORE THAN TWO WOMEN. HE HAS CHILDREN
SCATTERED ALL OVER THE REZ!**

I didn't know about most of those women. That happened when I was still a young kid. The only one I knew about was Thelma's mom and I accepted that. Dorothy used to respect my mom, and then she never said anything against my mom. They were just like sisters. We found out that these were my brothers and sisters, and we just started relating to each other. There were no

hard feelings. But I remember when we first out that they were my brothers and sisters, I don't think nobody liked it.

TALK ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SIBLINGS.

When we were growing up, I guess I was closest to my late brother, Albert, because we were almost the same age. We did things together. We used to go to sheep camp together. We had fun herding sheep on a daily basis, playing all these different games, riding horses, going up the mountains, and learning about these different herbs. We used to bring this natural tea back home and have my mom boil it for us. We used to go hunting for rabbits and prairie dogs. We grew up together, and we went to school together. Of course, he was a couple of years ahead of me. We started rodeoing together so we used to travel a lot. So I was really close to him. And then Roger, he was the next oldest of the guys. Then Eddie came around and I was close to him as he grew up. We played basketball together, traveled together—but not like Albert. And Jasper, there's a big old gap between us so I was never around while he was growing up. On the women's side, Irma is the one that I'm really close to. I used to pick on her a lot. (laughter) We grew up together, went to boarding school, went to high school. She's my older sister so she basically looked over me when I was in school. She used to come around and help me financially because, at that time, my dad was working but he had two families to take care of so financially we weren't stable. So she was the one who used to bring in the bread for me and Albert. She used to buy flour and she used to make frybread and sell frybread at school. Whatever profits she made, she used to divide it between me, Albert, and her. She was more or less like a mother to us, I guess.

* * * * *

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU GRADUATED FROM WINGATE?

I got a scholarship from a junior college in Oklahoma. It used to be Bacone College. It used to be an Indian school. But before I went there, I guess they opened it to everybody because when I went there, there was blacks, whites, different cultures.

WHAT KIND OF SCHOLARSHIP?

Basketball. It was something big when I first found out. But when it came time to leave my family, it felt different because I was going to be away from my family and going to another state. I never had that experience.

I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT WHEN YOU WERE A YOUNG KID IN SCHOOL, YOU WERE LOOKING FORWARD TO GOING OUT INTO THE WORLD.

That's what I mean. I was excited but when the time came around for me to get on the bus, everything changed.

I THINK EVERYBODY GOES THROUGH THAT.

Oh, yeah, that was a different feeling. But I got adjusted.

HOW LONG WERE YOU THERE?

I was there for about a year.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Uh...I guess financial. I couldn't afford it.

BUT WEREN'T YOU ON SCHOLARSHIP?

That was only for one year. Of course, I didn't play ball.

WHY NOT?

I got rejected. Because when I went there, there were all these big *zhinny*^l guys, you know. They were all over 6'6", 6'8" and all that. And here I was, only about 5'11" and I couldn't compete against those dudes. I had the talent, but I was too short. So I didn't make it.

SO THEN YOU CAME BACK HERE?

I came back and found me a job, started working for a construction company in Fort Defiance. That's when I met my wife, started living with her. We never went through a traditional wedding ceremony or church service or nothing like that. So it really was no big deal.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR WIFE.

She was from Blue Gap, west of Chinle. When I was working for that construction company, I used to stay there at the construction site and she used to come around with her older sister. She used to pick me up and we'd go to town, go to movies, what have you, and then go eat. Pretty soon, she found a trailer and that's when I moved in. So we started living together and we had our first kid. Both of us were working so, financially, we were stable. We started moving around to different work sites like Tohatchi, Coyote Canyon, and finally down to Phoenix. We were together for sixteen and a half years.

YOU HAD THREE KIDS TOGETHER, RIGHT?

Lacosta, Shannon, and then Jermaine. It was a good marriage. I liked it. Financially, we were stable just like I said. We had money in the bank, we had two vehicles, we traveled around together a lot. I used to have a company vehicle and I used to take my family with me. We had good times.

WHAT HAPPENED?

When we moved back from Phoenix, we started living with my mother-in-law. I tried to look for employment and I couldn't find employment. Of course, we were out in a remote area around Chinle. Pinon was about the nearest...I wouldn't even call it a town. There was a school there and one trading post and that was it. I tried to get employment, but there were no openings. People out there stick to their job because it's the only job they have out there because it's so remote. I tried Chinle, same thing. I just got fed up and I started partying with her cousins. They used to come around, we'd go over there, drop my wife off, and go to the nearest bootlegging joint and start drinking beer. I just got used to it because I couldn't find anything. And, of course, my mother-in-law didn't like that. Then I just made up my mind. I said I can't find no job so I best come back to Window Rock because maybe I

could find something here. So I moved back to my mom's and I tried looking around again, couldn't find nothing so I started partying again. The mother heard about it and I think she more or less pressured her into divorcing me.

YOU DIDN'T TRY TO WORK THINGS OUT WITH HER?

I would think that she would consult me first. Because if you're married, you have at least about three months to see if you could live away from each other to see if you can consider if you can get back together and all that. But there was no leeway and that was that. I think she was being pressured by her family members.

HAVE YOU GUYS HAD CONTACT SINCE THE DIVORCE?

I used to give her a call and then I used to write letters. Sometimes, when she's around, she stops by the house. There's still a link between us. I still love her for having her share part of my life. And, of course, we have kids.

DO YOU HAVE REGRETS ABOUT LEAVING YOUR FAMILY?

Yeah, sure, who wouldn't? I think that was the best part of my life. I just didn't know that this was going to happen, and I didn't realize that it was going to be hard on me. I thought it would be easier on my own. But then it turned out to be the other way around.

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP LIKE WITH YOUR KIDS?

It was good. Because when we were married, the kids were happy. We were a happy family come to think about it. There was hardly any bad times. When she was in school, I was the one that was bringing in the bread. It was good. After our divorce, everything went down as far as the feelings among the kids.

THEY BLAMED YOU?

I think so. I think my ex-wife's family were the ones who started telling my kids it was my fault, and all the negative things were on me. The kids really were the ones who were hit the most. Their grades went down. They

started having problems. When we were divorcing, our oldest daughter went and started living with this one guy without my consent.

HOW OLD WERE THE KIDS WHEN YOU GOT DIVORCED?

My boy was only about seven years old. And Shannon was about 10 or 11 and Lacosta was probably about 15 or something. She started shacking up with this guy and the mother and the dad are traditional. In the traditional way, they're supposed to pay you, pay the parents. That didn't happen. If I would have known, I would have said, "If you're going to start living with my daughter, I want you to go through a traditional type of ceremony." I just didn't want him living with my daughter because he didn't pay or nothing. I think that would have been appropriate. But now they're just living together and having kids. And here, when it came to me, they started having negative things against me.

DO YOU EVER SEE ANY OF YOUR GRANDKIDS?

Yeah, I do. They finally started calling me "grandpa." But they still don't know me because I hardly see them. Now they moved into Gallup.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE LACOSTA?

I hardly see her. She's always not there. She's going to school and working at the same time. I don't know what kind of business she's in. There's no communication. When we divorced, everything just went down. There's no relationship. That's what I mean, they brainwashed my kids so damn hard that they hardly speak to me. I haven't seen Shannon for the past six years. J.J. is the only one that comes out here, like during spring break. That's the only time I see him. Other than that, I don't see him.

DID YOU HELP SUPPORT THE KIDS AFTER THE DIVORCE?

To a certain extent, yeah.

HOW DID YOU SEND THEM MONEY WHEN YOU HAD NO JOB?

I had temporary jobs. And then, of course, when I did my jewelry.

LET'S REVIEW YOUR JOB HISTORY. WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER YOUR FIRST CONSTRUCTION JOB?

After we had our first kid, I left my old job and we moved to Tohatchi. I was working at a handicapped school as a vocational instructor. She was the secretary so we both worked at the same place. I was there for a couple of years and a half. Then I went from there to Coyote Canyon.

HOW COME YOU KEPT MOVING AROUND?

There's better jobs, better money, and things like that. Who wants to stay at the same place when you're not making that much money? So we just needed to go elsewhere and make more money.

HOW DID YOU GO FROM DOING CONSTRUCTION WORK TO WORKING WITH DISABLED KIDS?

That was because of my aunt, the one who I was telling you about. She was more or less like an administrator there. She got me that job. Then I went back to school for elementary ed[ucation] at the branch. I had a part-time job doing social work at a nursing home. Then we started living at Gallup for about a year and a half. Then Maria applied for college at ASU. That's the reason why we moved down to Phoenix. We lived there for about five years.

DID YOU WORK IN PHOENIX?

Well, I started with temporary employment like daily jobs doing construction or whatever. And Maria was going to school and she got her scholarship so we had some money in the bank. Then finally I got me a permanent job with the State of Arizona as an eligibility worker working with what they call Medicaid here in New Mexico but in Arizona it's called Access. So I had a steady job. I started working for that particular program for about, say, a year and a half again. Then I went to construction school for about six months.

WHY DID YOU GO BACK TO CONSTRUCTION AFTER DOING ALL THE SOCIAL WORK?

They didn't have anything open. So I went to school for carpentry, got my certification. And then we moved back over this way since my kids were

growing up, and I just didn't want my kids growing up in a big city. I wanted them back over here on the rez so they can learn how to communicate with their elders and know at least something about traditional and cultural values. I was hoping that I would find a job. I thought it would be easy finding a job on the rez, but I was wrong. So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I made the wrong move. Now that I think about it, I think we should have kept living in Phoenix. That way, we wouldn't have had the divorce. I would have still had my family.

BUT IT WASN'T COMING BACK TO THE REZ THAT ENDED YOUR MARRIAGE. IT WAS THE DRINKING. DID YOU ALWAYS DRINK?

Oh, yeah, sure. Like I said, I used to go rodeoing with Eddie and Albert, and I used to drink with my friends. Especially when I'm in town, I'd go out to bars and just stay out. It wasn't a problem until I had responsibilities. I couldn't find a job, it was so stressful. It made it more stressful when we didn't have no money.

HOW'D YOU BUY ALCHOHOL?

Friends. When we used to live in Chinle, her cousins, there were about five or six guys that basically did the same thing. The only job they had was, you know, railroad and sometimes they don't work. They'd come around. They'd pawn things at the bootlegging joint like a bracelet or something and get their booze.

WHAT'S A BOOTLEGGING JOINT?

It's just like a normal house out on the rez. They come to town and get their booze by the cases—say about twelve cases of beer, sometimes whiskey if they have the money—and they take it back to the reservation. Since it's hard for people to come into town because they're either on foot or they don't have no money, they usually go to the bootlegging joint. It's out in a remote area. They go in, they get their booze from there, they get drunk. It's an illegal type of business.

THAT'S WHEN THE DRINKING BECAME A BIG PROBLEM?

Oh, yeah. I came back home. I tried to look for employment. I didn't have no transportation so I started hitchhiking around. Sometimes, I'd come to town and go to bars and start drinking with my friends. Sometimes, they'd give me a ride back or sometimes I'd hitchhike and make it back home before dark. If I don't make it home when evening comes around and it gets late, I spend the night out in the boonies.

WITHOUT A BLANKET OR ANYTHING?

During the summer, it doesn't get cold.

WHAT ABOUT DURING THE WINTER?

During the winter, I try not to stay out too late. (laughter) I get on the road early. So that's how it is. I'm not saying that I don't drink no more but I try to limit my drinks. The reason why also is because I'm getting older and, maybe one of these days, I might settle down again.

YOU WANT TO GET MARRIED AGAIN?

Not get married but just living with somebody, common law.

ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU HAVE RIGHT NOW?

I wouldn't call it that. It's not that serious. If it was serious, we'd be living together on a daily basis and things like that. But I stay out here a few days out of the week and then I come home for about a week. So I wouldn't call it living together. We're not serious about it. Because Ann's got her family living with her, and I just don't want to live with no one. If I want to settle down with her, I'd rather live alone with her.

SO WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH HER THEN? WHAT DO YOU CALL IT?

Uh...using each other. (laughter)

WHAT IS SHE USING YOU FOR?

Sex. (wild laughter)

ARE YOU SERIOUS?

I don't know. That's the only conclusion I can come up with. I mean, I'm not working. I think she just needed somebody to live with because she was living with this dude for over twenty-two years. And I think she just got used to having a man live here. She needed male company.

AND YOU NEED FEMALE COMPANY?

Not really. Because I had fun living alone. I got used to living alone and doing whatever I want. I'm not saying that she doesn't tell me to stay here all the time and all that. It's just that it's hard for me to adjust from living by myself and then living with a family.

WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THE FUTURE FOR THIS RELATIONSHIP?

I don't think about the future. I just take it one day at a time. And when she gets mad, I usually just go back. I don't argue with her. I don't think I abuse her. So I just go home, give her time to think about it. Then she picks me up when she's feeling better. So the rope's still loose.

IS ANN YOUR FIRST SERIOUS GIRLFRIEND SINCE YOU GOT DIVORCED?

No. I used to live with some chick in Window Rock. I've known her for about ten years. When I was still married, I met her through my job in Fort Defiance. As a matter of fact, she was going to have a kid for me.

WHILE YOU WERE STILL MARRIED?

Uh-huh. (laughter) When we used to live in Tohatchi, I used to go see her. She was by herself, she was single. She was three months pregnant when she went and had an abortion.

HOW COME SHE GOT THE ABORTION?

She knew that I was married. If she did have the baby, she knew there was going to be a confrontation between me and Maria. So she just got rid of it.

DID YOU WANT HER TO GET RID OF IT?

She didn't tell me until afterwards. If I would have known, I would have told her to have it. Maybe to a certain extent, there might have been problems. But it would have been too late, though.

DID YOU HAVE OTHER AFFAIRS WHILE YOU WERE MARRIED?

Uh...

THAT MEANS YES!

Sure, sure. The way I think about it is that I got married too soon.

SO YOU NEEDED TO SAMPLE THE BUFFET A LITTLE BIT MORE,
HUH?

Sure, just like my dad, I guess.

HE WAS YOUR ROLE MODEL.

Yes, plus you only live once. Make use of it, you know.

DID MARIA KNOW YOU WERE MESSING AROUND WITH OTHER
LADIES?

Uh-huh.

SHE DIDN'T CARE?

She probably cared but then she grew up traditionally. They have to respect that. Because back in the old days, I guess that was a traditional type of living. The women, they respected each other just like my mom and Dorothy. But nowadays, things have changed. They'll put you in jail. But I experienced

that, and it was fun. It was fun having sex with girls from different parts of the rez, not only Navajos but Anglos, too.

HOW DID YOU MEET THESE WOMEN?

Throughout my training. They were the ones who made the first move, let me tell you that. I used to be an administrator and I used to go travel a lot, not only throughout the reservation but throughout cities like Denver, Albuquerque, Phoenix. So I met some Anglo women when I was on my trips. Even on the reservation, there was some Anglo ladies that used to work as teachers.

ARE YOU STILL PLAYING AROUND NOW?

Nope. I just don't think about it. Just like drinking, I have it under control.

WAS SEX AN ADDICTION FOR YOU LIKE ALCOHOL WAS?

I don't think so. It was just more like a game.

LIKE SEEING HOW MANY WOMEN YOU COULD GET?

Yeah, probably.

HOW MANY WOMEN DO YOU THINK YOU'VE BEEN WITH? HONESTLY.

Probably about forty.² That's just a ballpark figure. As a matter of fact, I was thinking about it at one time and I thought, Jesus Christ, all of a sudden this face comes up. Oh, yes, I've been with this woman before! And then I see them sometimes.

DO THEY SAY ANYTHING TO YOU?

No, they just look at me and they ignore me. They probably think, "Hey, I had him before so..."

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THERE WAS A TIME NOT TOO LONG AGO WHEN YOU WERE ON
THE WAGON. HOW LONG WERE YOU SOBER?

I'd say about six months. And then not only at that time, in between, I usually go for about three months here and there.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO MAKE IT THIS LAST TIME.
WHAT HAPPENED?

I went roping with Thompson and, of course, he was drinking with his friends. And I guess I got the urge. And that was that. Then I started again. I had different feelings about that. I thought to myself, should I start again? But then, I thought, well, it's too late.

DIDN'T THE DOCTOR TELL YOU THAT IF YOU DRANK ANYMORE
THAT YOU WOULD DIE?

No, uh-uh. I think it would have already happened. Some of my friends, they went through that. Of course, some of them didn't make it. But I hardly drink hard stuff. Drinking beer, I think it's not that hard on your liver. But most of the guys I know—I *used* to know—they really drank vodka or all that hard stuff. I think that's one of the main reasons why they didn't make it. As long as I stick to beer and I don't drink that much, I think I'll be all right.

ALBERT DIED FROM DRINKING. SO DID EDDIE. THAT WASN'T A
WAKE-UP CALL?

No, uh-uh. I think it's up to you how to control it. Because I remember hearing about Albert, I guess he used to really drink whiskey. Then I saw Eddie doing the same thing. One time, I saw him drinking pure alcohol, rubbing alcohol.

AS CLOSE AS YOU AND EDDIE WERE, AFTER HE PASSED AWAY,
I THOUGHT YOU WOULD DEFINITELY CLEAN UP YOUR ACT.

To a certain point, I did.

BUT YOU WERE DRUNK AT HIS FUNERAL!

Yeah, because I couldn't take it. Sometimes, I think and I wish he was still around. I think that he deserved to live to the fullest extent, but it happened so quickly and I don't understand why it happened. I heard the doctors say that he was a diabetic.

YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT? HOW DID I KNOW THAT BUT YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT?

I didn't know that. Nobody told me. I didn't find out about it until afterwards.

SO HIS DEATH WASN'T ENOUGH, HUH?

Uh-uh.

DO YOU THINK THERE IS ANYTHING THAT WILL MAKE YOU COMPLETELY STOP DRINKING?

Yeah, if I come to my senses. I just need to sit down and really get serious about what I'm going to do. Like if I'm going to go back to school, if I'm going to reach my goal, that's it. And the only way I can do it is start getting my shit together and start thinking about it and see where I'm going. I don't know what she wants to do, if she wants to leave or start living with me just the two of us. That way, I'd know where I'm going. But when we're just living like this, not being serious, I can't set no goals.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?

I want to go back to school and get my degree and be a teacher. And I want to learn more about the traditional type of teaching, meaning that I want to teach cultural values like what the chant is for in Navajo way and things like that. I want to really get into that.

OK, SO LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

I was brought up to respect traditional beliefs. The way I was taught is that you're going to have to believe in the cultural, traditional beliefs because that's the only way you can live in harmony. That was about the first thing I

was introduced to. Whenever somebody gets sick, the belief was that it was something you needed a medicine man to cure. When we were growing up and if somebody got sick, my dad used to go out and get a medicine man for the person. And he or she would do maybe one night or two nights of traditional things or ceremonies. Of course, they used different herbs and corn pollen and things like that. I learned to believe in that, and I respected that. So it's something I learned while I was still young. When I got to elementary school, they introduced us to the white man's way, Christianity. I didn't really know what that was. They just used to send us to either Catholic or Christian church. They asked the parents which church they belong to. I used to go to the Christian church. You didn't have any choice, you just had to go, you couldn't say no. It just came with the school. It was a white man's school, so they were more or less turning us into becoming white people, I guess.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT GOING TO CHURCH?

I didn't really care for it. Basically, I just got used to it.

DID YOU BELIEVE IN IT?

No, uh-uh. I didn't want to comprehend that. I didn't want to understand that white way of living because I didn't belong.

BUT YOU HAD SAID THAT YOU WANTED TO LEARN TABLE MANNERS AND...

But that had nothing to do with the church, though. As far as eating or something like that, I can take that. But as far as the religious, I didn't even want that as part of my life.

DO YOU REMEMBER CONSCIOUSLY MAKING THAT DECISION?

I probably thought about it because while we were going to church, we would just play around, not being serious. They used to make us dress up to go to church, which didn't really occur to me that you had to dress up to go to church. I was just thinking that I would go like this, the way I am. It didn't make sense. We just used to play around going to church, not even being serious about it. Of course, we had to learn the songs and all that and go along with the flow. After I got out of elementary, I went to high school.

There, it's up to you if you go to church or not. So me, I just shut it out. I never went back to church. To this day, I still kid about it. I say, "Don't be telling me to go to church unless it's a funeral." Other than that, I'm not going to church. But I respect that. No matter which church you go to or either if you're a traditional type of person, you're only praying to one god. It's just how you do it, not when you do it. That's my philosophy. You don't have to go to church and pray. You can pray day or night. That's the way I think about it. I just pray whenever I want to. I respect the traditional way more than the white man's way. That's the reason why I moved back from Phoenix so my kids could get involved with traditional values. That's what I wanted for them to learn.

WHAT ARE TRADITIONAL VALUES TO YOU?

It covers everything: what you do, how you talk, how you think. Just like I told you before, I was taught to respect others. That's one of the things. And you don't cuss at people. And you don't tell people to go to hell. My grandpa told me, he said, traditional wise, you talk with your tongue. You don't tell people to go to hell because you're talking with your tongue. And if you say that to another person and, sure enough, if something happens to that particular person, you're going to regret it because you're the one that said that. Things like that is what was taught to me. Throughout my years, one of the things I learned is how to judge people. I can even see a person standing there, I can see that person in the eye and know how that particular person is. Especially when I'm drinking with somebody. When they're drunk, that's when the real person comes out.

LET'S GO BACK TO TALKING ABOUT TRADITIONAL RELIGION.

I guess I had more experience when I was growing up. I remember sitting there with the medicine man when they shaking the rattle. We used to sit by them and shake the rattle while they're singing, keeping up with the beat.

DIDN'T THE BOARDING SCHOOL TEACH YOU THAT THESE THINGS WERE WRONG?

Well, they didn't let us talk Navajo. But I'd rather be with the traditional side. Because in the white man's way, I didn't know what they were telling me about. They were just talking about it, what church was all about, talking

about Jesus and Yahweh. But traditional wise, the medicine man was there so you could *see* what he was doing. In church, they just talk about it. You don't see anything.

BESIDESTHEBLESSINGWAY,WHATOTHERKINDSOFCEREMONIES HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN?

The Evil Way. That's when the evil spirit is upon you and affecting your daily life, your mind, your spirit. When you have that, you're not living in harmony. You're not living to your expectations and you feel hatred inside you, against yourself and against others. So that's when you have to have that healing ceremony.

WHEN WAS THIS DONE FOR YOU?

When I was growing up, probably back in elementary school. During high school, I had the Beauty Way.

WHAT WAS THAT FOR?

Just to live in harmony with nature, living on the good side. You think straight and you're more in tune with yourself, with others. Whatever you do, your mind is more open and you feel like you're a different person instead of feeling down all the time. The Beauty Way is to have you live in harmony with nature. You have that feeling like you could do anything you want. It's just like taking a pill.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

It's like you're energetic. You're open to your family, your girlfriend, your wife, whatever.

WHY DID YOU HAVE THIS CEREMONY?

The opposite of feeling good is feeling down. You're not involved, you don't have energy. I was having bad dreams. That's one of the key points that shows you that you need to have something done for you to get out of that feeling.

WHILE YOU WERE ON THE WAGON THIS LAST TIME, WHY DID YOUR FAMILY HAVE A BLESSINGWAY CEREMONY DONE FOR YOU?

To keep up that feeling.

WHAT HAPPENED?

I guess I didn't have that confidence in myself. It didn't work.

HOW LONG AFTER THE CEREMONY DID YOU START HITTING THE BOTTLE AGAIN?

I don't know. I don't keep track of that. It wasn't that soon or it wasn't that late.

LIKE A COUPLE OF MONTHS?

Maybe about three months.

BUT IF THE CEREMONY WAS PERFORMED WELL, THEN IT SHOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED, RIGHT?

It depends on the individual. You can't go blame the medicine man because he did his part.

DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THAT YOU'RE A MEDICINE MAN?

To a certain extent, yeah. I help people out.

HOW?

Well, I've done this about three times now. I learned that by going through Native American Church. And then I had seen it when my grandpa did that. The way I see it, I was blessed by going through Native American Church. And it is effective when I do it. Because when I done it for these three people, sure enough, man, it worked.

WHO WAS IT FOR?

The first one was this lady. She is related to me on my mother's side. She came up to my mom's house. I guess the word went around that I was doing that at home because, like I said before, me and my mom usually sit down and pray. So this lady came by, and she wanted to have that done for her. I told her that I'd do the best I can. I told her I'm not that good but I'll try and help you. And I did. She said that she got into an accident and she went and totaled her vehicle. And they told her that it's not going to be fixed and she doesn't have a vehicle. So she told me, "I want you to help me out." So I did.

HELP HER OUT HOW?

By praying for her so she can get another vehicle. So I prayed for her and put down some cedar. The following day she got a new vehicle.

HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

Through my prayers. She didn't pay no down payment. She has good credit.

SO THEN SHE WOULD HAVE GOTTEN THE VEHICLE ANYWAY.

No, uh-uh. She had negative feelings about that. She thought that she wasn't going to get another vehicle because that accident was her fault. But then I did that and the following day she got a new vehicle. I was so surprised myself. I just shed my tears.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER TIMES?

The other time, her uncle came by because she recommended me. He said that "I feel down and I'm not interested in nothing. And sometimes, I just want to commit suicide because I'm not getting anywhere." So I went back over there and did it again. And I guess his mood changed. So there it worked again.

WHAT EXACTLY IS IT THAT YOU DO?

I just start praying. What I think about is the patient, what they're going through.

IN ORDER TO BE A MEDICINE MAN, DON'T YOU HAVE TO KNOW
A WHOLE BUNCH OF SONGS?

Not exactly songs. It's just prayer, that's the main thing. What I do is different. I pray for the person and use my eagle feather, some cedar.

WHERE DID YOU LEARN TO USE ALL THAT STUFF?

I just said I had experience watching, seeing how they do it, how they set their feather and everything. And I learned to pray for these different events by going through meetings. Like that lady was in an accident, so you got to think about that and what she's going through. You got to memorize how to pray for each different type of event. Like that guy, it was different for him to get off that negative feeling. So you have to think the good way and leave the bad part out of it.

ISN'T IT STRANGE THAT YOU CAN HELP OTHERS BUT YOU CAN'T
HELP YOURSELF?

I don't think it works that way. See, that's where the money comes in. Because you're putting your life on the line.

HOW'S THAT?

Because whenever you pray for someone, when everything is accomplished, everything goes back. Whatever was bothering that particular person, it goes back to the person that was doing the praying. That's where the money comes in.

SO THE MONEY MAKES THAT SUFFERING GO AWAY OR WHAT?

No, you just have to live with it. The money, depending on how bad the situation is, is just like a reward. If you help these people, it's going to reflect back on your life. You're just going to have to be strong.

HOW MUCH DO YOU CHARGE FOR YOUR SERVICES?

There's no specific deal. I just tell them, "It's up to you. What is your life worth?"

SO WHAT DID THEY PAY YOU?

That lady with the vehicle, she paid me a hundred bucks. And her uncle paid me a hundred bucks. And I did that for...you know my Uncle Francis? He got in an accident and he almost killed three people. That's when he lost his truck. He was really down because those people, they were going to charge him with all the hospital bills. So I did my stuff. And he only gave me about fifty dollars and he promised me that he was going to pay me again when he gets paid. I didn't say anything being that he was my uncle and he's in trouble and all that. The following day he was going to court and the family was going to be there, the ones that he got into an accident with. It was his fault. He was worried, you know, really feeling down. All of a sudden, his name came up. He went to the bench. They said, "Francis, this case is closed."

WHY?

The peoples' lawyer didn't show up. There's no evidence. So they got no case.

HAS FRANCIS PAID YOU YET?

No, he hasn't given me shit yet! This happened last year. If it wasn't for me, he would have been in debt!

HOW ELSE DO YOU GET MONEY?

I get it through silversmithing. I usually don't sell to the big traders in town but I sell it directly, maybe to relatives or something like that. Then sometimes when my mom gets paid, maybe she'll give me about twenty dollars.³ But that's about it. Most of the time, I'm broke like I am right now! (laughter)

YOU DON'T GET ANY GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE?

I applied for...see, I'm disabled.

BULLSHIT. WHERE?

My back. I go to physical therapy every month. So I'm limited. I can't do hard labor any more. I can do paperwork and all of that, but I can't sit for long. I'm taking medication for that, too.

HOW DID YOU HURT YOUR BACK?

I hurt it way back in the latter part of the '80s playing basketball. I slipped on the floor. I never did go to the hospital. I talked to a medicine man and he made me some traditional medicine. And it worked. But then about three years ago, it started coming back again. I went to the hospital and got x-rayed and, sure enough, it was one of my discs in my lower back. Arthritis set in now. They told me that I'm going to have to live with it. They told me that I can go through surgery, but then it's more serious because they might do something to my spine and, eventually, I'll be disabled for good. Then they referred me to social services and I got some kind of grant. Then they looked at my resume. They told me, "Hey, all these things you've done, man, you don't need to be on welfare." They told me I can get a job just like that but I told them that I can't. I'm disabled. I can't work. So I was referred to SSI and I applied for it, but they denied me. The social security office told me to go ahead and re-apply again and keep on trying. To this day, I haven't tried again yet.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE NAVAJO?

I think it's good being a Navajo, being an Indian. I'm glad to be an Indian because the way I think is that we don't have very much of a hardship as the white people do. We're the kind of people that respect mother earth and we pray to mother earth. And we have respect for traditional values. And we pray to our god, and we respect that. We're the type of people that living on this earth means a lot. I don't think the White people take that under consideration sometimes. They're not in tune with mother earth and they don't live in harmony like we do. I think being Navajo is more important because we respect our traditional values more than these other tribes.

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

Because I think more of these other tribes have lost their identity as being Indian. They don't have their language no more. They don't have their traditional beliefs no more. I think being Navajo is still good because we still believe in our traditional beliefs. We still have our language. And good thing that we still have some of our elders that do carry on the traditional beliefs

and all that. That's why I think being Navajo is great. One of the things that I really like is we're increasingly rapidly. We're the biggest tribe here on earth. I think that a lot of teachers are beginning to teach the traditional side where other tribes don't. But being Navajo, we're still trying to teach our kids the traditional way of living.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "TRADITIONAL BELIEFS"?

Traditional ceremonies, song and dance, the language...just all these different types of ceremonies like squaw dances and things like that. And the *kinaalda*, the Puberty Way. The traditional ways are still with us, like I silversmith and my mother weaves and my aunties still raise sheep. That's what's unique about Navajos.

GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF A "TRADITIONAL NAVAJO."

There's my mom. She knows how to weave, she knows how to make traditional food, she knows how to butcher, she knows how to herd sheep, things like that. And my dad, he knew a lot of the traditional stories. I remember when we used to live in the hogan, we'd stay up at night and he would tell us about the [Monster] Twins, how the Navajos emerged from the fourth world, things like that. He knew a lot of ceremonies and different traditional songs like the squaw dance. Sometimes, when we'd come back from school, we used to go to sweat bath with him. He loved all these songs and he used to sing for us in there. I'd sit there and listen but I never learned those songs. Also, I was separated from my family and spent more time at the boarding school. If I went to the public school, maybe I would have picked up something from him by being home every day.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A TRADITIONAL NAVAJO?

Sure. You don't have to know everything. As long as you know a little bit about your culture.

HOW MUCH IS A "LITTLE BIT"?

As long as you learn something about the squaw dance, what they do and all that. For me, I participated in that many times. And then I know how to sing some songs. I think as long as you know your language, you're Navajo.

ARE YOU STILL A NAVAJO EVEN IF YOU DON'T KNOW ANY OF THESE THINGS?

You're still Navajo, but you just don't know about the Navajo way. From what I've heard, there's two individuals that I know of who were adopted by Mormons. They came back to the reservation looking for their extended family. They looked around and they found their family. So, now, they moved back and they're going to be part of the Navajo tribe. Even though they were gone all these years and they were brought up in the city, the White man's way, but they still want to come back and be part of the tribe. So no matter where you're brought up, you're still Navajo. You can always come back, just like that lady that was brought up by the Mormons. And there was also another guy that was brought up by an Anglo family, he came back too. He was living around Monument Valley and I guess his family just went ahead and gave him up when he was only a baby. This was when they were making those movies around Monument Valley and John Wayne was over there and he was the one that gave him that name: John Wayne Cly. But he wanted to come back after all these years. So I don't think it matters where you're brought up.

MOST OF THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS, LIKE YOUR NIECES AND NEPHEWS, KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT THEIR CULTURE EVEN THOUGH THEY GREW UP HERE.

I know. But that is our fault. If the bilingual education was brought up, say, twenty years ago, I think the kids would have been tuned into traditional things. But it just came up about four years ago. So they weren't taught the traditional side.

IT'S NOT THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH KIDS ABOUT THEIR CULTURE. THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO LEARN IT AT HOME.

That's where it comes in as far as education. The way we were brought up was at the boarding schools, being taught the Anglo side. Now, they're into public school where they come home every day. It should have been to where they were being taught the traditional ways of living. They had every opportunity to learn since they go to school and back, but it's us guys who don't teach them. They should have started while they were still young like

I did. That's when there was a lot of medicine men. People were in tune to traditional beliefs. But then everything changed. Now it's too late.

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THIS GENERATION GAP?

I feel sorry for the kids because they don't know which way to turn. That's why they get into jail and alcoholism and what have you. They don't know which way to turn: the White man's way or the traditional type of living.

WASN'T THAT ALSO TRUE FOR YOUR GENERATION?

It wasn't that bad at that time because people that are my age are more in tune with the traditional type of living. They didn't really accept that Anglo type of living.

EVEN THOUGH YOU SPENT YOUR ENTIRE YOUTH IN BOARDING SCHOOL?

That was the past. My time in boarding school had nothing to do with how I'm living now. Just like I told you before, I was already traditional then, not into the Anglo side of living. Nobody's going to change my lifestyle. Even if they try, I'll still go back to the traditional way of living.

DO YOU THINK YOUR LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER OR WORSE IF YOU DIDN'T GO TO BOARDING SCHOOL?

I have mixed feelings about that. Because some of the people around where I lived, they went to public school and they used to come back on the bus every day. I know they were really within the family. They were stuck together and they had that bond. But, me, I was just stuck at the boarding school. With my brothers and sisters, we were more or less separated. We lived in different dorms. To this day, I don't know how it's turned out. The thing that was good about it is that I learned how to fix my bed, how to sweep, how to take care of myself like shower.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR NAVAJOS?

The traditional things I think is going to diminish. There's that self-determination act where they're saying that we're going to live the way the

way we want to live. There's a choice under that particular law. It seems like they're going to go with the Anglo side of living. Well, it depends on what type of family background they have. If they're traditional, they're going to stay traditional. But if their parents are not traditional, the kids are going to move away from the rez and start living at these border towns or cities. But the bottom line is that the traditional way of living is going to diminish. So things are going to change and kids are going to be like they are right now and live like the Anglo way.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOING TO HAPPEN EVENTUALLY?

Eventually, people won't respect each other. The people are not going to be like they used to be. The tribe is going to part.

LIKE THE WAY PEOPLE IN YOUR FAMILY DON'T SHARE WITH EACH OTHER?

When we were growing up, we all lived in one hogan. And all the kids slept together. In the morning, mom cooked something for us and we always shared. We knew we were a family, and everybody loved each other. I remember there were times when we used to hug everybody. People used to share everything at that time when I was growing up.

WHEN DID YOU NOTICE THINGS CHANGING?

I think it changed when we started going to school in the elementary years. It seemed like everybody went their separate ways. Just like I told you before, we started living at the boarding school and we started getting used to boarding school type of living. We still had love but then it wasn't like how it used to be, living together in one house and sharing the same food. It was a lot different. And then we started just gradually growing apart. But my mom was still there. Every time we go back, we still shared the same food. But as soon as we went back to school, that's when it changed again.

WHAT HAPPENED AS YOU GUYS BECAME ADULTS?

I think that was the hardest part. Because as soon as we got out of high school, people started going their different ways. Like I went to Oklahoma to go to school. And then Irma went to Colorado. And then my brother, Albert,

he went to Denver to go back to school. So things started going their own way. Everybody started getting married and having their own friends and things like that. There's no unity after that. The love is still there, but the sharing wasn't because after you start having kids, then you got to start living with your own family. People are doing things on their own, and it seems like they don't even care until you do something out of the ordinary like getting drunk. Then they start looking down on you even though you're still part of the family. Just because you're doing something wrong, they start neglecting you and they don't want you to be involved. In my case, after I started being single, other people sort of pushed me off to the side. Because I'd go out and drink with my friends and sometimes I don't even come home during the weekends and things like that, people started looking down on me. I think the only time that people really come up and start caring about you is when you either die or when something really harsh happens to you like you might get into an accident and you're disabled. But when you're living, just because of all these wrong things that you're doing, they don't really care.

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HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ANGLOS?

I think they're rednecks. They don't really care for Native Americans. I'm a jewelry maker and they've been using jewelry to make themselves billionaires. And they don't care to come back and pour some money back to where they got their money from. They're so fucking stingy. They think they're so rich, and they still look down on us. They probably think that we're not educated that much. But there's some preachers, they try to hang in there. But deep inside, they might be just as bad as the others.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU SAW AN ANGLO?

Yeah, probably when I was growing up, maybe when I was four or five.

THIS WAS WHERE?

Hospital. When you get sick, they take you to the hospital and there's an Anglo doctor. I used to start crying. Right away, it makes you feel like he's a bad guy because he makes you cry. I just saw them as somebody who'll hurt you. (laughter).

WHAT ABOUT YOUR TEACHERS AT BOARDING SCHOOL?

Well, they were really mean. For no reason at all, they'd...this one lady, I remember she was my sixth grade teacher. She used to have this stick about that long, about that round. She'd make us stand in line and tell us to bend over. For no reason! So I've always had that grudge against whites. They're so fucking mean.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY ANGLO FRIENDS?

I don't think so. None.

MOST OF YOUR DEALINGS WITH ANGLOS HAVE BEEN THROUGH SELLING YOUR JEWELRY?

That's about it. They just put you down. Like say you have a watch bracelet and you ask for, say, a hundred or something. They'll just look at you and say, "Hey, I can buy it cheaper from this other person." They'll just put you down. That's the reason why I don't have no feelings for whites. There's some Mexicans...

YOU'RE NOT FRIENDLY WITH MEXICANS EITHER?

I just have this feeling that they're as bad as the whites. Maybe it's just around here in Gallup, but they don't really care for Native Americans. I know they're making money off of Native Americans. They own businesses in Gallup. They're buying Indian jewelry and then selling it for higher prices. They're just using Native American art to get rich. Now the Arabs are the same way now. They just want to get something cheap and just use Indian jewelry to become rich. I hate those Arabs, too. And the blacks, they like to come out and use these Navajo women for sex. I knew a bunch of blacks that came out from the east. They're just going from woman to woman with these Navajos. They have kids and just leave them.

WHAT ABOUT BLACKS IN GENERAL?

They're nice people. I got black friends. But it's just that I hold grudges against them because they're using these Navajo ladies. Some of them are nice, but some of them are assholes.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF BLACK AT ALL?

Not really. I like just being what I am. Color doesn't matter to me.

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DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE LIVING IN HARMONY?

Sure. I usually go out and pray in the mornings. It doesn't matter when. You can go in the afternoons or the evenings, I still pray. And I'm happy.

REALLY?

Yeah. Because I'm looking forward to a lot of things.

LIKE WHAT?

Like the summer, there's a lot of things going on. I'd like to go roping with my brother again. There's a lot of different things that are coming up like pow-wows, the ceremonial. I want to have that stand again. Not what we had last year, but maybe just sell fry bread.⁴ And all these things I like to get involved in.

SUCH AS?

Well, I'd sure like to get my foot into politics.

LIKE YOUR DAD.

Yeah. I'd like to become a councilman if I can. And then I'd like to get my degree like I said. I'd like to be up there one of these days. Maybe living in Window Rock. I'd sure like to have a house like everybody else, have a vehicle. But that's like Navajo heresy. It's taboo or something like that.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

You don't predict your life. You don't try to set your goals so high because you never know when you're going to leave.

IT'S TABOO TO SET HIGH GOALS?

Yeah. Because you don't know when your number is going to come up, so don't set your goals too high.

WHO TOLD YOU THAT?

I heard it way back when I was growing up. I can't say I believe in it, but I'm just living day by day. You can just make short-term goals but not...

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE SOME LONG-TERM GOALS.

That's what I wish. I'm not saying I'm going to do it. It's just a wish.

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE YOUR WISHES COME TRUE?

Just work at it. See what comes about. That's where that day-by-day comes around.

WHEN WAS YOUR LAST STABLE JOB?

Probably in Phoenix. That was about seven years ago.⁵ Then I had some temporary jobs.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR MOST RECENT JOB?

That was with Headstart. I couldn't get along with the staff. I can't work with people that are too...they want you to do this and do that. They're really directive. I can't...

YOU CAN'T TAKE ORDERS?

Not in that way. If they say it nicely, like "Hey, Mr. Benally, can you please..." I like to have respect, you know.

YOU EXPECT YOUR BOSS TO CALL YOU MR. BENALLY?

Yeah, of course. Because it seemed like they don't have as much experience as I have, administrative wise. It seems to me that they're just now learning.

If you look at my resume against theirs, they might have the education and all that but as far as the experience, they don't have that. All these things that they were trying to tell me, I knew before they got into Headstart. Because I've been working with Headstart way back when it just started. I've been a parent coordinator, I've been a master teacher for special ed. All the things that I know now, they're probably just going into that right now. They expect me to re-learn that whole thing I already learned.

SO YOU QUIT YOUR JOB?

I quit. I just worked there for about two weeks.

BUT A LOT OF THAT TIME THE SCHOOL WAS CLOSED BECAUSE OF THE WEATHER. HOW MANY DAYS DID YOU ACTUALLY WORK?

Shit, probably three days.

I STARTED BY ASKING YOU HOW YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF. HOW WOULD OTHER PEOPLE DESCRIBE YOU?

Probably "crazy." Because I talk the way I talk. I like to joke around. I like to laugh about other people, not to make them feel bad but just to make jokes about them. I like to, just like I told you before, go through woman after woman. And I like to get drunk and do crazy things like go hitchhiking around.

SO EVERYBODY LIKES YOU?

I think so.

YOU DON'T HAVE ANY ENEMIES?

I have got some enemies, yeah. They're my friends but, deep inside, they don't like me. Because I'm an outgoing person. Like I'm into sports, I can talk, I'm into rodeos—a jack-of-all- trades in other words. People don't like that. And I could get a girl just by being at a bar, and they come to me. Maybe this guy's been trying to get that chick, and here I come and go up that chick. Then he doesn't like it.

YOU THINK PEOPLE ARE JEALOUS OF YOU?

Yeah. Some guys are like that. One time, a couple of years ago, I went to this bar here in Gallup. I sat there, and I was feeling good. Then all of a sudden, I turned around and one of these guys just came up to me and smacked me right upside my head. For no reason! But it happens every now and again.

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

When I returned to the reservation to begin my research, it appeared as if Delbert finally had overcome his addiction to alcohol. After six months of sobriety, he seemed committed to turning his life around. Members of his family commemorated this milestone by donating their time, food, and money for a Blessingway ceremony followed by a festive celebration in his honor. The show of support even included Delbert's three estranged children, who had not seen their father for a number of years. A loud thud only a few months later was the sound of Delbert jumping off the wagon—again.

For many of his relatives, this latest relapse was the final straw that broke the proverbial camel's back. Everybody felt hurt and betrayed, especially because Delbert appeared so genuine and sincere about making a fresh start. Members of the Benally family have since grown weary of Delbert's routine and have simply given up hope by dismissing him as an incurable drunk.⁶ Perhaps as a self-defense mechanism, they refuse to allow themselves to be set up for another disappointment.

Then again, broken promises are nothing new for Delbert, who can only be described as a classic bullshitter. For as long as I have known him, he has made incessant claims that never materialize—or, as one of his nephews puts it, “he’s all talk.” Whether it is organizing a basketball tournament in honor of his deceased sister or fulfilling his lifelong ambition of acquiring a college degree, nothing seems to progress beyond the utterance phase. Delbert is fully aware that members of his extended family look down on him, especially his younger sister, Isabelle, who does not greet or even acknowledge him anymore. Yet he remains determined to prove his naysayers wrong. Looking forward to an imaginary future by lying to others and, more importantly, to himself is perhaps the only thing that keeps him going.

The bullshitter in Delbert is readily apparent in the interview transcript. He is both an ethnographer's dream informant by virtue of his enthusiastic willingness to share "cultural knowledge" and worst nightmare for the same reason. Such individuals have a long and storied history of leading anthropologists deliberately astray. After his prior experiences speaking with television and newspaper reporters while selling Indian jewelry in Texas, Delbert is familiar with the process of packaging his native culture for consumption by outsiders. Indeed, he knew all the right lines ("living in harmony," "in tune with Mother Earth"). Despite my admonition early in the interview to drop the spokesperson persona, he was clearly operating in a public relations mode, as evident in the "official" sounding tone of his voice and his atypical use of more formal language.⁷

On a more personal level, both features are also indicative of his desire to present himself in as positive a light as possible. His boasts regarding his intelligence and athletic ability culminate with the repeated proclamation of being an "outstanding individual." Even when he is clearly in the wrong, such as abandoning his family and not financially supporting his children, Delbert professes not to be at fault. Like all inveterate liars, he feels the constant need to build himself up as a compensatory mechanism for feeling down. The result is blatant hypocrisy. Marvin, one of my research assistants, remembers how his uncle used to lecture him about the importance of respecting females all the while he was regularly beating and cheating on his own wife. Marlin, my other research assistant, states that his uncle's claims of basketball prowess are greatly exaggerated, if not totally fabricated. In fact, he maintains that Delbert was the only one of his uncles *not* athletically inclined.

But perhaps his most outlandish claim is that he became a medicine man by "watching" medicine men. Such autodidacticism is akin to a person declaring himself competent to perform surgery by virtue of viewing hospital dramas. Becoming a medicine man requires numerous years of apprenticeship under the guidance and supervision of a respected healer. As Tim Giago, the Oglala Lakota publisher of *Indian Country Today*, states: "If you can find a medicine man who started three or four years ago because he had a dream, that's a bunch of baloney. It takes decades of instruction to become a legitimately recognized holy man of any tribe" (cited in Searles, 1994).

Ever since feature films like *Dances with Wolves* (Wilson & Costner, 1990) and *Thunderheart* (De Niro et al., 1992) have commodified and glorified native spirituality, many people in the audience have expressed the desire to experiment with Indian ways. This has provided the opportunity for some unscrupulous natives and pseudo-natives to capitalize on the demand. Since

1970, there has been a concomitant increase in the number of individuals purporting to sell “Indian wisdom” for a fee. Churchill (1992) describes this process as “spiritual hucksterism” and the people who participate in it as “plastic medicine men”—individuals of both genders trading in the commercialization of indigenous spirituality (p. 220). Janet McCloud, an elder of the Tulapip Nation, expresses her dismay at these practices: “It’s not only wrong, it’s obscene. Indians don’t sell their spirituality to anybody, for any price” (cited in Churchill, 1992, p. 217).

Generally, non-Indians have been the ones duped by fraudulent medicine men. But, as McCloud’s non-discriminatory prescription attests, it is equally egregious for Indians to con other Indians—as in the case of Delbert. Whether he actually believes that he is deceiving his clients is debatable, but there is no doubt that he is motivated by economic gain. Contrary to his claim that payment is necessary to compensate the healer for the damage he has incurred by taking on the patient’s sickness, asking for or expecting financial retribution for their services is the most obvious indicator of a plastic medicine man. According to Rick Two Dogs, an Oglala Lakota holy man on the Pine Ridge Reservation who traces his healing lineage back at least 250 years: “Traditional medicine men are not allowed to charge a fee” (cited in Searles, 1994).⁸ For Delbert, being a medicine man for hire is less a spiritual calling born of an altruistic desire to help those in need than just another one of his scams to make some fast cash.

Indeed, the degree to which Delbert privileges his own personal profit over others’ personal welfare is clearly evident in his vitriolic statements regarding his eldest daughter “shacking up with some guy.” His anger, however, is not directed at his daughter for living with her boyfriend and having a child while still a teenager or at himself for abandoning her but at the boyfriend’s parents for not providing him with a dowry: “I just didn’t want him living with my daughter because he didn’t pay or nothing.” Since he made these recorded comments, Delbert has repeatedly criticized his common-law son-in-law—or, as he calls him, “that fat, one-eyed motherfucker”—for being chronically unemployed and taking off for days at a time on drinking binges with his friends only to come home and lay on the couch all day while his girlfriend works and goes to school to support him. Delbert is apparently unaware that he is also describing himself. After all, it is said that women choose to be with men that remind them of their fathers.

If daughters marry their fathers, then sons grow up to become their fathers. This is certainly true in Delbert’s case. Hosteen Benally earned a notorious reputation for being a “ladies’ man.” He has planted his fertile seed in the

embryonic soil of scores of different women throughout the reservation. Nobody knows the exact number of progeny, although estimates range anywhere from “around fifty” to “over a hundred.” Such speculation serves as a source of humor and even pride among some of the male descendants.⁹ On a more serious note, impregnating dozens of women without at least providing for them financially is the ultimate in irresponsibility. While Hosteen supported the children he had with Elsie and Dorothy, all the rest grew up without the presence—financial, emotional, or otherwise—of their biological father. This type of parental absenteeism established a template for his sons to emulate.

Delbert himself is not sure of how many children he has fathered. He figures the number to be “about ten,” but admits that there are likely more that he is not aware of. One day, Delbert casually mentioned how he recently learned that a lady with whom he had a relationship in high school gave birth to his baby. This “baby” is now a woman in her thirties with children of her own. Yet it did not seem to bother Delbert in the slightest that he had missed out on so much of his daughter’s life or that she had to grow up without knowing her birth father. I commonly hear other Navajos (both men and women) use the preposition “for” when identifying the father of a newly born child as in “she had a baby for him.” They do not say “by,” or “from,” or even “with,” but “*for*,” as if the baby was a present that the mother was giving to the man. This peculiar choice of prepositions is especially contradictory since so many Navajo men do not accept the responsibility of raising or supporting their children. In fact, virtually *every* Navajo man I know has abandoned his child. There is a sad irony in that Navajo men continue to insist that their women had a child “for” them but they do nothing “for” the child.

I later learned that both the curious terminology and the ambivalent attitude towards fatherhood derive from clan lineage. As a matrilineal society, all Navajos are “born of” their maternal clan (*nliji*) but “born for” (*bashishchiin*) their paternal clan (Lamphere, 1977, p. 87). Although a child acquires descent identity from his or her father, the child is not placed in the same descent category as his or her father. Whereas the mother-child bond is the primary kinship bond, the father-child bond is relegated to secondary and complementary status.¹⁰ According to Witherspoon (1975), Navajo children often refer to and address their father as an in-law (p. 31). The separateness of the father from the mother-child unit within the family is evident in the phrase “Mr. X and his wife and her children” (Lamphere, 1977). Generally, the intensity or closeness of the father-child relationship varies proportionally to the intensity or closeness of the father-mother relationship. The fact that

there are so many break-ups necessarily results in a decreased involvement of the father in his children's lives.

Individualism

The cultural shift from communalism to individualism mirrored the economic shift from agriculture and animal husbandry to wage labor. Before the transformation to industrial capitalism, Navajos relied entirely on an agrarian economy. The raising of crops and livestock, in particular, required the participation of every member of the family unit. Like many non-Western societies, Navajos employed kinship ties as their primary basis of social organization. For centuries, survival was predicated upon mutual aid and cooperation. Whenever a crisis arose in a family, its members had a wide variety of relatives on whom they could call for assistance. Cooperative kin networks linked extended families, and all members of the family played important roles. This is no longer the case today.

The federally mandated livestock reduction program of the 1930s had disastrous consequences for the traditional Navajo lifestyle. The most immediate and far-reaching consequence for settlement patterns and economic adaptations was that the wealth hierarchy based on livestock was truncated throughout the reservation. Before stock reduction, most Navajo families moved seasonally over long distances. The composition of the co-residential kin groups often varied according to the season as different kin had different sorts of claims on different portions of the range (Henderson, 2000). Thus, seasonal moves helped to integrate an extended family over a wide area and also promoted cooperation among various kin groups in a number of distinct areas. Reduced flocks, coupled with the restricted seasonal moves, diminished the extent of mutual cooperation within and between kin groups.

In the wake of livestock reduction, entering the wage labor market became a necessity for most families. Most jobs were located off the reservation since the population had simply outgrown the capacity of the reservation to support it. During World War II, many Navajos worked in the war industries as well as served in the military. As a result, the new positions of status and authority became linked to participation in the cash economy. This new foundation for income and wealth differentiation necessarily entailed social stratification. Changes in economic strategies, settlement patterns, and extended family residence arrangements over the past five decades have affected the extent and nature of kinship obligations—with whom individuals cooperate, how

they behave toward different categories of kin, and how they conceive of and label these kin (Henderson, 2000).

Born in the 1950s, Delbert came of age during this transitional period. He remembers his early childhood as a time in which everybody lived together in harmony. He paints a portrait of a loving family, and he has particularly fond memories of his caring and devoted mother: “She did everything for us.” Delbert professes to be close to some of his siblings but alienated from others. He blames boarding school for breaking those connections: “If we stuck together as a family like we used to, maybe things wouldn’t be this way.”

Critics of the boarding school system have argued that boarding schools break up families and “invariably sets parents and children, home and school, to warring with one another” (Kunitz & Levy, 2000). Schools typically banned parents from visiting, lest they infect their children with tribal culture. Being separated from their families for months or years meant that many students never learned how to be good parents themselves.

A central feature of contemporary Navajo life is the conspicuous lack of sharing between individuals, even those within the same family. Delbert frequently complains about the miserliness of his sister, Isabelle, and her children, who are his nieces and nephews. He grumbles about not being allowed to use the telephone and being turned down for rides and not being offered food when everybody is eating. In their defense, however, Delbert *always* seems to be asking for favors. Since he cannot—or, more accurately, is unwilling—to earn the money to buy a phone or a car or food of his own, he expects to be given these things.

FREELoader

When he is not pestering his relatives for favors, Delbert is leeching off of one of his many female companions. He is presently living with a girlfriend, Ann, in her trailer in Iyanbito, a desolate reservation community located approximately fifteen miles east of Gallup. Delbert admitted that the basis of their relationship is that they are “using each other.” Before his arrival, Ann shared the two-bedroom trailer with her adult daughter, her daughter’s common law-husband and their infant daughter. The young couple has been less than hospitable towards their new houseguest, and Delbert cannot understand why they would resent him for living there: “I don’t know what their problem is. They won’t even communicate with me.”

Delbert claims to have made numerous attempts at conversation with Ann's daughter and son-in-law only to be ignored. He described one specific incident in which he was heating up some food for himself when his girlfriend's daughter abruptly turned off the stove. He concedes that their contempt for him may have something to do with the fact that he does not pay for any of the household bills. Understandably, the young couple views Delbert as a worthless freeloader.

His adventures in Iyanbito are just the latest stop along his desultory existence. For most of his adult life, Delbert has been unemployed or underemployed. His uncertain job status, however, is more a matter of choice than circumstances. Delbert stated that he quit his most recent job after only three days because he did not feel like he was receiving the level of respect he thought he deserved from his Anglo supervisor. I found out later that he was actually fired for coming to work with a hangover. As Native American novelist, Adrian C. Louis (1995), observed: "[Indians] like to blame the white man for all their troubles. But their poverty was caused by ten percent ignorance and ninety percent laziness" (p. 59). Only another Indian could be so blunt.

Delbert is simply a lazy human being. He claims to do chores around the house such as sweeping or raking, yet I have never seen him with a broom or rake. Instead, he delegates these and other tasks to his young nieces and nephews, whom he orders around as if they were his personal assistants. Once, while building a hogan for his mother, I had to plead with Delbert to help. His sole contribution consisted of sitting on the logs—while reading the newspaper—as the rest of us engaged in the backbreaking work of hacking at them with dull axes. He then retreated into the house after only ten minutes because it was "getting too hot." Of course, he was the one complaining the loudest that the hogan was taking too long to be built.

If confronted about his laziness, Delbert will invariably claim that he has a bad back. Supposedly, the pain is so debilitating that he has attempted to collect disability. Yet chronic back pain has not prevented him from playing basketball or participating in rodeos roping calves, not to mention his frequent sexual exploits. Like everything else, "my back hurts" is just another lame excuse. The fact is not that he is unable to work but that he does not want to. Delbert certainly fits the image of Indians as lazy, drunken deadbeats who refuse to work, preferring instead to rely on government aid. This pervasive stereotype is embodied in the racist joke that the best way to starve an Indian is by hiding his food stamps underneath his work boots.

Cultural Authenticity

Delbert frequently mentions the word “traditional,” which is usually stated in opposition to the white man’s way of doing things. In these cases, he always privileges the “traditional” over the “modern.” For instance, he explains that the reason he moved his family out of Phoenix to return to the reservation was because he feared that his children were becoming “too brainwashed” by Anglo society and he wanted them to learn about the “traditional ways” of their culture.¹¹ I once asked Delbert to define specifically what he means by “traditional ways.” He responded in a typically vague fashion. Then it occurred to me that he did not really know himself.

For Delbert, “traditional” functions as a catch-all category. He often uses the ideology of traditionalism to rationalize his own bad behavior. One of the first things he ever told me was that it is “traditional” for a Navajo man to have extramarital affairs. Similarly, he expected a monetary payment from the parents of his daughter’s boyfriend because they are “traditional” family. Of course, when I asked him if he had fulfilled his dowry obligation to his ex-wife’s parents before they married, Delbert smiled and shrugged: “I gave them my love.”

Today, “traditional” is sometimes used as a euphemism for “poor.” A traditional Navajo identity suggests the negative qualities of little material wealth, a lack of sophistication and formal education, and few of the modern luxuries more assimilated Navajos enjoy. As I have described, the shift from a subsistence economy to a cash economy has resulted in an unequal distribution of resources among tribal members, thereby creating a bifurcation between “haves” and “have-nots.” Not surprisingly, the have-nots are the ones who live “traditionally” in dilapidated housing without electricity, running water, or telephone service. This is less a matter of choice than circumstances. Given the option, most “traditional” Navajos would prefer a more “modern” lifestyle in terms of living in a nice home equipped with up-to-date amenities and driving a new vehicle. Realizing that this is not possible, impoverished individuals such as Delbert find solace in being more “authentically” Navajo.

MUTUAL APPROPRIATION

Unlike many younger Navajos, Delbert is not upset by whites who try to look or act like Indians. In fact, he was positively ambivalent when I informed him

that Iron Eyes Cody, one of his cinematic heroes, was actually a full-blooded Italian named Oscar DeCorti: “I don’t give a shit.” Perhaps his indifference can be attributed to his own experiences with cross-cultural transvestism. Just as whites have masqueraded as Indians, so too have Indians imitated whites. Yet whereas the former is called “appropriation,” the latter is termed “assimilation.”

Throughout the reservation, the outfit of choice for a Navajo man over the age of thirty is a Western shirt tucked neatly into a pair of Wrangler jeans held up by a thick belt adorned with a shiny buckle. This ensemble is always topped off with a cowboy hat and bottomed off with leather cowboy boots. While it may seem ironic that Indians have exchanged much of their traditional garb for that of their conquerors, there is no denying that what has been identified with the American cowboy is also associated with the modern American Indian. Indeed, the current trend for Indians living west of the Mississippi is driving a pickup, wearing cowboy garb, listening to country and western music, and participating in rodeos. But clothes do *not* make the man. Indians can comfortably incorporate elements of cowboy culture without feeling that they are replacing or capitulating their native identity just as whites can wear deerskin jackets, moccasins, and turquoise jewelry while still maintaining their essential “whiteness.”

The consumption of foreign influences poses an inevitable dilemma: either one takes the antimodern stance and rejects them wholesale or one appropriates them, tames them, and makes them indigenous and “authentic.” Navajos have historically chosen the second alternative. When Delbert wears a cowboy hat and boots, as he often does, he does not view these objects as foreign. Rather, they have already been appropriated as the modern equivalents of traditional male display items. Wearing a sash around his head or a cowboy hat is not seen as mutually exclusive choices and do not necessarily imply the embrace or rejection of “tradition” or “modernity.” A man can wear one one day, and wear the other the next.

Between Two Worlds

Despite agreeing to send their children to government schools, most Navajo parents saw little use in it. Most boarding schools required children to be removed from their families and communities and, in some instances, away from Navajo land altogether. Parents opposed the strict discipline policy, and they needed their children at home to tend the sheep. By the turn of the

twentieth century, only about 3% of Navajo children attended school and, even as late as 1930, only 40% were enrolled (Page & Page, 1995). It was not until the 1950s that the government provided sufficient classroom space for all Navajo children.

The idea that Indians must become assimilated into European American culture rather than practice their own traditional lifeways was, like religious conversion, based on the assumption that Indians as Indians were undesirable to the Christian hegemony (Vickers, 1998). The mission of the schools was to void students of their Indian identity. Indeed, “Kill the Indian, save the man” was the motto of Richard Henry Pratt, the retired Army general who founded Carlisle Indian School, the first off-reservation federal boarding school, in 1879. As a young officer stationed in Indian territory, Pratt had become convinced that tribal peoples could and should be assimilated into the territorially advancing White civilization (Malmsheimer, 1985). He differed from many of his contemporaries in his belief that tribal peoples were fully capable of both appreciating the superiority of Anglo qualities and acquiring them.

Predictably, Pratt’s controversial efforts at acculturation were constantly challenged from various and conflicting points of view. This is where the transformation photographs came into the picture—literally. These photos, used as before-and-after pairs, are iconic representations of the cultural transformation that was the central aim of the school. As both persuasive devices and marketing tools, these photographs vividly demonstrated the efficacy of his solution to the “Indian problem.”

Perhaps the most widely circulated transformation photos were those of Tom Torlino, the son of an important Navajo leader who came to the school in 1882 at the age of 22. His portraits were seen to represent the fullest contrast between the “before” and “after” states symbolized, and, to this day, they remain the most often reprinted photographs from the Carlisle Indian School (Malmsheimer, 1987). The picture on the left is of Torlino as he appeared upon arrival at the school on October 21, 1882 and, on the right, as he appeared after three years at Carlisle (Figure 1).

Even a casual observer will notice the obvious juxtapositions: long hair/short hair, earrings/no earrings, blanket/coat and tie, somber expression/slight smile—just to name a few. In addition, there is a marked contrast in skin color between the two photos as Torlino appeared literally to be getting whiter. While the photographs’ basic and obvious theme is change, the change they suggest, Malmsheimer (1985) points out, is far more profound than the

Figure 1. Transformation Photos of Tom Torlino



actual change that could have occurred during the brief period of time that typically ensued between the shooting of the two portraits (p. 31).

For his part, Delbert credits the boarding schools for teaching him to be conversant in both cultures to the point that he is able to move effortlessly between the Anglo and Navajo worlds: “I know how to eat in public, but I still know about my traditions.” He claims not to have experienced any problems traveling back and forth—both literally and figuratively—between the “traditional” Navajo lifestyle of his parent’s home with the “modern” lifestyle taught at boarding school as he compartmentalized the “two different types of living.” Although the school was strict, Delbert concedes that it taught him the skills necessary to be successful in an Anglo-dominated world.

MAN OF THE HOGAN

But he has *not* become successful. Delbert stated that the reason his father promoted education was because “he didn’t want us to be homeless and be alcoholics.” Sadly, that is exactly what has happened.

Navajo men are the ones who have suffered the most from the stresses of culture contact and culture change on the reservation. Ruth Underhill bemoans the effects of boarding schools on Indian boys who, denied their traditional vision quests, “were made to feel inadequate in their new tasks, their energy and ambition went down to zero and generations have been needed to bring it up” (cited in Vickers, 1998, p. 61).¹² To be sure, the maintenance of a viable

male image is a very serious problem facing Navajo men. This is especially true for Delbert's generation, as they were the first to have had the fullest formal introduction to Anglo culture.

Boarding schools presented native students with competing standards of normalcy. For males, one particular source of confusion lay in contradictory gender roles. Navajos are traditionally a matrilineal and matrilocal people. Because descent is recognized through the mother, a Navajo man owes his first loyalty to his mother's family. Once he marries, priority transfers to his wife's family, with whom he must live. Although a man may have a job and bring home a paycheck, it is his wife and her family who determine how it will be spent. Because the women own the land and the sheep, they are responsible for making all of the economic decisions.

In contrast, the man is the head of the household in Anglo society. Students are taught in boarding school that the fathers are the primary decision makers in the family, specifically with regard to finances. All of this seems very strange to the young Navajo boy who was raised in a traditional context for the first few years of his life and who must return to the reservation when his schooling is over. Because a Navajo man with a steady job has a large number of relatives continually asking him for financial support of some kind, it is virtually impossible to accumulate the type of capital needed to live like his envisioned Anglo counterpart, who is always economically and socially independent from both his and his wife's sides. Chances are few that he will be able to occupy the male role that he has been taught in school is "normal" (Topper, 1980).

Since unemployment rates exceed 70% in most areas of the reservation, many Navajo men face the additional indignity of having to rely on their wives or girlfriends to support them. Stripped of their self-esteem, an all too common retaliatory response is to lash out against their female companions by engaging in extramarital affairs or committing domestic violence. Turning their frustration inwards, many seek comfort and solace in alcohol. Drinking is now a socially acceptable way for Navajo men to discover and demonstrate their manhood.

ALCOHOLISM

Native alcoholism remains a common denominator of poverty, ill health, and social pathology, wreaking a degree of human devastation upon Indian communities that can only be compared to the ravages of smallpox in centuries

past (Bordewich, 1996). The cumulative effect of alcoholism on Indians is staggering. Heavy alcohol use has been a problem for Native Americans for generations, and it undoubtedly constitutes their number one health problem. At present, death rates among aboriginal Americans from alcohol-related causes are five to seven times greater than those of the general population (Kunitz & Levy, 2000). The native population is three times more likely to die from homicide and suicide where alcohol is present than other Americans, and two-thirds of alcohol-related deaths for Indians result from cirrhosis of the liver (Everett, 1980). Indians are twelve times more likely than other Americans to be arrested for alcohol-related offenses, and most Indians who are in prison are there because of a crime committed under the influence of alcohol (Bordewich, 1996).

Indeed, the costs in destroyed lives, premature deaths, and social disruption have been documented endlessly. This may explain why any discussion about the topic of Indians and alcohol usually dissolves into clichés. Perhaps more troubling than all of the statistics is the general attitude in native communities that all of this is somehow natural. For too many Native Americans, including Delbert, suffering at the hands of alcohol has become permanently woven into the fabric of everyday existence as a way of life—and death.

RESPONSE

Delbert confided that reading about his own life stimulated reflection. He had never shared so many details of his life before nor had anyone ever inquired. “I never experienced something like this,” he repeatedly stated. At various points, the novelty and strangeness of the experience led to a detached perspective that made him feel as if he was reading about somebody else. While Delbert acknowledges his transgressions and misdeeds, he claims to be at peace: “I’m satisfied with the life I’ve lived.”

However, he was not entirely satisfied with the interview transcript itself. On blank sheets of paper that I included with the transcript, Delbert listed a series of clarifications and corrections identified by an alphabetical letter and corresponding page number. The vast majority of his these were basically limited to eliminating colloquialisms such as “you know” (I had already removed most of them) and clarifying minor points. For instance, Delbert noted that the Medicaid program in Arizona is called A.H.C.C.S (Arizona Health Care Containment Care Services) instead of Access and he wanted me to change “I hardly stay there” to “I continue to stay here.” His guiding

rationale for his editorial decisions seems to be a concern with advancing a positive public persona. In other words, it is important for Delbert to appear well spoken, articulate, and educated. Consistent with his personality in general, he privileges style over substance.

Following his list of corrections, Delbert included a brief section addressed to me, which he has allowed me to reproduce here:

Congratulations. You have asked me so many different questions that made me feel who I am and how I feel about others. I never had this experience in the past. Never did I share it with my siblings or parents. I hope that you accomplish whatever you intended to provide for yourself. I believe that you were not at any time being manipulative or being aggressive. I was being assertive and still have a positive mental attitude towards life. I'll try not to be obsessed with women and alcohol. (yeah right...)

He supplemented his remarks by sharing “three important writings”:

- If nobody knew me, I cannot say anything. But people would never hear me.
- Remember the traditional way to live and combine it with the new way. Don't confuse yourself.
- Control your mind, in order to harness the body's life force (the energy that burns within us). When you learn to control that, the dissonance of the daily world falls and all is silent.

Finally, Delbert concluded with what he called a “word of wisdom for my sister, Isabelle”:

Expect people to be better than they are. It helps them to become better. But don't be disappointed when they are not. It helps them to keep trying.

I was very intrigued by the series of quotations that appeared at the end of his comments. Since there were no attributions, I initially thought that the quotes were his own, but then realized that he would never use a word like “dissonance.” Delbert admitted that the quotes are part of an informal collection of “ten to twelve writings” which he has saved in a notebook.¹³ This theft of intellectual property did not detract me from feeling any less impressed. Then he revealed that he follows the same principle for collecting dirty jokes, which is far more expansive: “I have a whole stack of them,” he

boasted. Just when I thought he harbored a deep, thoughtful component to his personality, Delbert's final comment brought me back to earth.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Zhinny” is the Navajo word for “black.”
- ² The following day, Delbert informed me that after he thought about it, “the number’s actually closer to sixty.” He said that it was important to amend the original count so as not to compromise the interview’s purported veracity.
- ³ No matter where he is or what he is doing, Delbert always manages to be “around” at the beginning of each month when his mom receives her social security check.
- ⁴ The summer before, Delbert recruited several family members (and me) to donate supplies and labor for a food stand at the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial so that he could raise money to buy a vehicle. It turned into a total disaster. Torrential summer rains kept most of the visitors away, and we did not sell much food. Delbert never got his car.
- ⁵ According to family members, it has actually been closer to twice that long.
- ⁶ After hearing reports through the reservation grapevine that Delbert was “running around,” Isabelle finally accepted her brother’s fate: “He’s *never* going to change.”
- ⁷ The only reason I was able to detect these subtle differences was because I have known him for so long.
- ⁸ Instead of money, people usually offer gifts such as tobacco, food, clothing, or other useful items to show respect and appreciation for the medicine man’s service.
- ⁹ My research assistants, for example, refer to their grandfather as “a big pimp.”

- 10 The fact that children do not belong to the same clan as their father partly accounts for the negligent role of fathers in contemporary Navajo culture. But paternal absenteeism cannot be attributed entirely to cultural mores. “Deadbeat dads” have become all too pervasive in every racial and ethnic group, and everybody cannot hide behind “culture.”
- 11 To this day, none of his three kids can even speak Navajo.
- 12 In his novel, *Skins*, Adrian C. Louis (1995) describe the dilemma unique to Indian men: “The true victims of the reservation system were men. When the U.S. Army first herded redskins onto reservations, the men could no longer go great distances to hunt, they could not take up the warpath or even practice their old religious ceremonies. Their usefulness died in front of them. They became idle, accepting relief and depending on rations. They discovered alcohol. The women continued to do all the housekeeping chores and child-rearing, but the women also became the true heads of the households. They began to wear the pants in the family, even though they still deferred to their men in public” (p. 209).
- 13 Apparently, whenever he reads or hears something he likes, he will copy it down in this notebook. However, he never bothers to note the citation or even the name of the author. For Delbert, such information is irrelevant for it is not who said it but what is said that matters.

Chapter 4

Isabelle

ABSTRACT

Isabelle is the sister of Delbert and the daughter of Sharmaine. She is also the mother of 10 children of her own: six biological children fathered by four different men in addition to the four children of her deceased younger sister. Having survived a succession of abusive relationships with various men, this mother hen has been the sole provider for her large brood for most of the time that the author has known her. In many respects, Isabelle can be called the “white sheep” of the Benally family. While the rest of her siblings have battled alcoholism and chronic unemployment for most of their adult lives, she has never imbibed alcohol and has been gainfully employed for the past 40 years. She is not unlike a Native American version of Horatio Alger: a girl from the rez who, through diligence and determination, vowed to raise herself up from her bootstraps and overcome any obstacles placed in front of her. This chapter introduces Isabelle.

PROFILE

Isabelle put herself through college as a single mother on welfare. After graduating with an Associate’s degree in accounting, she found an entry-level job in the tribal government and steadily worked her way up the ladder to her present position as the supervisor of credit services for the Navajo Nation. Indeed, the reason she was granted custody of her slain sister’s children was because she was the only one in her family deemed financially and emotionally stable enough to undertake the task.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3420-5.ch004

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In other respects, Isabelle is perceived as elitist and sanctimonious—or, as some of her relatives disparagingly refer to her, “Miss High and Mighty.” She has a tendency to look down on her brothers and sisters for their problems precisely because she has succeeded where they have failed. Isabelle has all but completely segregated herself from her siblings and mother, preferring instead an insular existence confined to her live-in boyfriend and children. In fact, she even chooses to celebrate the holidays separately.

Isabelle also has a well-deserved reputation for being selfish and materialistic. She makes no attempt to hide her longing for money and material possessions, and she takes great pride in flaunting her relative excess of both in the presence of others. Along the same lines, Isabelle steadfastly refuses to share any of her belongings with those outside her inner circle, whether it is the use of her telephone or the food on her dinner table.

Nature of Relationship

Isabelle refers to me as “son” and she has embraced me as an adopted member of her inner circle. Shortly after we first met, she invited me to live with her family. For intermittent periods since, I have taken her up on this uncharacteristically generous offer. Her benevolence towards me, however, is less the result of affection than appropriation. For instance, Isabelle takes great pride in parading me in front of her friends and acquaintances and introducing me as “[her] Chinese son.”¹ During these uncomfortable moments, I feel like another one of her flaunted possessions.

While others frequently complain about Isabelle’s moodiness and stinginess, I have rarely been the recipient of such displays. I suspect that this is due to the fact that ours is not a reciprocal relationship in that I have given her much more than I have received. Although she claims to be my surrogate parent, we actually operate more as peers. She will consult my opinion on matters ranging from her relationship problems to her financial difficulties. In certain situations, she will even defer to my authority. When her sister’s murderer was about to be released from prison, Isabelle asked me for suggestions as to how the family should respond. I also detect a desire on her part to convince me that she is “not like everybody else around here.” As such, Isabelle will often exaggerate, withhold information, or blatantly lie in order to maintain her carefully crafted persona—all of which were evident throughout the interviews.

TRANSCRIPT

DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS IF YOU'RE TALKING TO SOMEBODY
YOU MET FOR THE FIRST TIME.

(Pause) I'd probably say I'm a mother. I'm in my middle 40s and a very caring person, not a mean person. And hard working. That's about it.

STRANGE YOU DON'T MENTION ANYTHING ABOUT BEING
NAVAJO?

I'm Navajo but I really wouldn't want to say I'm Navajo or I'm Black or anything like that.

THAT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER?

No, uh-uh.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD. WHAT WAS IT LIKE GROWING
UP?

What I remember, most of all, is being a daddy's girl. And also being in boarding school for almost twelve years of my life, from six to seventeen years old.

DID YOU COME HOME DURING THE SUMMERS?

We hardly ever came home. It was just like maybe once-a-month type of thing.

YOU WENT TO BOARDING SCHOOL PRETTY CLOSE TO HERE,
RIGHT?

About 25 miles.

CHUSKA?

Tohatchi.

AND YOU WENT TO HIGH SCHOOL AT WINGATE?

Uh-huh.

SO EVEN THOUGH IT WAS SO CLOSE, YOU ONLY CAME HOME
ONCE A MONTH?

Uh-huh, once a month.

DID YOUR PARENTS PICK YOU UP OR HOW DID YOU GET HOME?

Usually my dad or my Aunt Pearl used to come for us once a month and we came home. I guess that's one thing that kind of bothers me now is I've never had that mother/father-child, parent-child relationship because we were at boarding school all the time. And that's where we learned to, you know, wash our clothes and learned to clean, mop, sweep...those types of things.

I'VE HEARD A LOT ABOUT WHAT A TERRIBLE PLACE BOARDING
SCHOOL IS, LIKE THEY CUT OFF YOUR HAIR OR THEY PUT
SOAP IN YOUR MOUTH IF YOU SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE. WAS
IT LIKE THAT FOR YOU?

I didn't think it was that bad, but we could never wear our hair straight—I had long hair then—and we always used to have it braided. The older students there used to come over to our dorm and they used to braid our hair. We also couldn't wear make-up even though I was in the eighth grade. And we all used to only shower like every Wednesday night and on Sunday. Twice a week we used to take a shower.

WHAT ABOUT SPEAKING NAVAJO?

They allowed that.

REALLY? WHO RAN THE BOARDING SCHOOL?

The B.I.A.

SO MOST OF YOUR TEACHERS WERE INDIAN?

Yeah, uh-huh.

MOST PEOPLE THINK THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF PUTTING INDIAN KIDS IN BOARDING SCHOOL WAS TO KILL THEIR INDIAN IDENTITY AND TRY TO TURN THEM INTO WHITE PEOPLE.

No, it wasn't like that.

SO WHEN YOU SAID THAT THEY TAUGHT YOU EVERYTHING, WHAT DID YOU MEAN?

Like we'd go to cafeteria and we would have what they call a "family dinner." That's where we ate like a family around a table with all the classmates. We learned how to set tables and where forks should be and whatnot. I felt like I needed to learn that.

BUT THAT'S TOTALLY A WHITE CUSTOM. NAVAJOS DIDN'T EVEN EAT WITH FORKS! YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T EVEN REALIZE WHAT THEY WERE DOING TO YOU.

I probably didn't know. (laughter)

BUT WHEN YOU WOULD COME HOME ONCE A MONTH, YOU WOULD SEE THAT THE WAY YOUR PARENTS LIVED OR YOUR GRANDPARENTS LIVED WAS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY THE BOARDING SCHOOL WAS.

Yeah, that's right.

AND HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?

I didn't feel *anything* about it. It was just a normal routine, you know, life at boarding school and then when you come home, there's a different routine of life.

WHY DIDN'T YOU WANT TO HAVE YOUR *KINAALDA*?

I was in boarding school when I got it. Usually when a girl gets her period, she tells her mom right away. But me, I hid it. I didn't want to tell my mom. I didn't want to go through that ceremony because I just didn't feel excited about it. I think I was embarrassed to have it done on me.

BUT YOUR OLDER SISTER AND MANY OF YOUR FRIENDS HAD IT DONE.

Yeah, they had their puberty ceremony. A lot of them had to get checked out of school when that happens and they have to stay at home. I was mostly embarrassed because in boarding school, you don't have any pads. You have to ask the dorm aide for some and I was even embarrassed to ask for one.

ALL YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WENT TO BOARDING SCHOOL AS WELL, RIGHT? YOUR COUSINS TOO?

Yes.

SO IT REALLY WASN'T LIKE YOU WERE ALL ALONE IN A STRANGE PLACE. I MEAN THE SCHOOL WAS LOCATED PRETTY CLOSE TO HOME AND YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WERE THERE WITH YOU.

We never interrelated. They were up in a higher class. Just like Irma and Delbert, they were up higher. And we all lived in different dorms.

YOU GUYS NEVER SAW EACH OTHER?

We *saw* each other maybe in the cafeteria or something, but they wouldn't let us talk and stuff.

YOU DESCRIBED BOARDING SCHOOL AS A BAD EXPERIENCE. WHAT WAS BAD ABOUT IT BESIDES OBVIOUSLY BEING AWAY FROM YOUR FAMILY?

Ummm... (long pause)

WERE THEY REAL STRICT WITH YOU? DID THEY HIT YOU?

The dormitory aides, they were really mean. They used to grab you by your hair.

THE DORMITORY AIDES WERE OLDER STUDENTS?

No, they were older people, adults. The majority of them were Navajos.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?

I just took it as them punishing you if you did something wrong cause they punished you a lot. They would make you stand in the corner or scrub the bathroom.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS WOULD YOU GET PUNISHED FOR?

When I was in the eighth grade, I used make-up—eyeliner and mascara—and I got caught for that. That's what I got punished for.

WERE YOU A TROUBLEMAKER WHEN YOU WERE IN SCHOOL?

No, uh-uh. I was quiet. We were into sports, of course. We played basketball, and they took us all over the reservation playing other teams. That was usually on weekends, and that's probably another thing why we didn't come home all the time either.

WHAT WERE YOU LIKE IN SCHOOL? HOW WOULD YOUR FRIENDS HAVE DESCRIBED YOU?

Probably as someone nice. I know they used to make me cry.

WHY?

Because of our height. They used to really tease us because of that and make fun of us. Some of the dorm mates knew my Grandpa Jack. Of course, he was colored so people used to make fun of us, call us names like "Black people," "*zhinnys*," and other things. We were the ones that had real long feet, you know, long arms and, man, those dorm aides didn't order correct

sized shoes for us and we always used to wear those small shoes. Today, the kids look at my feet and I have a lot of corns on them (laughter) and that's because they gave us real tight shoes. One of the things that the dorm aides also forced us to do was go to church every Sunday.

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH WAS IT?

It was Catholic and Christian.

AND YOU COULD CHOOSE WHICH ONE YOU WANTED TO GO TO?

When you go register, they usually have you choose so my family always chose being a Christian. So we went to church every Sunday and had to dress up in dresses. You couldn't go to church in pants.

WHAT WAS CHURCH LIKE?

We used to go on Thursday nights. That was just like evening church services. They had those in a classroom and we used to go over there. The service lasted for about an hour to an hour and a half. Then we went back up to the dorm. The real service was on Sunday, and that's when we all marched down to the church. That church was probably a mile away. We all had to wear dresses and good-looking clothes. There was usually a lot of singing that we had to do and then a little gospel they used to preach. Then we go to different classes in the church where they used to teach us about the Bible.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT GOING TO CHURCH?

It was interesting to know what church was about. If I was here, I probably never would have been taught about the Bible. It was kind of like school in a way, something that they're trying to teach you.

DID YOU EVER GET INTO IT? WERE YOU EVER "TOUCHED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT"?

No, I never had that experience. The only time I went to church was in boarding school up to my eighth grade year. Once I got into high school, they didn't make us go to church anymore so I just stopped going.

WHEN THE CHURCH TOLD YOU THAT YOU HAD TO ACCEPT THEIR
TEACHINGS TO BE SAVED...

I just didn't believe it. Because, at the same time, when we used to come home and if one of us got sick, my dad would bring a medicine man to do sings on us. To me, I believed in that more than the church way. I felt more at ease with the traditional medicine man. When I got sick one time—I really used to have bad headaches—a medicine man that lived just over the hill used to sing on me and I always felt better. So I always believed in it.

* * * * *

EARLIER, YOU SAID THE STUDENTS WERE ALLOWED TO TALK
TO EACH OTHER IN NAVAJO.

Yes, that was okay. We all had to get up at the same time every day. I remember those dorm aides telling us to wake up and we'd turn on the lights at about six o'clock and, you know, you got into a routine of fixing your bed, washing your face, brushing your teeth and being in line at a certain time to go to the cafeteria to eat breakfast. They make you stand in line like boy, girl, boy, girl. When it came to cafeteria time, the boys would be waiting. Here we come from the girl's dorm and they would let us go in boy, girl, boy, girl. That's how it was.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU GUYS GOT A LITTLE BIT OLDER LIKE
TEENAGERS AND THE HORMONES STARTED KICKING IN?
COULD THE BOYS AND GIRLS MINGLE?

Yeah, but that didn't happen until high school. All through eighth grade, that was the way it was.

SO WOULD IT BE OKAY FOR A GIRL TO HAVE A BOYFRIEND?

No. We couldn't even go to the boy's dorm which was only two buildings away. We couldn't get caught being in their territory. It was strict.

THEN HOW DID YOU GUYS GET TOGETHER IN HIGH SCHOOL? DID THE SCHOOL SPONSOR DANCES AND STUFF?

Yeah. I was in the honor dorm when I first went to Wingate. It was just a total girl's dorm and then we had a different boy's dorm. And that's when everything was more free. Then you go to breakfast only if you want. That was a first. And then you go with whomever. We had our own rooms. You could go mingle. The boys can come over to the dorm, and we used to talk. It was a totally different thing in high school.

BUT WAS IT STILL STRICT?

You still had to be back in the building by a certain time, they still took roll call. All of us went to bed at a certain time. And even as far as what you wore to bed, we couldn't wear our panties to bed. They made sure that you weren't wearing anything other than that cotton nightgown they gave us. Even your clothes, they give you a number. When you come in, like, say they gave me number 35 and 35 went on my socks, my underwear, my slip. (laughter) We all had little cubby holes and 35 would be up there on my cubby hole. They only did the laundry maybe once a week so the dorm aides are the ones that washed, and they would get girls in there to separate the clothes according to those numbers and put them in your boxes. So that's how everything was.

WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN YOU HAD FREE TIME?

It was usually in the evenings. After supper, then that's when we had free time. We only were allowed to watch TV for like an hour. On the weekends, you had to make sure your chores were done first, like sweeping the whole dorm or mopping or waxing the dorm or cleaning the toilet bowls. We all had our names on those assignments so we all knew what we had to do. They come and check it to make sure they were done. And after that, we had our free time. They still kind of control it, though, because they put everybody in a big batch. You sit there on the floor while there's a TV over here and you really didn't have a choice of what to watch and you have to be quiet. So it was like that.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WHEN YOU LOOK BACK ON YOUR BOARDING SCHOOL YEARS?

I probably would say it was not good or bad. Because sometimes I wonder what it would have been like if I was with my parents going back and forth to day school and what kind of care my parents would have given me. Maybe they just wouldn't have took care of me or looked after me like what boarding school people did. So I really can't say how it would have been living with my father and, especially, with as many kids as my mom had. And there was my dad having two women at the same time. So he was never around, I would say, to really give us that attention. And maybe we wouldn't have had any food whereas in boarding school, we ate three times a day. So I can't really say it was that bad in boarding school.

WOULD YOU WANT YOUR OWN CHILDREN TO HAVE GONE THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE THAT YOU WENT THROUGH?

No. I guess the bad thing is because I believe that you should have that parent-child relationship, the nurturing that goes with raising a child. I think that's very important and that's one of the reasons why I would not put my kids in boarding school. I'm always criticizing Do-Do² because she does that. She just dumps her kids at boarding school, and I feel that her mentality is that she thinks that they'll take care of her kids, feed them three meals a day. She's experienced boarding school and she knows that they take care of you, that you're in a warm place and whatnot. So I think that's why she just dumps her kids at school. And I always look at those little boys and think, "Man, where is that parent-child relationship?" Those boys don't have it.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER YOU GRADUATED FROM WINGATE?

Well, the bad thing is that when I was in high school, I got married off to Marlin's dad, someone I didn't know totally. I was just turning 17, and I was a junior in high school when all that happened. I think that's one part of my life that I really regret because my parents should have never done that to me. I feel like they really deprived me of my teen-age years, the prom I never went to, and all those other things that usually happen when you're in high school. I never did those things. One day, I came home and was told that I was going to have a Navajo wedding and be married to this guy that I didn't know and they brought cows. Then the next thing I know, the entire

family was planning my wedding, a Navajo wedding. So I just didn't have any say because my father was a very dominant person. He dominated his wives, and us kids were scared of him. It just happened. They didn't give me no slack. They planned it and, the next thing I know, I was married instantly.

WASN'T TONY BILLIE ORIGINALLY WITH IRMA?

Yes, and I thought they were going to get married. He went off to the military and I guess he came back and he found out that Irma was married to Sonny Jim and I guess he just wanted to marry her so bad. And he went and asked my father if there was another sister or something. Maybe that's how it happened.

YOU NEVER ASKED YOUR PARENTS?

I never asked him. And I don't think my mom would give me a good answer. She would probably say, "Well, it was all your dad's idea. I had nothing to say." Because the way I look at my mom is that she really didn't have nothing to say in their marriage also. She's just a real quiet lady. She knew better than to argue with my father. She had to do as he said. Of course, my mom, she's been an orphan all her life so she does everything that people tell her to do. Even now, I would say my mom just lives over the hill from me but I'm not close to her. I never felt that nurturing from her like, you know, hugging me and saying "I love you." Never. She's really distant from me.

WHAT ABOUT TO THE OTHER KIDS?

To the others, she's really going all out with them. Like Irma, Delbert, and Albert, man, she's always at their discretion. But it's me that she's real distant.

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

I think it's because of my dad. She knows that I was real close to my dad.

DO YOU THINK SHE WAS JEALOUS OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

I really don't know. I just feel really distant from her. Even now, I feel that way. I hardly ever talk to my mom about what used to go on years back

during my childhood years or boarding school or anything like that. I've never asked her.

YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE THERE'S A HOLE THERE THAT NEEDS TO BE FILLED?

I don't think so. I've just learned to deal with it.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR WEDDING?

I remember being in a hogan dressed traditional. My Aunt Pearl, she was the one who made my outfit for me. I remember seeing a lot of people, mostly just elderly people. I didn't see no younger people there. I think it was a very prestigious thing for my dad because he was very well known.

WHY WAS HE WELL KNOWN?

Because of his involvement with the community. He was into politics because he used to be involved with the chapter and he ran for state representative. He was also well known because of my grandfather. To me, it was like a prestigious thing for him to have that because they went and got my wedding invitations out and all sorts of medicine men came. I guess that goes along with Navajo weddings is that they preach to the couple about life, and I didn't know anything of what they were talking about. It was really strange for me and I couldn't say anything. I felt really helpless. And I couldn't say no to my dad. Thinking back about it now, I don't think that I enjoyed it. I guess it's just part of my life that I think shouldn't have happened to me. And I blame my mom and dad for what has happened to me. But, then again, I think maybe it's good that they did that to me because I look at my other brothers and sisters and, you know, the way that they are living right now. They're mostly alcoholics.

SO YOU THINK THIS ARRANGED MARRIAGE SET YOU OFF ON A STRAIGHT COURSE?

I always say that ever since I had Regina when I was seventeen, to this day, I've always had a kid around me, raising kids. That's a lot of years. It probably has taught me a lot of things.

BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF TEEN MOTHERS...

I think there's a big difference way back then having a child when you're a teenager and the way it is right now. I think that, nowadays, teen mothers are very immature whereas I think I was mature in those days. There was a lot of teaching from the elders then.

BUT YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY TEACHING FROM YOUR ELDERS.
YOU WERE IN BOARDING SCHOOL THE WHOLE TIME.

I remember my dad kind of did a little to me here and there. When I would come home, my time would be with him. But one thing I learned from my mom is how to weave Navajo rugs. I would help her card wool, spin the wool, and things like that. Just by watching her, I learned those things. She didn't say, "Oh, this is how you do it, my daughter." (laughter) She never did that. It was just basically me learning by looking at it and making those patterns by trying to figure them out. So that's how I learned how to weave rugs. My other sisters like Irma, Emma, and Esther, I guess their concentration wasn't in learning how to do it. They just didn't care. But you know how when you're a mother you teach your daughters things? My mom wasn't like that. Otherwise, all my other sisters would be weavers, too. It was just myself that wanted to learn so I mostly watched her when we would come home.

WERE YOUR OTHER BROTHERS AND SISTERS PUT IN SIMILAR
ARRANGED MARRIAGES?

No, it only happened to me!

WHY ONLY YOU?

I really don't know. Maybe because I was more closer to my father than my mother. And he was always like real close to me and he would always hug me, take me to places, and things like that. Maybe it was his way of being protective of me. But he never planned it for any of my other siblings.

WERE THERE OTHER GIRLS IN YOUR HIGH SCHOOL WHO GOT MARRIED SO YOUNG?

No, uh-uh. I was probably the only one. (laughter) It was something really strange. And I quit school there for a while. I got pregnant with Regina. I was probably embarrassed to go back to school because I thought that kids would laugh about me. But after I had Regina, I still went back.

SO HERE YOU ARE AT 17, YOU MARRY A MAN YOU JUST BARELY MET AND LESS THAN A YEAR LATER, YOU'RE WITH CHILD. THAT'S GOT TO BE PRETTY OVERWHELMING. DID YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WERE PREPARED FOR SUCH A BIG CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE?

I was in a state of shock and lost and didn't know what to do. I just took it a day at a time. My mom never told me that this is how you should be feeling when you're pregnant. I was all alone.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR MARRIAGE WITH TONY?

(Pause) I didn't really think of it as how a marriage should be. He was a good person, you know, he never mistreated me and he never beat me up. He worked all that time and provided for us and, to be honest with you, he's probably the one that first bought the first TV for the family. He used to work at the mine over here in Church Rock so he got paid a lot of money. We had our own vehicle.

EVEN THOUGH HE WAS KIND OF A STRANGER AT THE BEGINNING, DID YOU WARM UP TO HIM PRETTY QUICKLY?

I don't even remember. He's probably eleven years older than me. He was *way* older than I was. It was like I had to be a wife and I had to cook for him. I had to do things. I don't remember intimate moments with him at all. I guess he was always a stranger to me that I had to do my duties for. We were married for about ten years and, during those times, my dad died. I would say about another three years after my dad passed away, I finally realized that this guy isn't who I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. There was no love, never felt that at all. It was more like I looked up to him like a big brother. That's when we divorced.

WAS HE UPSET?

He was upset, and that's when he turned to alcohol. He really started drinking. Before that, he never drank. I remember my dad being really fond of him just because he came back from the services and he brought back money or he had his own brand new vehicle.

DO YOU THINK IF YOUR FATHER WAS STILL ALIVE...

I think that I would still be married to him! (laughter) If that's what my dad wants...

BUT YOU WERE WITH TONY FOR THREE MORE YEARS AFTER YOUR FATHER DIED. WHY NOT BREAK AWAY SOONER?

I think he kind of was there to help me through my grieving. But after that was settling down, that's when we broke apart.

SUDDENLY AT 27, YOU'RE A SINGLE MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN. WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

It was scary. I never worked in my life at all. At that time, we were renting a place in Gallup. When we got our divorce, it was a default judgment. He never showed up. The judge ordered child support, no dollar amount, just whatever he could. But I never got any child support from him. I never pursued it.

SO HOW DID YOU LIVE?

I got on welfare. I got on food stamps. And I knew that I would never live like this again. I wanted to be something. So that's when I went to register at the UNM branch and that's where I started my schooling again. Man, that's when I had to find childcare centers for Marvin and Marlin and Regina, and I got student loans just things to keep us going.

DURING THIS TIME WHEN THINGS WERE PRETTY ROUGH, DID YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS HELP YOU?

No, nobody ever did. I just knew that they wouldn't be able to help. I was very, very determined. I was not going to be depending on somebody again.

That's when I started thinking back to what my mom and dad did to me, and I think that just made me *more* determined. I went to school, didn't quit. I stayed in there for two years, and I got my A.A. degree in May 1984 and I said I'm going to find me a job. That's when I went to the tribe looking for a job and I got hired. I've been there ever since.

DESCRIBE THIS PERIOD OF YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU'RE A YOUNG SINGLE WORKING MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN.

In 1985, I met Sharmaine's dad through my job. He's from Kayenta, and he also came from a very traditional family. In 1987, before Sharmaine was born, we got a marriage license but we didn't have a big old wedding and all that. But the thing is that I never lived with him because he was always working at Peabody.³ We went from here to visit him on weekends at his house—he had his own house in Kayenta—and then on Sunday, we would drive back over here. He had two small girls. Well, he had three kids from a previous marriage: an older boy and two little girls. The youngest was a year old. So he was recently divorced because the baby was only a year old and the other girl was three. And I saw him taking care of those girls by himself.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MOTHER?

She just left. She divorced him and left him with three kids. So when we used to go visit him and I would see the grandparents struggling to take care of the two little girls, I volunteered to bring those girls back. So they lived here and that's the time I got this trailer in 1989. That's when we started living separate by ourselves. Other than that, we were at my mom's. So I took in those girls until...both of them started going to school so I must have had them for three or four years.

HOW LONG WERE YOU WITH ELROY?

I was married to him about four years: 1986 to 1990, I think. And we never lived together. It was a very distant marriage. He also was not abusive. He didn't drink. He never asked me to quit my job and, even if he did, I don't think I would have quit my job.

HOW DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR TIME WITH HIM?

I wouldn't say it was a bad time. I think that it was like puppy love because I've never been in love before and I thought, "Wow, there's this guy here" and it was my first time feeling something about men. (laughter) Here I was, over 30, and barely experiencing my first puppy love. But towards the end, I kind of got more distant from him. That's when he took those girls back.

SO NOW HEAR YOU ARE, DIVORCED AGAIN AND THIS TIME WITH FOUR CHILDREN. DID YOU FEEL BETTER ABOUT YOUR SITUATION THAN WHEN YOU SPLIT WITH TONY?

I had a job and I told myself that I'm going to keep this job no matter what. I came in as a clerk making four dollars and eighty-six cents an hour. I said I'm going to go on, I'm going to grow up. I'm not going to be a clerk or a secretary forever and ever so I really put forth my effort.

DESCRIBE THIS PERIOD IN YOUR LIFE.

I was alone for about a year, and that's when I met Johnny. That was through my work again. Johnny was a politician and he was a chapter official at that time. I never really had much experience with men and their character. Of course, I never had that many boyfriends either so I didn't really know that each man was different.

YOU THOUGHT THAT ALL MEN WERE THE SAME?

I thought all men were the same, you know, kind of always dominant, always want to be the person in charge, more like a ruler type of person. I think I looked at them like that.

AND IF THE MAN WAS THE BOSS, THEN THE WOMAN WAS...

Like the way my mom was: obedient and all that. And I didn't want to be like that.

THAT WAS THE WAY IT WAS BETWEEN YOU AND TONY. WAS IT LIKE THAT BETWEEN YOU AND ELROY?

No, uh-uh. It was totally different because, like I said, he was away all the time. I never saw him. He didn't keep an eye on me. He was not jealous.

WHEN YOU GUYS WERE TOGETHER, WAS IT AN EQUAL RELATIONSHIP?

It was probably equal. I think that was just him, and I think that's how his previous marriage ended because he just let her be whoever she wanted to be and she got carried away and whatnot. He wasn't the type that was always looking over your shoulder and wanting to know what you're doing.

WHAT WAS THE AGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND ELROY?

Probably like two years.

MAYBE THAT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.

Maybe. But I guess Johnny kind of attracted me in an unusual way because of his politics. I saw him more like always wanting his way like what I saw in my dad (laughter).

JOHNNY REMINDED YOU OF YOUR DAD?

Yeah, he was real headstrong. I thought of him like that.

AND YOU LIKED THAT?

I probably missed that in a man because of my dad, and I wanted to see that role again and that's what I saw in Johnny: outspoken and people knew him and he was popular. It kind of attracted me in that way. I thought here's a person that is almost like my dad because my dad was into politics too. And then, of course, we were still getting to know each other when the tragedy about Emma happened. That was around that time. Then also I had my thyroid disorder at the same time, and I was diagnosed with Grave's Disease. I was very hyperactive and my heartbeat was raised, and I knew there was something wrong with me. So finally I went in and that's when they diagnosed me.

WHAT IS GRAVE'S DISEASE?

It's just a thyroid disorder. You either be hyper or the opposite. What they did to control it was a radiation treatment and that totally killed my thyroid gland. So they had to replace it with synthetic hormone pills, which I'm on. But it took me long time to get stable, I would say about four years. That's when they got me stabilized to the right amount of dosage that I need.

SO THOSE FOUR YEARS WERE PRETTY ROUGH?

Yeah, I would say the roughest time in my life is probably 1990 to 1995 because of my health problems and then Emma. That's when I needed Johnny because I never really had someone in my life I could depend on. He was there for me through my health problems. It was really bad to where I couldn't orient myself. I had to walk with a cane, and I had to hold onto things to keep my stability. And that's the same time that Emma died. That's the first time I would say I experienced the death of someone close to me.

BUT YOUR FATHER...

My dad's death really didn't put me in the same situation with the grieving part of it. At that time, that's when death hit me. What is death? Is this what death is? It took me through a lot of mental states of mind about death because I remember I was really, really scared of death at that time. It wasn't like that when my dad died because I could go to his casket and I could hug him and all that. But with Emma, I couldn't face her death. I didn't go near her casket. I didn't even look at her, nothing. I was having fainting spells, and people were trying to hold me up. So it was a real experience I had with death at that time. Those were the years I will never forget. Then, at the same time, I got pregnant with Jerrol. I was pregnant, I had thyroid disorder, and Emma died. Man, it took a toll on me. Those were real hard times for me. That's when Johnny was around, and he put up with a lot from me. Because when you have hormone problems, your state of mind is always corrupt. You break down for no reason. I would want to kill myself. I wouldn't want to do this or do that. He never just let me be. He was always there to make sure that I was safe. Then, of course, those were the years my family decided that I should take these kids on and I had to go through court battles with the Mayes family. They had to put me through psychiatric evaluation because what the Mayes family told the court was that I wasn't capable because of

my thyroid disorder. So they even had to bring in a doctor to actually tell the court what that disorder entailed, you know, the history on it. They did all sorts of things to me. And, again, my family put me in that spot. My mom said she couldn't do it because she was too old. She knew the court wouldn't give her the kids. And all of my siblings had an alcohol problem. They did a police background check on me, they did home study, and all sorts of things.

AND YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE WHO PASSED?

I guess I was the only one that would be capable of passing so my family put me up to it. They said that they would be there to help me. It wasn't my choice. *Again*, it wasn't my choice.

WHY DID YOU GO ALONG WITH IT IF YOU DIDN'T WANT TO?

I guess I thought about my sister Natasha, the things that she went through with Charles Mayes. I always thought in my heart that she would only be satisfied if I took the kids because the setting that I had, she knew her kids would be in good hands. Through those times when she was still alive, I always came to her rescue. In a way, it was like I *had* to do it just to make her feel good even after she was gone. Then, at the same time, my family didn't think of it like that. They thought of it more as a fight between the Mayes versus the Benallys, you know, who gets the best of who. They really weren't concerned about the kids. But, for me, I had to do it. I knew that there would be nobody else to do it. Chucky and Deebo probably would be living with their [paternal] grandma. Thelma and Tashina probably would have ended up who knows where. Maybe for a little while with their [biological] father, but I don't think they would have survived living with their father. So I wouldn't really know where they would have been.

HOW DID ADDING FOUR MORE KIDS INTO THE FAMILY CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

It was a total change for me. I had them coming in where they were a separate set of kids, where they were exposed to all sorts of things like seeing their mother being abused and whatnot whereas my kids over here were totally different and they never saw me being beat up. To me, I knew that these four kids had a problem. Psychologically, they had a problem because of them seeing what happened between their dad and their mom. So it was really rough

and those kids, man, they fought and fought like crazy. It seems like the four kids that came in, they miss violence so they try to fight. Especially Thelma would be fighting with Marvin and Marlin. It was part of them is what I'm trying to say. I had to get them into counseling, and it came down to my kids having to go to counseling. So it was a rough time for me during those years.

HOW DID YOU GET OUT OF IT?

I haven't. (laughter) I think the kids growing older and my health got better. I'm just trying to deal with it in a positive way every day.

DURING THOSE YEARS, DID YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WERE IN CONTROL OR DID YOU FEEL HELPLESS AGAIN?

I think I was in control with Johnny's help. If he was not there, I do not know what would have happened to me. Maybe I would have gone haywire. He really helped me during those years, and that's why I always tell him that I really appreciate him for being there. I think we just had the kids given to us plus our kids and Jerrold. There was not enough time for us to really be alone together, to really nurture our marriage. It was just an everyday thing where we had to deal with the kids, with psychiatrists, with this and that. We did not go out and spend time together alone or just be in that way. When I look back, I think we drew apart during those years.

DID THINGS WITH JOHNNY END BADLY?

Like I said, he was a very controlling person. He was a very jealous person. He wanted me to quit my job. I didn't realize that until things settled down and I look back and say, "Wow, is this the kind of man he really is?" I don't like it.

BUT YOU SAID YOU LIKED IT?

I guess I did miss it for a time, but I got sick of it. That's not what I wanted. But it was just too dang busy for me to even notice all those things. Until '97, that's when things settled down, and that's when I thought this is not what I want. *I want to be independent.* That was my main goal after I divorced Tammy's dad.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU NOW HAVE CONTROL OVER YOUR LIFE?

I believe I do. I'm very content. Like I say, I never had these real loving moments, intimate moments with nobody. And now, I found that in Virgil. It's really different. It's like he doesn't control me, he's very supportive in whatever I want to do. But, then again, I think maybe it's because the kids are older. Even now, thinking back, I really didn't have to go through what I've gone through, especially from 1990 to 1995.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I didn't have to take the kids in, for example, even though I thought I owed it to my sister. Sometimes, I wonder how it could have been if that wasn't the case. I feel like I need to free myself of that obligation, of wanting to satisfy my sister as far as the kids are concerned. I feel like I did my best.

IF YOU COULD DO IT OVER AGAIN, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

I think the part where I'd like to do it all over again is my marriage to Marvin's dad. If I could re-do my life again, then those teen-age years would probably be my own way. I would not have gotten married. I would have gone straight to college. Had kids until a later age. I think that's why I tell my kids that they shouldn't have kids real young because of the hardships I went through after Tony and I divorced. I always tell them that they shouldn't get married unless they know it's a for sure thing, a forever thing.

DID YOU TELL REGINA NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN YOUNG?

No, uh-uh. I just didn't think at that time about it. But when Thelma came, man, I didn't want her to have kids so right away I got her on birth control. The same thing I'm doing to Tashina right now because I don't want her having kids.

WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU CHANGE OR DO DIFFERENTLY?

Ever since I was 17, I've had kids with me. All these years, to this day, I still have kids.

I REMEMBER YOU SAYING THAT YOU LIKED HAVING KIDS
AROUND YOU ALL THE TIME. YOU COULDN'T DEAL WITH
NOT HAVING THE KIDS AROUND.

I think I'm just used to having kids around me all the time. I think because I'm older right now, I feel like I'm at the age where I need to be alone and I need to spend time with Virgil and just spend it together alone and enjoy life because I feel like I deserve it.

* * * * *

NOW THAT YOU'RE OLDER, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT
GOING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN TWO VERY DIFFERENT
WORLDS.

Like I said, it was probably good to go to boarding school. There was a structure, they taught me how to make the bed, they taught me how to wash my clothes, and things like that.

LOOKING BACK, DO YOU WISH YOU HAD GROWN UP LIKE YOUR
PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS?

No, because I don't think my parents really lived traditional. Like they never lived on dirt floor. We always ate at the table. We never ate on the floor from one bowl. I never knew my parents to be living in that type of society. They never owned sheep. It was my grandfather that owned sheep. Of course, he had his own shepherders around. The boys would come home and help their grandpa herd sheep, but it was not like an everyday type of thing. Because from what I heard, my dad got a portion of the sheep but he sold them all. So we were never exposed to that very, very traditional type of life. I have respect for it. Just by looking at what's around and then by reading.

READING WHAT?

Books about Navajos and their traditional ceremonies.

WHAT KINDS OF BOOKS?

I don't remember.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHERE YOU GOT THESE BOOKS FROM?

Usually from the library.

AND YOU WENT THERE SPECIFICALLY TO CHECK OUT BOOKS ABOUT NAVAJO CULTURE?

Just out of curiosity, I would do that. I read them fast, not really concentrating.

DID YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU READ?

I think I really believed in those things. But now, if you read a book about something traditional like the ways old ceremonies are performed, I don't think that a book really tells it all. It's just something to freshen our minds here and there. I don't really take it all in and say that this is the truth or how it is. I'd rather go to an old medicine man and sit down with him and ask if this is really how it used to be and listen more to that person talk to where I know that it's true. But I don't have my mom sitting there telling me how the old days used to be, how they do this traditional ceremony. I don't have nobody.

SHE NEVER TOLD YOU THAT?

Never. That's what I mean. My mom don't know nothing. She just grew up being a sheepherder totally, like going from one house to another house and herding sheep for different people. That's how she was raised. There was nobody solely there for her to be her teacher.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FATHER?

He grew up here. He worked for this company in Gallup. He was like a maintenance man for this company for a lot of years. And then he was a chapter official. He was also a Navajo police officer at one time. So various jobs he had with a third grade education.

WHAT IS THE STORY WITH HIM HAVING SO MANY CHILDREN?

I think it just happened. My dad was, I guess you would say, not a gigolo (laughter), but a person who was not satisfied with only one woman. So he

just went here and there with different women and I heard women used to chase after him because he was good-looking and they used to fight for him.

TO THIS DAY, DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY HALF-BROTHERS AND SISTERS YOU HAVE OUT THERE?

They're probably all over. Just between my mom and Pam's mom, there was eighteen of us. I know there's a lot more because when I made that trip to Shiprock one day last year, I was told that I had a sister there.

WHAT CHILDHOOD MEMORIES DO YOU HAVE OF HOME?

I think I have more memories of being at boarding school than being at home. Probably just spending a day at home cleaning and being with my mom and dad. But, for me, my time was with my dad. The next day, we were being taken back by noon time to boarding school.

DO YOU REMEMBER FEELING EXCITED ABOUT GOING HOME?

It was just part of the routine. I really don't have that many memories about home. When I went home, I think all we did was clean for my mom, and what was taught to us in boarding school was how to clean and so that's what we did at home. It was more work because my dad was really strict. We would come home Friday late at night, and the next morning he would chase us out of bed. We had to be up before the sun, and we had to go help my mom clean and the boys were out doing something. It wasn't a relaxation or enjoyment, I would say, that I came home. It was the same thing what we did at boarding school.

TALK ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. WHO WERE YOU CLOSEST TO AMONG YOUR SIBLINGS?

I don't think any of them. Because my dad always had this thing that we're not supposed to be playing around with our brothers or touching our brothers.

WHY?

I guess because of a taboo or something like that. Like if Thompson and I were to play with each other, something like incest might happen. So they really told us not to bother our brothers so the boys and girls were always apart—just like boarding school.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR SISTERS?

I was not close to nobody. I didn't feel connected to anybody at all. Even to this day, I don't have contact with anybody.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR HALF-BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO LIVE DOWN THE ROAD?

All I remember is that we all used to live together at one time. That was before my mom's house was built. That hogan, remember, by Pearl's house? We all lived in there together. Of course, my mom and Pam's mom, they got along, so my mom was babysitting Thelma and Pam⁴ while she worked.

YOUR MOM NEVER HAD A PROBLEM WITH THE FACT THAT HER HUSBAND WAS HAVING CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT WOMEN?

I never asked her. Like I'm at the age where I wonder how it feels to go through menopause and I wonder if my mom knows anything about it. She's not that outspoken about a lot of things. I just wonder what she went through.

WHY DON'T YOU ASK?

Because she probably would tell me, "I don't remember."

SO WHEN YOU GO OVER THERE, WHAT DO YOU TALK ABOUT?

Nothing. I just go over there to make sure she's okay and she has food. That's it. Other than that, to carry on a conversation, there's none.

YET SHE'S CLOSE TO YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS?

Yeah, she can talk and visit with Irma. They can stay over there and they can talk and talk. But when I'm over there, I'm not comfortable. I've always felt that way. I think I've accepted to it to the point where I was never close to my mom.

YOU DON'T FEEL ANY DESIRE TO BE CLOSE TO HER FROM NOW ON?

Uh-uh.

THERE ISN'T ANYTHING YOU WANT TO TALK WITH HER ABOUT BEFORE SHE PASSES AND SHE'S GONE FOREVER?

I think that I will accept her death. I probably won't grieve as much.

DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ANY OF YOUR BROTHERS OR SISTERS.

I really don't have a relationship with any of my brothers or sisters. I never visit them. They never visit me.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THEY ALWAYS COME OVER HERE!

They used to but not anymore.

WHAT HAPPENED?

I don't know. I think I just have too many things. I'm too busy. I don't have time, and I feel like I'm in my own small world and I don't need to associate with anybody.

WHO'S IN THIS SMALL WORLD WITH YOU?

My kids and my grandchild. And Virgil. That's it.

WHAT ABOUT FRIENDS?

Yeah, Birdie. Her and I got another girlfriend. That's probably the only two best girlfriends that I have. I associate with them and their kids. I'm closer to them than my sisters, and they know more about me than my sisters do. I guess I do hold a grudge against my mom because, as a mother, I think you have an obligation, a duty, a responsibility to tell your kids that there is a better way of life. But my mom, she just tends to baby her kids. Whenever they need help, she's there and then they take advantage of her. Like whenever she gets her check on a monthly basis, Delbert comes around and she gives him a hundred dollars. Irma comes around and she takes off with some more of her money. I feel like my brothers and sisters should be the ones that should be helping my mom. I do not like it, and I think that's the reason I distance myself from them. Because I feel like my mom is old, and it's up to her to tell her kids that you shouldn't drink or that's bad for you and you should live your life this way. But, no, she doesn't. For instance, she just accepts Delbert how he is. From the beginning, before he became a real hard-core alcoholic, she should have told him a lot of things when he was a little bit younger. Instead, she just accepted it and started helping him buy booze and things like that. She should have had control over her kids.

DID YOUR MOM EVER DRINK?

She drinks with them. To me, that's not how it should be. Delbert, as old as he is, should have his own home. He should have a better way of helping his kids that he just abandoned years ago. He should be able to control his drinking. He should be able to have a good, decent job.

I HEARD HE JUST GOT A JOB.

He went only for two days and he got fired for coming in to work drunk. So I always look at my brothers and my sisters like Irma, you know, who just has a whole house full of son-in-laws, grandkids. She should be telling them, "Go find a job, go do this, go back to school" and whatnot. She should be doing these things, but she just accepts it instead and just lives like that. All they do when they see me is they're stressed or burned out from paying bills or paying for their grandkids' diapers and things like that. I think they should be in control and say, "This is it. I don't want this." So I see them as

weaklings. I see them that way so I always think that I don't have no use for them.

AND YOU'VE MADE THESE FEELINGS KNOWN TO THEM?

That's why they don't come around. Pogo and Amy⁵ had kids so young, and the fathers of those children don't work. I always tell them, "You girls shouldn't be in this predicament. If you want to have somebody in your life, get somebody that will support you, put you in a nice home and whatnot. Have somebody that has a job." And they don't appreciate me telling those things to them. But that's how I want to see my family, my sisters, my brothers. But they're not, and my mom is just sitting there accepting everything and giving out money to everybody.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT FROM YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS?

I think that they're still in shock from losing my dad. Because when my dad was around, he was there for them to look up to and he was there to make the decisions for all the kids. My mom, she would say nothing. And, all of a sudden, my dad vanished. It was such a shock to them. He was gone, and they were all standing there like "What now? Who's going to tell us what to do, who's going to do this for us?" Then from there on, I feel that my mom should have taken that step to start, you know, not really filling my dad's shoes but kind of like being the leader of the family. But, no, she didn't.

I DON'T THINK SHE COULD BE A LEADER CONSIDERING...

I know but at least something. But she never did that. To this day, she never has. The kids like Delbert and all my brothers, they just thought "Well, there's nothing else for us to do but just turn to drinking." When I look at Delbert, I always think, "What is it that he can't stop himself from drinking? Why is he so weak?" I can't understand that.

SINCE YOU WERE THE ONE CLOSEST TO HIM, WHY DIDN'T YOU FALL APART?

I think one of the main reasons that I'm like how I am is because he nurtured me in a different way. He gave me strength, he gave me love, and

just hugged me. He probably told me that he loved me more than he did with the other siblings. So I was really bonded with him. Sometimes, I think that's where my strength and determination came from.

SO, IF ANYBODY SHOULD TURN TO ALCOHOL AFTER HIS DEATH,
IT SHOULD BE YOU BUT INSTEAD IT MADE YOU STRONGER.

I always thought that I was different than my other brothers or my sisters just in the way I look at things. For instance, my sister Irma had her time with all sorts of men from high school to this day. After my dad died, that's when she started going haywire with all these guys. But for me, I couldn't get myself to do those things. I always thought of it as something bad. My approach was different. I guess just seeing what my brothers and sisters were doing to themselves, I always wanted to do the opposite. They were kind of a bad example, and I wanted to go into a different direction and not do what they were doing. One thing that I swore that I would never do is drink in front of my kids because I always believe that alcoholism runs in the family, and the worst thing you could do to a child is have them see you drink. It goes on and on. Pretty soon, you're fighting with your husband and they're seeing it all. It's just something bad that I would never bestow on my kids. That was always my mentality. I want my kids brought up the right way and not seeing those things. That's the reason why I never drink. I always believe that within you, you have this higher power that you can overcome something like that. That's what I believe.

HOW DID YOU ATTAIN THIS HIGHER POWER?

I think I just look within myself. Because I really didn't have nobody around me, no family members, my mom wasn't there, nothing. I never depended on my mom even to babysit my kids. That's what I always tell my mom when I see her babysitting all the grandkids. I say, "You never did that for me, huh, Mom?" I said. And she says, "Yeah, that's true, you did it on your own."

YOU DIDN'T ASK HER TO BABYSIT BECAUSE...

Probably because, like I said, I wasn't close to her. She was like at the bottom of my list.

WHO WAS AT THE TOP?

Probably...nobody. I just had to do it some way, there was always a way. I think I became very independent whereas before I was always dependent on somebody. And I was depending on my dad also, but after he was gone, I guess his loss to me was kind of devastating. I know that, from there on, I would have nobody to actually turn to. So I think based on that, I knew I had to do it on my own.

WHERE ELSE DO YOU TURN TO FOR STRENGTH BESIDES WITHIN YOURSELF?

Spirituality.

WOULD YOU STILL DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS A CHRISTIAN?

No. I think that stopped once I left boarding school. In eighth grade, that's where it ended. I never took it seriously anyway.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A RELIGIOUS PERSON?

No.

BUT YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A SPIRITUAL PERSON?

Uh-huh.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Religion, I feel, that's where one becomes a Christian or a Catholic and really practices. But spirituality is not so major. I feel the spirituality is within me, where I can go practice that wherever I'm at. But religion is like you have to do it at a certain time like Sundays are the only times that you can go and confess. But with spirituality, it's different. It's any time, any day, anywhere.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE A MEDICINE MAN?

I hardly see medicine men, probably like every other month. I always say that my spirituality is inside me. I always feel there's a higher power within

me. Say Jerrold got really sick, I probably won't go to a medicine man. I would probably do a prayer myself. I get up early in the morning, I go outside, and I pray. I pray for the kids, my home, my mom, everybody.

WHO DO YOU PRAY TO?

Just the sun, the sunrise. I feel like that's what gives me strength. It makes me feel good after I pray. When I go pray, there's this feeling, this connection I have with my dad. I always include him in my prayers.

* * * * *

TALK ABOUT THE SHIFT FROM THE "TRADITIONAL" WAY OF LIVING WHERE EVERYONE LIVED COMMUNALLY TO THE "MODERN" LIFE WHERE PEOPLE LIVE MORE INDIVIDUALLY. DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN THAT CHANGED?

I know I used to do that with my mom when I was living with her. Of course, my dad was with Dorothy and my mom at the same time and I remember living under one roof with both of them and all the kids. It didn't last too long because Dorothy was real uncomfortable about it so she went back across over there. And when I was married to Tony, he used to work at the uranium mine and he used to bring a lot of money home. At that time, we were still living with my mom over here. We would pitch in for groceries and whatnot but some of the other people didn't pitch in so we kind of like just didn't want to do it anymore. So we started just cooking food in the bedroom and taking stuff back there for ourselves. I had my own little groceries over here. And I know Do-Do used to do that too. She used to buy food from food stamps, and she used to store it in her room and take it out whenever her kids needed it. And then we used to all take turns cooking separately. Then another family would come in and cook again while the people who were eating would get out of the way. It was like that when we used to live with my mom.

WHY? IT WOULD SEEM EASIER IF EVERYBODY ATE TOGETHER.

It was like that before.

SO WHAT CHANGED?

People, some of them, didn't work. And you kind of think, "Why is this person freeloading off of me?"

BUT "THIS PERSON" IS YOUR BROTHER OR YOUR SISTER OR YOUR NIECES AND NEPHEWS. IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'RE STRANGERS. THEY'RE YOUR FAMILY.

I know. But still, I felt like they needed to pitch in for something too. So I remember us doing that, taking turns cooking our own food and just feeding our own kids.

WHICH WAY DO YOU PREFER?

I like it this way instead of the other way where everybody shared equally.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN THE MEDICINE MAN TOLD YOU THAT IT WAS ONE OF YOUR RELATIVES WHO WAS WITCHCRAFTING YOU?

Yeah, I remember.

WHO WAS IT THAT WAS DOING IT?

They usually don't tell you. They just say it's a family member, someone close to you and right away, a light bulb comes up: it must be my cousin, my aunt, or my uncle. I never think for a minute that it can be your own brother or sister.

WHY DID THE MEDICINE MAN SAY THIS FAMILY MEMBER WAS WITCHCRAFTING YOU?

Jealousy.

JEALOUS OF WHAT?

Probably of what we have. Like about a month ago, I found a deer horn outside the house right by the steps in the middle of the door. It had antlers

and everything. And I thought, “Who would leave this here?” The dogs won’t leave that around here. To me, that means something bad because you usually don’t see antlers around here. Somebody must have gotten it and put it there on purpose. What they say about deer is that when somebody witches you with something that has to do with deer, they want your family to split up and go astray and not come back together. So Virgil got his gloves and he put it in a plastic bag. And then we got a medicine man that came over and he did a ceremony for us. Right away, he said, “It’s your own relative who’s doing that to you because of land.” And right away, I thought about my Auntie Thelma because she’s been upset about our building that hogan there. She went over to chapter housing and said, “Her home site lease is not right there.” She has always been stingy with the land here.

I’VE HEARD YOU SAY MANY TIMES THE STATEMENT “THAT’S HOW NAVAJOS ARE.”⁶ WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?

(Laughter) I guess that’s just part of Navajo character, like you always provide help in some way but, in return, they never appreciate it or you never get help in return when you need it. It’s just one-sided.

DO YOU REALLY FEEL THAT’S THE WAY *ALL* NAVAJOS ARE?

Not all Navajos but probably the majority of them, especially the modern Navajos.

WHAT ARE SOME SPECIFIC TRAITS FOR A “TRADITIONAL” NAVAJO?

First of all, you should be able to talk Navajo. You should also know a lot of things about the ceremonies, the four sacred mountains, knowing how to pray, knowing a lot about herbs...just things like that a medicine man usually knows. That’s the basic a person should know in order to be traditional.

BY YOUR OWN DEFINITION, DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A TRADITIONAL NAVAJO?

I don’t think so. I think you need to know more about the stories that are behind how the third and fourth world came about and identifying the people and animals that were involved in that and what their meaning was and all this

like the sun and—what was it?—the White Shadow Lady. I don't know any of that. I *want* to know and I wish somebody would teach me, but we were never taught those things by my mom. As far as my mom was concerned, she doesn't know nothing about that. She doesn't even know about the origination of squaw dances or what they mean or the stick they use in those ceremonies.

THERE SEEMS TO BE A LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL THINGS TRADITIONAL. WHILE ON THE ONE HAND, YOU WANT TO KNOW THE STORIES BEHIND THE MOUNTAINS AND ALL THAT BUT YOU DON'T WANT TO BE *TOO* TRADITIONAL OR YOU'RE LAUGHED AT FOR BEING A "JAAN." IT'S IMPORTANT—PERHAPS *MORE* IMPORTANT—TO DRIVE THE NICE CAR AND WEAR THE NICE CLOTHES. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT?

Yeah, that's true. Everything that's traditional is slowly being phased out.

AND AS THE TRADITIONAL WAY OF LIFE IS DISAPPEARING, MODERN PEOPLE LONG FOR THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE. A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE HOUSE WHICH YOU GUYS ARE BUILDING. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO DESIGN IT IN THE SHAPE OF A HOGAN?

Because I'm Navajo. I just like the shape.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A NAVAJO?

I really can't distinguish myself in that. I can't really come out and say "I'm Navajo." I would probably say "So what?" To me, I'm a human being first of all. Being Navajo does not matter to me. I don't take it for granted. It's just that it identifies me. That's all it does.

EXPLAIN.

I think because I have not really experienced the mainstream society. I have never really exposed myself. It's always been with, you know, this side. Where I am today is where I've always been. I never really went off the reservation and knew how people lived out there so I have nothing to make that comparison against.

BUT YOU TRAVEL A LOT WITH YOUR JOB. YOU WERE JUST IN LOS ANGELES A LITTLE WHILE AGO, RIGHT? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

I didn't like it. I thought that people didn't have time to talk like it was too fast and you had to constantly be like move, move, moving all the time. I never relaxed. And there were all sorts of people around me, but I wasn't scared. We just got there, did what we had to do, didn't go out.

DID YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE OR SELF-CONSCIOUS IN ANY WAY BECAUSE EVERYBODY LOOKED DIFFERENT FROM YOU?

No, probably because it wouldn't matter what the hell they think. (laughter)

HAVE YOU HAD EXPERIENCES WITH RACISM?

Yeah, but I just walk away.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR WORST EXPERIENCE.

Just being called "chief" or something like that. One time, we went down there to Houston for a trip. It was a show that we went to with Sonny Jim. They took me along to demonstrate rug weaving. So we were down there and people were calling us all sorts of names. I was maybe sixteen. We were down there for almost a week.

DID THAT HURT YOUR FEELINGS?

It probably did, but I didn't make a big deal out of it. I really don't remember. I'm just the type of person that I don't let it bother me. I just say forget it. I think what really tees me off is when your own people, like Navajos, say things about you and they put you down. That's what gets me pissed off, when you're own kind says things. Not so much these outsiders, I don't give a darn about what they say.

WHAT NASTY THINGS HAVE PEOPLE SAID ABOUT YOU?

Probably “she thinks she’s all that” or “she thinks she’s something all mighty up in Window Rock” or something like that. Just making remarks like that. So that’s what pisses me off, but not so much *bilagaanas* saying something. But Virgil is totally different from me. He hates White people. He hates Mexicans. And if they say something, man, he jumps and says something back. He’s ready to punch them. But, for me, I’m different. I don’t care what they say.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHITE PEOPLE?

Like I say, I don’t make the distinction. I’ll always think of people as one. Whether they’re White, yellow, Black or brown, they’re still human beings.

OK, WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT ANGLOS, WHAT COMES TO MIND?

(Long pause) Trash. (laughter) I’m just joking! I guess when you say “White people,” right there it puts a block and I say, “I don’t have to associate with this person.”

SO IT IS A NEGATIVE IMPRESSION THAT YOU HAVE. WHAT MAKES YOU NOT WANT TO ASSOCIATE WITH THEM?

Probably because they think they’re always smarter than you are, that they know better than you are, that they’re more richer than you are.

ARE THOSE IMPRESSIONS BASED ON ACTUAL EXPERIENCE?

They’re probably stereotypes.

WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU PICKED UP THOSE STEREOTYPES?

Probably watching it on TV.

TELL ME ABOUT THE FIRST TIME YOU REMEMBER COMING INTO CONTACT WITH A WHITE PERSON.

In boarding school, with one of my teachers.

WHAT ABOUT OUTSIDE SCHOOL?

Probably in Gallup doing business, like the Laundromat. I know there was a White lady working there tending the laundry.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY ANGLO FRIENDS?

Never.

DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO BE FRIENDS
WITH AN ANGLO?

Yeah, I think so. But I don't think I need them. I don't think I need that in my life.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU'RE AT WORK?

They're pure Navajos. The whole building where I work is totally Navajos. Like say I'm going on a training and I know I have to associate with Whites, I always make them approach me. I never approach them. If they want to talk about something, I'm not the type that would go up to them and start jabbering and all that. It's them that have to open up to me first.

DO YOU MAKE YOURSELF APPROACHABLE TO THEM?

I think I put up a guard.

DO THEY EVER APPROACH YOU ANYWAY?

Yeah, they do. I have to make myself friendly and just politely answer their questions.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU'RE AROUND OTHER NAVAJOS YOU'VE
NEVER MET BEFORE?

They have to approach me.

SO THAT'S YOUR POLICY FOR EVERYBODY?

Yeah. I'm not the type of person that makes the first move! (laughter) Like Virgil is really outgoing and can start a conversation with anybody. But, for me, I can't do that. Maybe it's because I'm ashamed or embarrassed.

EMBARRASSED OF WHAT?

I might say something wrong or do something wrong where I'd be laughed about. So I'm really quiet at these trainings. Sometimes, the trainers will say, "You guys have ten minutes to mingle with one another." I just sit there. For me, I have to think about what should I say. I go through this mental process where if I say this, then they'll say this back to me, and what do I say back. I'm not a social person.

WHAT OTHER RACES HAVE YOU COME INTO CONTACT WITH?

Blacks.

AND WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT BLACKS?

I don't feel bad towards them probably because I know I have that blood in me. Sometimes I wish that I had more Black blood in me than Navajo.

WHY?

I don't know. (laughter) I think they're just a very unique people going back to how they were slaves and whatnot. I think about them, what happened to them. I guess I feel a connection to them since they went through their suffering too. So I'm more sensitive to Blacks than I would be to Whites.

DO YOU HAVE ANY BLACK FRIENDS?

I probably would say yes, but not very, very close friends. I don't remember.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF ONE OF YOUR DAUGHTERS LIKE SHARMAINE, FOR EXAMPLE SAID, "I'M GOING TO MARRY A BLACK MAN." WOULD YOU BE OPPOSED TO THAT?

No. Even if she comes and says, "I'm going to marry a White guy," I wouldn't be opposed to that either because I would feel like that's her choice and not mine. But if Sharmaine came in and told me that she's going to marry a Navajo, I would be very curious and say where is this person from, who is his family, what is his plan? I would probably interrogate her more if she says she's going to marry a Navajo. But if it comes to her marrying a White man or a Black man, I'd probably ask a few questions but not get down to the nitty-gritty. I would want my daughter to marry into a family that is, you know, a good family. Not a violent family or a alcoholic family or anything like that. I would want the best for my daughter. (pause) I always tell my boys, "Don't marry a Navajo. Marry a Mexican or some other Native American." I just feel that, nowadays, Navajo girls got this thing about wanting to use a guy and leave them. That's just my assumption, I guess, because I know Navajos more than other races.

WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU GET YOUR IMPRESSIONS ABOUT PEOPLE OF OTHER RACES?

Probably from other people like maybe from my co-workers saying, "Oh, my daughter is marrying this guy and he's like this," you know. Maybe that's where my information comes from. I haven't seen it, so it's mostly heresy. And I guess also television.

* * * * *

WHEN WAS THE VERY FIRST TIME YOU REMEMBER WATCHING TV?

Probably when I was in boarding school. I was about seven years old. I remember seeing that show "Petticoat Junction" and those types of things. We saw a lot of those cowboys and Indians shows like "The Lone Ranger."

HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL SEEING THE COWBOYS AS THE
GOOD GUYS AND THE INDIANS AS THE BAD GUYS?

I always rooted for the Indians because I was an Indian. On Saturday, as we got older, I know they used to put on that show with that Dick Clark guy, “American Bandstand.”

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU SAW?

It was exciting to watch something like that. There were all these different types of people dancing. (pause) I never really thought about it. It was just like, “Wow, there are people like that in this world.” To me, I thought that was crazy! To this day, I’ve never danced. Seeing them moving their bodies that way was embarrassing for me.

DID YOU EVER FEEL ANY SHOCK ABOUT WATCHING A WORLD
SO DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OWN?

It didn’t affect me that way. I thought of it as a make-believe type of thing. I knew that what I was looking at wasn’t true.

AT SEVEN YEARS OLD YOU COULD MAKE THAT DETERMINATION?

I don’t remember thinking otherwise. It was just there. I was forced to watch it. To this day, I don’t enjoy watching TV. I hardly ever watch TV or videos.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? YOU HAVE AN ENTIRE LIBRARY OF VIDEOS!

I know, and we haven’t even seen all of those.

BUT THE POINT IS YOU WOULDN’T HAVE BOUGHT THEM OR
GOTTEN THE SATELLITE DISH IF YOU DIDN’T HAVE ANY
INTEREST IN WATCHING TV?

It’s just something to do in my spare time.

YOU KEEP SAYING THAT YOU HARDLY WATCH TV. CAN YOU ESTIMATE, ON THE AVERAGE, ABOUT HOW MANY HOURS OF TELEVISION YOU WATCH IN A DAY?

I would say at least an hour in the morning just to watch the news. That's it. Then I'm off to work. And then in the evening, I watch the news again. And that's about it.

WHAT ABOUT THE WEEKENDS?

About the same. We don't really watch that much TV on weekends.

DID YOU WATCH MORE TELEVISION DURING OTHER PARTS OF YOUR LIFE?

I remember watching soap operas. I kind of got into that at one time. This was when I was in school. I used to run back for lunch and make sure I catch that one soap opera, I think it was "Days of Our Lives." Then it got too old for me or I didn't care for it. It's been years since I've watched any soap operas. Now I see Tashina getting really into it and then Regina got into it. I always tell them, "Why are you watching that crap? You shouldn't be watching those things because it'll screw up your mind?"

WHAT DO YOU MEAN "SCREW UP YOUR MIND"?

Like the affairs those people are always having.

SO YOU THINK THAT IF YOU SEE THAT TYPE OF BEHAVIOR ON TELEVISION YOU WILL TEND TO COPY IT?

I think so. Tashina has a lot of movies that she sits there and watches three or four times over like that *Love of Basketball*.⁷ I always tell her, "You watch that movie so many times. That's why you want to go out and experiment with what goes on in that movie with your boyfriend."

WHAT ARE YOUR OVERALL FEELINGS ABOUT TELEVISION?

I don't like it. I wish my kids weren't so into television. Especially Chucky, he gets into those MTV rap videos. I don't like it. I make him turn it off. I wish that they would watch something else like educational programs.

IF YOU HAVE SUCH A NEGATIVE IMPRESSION OF TELEVISION, WHY DO YOU ALLOW SO MANY TVS IN THE HOUSE?

I don't mind TVs in the kids' room because I want them to watch, like, cartoons but not those nasty cartoons. Chucky is always getting away with sneaking movies into his room.

IT WOULD SEEM TO ME THAT A SIMPLE WAY OF PREVENTING THAT IS TO NOT ALLOW THE KIDS TO HAVE A TV IN THEIR ROOM. IF YOU FEEL SO STRONGLY THAT YOUR CHILDREN ARE LEARNING NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR FROM TELEVISION AND MOVIES, WHY NOT PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN AND SAY "NO MORE TV?"

Maybe because I'm a pushover. I give into the kids.

ON SOME LEVEL, DO YOU ASSOCIATE HAVING TELEVISIONS WITH LIVING WELL?

Maybe a little, yeah.

DO YOU SET DOWN ANY GROUND RULES AT ALL FOR THE KIDS ABOUT WATCHING TELEVISION?

No. I probably should but I think the reason I have televisions for the kids is because they're always saying, "I'm bored. I got nothing to do around here." In the back of my mind, I think that when a kid says that, they go astray. They start hitting Gallup, they start getting involved with other kids who are out there doing bad things. So, I guess in a way, television's a way for them just to be here instead of them being out there walking the mall or doing things like that.

IT'S INTERESTING TO ME THAT YOU DESCRIBE TV AS A BABYSITTER, AS A WAY OF KEEPING YOUR CHILDREN OUT OF TROUBLE, WHEN EVERYTHING YOU SAID PREVIOUSLY INDICATES THAT YOU THINK TELEVISION *CAUSE* TROUBLE. DO YOU SEE ANY CONTRADICTION THERE?

When it comes to that, I'd rather have them be at home here than being out there somewhere. Look at Chucky. When he goes to his [paternal] grandma's, he spends all his time at the mall just walking around or walking the streets by his grandmother's house and whatnot. But over here, all he does is stay here. I never take my kids into town. I never take them to the mall. I never take my kids out to eat in a restaurant and things like that. They're always just here.

KEEPING THEM HOME IS YOUR WAY OF PROTECTING THEM?

Yeah. I think maybe if they have a movie or a CD or a video game, they won't be so bored. I'm always at work so all they do is just spend time here watching TV.

CAN YOU ESTIMATE HOW LONG THE TV IS ON DURING THE DAY?

They used to have it on *all* day. But I think nowadays, they don't turn it on until noon time and I don't know how long they watch it.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY WATCH?

It's mostly videos. The DirecTV has been off for some time now.

IS THERE A REASON WHY YOU'RE NOT GETTING THE DIRECTV FIXED?

I guess I want to shy away from it. I don't want them to be looking at MTV and all that. I don't think that I'm going to have it hooked back on, maybe into my room but not in here.

BUT ALL YOU WATCH IS THE NEWS.

I know.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE NEWS THAT INTERESTS YOU SO MUCH?
WHY DO YOU CARE ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE
OUTSIDE WHEN YOU'RE ALWAYS SAYING YOU LIVE IN YOUR
OWN LITTLE WORLD?

I don't care. I just want to see what's going on. It's more of a curiosity.
Once I see it, I just put it behind me. I don't even watch TV that much.

YOU KEEP SAYING THAT BUT MY MEMORIES TELL ME THAT YOU
WATCH A LOT MORE THAN YOU'RE ADMITTING TO.

No, I hardly ever watch TV.

OK, WHEN YOU DO WATCH TV, WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR
FAVORITE SHOWS?

I hate comedies. I don't like those shows where people are being goofy
and there's an audience that laughs for them. Ugh! I hate those things! I
never watch comedies. The way I think about comedy shows is that it's just
stupidity. Maybe it's because I'm just so set in being serious that I don't have
time to really look at a comedy and laugh.

BUT A LOT OF THE VIDEOS IN YOUR COLLECTION ARE COMEDIES!

They're just there for the kids. I haven't even watched Sister Act I and II.
They're just sitting in there.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MOVIE?

The Color Purple, even though I haven't watched the whole movie yet. I
just watch here and there. I like those types of movies: when the Blacks were
being slaves and whatnot.

IS THAT BECAUSE YOU CAN IDENTIFY WITH BLACKS?

No, it's more of a feeling sorry for Blacks.

DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVORITE CHARACTERS ON TELEVISION?

I usually watch Oprah because she's very sensitive to people that are in need. And Maury, too. They're always talking about these rowdy kids and teen mothers. I just sit there and think, "Oh my God!" (laughter) But I watch it anyway.

IS THERE ANYBODY YOU ADMIRE WHO IS ON TV?

No.

THEN WHY ARE YOU SO INTERESTED IN THE LIVES OF CELEBRITIES? THE ONLY MAGAZINE I EVER SEE YOU READ IS PEOPLE. WHY READ IT IF YOU DON'T CARE?

That's the only magazine I buy.

SINCE YOU DON'T HAVE A SUBSCRIPTION, HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHICH ISSUES YOU PURCHASE?

Not so much about a particular person but maybe an incident that happened which I'm interested in, like when Princess Di got killed.

THEN WHO ARE OR WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR ROLE MODELS?

Nobody! (laughter) I've never had a mentor or I've never had a role model in my life.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER? IS THERE ANYBODY YOU LOOKED UP TO?

Just my dad. I don't recall looking up to anybody after my dad died. I've always been distant from my mom. And none of my siblings, that's for sure.

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT YOU DON'T ENJOY WATCHING TELEVISION WHEN EVERYBODY ELSE AROUND HERE DOES?

I guess I'm the type of person that is really simple, and I always think I don't need that kind of entertainment in my life. I remember my sisters going

to dances at the chapter houses and going to rodeos. I was never interested in those things. I don't know why.

BUT YOU LIKE GOING TO THE CASINO.

Yeah, I like going over there. But entertainment like rodeo, I was never into it.

SO WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR FREE TIME?

Being at home. I'm really content being at home just being to myself, relaxing, maybe looking at the paper, reading a magazine, or something like that. I'm glad where I am.

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, WHERE WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Probably here. I've never wanted to go anywhere else or travel or anything like that. I don't even have those desires.

Virgil: *Sam, let me tell you something. When I was a little kid, we had to go from Point A to Point B in the back of a wagon. I was lucky to see maybe one vehicle go by in a whole month. I knew there was something out there because I could see planes flying in the sky. I can remember going across a railroad track. I stored these things in my mind. One day, my brother bought himself a brand new car and it was like wow, things could be done. Then he bought himself a TV. It was Black and White. When I first saw that thing, I seen that there's something more out there than just what it is right here. This is just a few miles but when you're younger, it's further. But that television brought me some of the things that were happening all around the world. It just kind of grabs you. It grabbed me. It made me want to go out there and see it. That's what it did to me.*

This one day, I was driving down the road and they were talking about a television in every room. Apparently, these parents were more concerned with what's happening on TV, the violence and all this. One lady says, "I would never have a TV in every room." Then I think about this place here and I wonder how did that happen anyway. Is it because the kids are more

Isabelle

in a command situation? Or is it just because I don't have time to answer any questions that they have so TV is the only answer that they have here?

LET'S ASK: WHY IS THERE A TV IN EVERY ROOM?

(laughter) We'd buy a new one and then when it gets old, somebody wants it so it's just passing it down. It kind of just happened.

* * * * *

WHO DETERMINES WHAT IS ON TELEVISION?

I would probably say whoever owns the station. I don't know.

WHO IS TELEVISION MADE FOR?

I would say everybody. I can't sit here and say, "Oh, it's just made for the White people." I would say it's made for anybody.

**WHY DO YOU THINK THE MAJORITY OF SHOWS ON TELEVISION
FEATURE ONLY WHITE PEOPLE?**

The way I think about television is that the majority of it is fake like "Survivor." That's probably why I just watch news all the time.

DO YOU EVER SEE YOUR OWN LIFE REPRESENTED ON TV?

Just when it comes to alcoholism in the family. I always think about how my brothers and sisters are affected by it. There's always that bystander who's innocent. I think that's the person I can relate to.

**I NOTICE THAT YOU CRY PRETTY EASILY WHEN YOU WATCH
SHOWS ON TV. WHY?**

Because I put myself in their shoes.

EVEN IF THAT PERSON IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM YOU, YOU CAN STILL RELATE TO THEM?

Uh-huh. Like in Apollo 13, when they got lost coming back down to the ocean and there was no noise from them for a while and then it did. That's what touched me.

IS THERE ANYTHING ON TV THAT YOU'RE OFFENDED BY?

I don't think they should have these movies on TV nowadays where there's so much gangs and violence and that type of thing. There's also too much sex on there and naked bodies.

BUT THE SEX AND VIOLENCE DOESN'T BOTHER YOU TO THE POINT OF SETTING RULES ABOUT THAT. AT WHAT AGE ARE THE KIDS ALLOWED TO KEEP THEIR EYES OPEN?

I would say about 13. I think there comes a point in time, especially a girl, has to be taught some things about sex.

SHOULD THEY LEARN ABOUT SEX THROUGH LOVE AND BASKETBALL?

When something like that shows on TV, that's when the teaching by the parents should come with it. That's what I tell Sharmaine, "This is what's going to happen if you do that. You're at the age where you can conceive a baby and this is what it's all about." So she's aware of it.

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

It's too violent. I don't like it. We used to order those pay per view shows for Buzz and Jerrold but I quit doing that. It just got too rowdy and they tried to copy it. I told them about these two kids who killed their little brother so I said no. I see Deebo and Jerrold wrestling and I always get after them.

SO THIS IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF KIDS COPYING WHAT THEY SEE ON TELEVISION. AT WHAT AGE DO YOU THINK THEY'RE MOST IMPRESSIONABLE?

I think they're more vulnerable when they're Jerrold's age to maybe nineteen or twenty. But after twenty years old, I would think they should be mature. Even girls, they see all these movies on television, that's the way girls are supposed to be dressed. I always wonder about Marlin. He never watched that much movies. I wonder why he dresses the way he does like a gangster. He got himself exposed to city life in Albuquerque and he saw people dress like that and now he wants to dress like that. I would say that the way he dresses didn't come from television. And then Chucky is always wearing those skull caps and those baggy pants. That one I know he gets from being in Gallup when he's with his grandma.

DO YOU PUT ANY RESTRICTIONS ON THE MUSIC THE KIDS LISTEN TO?

On Jerrold's I did. I didn't even know that he bought some CDs that were really nasty. I guess he bought that when he was with his dad. Sharmaine was telling me that they were rowdy. I told him that he can't buy those. I said he had to buy those edited ones.

DO YOU THINK THE MUSIC THEY LISTEN TO INFLUENCES THE WAY THEY THINK AND ACT TOO?

I think so. I think rap goes with *zhinnys* so they want to be more acting like a *zhinny* and being cool and whatnot.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF TELEVISION?

For entertainment. And money making.

HAVE THERE BEEN TIMES WHEN YOU'VE SEEN SOMETHING ON TV AND THOUGHT "I WANT TO BUY THAT"?

Yes, that Victoria Principal face cleansing stuff! (laughter) Also, that Torso Track. But I've never tried it. So it's just sitting there brand new.

I WAS WONDERING WHAT THAT WAS. SO YOU WATCH
INFOMERCIALS?

Early in the morning is when they're usually on. After Virgil leaves, I can't go back to sleep so I turn on the TV and that's where those commercials are.

DO YOU THINK YOU MIGHT BE INFLUENCED BY TELEVISION IN
LESS DIRECT WAYS SUCH AS THE WAY ACTORS DRESS, THE
CARS THEY DRIVE, THE HOUSES THEY LIVE IN?

Not really.

WHAT ABOUT ALL THESE GLASS DISPLAY CASES IN YOUR HOUSE?
WHERE DOES YOUR ATTRACTION TO THESE COME FROM

I never had those things before. I just barely got them the last three years. It makes me enjoy the home and I tend to relax more. I'm really close to my room. I've really changed the last three years because, before, I couldn't do these things because Johnny was here and he never would let me relax and let me enjoy things. So I never had that privilege to display what I really like. So these curios didn't come into play until he left and that's when I started bringing them out. It just makes me feel really content at home. I enjoy being at home. Now I feel like I have more freedom and I can decorate my home the way I feel comfortable to.

THE FACT THAT ALL THESE ITEMS ARE ON DISPLAY IS IMPORTANT.
THEY'RE ON DISPLAY FOR WHOM OR FOR WHAT?

It's just for my satisfaction. The kids say, "Mom, that's junk!" All of them say that to me. But to me, it makes me feel good. It's not for anybody else. It's just for me.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A COLLECTOR?

Certain things attract me like little knick-knacks. I think they're so neat.

HOW DIFFERENT DO YOU THINK YOUR LIFE WOULD BE WITHOUT
TELEVISION?

It won't affect me, that's for sure. I don't think my life would be any different. The kids would probably get bored. I remember thinking back now that there was one time when Marvin and Marlin were about Chucky's age, I did take away their TV for about a month or so because they got in trouble. I took away their stereo so they couldn't listen to music anymore. Even now, those video games like Nintendo 64 and Playstation, I took that away from Jerrold and Deebo and have it locked away in the shed. To me, that's still rowdy too. I don't want them playing those games to where they're really into it. Thelma went and bought Buzz, Jerrold and Deebo those little Game Boys. Man, I swear I sat at Regina's house one day—we were playing cards—and Buzz played that little Game Boy for five or six hours, just sitting there looking at that thing. I couldn't believe how much time he put into that little machine. We kept talking to him but he was like a zombie to us. Finally, I told her to take it away from him so she finally did. So it really takes their mind off of things.

DO YOU EVER WORRY ABOUT THE LONG TERM IMPACT
TELEVISION, MUSIC, AND VIDEO GAMES HAVE HAD ON THE
KIDS?

(Pause) It'll probably affect them in their adult life. But I think as you grow older and mature, it kind of phases out. Like I don't see Marvin watching television like he used to because he's with his in-laws and his mind is on other things like working and doing things for the family. I think he's slowly growing out of it. But when he was here, before he moved in with Danny, he used to watch a lot of TV. I guess it all depends on your environment, especially for older kids like him.

WHAT ROLE, IF ANY, HAS TELEVISION PLAYED IN THE SHIFT FROM
THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE TO THE WAY THEY ARE NOW?

TV totally changed everything. I think it's an everyday change. For instance, we were watching football two weeks ago and then there was this saw that came on the commercial that did all sorts of things. Virgil and Marvin wanted that so bad like, "Oh, I wish I had that!" There was a 1-800 number on there and they started calling. So TV does change a lot of things. If it wasn't on TV, we would never know about it.

DO YOU THINK THE CHANGE HAS BEEN POSITIVE?

I would say yes for us but, for other people, it's probably been very negative by showing all these killings and bad stuff. Overall, I think the bad outweighs the good. But it's too late now because the kids here have already seen what they shouldn't have seen.

HOW HAVE THE CHANGES AFFECTED YOU SPECIFICALLY?

For me, going back to the traditional world is too late. Everything is going forward so I might as well just go with the flow. I look at Regina and I always think of her. She has friends who are young guys learning to be medicine men. She's learning a lot from those guys about the traditional ways. Yesterday, I called her and she said there was a *yeibachee* dance one of them was performing at Naschitti. I've never seen a *yeibachee* dance in my life! I wish somebody would have taught me those things. But it's really good that she's learning those things. But I think it's too late for me.

COMMENTARY

"Possession means nothing to the Navajo." -Dig McCaffrey in Say It Isn't So (Farrelly et al., 2001)

Until relatively recently, anthropological studies of native peoples ignored or at least assigned secondary status to women. The view that the responsibilities of Native American women, in particular, were less significant than their male counterparts permeates early writings.⁸ This discrepancy can be attributed to the ethnocentrism and sexism of male researchers. Early anthropologists measured the status of women in different cultures based on Western perceptions of power. Since females held a subservient status in their own society, they naturally assumed that men likewise held all positions of power everywhere else. With the feminization of anthropology has come the realization that women's status cannot be measured by Western standards.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

There is an old Navajo joke that humorously encapsulates the relationship between men and women:

An Apache woman walks in front of her man to block bad things from hurting him. A Hopi woman walks behind her man to pick him up when he falls. And a Navajo woman walks all over her man.

The nature of inter-tribal jokes is that the names of the tribes invariably change depending upon who is telling the joke.⁹ In this case, although there are slight variations in the first two lines, the punch line always remains the same. Like stinginess, female dominance appears to be a tribally specific trait.

Navajos belong to a matrilineal and matrilocal society. As stated in the previous chapter, the man typically goes to live with his wife's family after marriage. The women own the land, and they are usually responsible for making the economic decisions in the household.¹⁰ In fact, all of the Navajo men I know who are involved in relationships have to ask their girlfriends or wives for permission to spend any money.¹¹

Managing the financial resources in the relationship falls under Isabelle's domain as well. Amidst her frequent exhortations aimed at her daughters and nieces to "find men who can do something for you"¹² is a not-so-veiled admission of her own primary criterion when looking for a male companion. Isabelle is clearly using her present common-law husband, Virgil, for personal gain as she did the others before him. In addition to contributing his substantial income as an electrician, Virgil has been building her a customized hogan. In Virgil, Isabelle has obviously found someone who can do something for her, which, some relatives say, is the only reason that she is with him in the first place.¹³

Despite cultural norms prescribing the importance of a stable marriage, marital bonds are weak and divorce is common (Lamphere, 1977). Isabelle has demonstrated a history of discarding men once they outlast their usefulness. She has been married four times in addition to having numerous other liaisons.¹⁴ Each of these relationships has represented a fresh start. Although she is now in her mid-40s, Isabelle is looking forward to leaving her checkered past behind and doing things "the right way" with her latest man. As such, they are in the process of building a new house only big enough to accommodate the couple and their new baby.¹⁵ As for the rest of her kids,

Isabelle has joked—with increasing frequency and seriousness—that she will leave them in her present trailer to “fend for themselves.”

Individualism

Isabelle’s adherence to an “every man for himself” mentality was cultivated during her childhood. She reports that she constantly felt alone, alienated from both her mother and her siblings. Lamphere (1977) posits that the tie between a mother and her children should be strong and enduring, while the tie of a father to his children tends to be positive but more distant (p. 72). Isabelle’s relationship with her parents did not conform to these cultural prescriptions. Not only does she describe herself as a “daddy’s girl,” she claims to have always been estranged from her mother. Unlike Delbert who portrays Grandma Sharmaine as loving and caring, Isabelle paints a portrait of her mother as emotionally distant and unsupportive.

Similarly, she professes to not having a close relationship with any of her siblings.¹⁶ According to Lamphere (1977), sibling ties are an outgrowth of the mother-child bond and should remain strong even after adulthood. Instead, Isabelle looks down on her brothers and sisters for being unable to follow her Horatio Alger model of self-transformation: “To me, they’re just weaklings.” Because she does not hesitate to express her disapproval at their continuing struggles with alcohol and unemployment, Isabelle has earned a reputation for character assassination or, to use the reservation vernacular, “talking shit.” She acknowledges that being perceived as elitist is the main reason her relatives do not come to visit her. Not that she cares.

Isabelle deliberately celebrates the holidays separate from the rest of her family. One Easter, while her brothers and sisters and all of her nieces and nephews assembled at Grandma Sharmaine’s house, she decided to have her own party in her trailer with only her immediate family. Since I was invited to both gatherings, Isabelle asked me for a scouting report: “What are those guys eating over there?” When I informed her that they were grilling hamburgers and hot dogs, she offered a dismissive laugh as those standard offerings noticeably paled in comparison to her own spread of steaks, enchiladas, and potato salad.

Segregating herself from the rest of her family is indicative of an isolationist policy that applies to people in general. Isabelle has confined her energies to her significant other and her children: “That’s all I want—and all I need.” The line she draws between “us/self” and “them/other” is meant to compartmentalize

her thinking, emotions, and behavior: one set of categories, feelings, and actions for her inner circle and another for those outside the circle.

Yet for all her convictions about the fundamental importance of a “parent-child relationship,” Isabelle does not enjoy a particularly endearing relationship with any of her kids. In Navajo culture, mother and child are bound together by the most intense, the most diffuse, and the most enduring solidarity. According to Witherspoon (1975), the relationship of Changing Woman to her children provides the major conceptual framework for the Navajo cultural definition of motherhood.¹⁷ As the primary bond in the kinship system, the mother-child bond is the most important tie in Navajo society. It goes without saying that mothers are supposed to put their kids before everything and everyone else.

However, in Isabelle’s case, she has always placed herself and her assortment of male companions before her own children. My research assistants remember a childhood filled with neglect and recall bitter memories of being “dumped off” at their grandmother’s house for days at a time. Marvin thought that his mom was busy working during these stretches, but he found out later that she was actually with one of her male companions. Marlin resented the succession of revolving door boyfriends: “As soon as we got used to one, he would leave and then here comes another one.”

WHAT’S MINE IS MINE

I have noticed a conspicuous lack of sharing among members of the Johnson family ever since I first visited the reservation fourteen years ago. Back then, Isabelle was living in her mom’s house along with her mother, two of her sisters, and all of their respective children. Despite the communal atmosphere, she only bought and cooked food for herself and her kids. Instead of everybody eating together, each “sub-family” would take their turn in the kitchen before relinquishing it for the next shift.¹⁸ Isabelle perceived nothing strange or peculiar about living under one roof with so many of her relatives and not sharing food with one another. In fact, she is the one who initiated the “every family for themselves” policy because she thought that it was unfair for her to have to feed “someone else’s kids”—never mind that those kids are her own nieces and nephews.

Although Isabelle no longer lives at her mom’s house, her policy of not sharing persists to this day. Today, anybody who is present while Isabelle and her family are eating will not expect to be offered any food. She will also not allow her mother or her siblings access to any of her possessions, such

as her washing machine, shower, or telephone, because she fears that she will be taken advantage of: “If I say yes, then they’ll just keep on asking.” I distinctly remember one particular incident when Junior, Isabelle’s youngest brother, made himself a snack from leftovers in his sister’s refrigerator while she was not home. He made me promise not to tell her that he was “raiding the fridge.” When I asked why he seemed so concerned that his own sister would become angry over a bologna sandwich, Junior simply answered: “That’s the way she is.” Contrary to the quote that appears at the beginning to this section, possession means *everything* to the Navajo—at least this one, anyway.

WITCHCRAFT

To the Navajo, the accumulation of relative wealth obtained through stinginess indicates someone who has not been generous and cooperative but who has acted in terms of her own desires rather than those of her kinsmen (Lamphere, 1977). As the epitome of the uncooperative Navajo, Isabelle personifies the social isolate. Similar notions of uncooperative behavior are part of Navajo beliefs concerning witchcraft.

When asked why some Navajos would want to practice witchcraft, one man explained:

Maybe that man over there has a big truck and lots of sheep and a good family. Maybe this other fellow over here is jealous of him, so he gets into a skin and goes around at night. Navajos go to the toilet outside and the yeenaaldloozhii [werewolf or skinwalker] can get a little piece of it and put it in a grave and the ghost will start working on that man and make him sick (cited in Lamphere, 1977, p. 37).

Someone who is designated “jealous” on the basis of quarrels or refusal of aid is also likely to be suspected of engaging in witchcraft in order to enhance his or her own well-being at the expense of others. Not surprisingly, Isabelle’s selfishness and self-alienation has rendered her particularly susceptible to being an object of witchcraft.

When Lamphere (1977) conducted her research in the early 1970s, incidents of witchcraft were much more likely to be carried out by non-kin than kinsmen. Today, “spells” are more probable to occur between those who are closely related. This appeared to be the case in the episode she describes

when she found deer antlers placed in front of her door. Isabelle immediately beckoned a medicine man to restore harmony. Although he did not know the responsible party for sure, the medicine man pointed to a relative as the likely culprit. Isabelle directs her suspicion to her Aunt Thelma, with whom she has had a longstanding feud.

Cultural Authenticity

Like Delbert, Isabelle spent her childhood and adolescence oscillating between boarding school and her reservation home. Even though the two worlds were vastly different, she reported experiencing no difficulty traveling back and forth: “It was just a normal routine.” Unlike her older brother, however, Isabelle does not regard herself as “traditional” nor does she consider herself raised as such. In fact, she usually is not even cognizant of being Navajo. Throughout the interviews, she continually insisted that her native identity was almost a moot point: “I don’t think of myself as Navajo. I would say ‘so what?’”

Perhaps at least some of her cultural ambivalence can be attributed to Isabelle missing her traditional rite of passage. With a girl’s first menses, a puberty ceremony called the *kinaalda* is sponsored by her family in recognition and celebration of her emerging womanhood. The chief aim of the four-day ceremony is to impart the physical, moral, and intellectual strength that the initiate will need to perform the duties of a Navajo woman.

An important component of the *kinaalda* is the making of the cake because it encapsulates each of the important virtues of a Navajo woman: physical fitness, endurance, education, reciprocity, and the maximizing of potential positive effects (Schwarz, 1997). Great energy is expended in planning for the cake during the weeks and months preceding the ceremony and in producing it during the ceremony itself, when the initiate and her female relatives break the individual kernels off the corn cobs, clean the kernels, roast and grind the corn, and mix the batter. During the last night, the cake bakes in a pit dug by her male relatives. It is said that the quality of the cake is a direct reflection of the girl’s mental and emotional state and serves as an indication of the kind of woman that she will become.

Mandatory attendance at boarding schools had a major impact on the ceremony. Living at boarding schools for nine months out of the year meant that many girls, including Isabelle, were away from home at the onset of their first menstrual period. Many traditional Navajos believe that women suffer deleterious consequences as a result of not having their *kinaalda*.

Some of Isabelle's relatives, for example, blame her future health problems to not being properly ushered into Navajo society. Because they did not want their own daughters and granddaughters to face similar problems, Navajo women looked for ways to adjust the cultural system to new practices. As a result, variations have developed over the last fifty years that are designed to accommodate families living away from the reservation and children attending boarding schools.¹⁹

Blending aspects of the traditional and the modern also appears to be the operating rationale for Isabelle's new hogan. As relics of the past, hogans are used today primarily as ceremonial dwellings since they remain an important symbol of Navajo identity. So I was understandably surprised when Isabelle bragged that Virgil would be building her a hogan. Unlike the simple floor plan of its predecessor, however, this one will include three separate rooms with an adjoining kitchen and bathroom. The home will also be fully equipped with indoor plumbing and electricity. In fact, the only similarity between this house and a traditional hogan was the circular shape. Instead of being a symbolic amalgamation of old and new, their "hogan" does little more than appropriate the name. This strategy is not unlike the one employed by Catholic missionaries who have persuaded Navajo converts to surrender their traditional ceremonies while still conveying lip service to their importance. In one such instance, they have replaced the *kinaalda* cake with a store-bought version—thereby defeating the entire purpose of the cake in the first place.

Between Two Worlds

Unlike her brother and so many Navajos, Isabelle has never battled alcoholism. Indeed, she takes great pride in proclaiming that "I have never been drunk in my whole life." The fact that Isabelle does not drink, however, does not mean that she is free of all vices. Her "addiction" of choice is shopping.

Isabelle is certainly not alone in her compulsion for shopping. Americans, and increasingly the rest of the world, are using brand names to create their identities. The label of our shirt, the make of our car, and our favorite laundry detergent are among the social markers that now fill the vacuum once occupied by religion, education and family name, James Twitchell (1999) argues in *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. The label has moved from the inside to the outside of the shirt because the label markets the desired image that comes with it.

Fashion has become the most pervasive form of self-marketing. Clothing essentially serves as a public display of status, wealth, and personality. Whatever you wear (or do not wear) defines who you are and where you are located on the social map (Schor, 1999). Our closets are a symbol of our evolving selves, as Twitchell (1999) realized:

For me the tie-dyed T-shirt, the engineer boots, the interview suit, the bow ties, the pointy Italian shoes, the Nehru jacket, the polyester bell bottoms, the double-knit jump suit are mute testament to my trying on of selves. They are not just clothes, they are entrails of myself. All I have to do is look at one object and I remember the constellation that swirled around it...Such ensembles are called outfits for a reason. They are literally how we fit our insides out (p. 202).

Social identity created via consumption may be summarized in the catchphrase, “you are what you eat.” This old saying can now be extended to “you are what you consume.” In fact, the aphorism about being what we eat is a distortion of the more palatable claim of a nineteenth-century French gourmet who stated: “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are” (Twitchell, 1999, p. 45). Perhaps a contemporary version would declare: “Tell me what you buy and I will tell you who you are—and who you want to be.”

For Isabelle and other similarly affected contemporary Navajos, such public statements of identity are the inevitable result of alienation and estrangement. An individualistic and dispersed population has few internal standards of group affiliation. Since people have limited chance—and less willingness—to get to know each other on a personal basis, first impressions and status symbols such as clothing or cars let others know who they are or, more accurately, who they want to project. The ubiquitous presence of advertisements only reinforces the ideology of “judging a book by its cover.” Isabelle has succumbed to shopping for identity in the first place because of the absence of a traditional anchoring system. In a society where community ties have fallen by the wayside, brand accumulation becomes the marker of status by default.

The fact that Isabelle “speaks” through possessions is most clearly demonstrated by the numerous glass display cases that adorn her living room. Although she insists that all of the items²⁰ on display are for her own enjoyment only, it is certainly no accident that they are strategically placed in the most public area of her home where they are bound to attract the attention of visitors. Furthermore, the items are encased in a manner intended

for *display* (hence the name). As Silverstone (1994) points out: “We buy and display what we value, and we value according to our social position” (p. 115)—or, I might add, the projection thereof. Social position is the product not just of income and wealth but education and family culture. For Isabelle, the former uproots, if not undermines, the lack of the latter.

CONSUMERISM AS ASSIMILATION

One of the most glaring contradictions of consumerism revolves around the tension between the desire for a group belonging and the promise of individual expression. Individualism lies at the root of consumerism, but conformity is the end result. One of the most pervasive myths of consumer culture is that we express our separateness by what we choose to buy. Yet, in the end, we are just like everybody else.

Consumerism as assimilation has a historical foundation in this country. The formation of an imagined national community in the United States during the late nineteenth century was coeval with the birth of modern consumerism. The proliferation of images and objects of mass consumption brought the most diverse audiences, including newly arrived immigrants, into not only a developing marketplace but also into an emergent set of shared understandings, memories, tastes, and habits (Foster, 2002). Andrew Heinze (1990), for example, emphasizes the way in which Eastern European Jews were able to utilize consumer goods as tools for forging an American Jewish identity. For these immigrants, unremarkable consumption practices such as drinking Borden’s condensed milk, cooking with Crisco vegetable shortening, or bathing with Ivory soap were the most easily accessible elements of the process of nationalizing themselves.

For Native Americans, the assimilation process started with boarding schools when children were taken away from their families, their home, and everything familiar and placed in an alien environment where they were taught—often forcibly—to adapt to a foreign culture. For the vast majority of these children, the boarding school experience offered their first glimpse into an idealized world that often rendered their own backgrounds paltry by comparison. Joe Suina (2001) reflects upon his experiences:

The Dick and Jane reading series in the primary grades presented me pictures of a home with a pitched roof, straight walls, and sidewalks. I could not identify with these from my Pueblo world...My life was no longer just

right. I was ashamed of being who I was, and I wanted to change right then and there. Somehow it became very important to have straight walls, clean hair and teeth, and a spotted dog to chase after. I even became critical of, and hateful toward, my bony fleabag of a dog. I loved the familiar and cozy environment at Grandmother's house, but now I imagined it could be a heck of a lot better if only I had a white man's house with a bed, a nice couch, and a clock. In schoolbooks, all the child characters ever did was run at leisure after the dog or kite. They were always happy. As for me, all I seemed to do at home was go for buckets of water and cut up sticks for a lousy fire. Didn't the teacher say drinking coffee would stunt my growth? Why couldn't I have a nice tall glass of milk so I could have strong bones and white teeth like those kids in the books? Did my grandmother really care about my well-being? (p. 95; emphasis mine)

Viewed through this new lens, everything familiar suddenly looked different. Suina and other Native Americans responded by adopting the white man's ways in order to acquire the white man's lifestyle.²¹

The vast majority of middle-class Native Americans such as Isabelle come from historically impoverished tribes who had been denied those things available to middle-class whites. For most of her life, Isabelle experienced the ridicule and shame of poverty. She grew up knowing inadequate sanitation, prevalent disease, malnutrition, crowded and poor housing, and high unemployment. Even as a child, she was fully aware that poverty rendered her a second-class citizen. As a parent, she did not want her children to experience these same feelings and depredations. Thus, material wealth became a symbol of equality by mainstream society's standards. For Isabelle, consumerism is largely a learned behavior and a way of participating in the dominant society.

Television

Isabelle expressed great difficulty in articulating her feelings about television. She cannot remember a time when television ever seemed strange. Since her first exposure to TV in boarding school, Isabelle claimed that the sudden awareness of the outside world did not pose a shock to her psyche: "It didn't affect me that way." During the intervening years, she basically dismissed television as "just something to do in my spare time." In fact, she repeatedly insisted that she never watches TV.

This tendency to dismiss television in public while voraciously viewing it in private owes its existence to the popular perception of television as a

“boob tube,” “mind candy,” and “vast wasteland.” So it necessarily follows that anyone watching it must not be very intelligent. In our society, people are judged according to their tastes for everything from restaurant choices to the programmed radio stations on their car stereo.

Usually, those tastes and perceptions are tied to class, and specifically to education and income levels. The fact that networks must appeal to the broadest range of viewers possible invites a backlash from the so-called too-savvy-for-TV cultural elite. A famous quote attribute to Ernie Kovacs asserts that “Television is called a medium because it is neither rare nor well done.” Critically acclaimed programs are usually not embraced by audiences and often cancelled after a limited run due to low ratings, thereby confirming the skeptical view that TV audiences prefer mindless drivel. Because it is the preferred medium of the masses, television cannot be very good—or so their story goes.

In Isabelle’s case, her vehement disavowal of television goes beyond simple intellectual posturing and is inextricably tied to a social desirability effect born of a desire to impress me. I am widely viewed as a mentor and role model for members of the younger generation, and older family members such as Isabelle value my opinion. While it is true that “TV is bad” is a class-based assumption, Isabelle seems to have been influenced by my own views—or her perception thereof—regarding television. Her comments, therefore, mirror what she thinks I think.²² Furthermore, Isabelle wanted to cast herself in as favorable light as possible not just for my benefit but for the college professors that she knew would be reading about her life. Feeling this institutional glare, she did not want me to be looked down upon for watching too much TV. Isabelle clearly knew that she was narrating “for the record.”

The only form of programming that Isabelle admits to watching regularly is broadcast news. Being “informed” has become a favorite obsession of hers, and she relies on TV news as her sole source of information about what is happening in the world. But what type of “news” are the networks disseminating? Television stations are run by corporations whose sole motivation is making as much money as possible. Since stations are only as powerful as the number of people who watch them, they package the news like entertainment—quick, trivial, and sensational—in order to attract audiences. In order to compete in the economic marketplace, commercially motivated broadcasters must pander to the prurient interests of audiences by providing “news-entertainment.”²³

What gets lost amidst all the glitz and superficialities, of course, is the *actual* news. Viewers are not receiving thorough coverage since most news

stories last only forty-five to ninety seconds (Degaetano & Bander, 1996). By creating a deluge of information packaged for easy digestion, the television industry has created a dangerous illusion that the more time we spend watching hyped, sensationalized images delivered in sound bites, the better informed we are. As Neil Postman & Steve Powers (1992) point out, never before have people known so much about so little: “Americans have rapidly become the least knowledgeable people in the industrialized world. We know *of* many things (everything is revealed) but *about* very little (nothing is known)” (pp. 155-56).

The news stories that capture Isabelle’s undivided attention include such sensationalistic fare as celebrity gossip, high-profile murders, and anything involving sex. For Isabelle as for so many others, the news is less about what is important than what is titillating. Whenever I watched her watching the news, I noticed that her attention was fixated on fluff pieces like former NBA bad boy Dennis Rodman and his ex-Playboy Playmate wife Carmen Electra being arrested after a domestic altercation. But as soon as the newscaster turned to a topic more substantive such as the war in Kosovo, Isabelle became distracted and would usually look away.

The nightly news also contributes to making the public more frightened than it should be by relying more heavily than ever before on cheap scare tactics as a means of attracting viewers. Indeed, the allure of “this could happen to you” is intoxicating in an age where random sniper killings and anthrax mailings seem ubiquitous. George Gerbner and his colleagues refer to the cumulative effect of these scare tactics as the “mean world syndrome,” positing that heavy TV viewers see the world as being more violent and fearful than it really is. It makes intuitive sense that people who watch lots of violence on television—and particularly violence that is “real”—will overestimate their chances of being victimized. In Isabelle’s case, however, the first statement applies but the second does not. While she certainly believes that the rest of the world is filled with acts of indiscriminate violence, her own part of the universe is immune to the dangers that occur in the world of television news—another reason why she does not like to venture too far outside the reservation’s familiar confines. When the post-9/11 doomsday prognosticators predicted that there would be mass havoc and catastrophe on the eve of the new millennium, for example, Isabelle invited me to spend the last day of the twentieth century with her family because “nothing’s going to happen out this way.”

Knowledge about the salacious details of the latest scandal conveys a sense of power and pleasure. I have frequently overheard Isabelle gossiping

about someone in the news in the same way that she would gossip about somebody in her family. Before television entered peoples' lives, the most common medium for the circulation of popular knowledge was gossip. Isabelle's predilection for gossip may explain her attraction to talk shows, which, besides network news, is the only other genre on television that she admits to watching. Daytime talk shows, also a staple of tabloid media, are frequently dismissed as the electronic descendants of circus sideshows. Neil Postman and Steve Powers (1992), for example, characterize the talk show genre as "nothing more than a highly profitable freak show" that "serves as a diversion from the urgent issues of the day" (p. 94).

Such a view is not only naively simplistic but also demeaning of those whose marginalization consigns them to virtual invisibility in most commercial media programming. Talk shows provide one of the few forums for the marginalized to express themselves by inviting the participation of people whose voices are usually excluded from media discourse such as sex workers, the homeless, those with unconventional body shapes, and other social outcasts. As Elayne Rapping (1991) observes: "There is something exhilarating about watching people who are usually invisible—because of class, race, gender, status—having their say and, often, being wholly disrespectful to their 'betters'" (p. 36).

I suspect that Isabelle identifies with the class-based feelings of powerlessness and alienation from the mainstream. In the "us" versus "them" dichotomy that constitutes social relations between talk show guests and culturally dominant audience members, she sides with the former because she knows what it feels like to be judged. Always on the outside looking in, Isabelle similarly harbors deeply felt antagonisms toward the powerful institutions of the official culture.

At the same time, she also takes a certain satisfaction and glee in observing people who have more problems than her. Her favorite talk show, the *Maury Povich Show*, seems to specialize in revealing the results of paternity tests to unwed mothers. A mean-spirited tone invariably characterizes these programs, with accusations flying about who is sleeping with whom and what this person said about another person. Not coincidentally, Isabelle participates in the same type of discussions in a more private setting. She loves to exchange scandalous pieces of "dirt" about mutual acquaintances.²⁴ More often than not, these stories are totally untrue or at least greatly exaggerated.²⁵ "Talking shit" behind each other's backs constitutes one aspect of the endless cycle of one-upmanship so common among contemporary Navajos.

COMPETITIVE CONSUMPTION

The defining feature of the new consumerism is that reference groups have become vertically elongated. In times past, conspicuous consumption was limited to the cultural elites. Today, people are more likely to compare themselves with, or aspire to the lifestyles of, those far about them in the economic hierarchy. Even members of the lower economic classes have access to objects previously in the domain of the well-to-do (Twitchell, 1999). As opposed to the old regime of keeping up with the Joneses, the pace has quickened to include the Bill Gates and Warren Buffets of the world. Now, even people earning six figure incomes feel deprived because they are comparing themselves to the extravagantly wealthy. This is happening all the way down the income line.

Since most consumers cannot afford mansions or luxury cars, they imitate the very affluent on a smaller scale. Mass consumption offers individuals from the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum the sort of agency and equality usually denied them in the realm of capital and labor. Andy Warhol (1975) commented on this aspect of consumer democracy:

What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking (pp. 100-101 cited in Foster, 2002, p. 166).

Ironically, cultural differences in global media images attract audiences for the promotion of a consumerist ideology that aims to bring different cultures together into an increasingly homogeneous consumer culture. In the end, everyone buys—or at least dreams about buying—the same things.

Most people learn about the spending patterns of others through television. TV characters are a major source of consumption ideas, expectations, perceptions, aspirations, and comparisons.²⁶ Needless to say, the lifestyles portrayed on television present a highly inflated standard of living relative to how the majority of the American public lives. Schor's (1999) finding that television viewing correlated with spending more and saving less comes as little surprise: "Every hour of television watched per week raised annual spending by \$208 per year" (p. 45).

In our image-based culture, messages about goods are all pervasive as advertising has increasingly filled up the spaces of our daily existence.²⁷ Media are dominated by advertising images and public space has been so colonized by product placement that even most sporting events are accompanied by the name of a corporate sponsor. In fact, ads are so deeply embedded in our environment that we are likely to see, hear, and even smell them without thinking twice.

Advertisements invite desire through fantasies of wish fulfillment, but they also rely on powerful negative emotions. The strategy used to sell Rogaine, for example, conforms to the formulaic structure of conflict, product, and product resolution by introducing a painful or anxiety-inducing scene followed by a product remedy (Andersen, 1995). Ads work by conflating a desire for emotional well-being with obtaining a product that will ensure its fulfillment.

SHOPPING AS THERAPY

Through the vast glittering array of advertising, the world of consumption is presented as the key to profound human satisfaction—the end of longing and the fulfillment of desire. Advertising creates a world in which psychological and cultural symbols promise that a pair of shoes will alleviate psychological fears and a car stereo will make an unbearable world bearable (Andersen, 1995). The false promise that emotional well-being can be acquired from the multiplicity of products for sale is effective because so few opportunities for emotional healing actually exist.

In an article titled “Consuming for Love,” Edward Luttwak (1999) asserts that personal economic insecurities wrought by today’s “turbo-capitalism” have caused American households to buy themselves objectless and functionless presents as substitute “hugs” from an extended family they no longer have. Such surrogate affection is unnecessary in cultures where they have the “real” thing:

In normal²⁸ human societies, in which extended-family ties are naturally preserved by geographic proximity from birth till death or are actively sustained by those who depart to live elsewhere, the annual calendar is a sequence of birth celebrations, religious or voluptuary festivals, marriages, anniversaries, and funerals, all of which also serve as clan reunions. With much hugging and kissing of the very young and tacit pledging of mutual

aid and comfort among the less young, family ties are maintained, repaired, and strengthened (Luttwak, 1999, p. 55).

Although this author paints a utopian vision of a “normal” society, his point is clear: in a “dog eat dog” world, there is not going to be much room for bonding within the pack.

Fundamentally, all advertising conveys the message that consumption will bring about happiness. The secret to happiness is revealed through the purchase of goods or services. I remember seeing a simple advertisement for a mall that cut straight to the point: “Stressed? Shop!” Indeed, many people—men as well as women—self-medicate feelings of depression or anxiety by going shopping.²⁹ Spending sprees serve as a way for people to comfort and console themselves. Having bought into the idea that it is possible to buy happiness, growing numbers of people believe that vacation homes, swimming pools, designer clothes, luxury automobiles, and wads of cash are symbolic of a good life (Schor, 1999).

The act of purchasing goods is only tangentially about acquiring stuff.³⁰ For most of us, most of the time, shopping is about consuming meaning. What we are really buying—or hoping to buy—is a sense of self. We spend money in order to find validation. As one shopper-in-therapy confides:

I'd like to think I shop because I don't want to look like everybody else, but the real reason is because I don't want to look like myself. It's easier to buy something new and feel good about yourself than it is to change yourself (De Graaf et al., 2002, p. 105).

Nothing seems to cultivate the sense of self as does consumption. All we need to do, in a moment of insecure self-inspection, is take an inventory of our possessions to assure ourselves that a worthwhile, substantial being has been reconstructed (Rosenblatt 1999).

I have deliberately used the first personal plural as the pronoun of choice throughout this section to make obvious that nobody is totally immune from the trappings of consumer culture—not even an expert who has even published a book on the subject. To his credit, Twitchell (1999) acknowledges his own culpability by sharing a personal experience of succumbing to an impulse and purchasing a shiny red Mazda Miata sports car. Twitchell experienced buyer's remorse soon afterwards not because he was unhappy with his purchase but over concern that the car might compromise his carefully constructed social identity as a practical-minded college professor.³¹

Although a loyal member of the voluntary simplicity movement, I also must admit that I have experienced intermittent bouts of “car envy.” Recently, I ran into my childhood best friend whom I had not seen or talked to since junior high school. After quickly catching up about what we had been up to for the past twenty years (he is now a dentist and just opened his own practice), I could not help but notice his brand-new BMW convertible. It struck me how the two of us had come from such similar backgrounds yet ended up following such different paths. At the time, I was driving a 1984 Dodge Raider with a cracked windshield and a dented rear quarter panel. My feelings of insecurity were magnified since I was already severely depressed over my failure to complete my dissertation in a timely fashion.

As this incident taught me, we are especially vulnerable to “coveting thy neighbor’s possessions” when experiencing low self-esteem. The act of desiring status symbols becomes a compensatory mechanism to fill a pre-existing void or emptiness. Psychologists believe that pathological buying is related to a quest for greater recognition and acceptance, an expression of anger, or an escape through fantasy—all of which are connected to shaky self-images (De Graaf et al., 2002).

Initially, consumption appears to be a satisfying activity but, ultimately, the act of purchasing does not satisfy the needs that the products have been associated with. In her 1992 study, Juliet Schor correlated levels of consumption with perceptions of happiness. The percentage of people who reported being “very happy” peaked in 1957. By 1978, the last year in which a “happiness” poll was taken, the level of “very happy” had not recovered “in spite of the rapid growth in consumption during the 1960s and 1970s. Similar polls taken since then indicate no revival of happiness. Clearly, the accumulation of objects does not result in greater happiness.

Analysts of consumption have described shopping and the acquisition of personal possessions as an ultimately unsatisfying and frustrating affair (Mullin, 2001). Incapable of producing true satisfaction, advertising reinforces compulsive behavior both directly and indirectly. For an increasing number of compulsive shoppers, this paradox sets off a cyclical quest. The increasing compulsion to consume is inversely proportional to the amount of decreasing satisfaction derived from it. As Schor (1992) notes, “For some people, shopping has become an addiction, like alcohol or drugs” (p. 108). Like every addict, shopaholics need a bigger and bigger “hit” to experience the same “high.” Unlike alcoholism or drug addiction, however, the addiction to buying stuff is not perceived with the same type of disdain. In fact, shopping to excess is not only socially acceptable but sanctioned as a desirable way to relieve stress.

Society extols spending without limit as something positive, therapeutic, and of benefit to the economy.

Like the Greek myth of Sisyphus, who was condemned to an eternity of rolling a rock to the top of a mountain only to have it roll back down again, shoppers never find fulfillment. In the rat race of competitive consumption, there is no finish line. With every purchase, there is always some other purchase just out of reach. The act of acquiring itself reminds the consumer of the stuff they do not have, or do not have yet. Yearning drives consumption, and consumption drives more yearning. It is this relentless round of consuming and yearning that drives the system and traps us in a continual state of unhappiness.³²

FINANCIAL (MIS)MANAGEMENT

Among my informants, Isabelle is undoubtedly the guiltiest of spending above her means. She should know better considering that, as the credit services supervisor for the Navajo Nation, she witnesses first-hand the dangers of being too far in debt. Instead of applying these lessons into her daily life, Isabelle has depleted her 401k retirement fund to buy more stuff she does not need. But that is still not enough. She once informed me—very nonchalantly, I might add—that she had accrued almost \$20,000 in credit card debt alone. The “buy now, pay later” mentality promoted by credit cards is perfectly emblematic of her own financial mindset. Unfortunately, “later” never arrives or else is postponed so frequently that after the interest charges and late fees have tallied, she ends up owing far more than the amount she actually purchased.

Her indebtedness is all the more perplexing because Isabelle earns a very high income relative to the reservation population. In fact, she earns nearly ten times more than the average per capita income of \$4,000 a year, which does not include the thousands of dollars she receives in child support payments. In addition, hers is a two-income household as her common-law husband earns an even higher salary as an electrician who owns his own business. Yet Isabelle constantly complains of being in perpetual debt.

Once, I recommend to Isabelle that she should make wiser financial decisions. She countered by asking me what she should be doing with her money. I suggested saving for her retirement or as a financial cushion in the event of an unanticipated illness or injury—the proverbial “rainy day.” My words only elicited a quizzical expression on her face followed by a dismissive wave with her hand.

Isabelle is not only prone to compulsive shopping but *impulsive* shopping as well. If she decides that she wants something, she will usually buy it at that precise moment—regardless of how much it costs or whether she can find a better deal or a superior brand somewhere else. Indeed, market research and comparison shopping are not typically part of the buying process. Most observers would attribute such impulsiveness to immediate gratification. My research assistants, however, offer a different insight based on their own personal experiences: “I want it *now*” is the result of prolonged and unfulfilled longing. For most of their life, whenever they asked if they could have something that they wanted, they rarely obtained it. Instead, they were told “maybe later” or, worse, the dreaded “we’ll see.” More likely, they did not even bother to ask at all because they already knew the answer. When they became adults and found themselves able to purchase a desired item, they would not hesitate. They were literally making up for lost time.

In the book *Hoop Dreams*,³³ Sheila Agee, the mother of one of the boys profiled, admits to harboring dreams of her own:

...she never forgot those dreary days of desperation: how she spent nights wrapped in her bathrobe, worrying alone in the cold kitchen, watching a TV hooked to the bathroom by an extension cord, and dreaming of having all the riches—Cadillacs and convertibles, diamonds and gold, silk and satin, spicy romance, and steamy hot beaches—that emerged from the greenish glow of the TV (Joravsky, 1996, p. 173).

During those desperate years when she was a single mother living on welfare, Isabelle similarly dreamed of all the things that she would one day buy. Having worked her way to a position of relative financial success, she is intent on making her dreams come true in spite of the cost—monetary or emotional.

RESPONSE

Unlike her older brother who carefully read his interview transcript and noted down relevant remarks, comments, and revisions, Isabelle was not nearly as conscientious. I gave her a week to accomplish the task of reading and responding to her transcript, but the only thing she gave me in return was excuses. After a couple of months passed by and she still had not even read a single page, I realized that more drastic measures were necessary. I finally

told her that I was not leaving her home until she completed her assignment. So I sat in the living room for several hours while she read. Afterwards, this is what she had to say:

SO WHAT DID YOU THINK?

It made me laugh (laughter) at all the things I said in here! Like everything about my boarding school days and about my not being close to my mom. It was like, “Wow, I really went through that type of life!”

THAT WAS FUNNY TO YOU?

Yeah, it’s true. Everything in here is probably true.

“PROBABLY?” IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU DON’T FEEL IS ACCURATE?

The only thing that I didn’t tell you about was the baby.

ARE THERE ANY PARTS YOU WANT TO CHANGE OR TAKE OUT?

No, son, everything I said in here is true. I was just honest with you about how I felt and what happened throughout my life.

SO YOU CONSIDER THIS TO BE AN ACCURATE REPRESENTATION OF YOUR LIFE?

Uh-huh, what I went through, my boarding school years, my marriages...

IF YOU WERE TO WRITE YOUR OWN LIFE STORY, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

I would probably talk about when I was a little girl all the way to puberty and high school, my marriages—probably the same content. I would just elaborate more on the worst years in my life when I had my health problems and when I went through the child custody hearings. I would put my feelings in perspective and what I actually went through.

HAVE YOU EVER FELT A DESIRE TO HAVE YOUR LIFE PRESERVED
FOR POSTERITY?

No. Once you're gone, you're gone. That's it.

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR DESCENDANTS TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I don't think that would be important to them. I would probably just leave that up to my kids to tell them that "This was the type of grandmother you had and she was like this." Just like for me, Marvin and Marlin and Regina ask about their grandfather. I just tell them that this was who your grandpa was and he was like this.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR KIDS TO SAY ABOUT YOU?

I was a good mother.

ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE WAY YOUR LIFE HAS TURNED OUT
SO FAR?

I'm happy. I'm content.

HAS LOOKING BACK ON THE FIRST HALF OF YOUR LIFE MADE
YOU WANT TO CHANGE ANYTHING FOR THE NEXT HALF?

Yeah, that's probably why I'm different. I look back at those things and I try to change them. I think I'm changing a little every day.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The introduction is always in Navajo but interspersed with bits of English such as “over 10 years,” “vegetarian,” and “Ph.D.” As far as I can determine, it generally follows a standard format.
- ² This is the nickname for her youngest sister.
- ³ This is the name of the mining company located in Kayenta.
- ⁴ Mina and Pam are two of Dorothy's daughters and Isabelle's half-sisters.
- ⁵ Pogo and Amy are two of Irma's daughters.
- ⁶ For instance, she will frequently point out a Navajo driving a brand-new truck and speculate that he probably lives in a shack with no electricity or running water. Invariably, she concludes with this statement.
- ⁷ *Love and Basketball* (Davis et al., 2000) is an urban coming-of-age story that includes several explicit sex scenes.

- ⁸ Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Sands (1984) note that whereas autobiographies of male narrators usually center on historic events and crisis moments, female autobiographers tend to focus on everyday activities and private relationships. See Langness and Frank (1981) for a very clear statement of gender differences.
- ⁹ For instance, with a riddle like “Why is semen white and urine yellow? So the Chippewas can tell whether they’re coming or going (Lincoln, 1993, p. 40),” one can substitute the name of any tribe and it will still be funny.
- ¹⁰ Weisiger (2002) elaborates: “Dine women held power in their communities, where mothers, daughters, and sisters formed strong bonds of interdependence and men often stood on the periphery. But women’s power did not rest merely on female solidarity. Women were important to economic production, and significantly they also controlled the means of their own production: livestock and land...It was the intertwining of these strands—stock ownership, matrilineal residence, and matrilineal land-use patterns—that gave women power over their lives. Like the individual fibers of a braided cord, each reinforced the other” (pp. 92-96 cited in Iverson, 2002, p. 78).
- ¹¹ Control is not only limited to fiscal matters. For example, I learned that my research assistant’s girlfriend instructed him to sit on the toilet when urinating in order to avoid “splashing.” I teased him mercilessly afterwards. Imploring him to “stand up like a man,” I brutally chastised him for allowing a woman to train him as if he was a circus monkey. I later discovered that such female dominance is typical.
- ¹² It is important to point out that relations of exchange and reciprocity between the sexes have a cultural precedent. According to Witherspoon (1975), a Navajo woman bestows sexual favors on a man in exchange for something of economic value; moreover, it is wrong for her to copulate with a man without receiving something of value from him. This exchange is not considered prostitution. On the contrary, sexual relations without exchange are considered immoral (Witherspoon, 1975).
- ¹³ While Virgil was briefly unemployed, Isabelle expressed a lack of faith in the future of their relationship. But as soon as he found another job, she seemed to be in love again. This observation seems to lend credibility to the pessimistic prediction that she will leave Virgil as soon as he finishes building the house.
- ¹⁴ Isabelle constantly chastises her female relatives for their promiscuity, but she is far from being above reproach herself. One day, Delbert and

- Grandma Sharmaine counted “twelve or thirteen guys she was messing around with” since her first divorce. Yet, she had the audacity to present herself as being virtually chaste in the interviews. Isabelle only mentioned her four marriages while saying nothing about her myriad of short-term affairs. She seems perplexed by the reputation of the Benally women as “prostitutes,” apparently unwilling to acknowledge her own complicity.
- 15 During construction of the new hogan, Jerry (Isabelle’s nine-year-old son from a previous relationship) asked Virgil where his room was going to be. When Virgil informed him that he would not be living there, Jerrold paused for a moment before asking, “Can I at least come over for breakfast sometimes?” At the time, I laughed but this is actually very sad.
- 16 However, she does acknowledge closer ties with her sisters than her brothers. In Navajo kinship, relatives of the same sex enjoy greater solidarity than similar relatives of the opposite sex (Witherspoon, 1975). Isabelle refers to an incest taboo as the reason her father prevented her from playing with her brothers. Indeed, Witherspoon (1975) explains that brothers and sisters must avoid touching each other, passing items directly to each other, and being found alone together.
- 17 Changing Woman the mother of all Navajos because she had created the first human beings. She is regarded not only as a primary example for mothers but for all Navajo women because all women are potential mothers.
- 18 At the time, I was struck by the oddity of the arrangement but attributed it to a “Navajo” custom that I knew nothing about. Only later would I learn that Navajos traditionally defined a kinship group as a cluster of people “who cook and eat together” (Lamphere, 1977, p. 75). This is expressed in the phrase “*alahji’ ch’iyyaan dil’I doo ‘alahji da’iyyaa*,” which translated as “together food is prepared and together they eat” (Lamphere, 1977, p. 75).
- 19 For example, contemporary ceremonies are frequently shortened to two or three days and the all-night sing is often scheduled to fall on a weekend. In addition, most families have the bulk of the corn used to make the cake commercially ground, use aluminum foil to line the baking pit, and the girls are just as likely to wear tennis shoes as moccasins when they run (Schwarz, 1997).
- 20 The eclectic collection of items includes Indian artifacts such as baskets, pottery, and kachinas side by side with porcelain dolls, glassware, and figurines.

- 21 As Native American author, Adrian C. Louis (1995), observed: “America is the white man word for greed” (pp. 161-162).
- 22 Marlin, one of my research assistants, lived in my house for almost six months. I am certain that he relayed my “no TV” policy for my kids to his mother upon returning home to the reservation.
- 23 Respected news anchor Dan Rather shares his thoughts regarding the increased emphasis on entertainment and celebrities on network news: “The Hollywoodization of the news is deep and abiding. It’s been one of the more important developments of the last 20 to 25 years, particularly the last 10 to 15, that we run stupid celebrity stories...It has become pervasive, the belief that to be competitive, you must run a certain amount of celebrity news” (cited in Croteau and Hoynes, 2003, p. 47).
- 24 Of course, Isabelle does not appreciate it when the proverbial shoe is on the other foot. This is the reason she hid her pregnancy from everyone including her own family: “I didn’t want people talking about me.”
- 25 I know this to be the case after being the subject (or victim) of several false rumors.
- 26 For example, in a 1991 survey, Susan Fournier and Michael Guiry found that 27 percent of their sample identified television shows as a “really great idea source” for their own fantasy wish lists of things to buy (cited in Schor, 1999, p. 44).
- 27 Comedian Dennis Miller (2001) pontificates upon the ubiquity of advertisements: “It’s inescapable—from the designer label on the protruding elastic band of the size-52 underpants of the man in front of you in the line at Dunkin’ Donuts straining to point out a maple cruller on the bottom rack of the display case to the drive to work during which you are subjected to a flashcard-like strobing of billboards that leave your brain stamped with subliminal impulses to fly United to Florida’s Gulf Coast to take a Princess Cruise to a Radisson Hotel in the friendly Bahamas, where you’ll drink Ronrico White Rum and wear an oversized Tommy Hilfiger shirt and Merrill hiking shoes while getting Lasek eye surgery, having your teeth whitened, getting approved for a home loan over the phone, and winning a large cash settlement for your personal injury claim. And then the light changes, and you drive a *second* block” (pp. 135-36).
- 28 Problematically, Luttwak never bothers to explain what he means by “normal” so readers can only assume that he is referring to his own viewpoints.

- ²⁹ De Graaf et al (2002) report that at least three people out of ten flee to the mall when things get out of control at home or work (2002, p. 108).
- ³⁰ Francesca Turchiano has concluded in a study for the Center for Retailing Studies at Texas A&M University that almost three-quarters of Americans say they already possess most of the material things they want (Twitchell 1999:260).
- ³¹ Professor Stanley Fish (who drives a Jaguar) has written a satirical article about why professors drive Volvos in which he attributes the attraction of the unsightly Swedish imports to aspects of “professorial self-loathing” (cited in Twitchell, 1999, p. 278).
- ³² Twitchell (1999) poses the possibility of more damaging repercussions: “How close is the connection between the accumulation of goods and the fact that America also leads the industrialized world in rates of murder, violent crime, juvenile violent crime, imprisonment, divorce, abortion, single-parent households, obesity, teen suicide, cocaine consumption, per capita consumption of all drugs, pornography production, and pornography consumption? (p. 28).
- ³³ Readers will be more familiar with the critically acclaimed documentary, which followed the lives of two inner-city youths who dreamed of playing professional basketball.

Chapter 5

Regina

ABSTRACT

Regina is Isabelle's eldest child and something of an anomaly when compared to her siblings. While the rest are tall, slender, and athletic, she happens to be short, overweight, and has always preferred books to sports. Such dissimilarities have caused her to feel very insecure about her appearance. Regina has attempted to compensate for her physical shortcomings through her intellectual superiority. So, for example, whenever any of her brothers or sisters teases her about her height, Regina will always respond by reminding everybody that she is "the smartest." Despite the milieu of anti-intellectualism so pervasive among Indian youths, Regina was pushed to excel academically by her mother who wanted her to have all the opportunities that she herself never had. She graduated high school as valedictorian of her senior class and won a prestigious award for excellence in math and science that included a full scholarship to the college of her choice. This chapter introduces Regina.

PROFILE

Regina chose to attend Colorado College¹, an elite private liberal arts college with a long history of recruiting intellectually motivated Native American students, and graduated four years later with a Bachelor's degree in anthropology—the first in her extended family to achieve such a milestone. Her accomplishment is even more impressive considering that she gave birth to a son at the end of her sophomore year. The fact that she managed to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3420-5.ch005

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graduate on schedule while raising an infant is a testament to her uncommon dedication.

Since graduating from college, Regina has been employed as an archaeologist for the Historic Preservation Department of the Navajo Nation. Her choice in careers is a bit out of the ordinary as it is a taboo for Navajos to come into contact with anything related to the deceased much less be involved with re-burying human remains or handling ancient artifacts. As it will become clear, this is much more than just a job for her. Under the tutelage of her colleagues, Regina is learning about Navajo traditions and customs that were never taught to her as a child. This cultural awakening continues an infusion of Indian pride initially sparked while she was away at college. Concomitant with these emergent pro-Indian feelings, however, are deep anti-White sentiments. It is no exaggeration to say that Regina *hates* White people.

Nature of Relationship

My relationship with Regina covers a wide range of emotions and can be divided into two disparate parts. I first met Regina when she was a fourteen-year-old teen-ager. Soon thereafter, she developed a huge crush on me. Suffering from a severe case of puppy love, Regina decorated the mirror in her bedroom with photographs of me that I had mailed to the family. (Whenever I returned for visits, her brothers would delight in pointing out the conspicuous outlines that were previously occupied by the now jettisoned pictures.)² For my part, I never even entertained the possibility of reciprocating her amorous feelings. Instead, feeling somewhat uncomfortable and embarrassed, I tried to avoid her at all costs and waited for this adolescent phase to pass as quickly as possible.

The pursuit nevertheless continued unabated for several years until she met Marty, her first boyfriend, during her senior year of high school. Marty is the father of her child and, although never legally married, they have lived as husband and wife for almost ten years. Several family members have reported to me that I have been a frequent subject of conflict between them with Marty jealously accusing Regina of still harboring feelings for me. In an effort to respect their relationship and prevent any potential problems, I have deliberately maintained minimal contact with her.

The lack of closeness has been reciprocal. Although our brief interactions have been civil, I have definitely sensed some standoffishness or perhaps even hostility aimed in my direction. It is possible that Regina still holds a grudge against me for never returning her advances or that she is trying to placate

Marty's jealousy or that the militant anti-outsider attitude she cultivated during her college years has widened to include me. Furthermore, I was very open about expressing my disappointment when I heard about Regina's pregnancy, and I have no doubt that my statements were relayed back to her, which only strained our relationship further. Whatever the exact reason(s), among my informants, I feel the most uncomfortable with her. The mutual awkwardness is apparent during the interviews; however, once rapport was finally established, it flowed naturally.

TRANSCRIPT

DO YOU GENERALLY SHARE PARTS OF YOUR LIFE WITH OTHER PEOPLE?

"Other people?" Not personal things. I think I'm more of a private person.

AS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST YOURSELF, HAVE YOU CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS BEFORE?

Yeah, I've had to do that with my job. I've had to talk with people about land issues and reburials and just general stuff.

ARE THESE INTERVIEWS TAPE RECORDED?

No, we don't tape record them.

WHY?

From what I understand, we don't do that because that's...sensitive information.

DO YOU THINK OF INTERVIEWS AS BEING INTRUSIVE?

Well, I think it's you being an outsider and me being, I guess, Navajo. And I've always thought of interviews as being negative because I know some things are not interpreted right, especially if I'm speaking in my native language which I really don't know. From what I've seen and what I've read, outsiders have always portrayed things negatively.

GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE.

OK, let's say there's a road being built near this grandma's house and there's a hogan right there and there's a burial site nearby and the road will go right through it so they have to interview the grandma and she says, "Oh, this was my husband's house" or something. They can't go around it. So she tries to explain that this is what it means to her. Somewhere in the process, it will get misinterpreted.

IS IT MISINTERPRETED OR PURPOSELY DISTORTED?

I don't think it's an innocent mistake. They want this road built and they'll do whatever it takes.

DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE WHO DO INTERVIEWS HAVE GOOD INTENTIONS BUT ARE INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING OR THEY HAVE THEIR OWN PRE-CONCEIVED AGENDAS IN MIND?

They don't care.

* * * * *

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?

(Long pause) I'm a mother. (pause) I don't know. That's a hard question.

HOW WOULD THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU WELL DESCRIBE YOU?

First of all, I like nice things. I love animals. I love music.

WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE FROM OTHER PEOPLE?

(Pause)

WHO DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING TO?

Regina

My family, friends, people that I've known for a long time. It's a small circle.

DO YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE NOW?

I've never really had a conversation with you before. I think that's what's making me nervous. I think I'm more open to the people I associate with on a daily basis.

[Having hit a wall. I desperately turn to her brother (and my research assistant) and common-law husband, who are sitting nearby watching TV.]

MARVIN, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SISTER?

She's really calm. She's very private. She's really caring to her family members, her brothers and sisters. She's outgoing when she's not with her family. When I see her out with her friends, she's like a different person. I kind of like that and I don't know why she don't bring that home. At home, I think she's kind of serious.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, MARTY?

Basically, she's like her mom. She's very kind to other people. She lets them into her family. When I got into my accident, she was there for me even when my family wasn't. She basically turned my life around. She can also be a real bitch sometimes. To outsiders, she's very critical. She likes to put down other people. She has very low self-esteem about herself. I think that's because of her weight, her height. She has very low self-esteem. She's always criticizing other ladies.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU'RE MORE OUTGOING WHEN YOU'RE WITH YOUR FRIENDS THAN WHEN YOU'RE WITH YOUR FAMILY?

I think I can be more of myself when I'm around my friends. I know that's weird. Around my family, I'm the oldest of all the children. My mom always told me that I was the one that should set the example for everyone. That's why I try to be serious and think about what I say around them. (crying) It's even more now because I'm on my own and I have a job and all these things I've worked for.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOUR MOM IS PROUD OF YOU?

I know she's proud of me. I know she holds me to a higher standard. She has always treated me like I've never done any wrong.

IS THAT TRUE?

She *thinks* that. She just doesn't know.

DESCRIBE YOUR CHILDHOOD.

I was born in Ft. Defiance. We moved around a lot, but most of my time was down at my grandma's house. I always remember kids around me. I remember always caring for children. I remember my dad was always working. In the beginning, I was closer to my dad because I was the oldest and I was daddy's girl. I don't really remember my mother being there. She was always doing her own thing. I know that we would always get dumped off at grandma's house and I don't know what she was doing. This was mainly on the weekends and summers.

WHAT ABOUT DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR?

After school, I'd go home and just wait until my mom got home. I had to take care of my brothers and make sure they were okay.

YOU WERE ABOUT NINE WHEN THEY SPLIT. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THAT TIME?

My mom won't hear this? I know my mom wasn't faithful to my dad.

YOU THINK THAT'S THE REASON WHY THEY SPLIT UP?

That *is* the reason why they split up. There were so many times where all these men would be with my mom when my dad was at work. I saw it. When they split up, I remember because I chose to be with my dad. I think I was with him for maybe a month or two. It was funny because he would try to fix my hair and do things my mom always did. My mom had already moved in with some other guy. I didn't want to go with her because I know what she did to him.

Regina

AND YOU HOLD THAT AGAINST HER TO THIS DAY?

I think so.

HOW DID YOU WIND UP BACK WITH YOUR MOM?

As soon as school was over, my mom would come around and tell me to go with her and I wouldn't. Finally, my dad was the one that told me "Your place is with your mom. I can't care for you the way she can." We were staying in an apartment. My mom took everything so we had nothing in that apartment. I just remember this empty apartment and my dad telling me "You have to live with your mom because you belong to her and I'm going to move on." So one day, she came and I just went with her.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MOM?

I don't think I've ever been close to my mom. There are certain things that I wouldn't discuss with her.

ARE YOU CLOSE TO YOUR DAD?

When I was in college, I was close to him. But right now, I'm not close to either of them.

AMONG THE THREE OF YOU, YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD THE MOST CONTACT WITH HIM. WHY IS THAT?

I'm the oldest and I spent the most time with him. I'm also closer to him because he lives in Navajo and I work in Window Rock. And these guys are always out. I think it's because I'm more accessible.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE HIM?

Maybe once or twice every three months. He has his own family now.

DO YOU HOLD ANY ANGER AGAINST YOUR DAD FOR NOT KEEPING YOU?

That's weird because my mom is always telling me, "You should hate your dad because he was never there for you." I have *never* held anything against my dad. I know he should have been there. He could have if he wanted to. But I don't hold nothing against him.

RANDALL WAS IN THE PICTURE FOR A LONG TIME. DO YOU CONSIDER HIM TO BE YOUR FATHER AT ALL?

I think Randall is the closest I've ever had to a father. He calls me and we talk. I still call him "dad." I feel closer to Randall than my real dad. And, again, I blame my mom for their split.

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP LIKE WITH YOUR SIBLINGS?

I appreciate them a lot more than when I was younger. I look at my mom and her brothers and sisters. They're blood but there's no closeness. I don't want that to happen to me. I think more so for Marvin and Marlin because we have the same mother and father. My feelings for Sharmaine are not as much. And Jerrold was born when I was in college.

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOUR FAMILY SUDDENLY EXPANDED WITH THE INCLUSION OF EMMA'S KIDS?

I was in high school when that happened. Somebody had to take the kids and my mom was the most stable out of all her family. I know she had to take that responsibility and that would take some of the attention away from the rest of us.

HAVE YOU ACCEPTED THEM AS YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS?

Over the years, I've gotten closer to Thelma and Tashina. I've always wanted a younger sister. With the two boys, I just don't see them as much as the others. I call them my brothers and sisters but I don't feel about them like I feel about Marvin and Marlin.

I'VE ALWAYS HEARD YOU BEING REFERRED TO AS "THE SMART ONE." WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING SINGLED OUT NOT ONLY FROM YOUR SIBLINGS BUT FROM THE OTHER KIDS?

Regina

I think it put a lot of pressure on me and stressed me out so bad. My mom's always pushed me and put me on a pedestal. It was just so hard to stay up there and live up to that.

DID YOU FEEL ANY KIND OF STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH BEING THE SMART KID IN YOUR CLASS?

I was proud. I think I was after the praise like "Oh, she's a smart girl" and "Good for her."

BESIDES BEING SMART, YOU'RE ALSO THE ONLY ONE IN YOUR FAMILY WHO DOESN'T PLAY BASKETBALL.

I've never been into sports from the beginning. Out here, more of the boys are pushed into that. They say that to my son like "Oh, he should play ball. Don't let him be a queer." It's more pushed onto the boys than the girls.

BUT IN YOUR FAMILY, THERE'S A LEGACY OF FEMALE BALLERS.

I always heard people say, "Why don't you play ball?" But I never had the interest.

DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL YEARS.

I loved school! I'm a nerd.

WHAT ABOUT THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF IT?

I was always to myself. But the last two years of high school, I made some good friends and I saw how much fun they were having. Meanwhile, I was going home every day doing my homework and cleaning the house. That's what my mom expected of me. Even though she tried hard to keep me home, I know I used to lie to her just to be with my friends and stuff.

THIS IS WHEN YOU MET MARTY?

I met him in my junior year but we didn't start dating until I was a senior.³

DID YOU FEEL RIGHT AWAY LIKE HE WAS THE ONE FOR YOU?

Exactly. That's how I felt.

WHY DID YOU DO SO WELL IN SCHOOL BUT THE REST OF YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS JUST BARELY PASSED?

My mom's the one that pushed me the hardest. I always ask her, "Why didn't you treat them like you treated me?" She says that all her energy was spent on me.

DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD HAVE DONE AS WELL IF YOUR MOM DIDN'T PUSH YOU?

I don't think so. Maybe I wouldn't have graduated from college. A good example is Buzz. I had him when I was in college, and I didn't tell my mom because I knew how upset she would be. (crying) I think I had to finish because of what my mom would think of me. She always told me, "I don't want you to come back and get pregnant and live on welfare. I want you to go out there and have a better life than I did." Also, people around here see smart kids go off to college and then they just come back. I didn't want to be one of those failures.

DO YOU THINK PART OF THE REASON SHE PUSHED YOU SO HARD WAS THAT SHE WOULD GAIN SOME STATURE BY HAVING A SMART DAUGHTER?

I know she thought a lot about what people would say about her. She's always telling me, "I never got a chance to do what you've done. I got married off at a young age. I didn't have a choice. You're lucky to go to school. I've always wanted to do that." It's like she's living her life through me.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR COLLEGE YEARS. I REALLY FEEL LIKE THAT WAS A TURNING POINT FOR YOU BECAUSE THAT'S THE FIRST TIME YOU LEFT HOME AND WAS AROUND DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE.

Well, besides the summer program at Cornell.⁴

THAT'S RIGHT! HOW WAS THAT EXPERIENCE FOR YOU?

I went with a couple of friends. Plus, it was the Native American program there that hosted us but we were amongst other kids.

DID YOU MINGLE WITH ANY OF THESE OTHER KIDS?

Actually, my roommate was from New York. That was my first time—besides you—being around a Chinese girl. I think I expected her to be like the movies but she was like a party girl. She had a boyfriend and he would come to visit and she snuck him in a couple of times. That was something new for me because that's not what I expected. People stayed in their own groups like all the Indians, all the White people, all the Asians. They automatically made their little groups.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING IN THE MINORITY?

I felt shocked. I was scared. I definitely felt like a minority, but most people thought I was Mexican or whatever. I missed home.

DID THEY ASK YOU?

They would ask. They thought New Mexico was part of Mexico. I'm like, "God, where do you guys come from?" I felt like they were higher than me.

DID THEY TREAT YOU LIKE YOU WERE LOWER THAN THEM?

No, they didn't. I think it goes back to my low self-esteem. I didn't feel like what I had to say was that important.

WERE SOME OF THEM OVER-FRIENDLY?

Uh-huh. I would tell them I'm Navajo and they're like "Wow, you're cool!" Then I had to go into where we're from and all that kind of stuff.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? I'M SURE YOU DEVELOPED A SET RESPONSE.

I'm Navajo. I'm from New Mexico. That's about it unless they asked me another question. But through my actions, I think I would tell them I didn't want to talk and they just backed off.

DID YOU RESENT THEIR CURIOSITY OF YOU?

Yeah, I felt like they should know. It kind of made me angry. They should know their history or at least where New Mexico is.

AND YOU CARRIED THESE FEELINGS WITH YOU TO COLLEGE.
DID YOU ENJOY YOUR COLLEGE YEARS?

I felt like I just needed to get through it. I didn't really socialize the way Patty did.⁵ I didn't want to be considered the Navajo girl on campus that wanted everyone to look at her.⁶ I didn't want to be on display.

SO, AGAIN, YOU DIDN'T INTERACT WITH THE OTHER STUDENTS?

Only when I had to do like if I had to do a project or a class assignment.

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS?

The majority of the time, I didn't say anything. Only if something really bugged me. In one of my anthro classes, they were talking about the *kinaalda* and I didn't agree with what the professor was saying. I knew it was wrong and I was like, "Hey, wait a minute, that's not right. I actually went through this and I know." And they were like "Oh, cool."

YOU NEVER SOCIALIZED WITH ANY OF YOUR NON-INDIAN
CLASSMATES OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM?

No. I think I just felt more comfortable with my own kind.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR ROOMMATE?

I didn't really see her much. She was a White girl from California. She did her own thing. I didn't feel any kind of connection to her. I never even had lunch with her. Or dinner.

WHAT WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP LIKE WITH YOUR PROFESSORS?
DID YOU FEEL LIKE THEY GAVE YOU SPECIAL TREATMENT?⁷

I think they did. Whenever I asked for an extension, they would always give it to me.

WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?

(Pause) I think I acted a little. (laughter) I know I did. I would make up things like "I have problems at home" or whatever. I think that helped.

ON SOME LEVEL, DID YOU RESENT THE PREFERENTIAL
TREATMENT?

No. I felt like I deserved it. I attended the classes and did what I was supposed to do. It was just when papers were due and stuff, I asked for more time. That was it.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU RECEIVED HIGHER GRADES THAN WHAT
YOU DESERVED?

No, I think I worked for the grades that I got.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO MAJOR IN ANTHROPOLOGY?

Since I was little, I've always had an interest in archaeology. I used to dig up pots. The reason I got into it is because of this man my mom was dating at the time. He was a Mexican guy and he was fascinated with pottery. He would take us out and we would dig pots. He would tell us these stories about the cliff dwellers. That's when I got into watching movies about Egypt and all that stuff. It just fascinated me. And then, again, Jasmine played a role in this because she majored in anthro, too. Most of the anthro classes at CC

dealt with the Southwest and I felt more familiar with that. So I was just more comfortable with the courses.

WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS REGARDING ANTHROPOLOGY'S COLONIALIST HISTORY? DID A PART OF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WERE JOINING THE ENEMY?

I got that same question from one of my professors. I thought anthropology needed native anthropologists to help rather than hurt. I felt like I was going to help change the whole mindset.

IN WHAT CONTEXT DID THE PROFESSOR ASK YOU THE QUESTION?

I took an osteology class with him and that involved handling human remains. I guess Jasmine had a class with him and filled his head with all these taboos. He asked me, "Would you be more comfortable doing this with plastic bones?" I said, "No, I'm OK. I want to handle the remains. I think I need to." Then I told my grandma about this and she said, "*Eeya!* Don't bother those!"

BUT YOU WERE ALREADY AWARE THAT YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO TOUCH THOSE, RIGHT?

I knew I wasn't supposed to do that, but I did anyway.

YOU SAID YOU FELT LIKE YOU "NEEDED" TO. WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I felt like I needed to overcome the fear of dead people. I've always been told that you're not supposed to be around dead people. I just had to overcome that.

IN COLLEGE, DID YOU EVER WRITE PAPERS OR DO RESEARCH PROJECTS ON NAVAJO CULTURE?

Only twice. In a Women's Studies class, I wrote about Navajo women. I don't really remember what I wrote, but I know I brought up the *kinaalda* and matrilineal descent and how women have power since they own the sheep and the land.

DO YOU STILL BELIEVE THAT 'S TRUE? BECAUSE IT SEEMS TO ME
THAT MOST WOMEN AROUND HERE ARE TREATED LIKE DIRT.

I think things have changed, but I can only speak for myself. For my whole life, it has always been my mom who had the power and that's how she raised me. Marty and I don't see eye to eye on that. I think I should be the one to have control over the household and all the material things like the belongings in the house.

SO WHAT IS THE MAN'S ROLE?

I don't know about that since I never really had a male figure in my life. With Marty, he goes to work but I do the same thing.

ARE YOU "THE BOSS" IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Kind of. (laughter) I make the decisions.

WHAT WAS THE OTHER PAPER ABOUT?

I don't remember. I didn't want to write about my culture. I think that's too easy. First of all, I didn't think I was "Navajo" enough to write about that. If I did do something, I would probably have to research books.

HAVE ANY OTHER INDIANS CHASTISED YOU FOR BEING INVOLVED
WITH ANTHROPOLOGY?

No, never. Actually, the most important program we have at HPD (Historic Preservation Department) is run by a Navajo guy and he also graduated from CC (Colorado College). He's a year younger than I am. He was brought up very traditional. The program he runs is the Traditional Cultures program, and he's practically a medicine man even though he's that young.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR CHILDHOOD GOAL OF BECOMING A
MEDICAL DOCTOR?

I don't know. I'm still really interested in medicine. I would love to do forensic anthropology. Things just changed after I had my son.

WAS IT YOUR IDEA TO HAVE MARTY COME LIVE WITH YOU?

It just happened. [Marty makes a sarcastic comment that elicits laughter]

DID HIS BEING THERE MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU?

[Shakes her head side to side] Well, in my second year, we moved off campus. So I guess it made things easier. Looking at things now, I wish it would have turned out differently. My son was born at the end of my sophomore year.

I KNOW YOU HID YOUR PREGNANCY FROM YOUR MOM.

From everybody. Nobody knew. I didn't want to burden anybody.

YOU DIDN'T EVEN TELL YOUR BROTHERS OR SISTERS OR YOUR
FRIENDS?

I didn't tell anybody. I think I was afraid and embarrassed.

WERE YOU AFRAID THAT YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO FINISH
SCHOOL?

I think I was more concerned with what people would say about me like "Oh, she's pregnant. She's going to quit and go home." I didn't want that negativity around me. I was dealing with enough on my own without having people talk down to me.

DID ANYBODY TALK DOWN TO YOU AFTER THEY FOUND OUT?

My mom did. She didn't say it but I know she was feeling it. She was like "I can't believe you hid this from me." I remember her telling me, "If you get pregnant, you're getting an abortion no matter what." I think that's what I was afraid of the most.

* * * * *

WHY DID YOU JOIN A.I.M.?

I think that's when I started getting into the history of how badly we were treated.

YOU WEREN'T AWARE OF THAT BEFORE?

I was but it didn't really bother me until I got into college and I was surrounded by all these White people. It just turned into hate and I didn't want to be with White people. And that time, in '92, was the 500th anniversary of Columbus. That's also what helped me decide to join A.I.M.

DID YOU FEEL LIKE YOU NEEDED TO ASSERT YOUR IDENTITY LIKE "NO, I'M NOT MEXICAN. I'M INDIAN."

I felt that they needed to know that there are still Indians around. Most of the classes at CC were like "The Vanishing Indian," you know, like they're all gone. And I felt like I needed to make my presence known.

REMEMBER THAT BUMPER STICKER THAT USED TO BE ON THE BACK OF YOUR CAR?⁸ I THINK THAT'S A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF PUTTING IT IN THEIR FACE.

A couple of times, I got dirty looks. But I felt like I was ready to defend who I was.

WAS THERE EVER A TIME WHEN ANY OF THE WHITE STUDENTS OR FACULTY MISTREATED YOU IN ANY WAY?

No, I didn't feel anything from them.

SO YOUR FEELINGS OF HATE TOWARDS THEM ARE BASED SOLELY
ON WHAT THEIR ANCESTORS DID TO YOUR ANCESTORS?

Yeah.

DO YOU THINK IT IS FAIR TO HOLD THEM IN CONTEMPT FOR
SOMETHING THAT THEY THEMSELVES DIDN'T DO?

(Pause) I think so. I just didn't like them. They were...ugh! (laughter)

YOU GUYS WERE PRETTY ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN A.I.M. FROM
WHAT I REMEMBER.

Yeah, we were. This lady actually ran it. Her name was Cauilla. I thought
she was so cool. She was so outspoken and everything that I don't think I was.

WHAT DID YOU DISCUSS DURING YOUR MEETINGS?

Things that were going on within Colorado Springs like the Rainbow
Tribe that was doing all those weird ceremonies in the Garden of the Gods.⁹
We attended a few city council meetings and we pulled security for A.I.M.
Basically, we just wanted to let people know that we *are* still around and we
still have our language. Right now, the people I associate with really don't
like A.I.M. They feel it's just for urban Indians who have lost their identity.

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL VIEWS ON WHITE-INDIANS
RELATIONS?

We can probably live side by side.

BUT NOT TOGETHER?

(Pause) That's a hard question.

CAN YOU SEE YOURSELF HAVING WHITE NEIGHBORS?

I'd rather not do that.

Regina

IS THAT THE REASON YOU CAME BACK HOME RIGHT AFTER YOU GRADUATED?

Yeah. I was away for a while and I just missed home. I wanted to be home with my family. When I left for college, I wanted to get my education and come home to help my people. That's what I always wanted to do.

NOW THAT YOU'RE HERE, DO YOU STILL SUBSCRIBE TO THE SAME DEGREE OF ANIMOSITY TOWARDS WHITES?

I still feel that way. I'm not saying they're all bad. I just don't want to even associate with them.

WOULD YOU SAY YOU'RE PREJUDICED AGAINST WHITE PEOPLE?

I've said that before. I think I am.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN ANGLO FRIEND?

(Pause) The only person I can think of is one of my teachers from high school. I still see him today and we've gotten really close.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISSUE, WOULD YOU SAY YOU WERE PROUD OF BEING INDIAN BEFORE YOU WENT TO COLLEGE?

I didn't really think about it at all. Everybody was Navajo. I didn't really think I was different.

DID YOU EVER FEEL ASHAMED OF BEING INDIAN?

I think only a couple of times I felt like that. Like when you're in Dillard's or some place and you're surrounded by White people. They come to you and have their eyes on you like you're going to steal something. I *hate* that!

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED MORE OVERT FORMS OF RACISM?

Once when we were messing around with CBs. These truckers were saying bad things about Indians like "damn drunk Indians" and whatever. It got me so mad and I started saying stupid things and it just got into a big argument.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF BLACK?

No. I know that my grandpa was part Black but I really don't feel anything towards Black people. For as long as I remember, my mom would always say "I'm Black." I'm like "No, you're not. Grandma's Navajo and you're Navajo because everything runs through the mother." I don't feel *nothing*—no kinship—to any Black person.

DO YOU HOLD ANY CONTEMPT FOR BLACK PEOPLE?

Not really. The only time I see and hear Black people is on TV. I haven't been close to any Black people. How many Black people live in Gallup? Or how many White people live around me? They're just not around. But even if they were, I still wouldn't have anything to do with them. I just don't care.

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE PERFECTLY CONTENT ON YOUR LITTLE ISLAND. IS THERE A "NO TRESPASSING" SIGN ON YOUR ISLAND?

I think so. There's this guy, Marshall, who works at the museum and he's always with different White people, showing them around. He just welcomes them freely. I'm not like that. I will not do that. Jasmine's another good example. I think she tries to share her Navajoness with anybody who's interested. So, yeah, I would say that outsiders are not allowed.

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EVER SINCE COLLEGE, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE UNDERGONE AN INFUSION OF INDIAN PRIDE. YOU'VE EMBRACED YOUR HERITAGE AND YOU'RE TRYING TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR TRADITIONS. WHAT IS THAT THE RESULT OF?

My job. It centers around preservation. I work with two people that I think influence who I am right now: Tim and Steven. They grew up very traditional, way different than I did. They just opened up a whole new world for me. Here I am, at 26, barely learning the creation story. I mean I've read about it in books but it's different when they *explain* it to me. My grandma never told me anything since she never learned herself. And I actually get to see it first-hand going to these ceremonies that I never attended before in my

Regina

life. I guess I'm fortunate because of these opportunities to see these sand paintings and have the purpose explained to me. It's cool. I wish I grew up very traditional.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR JOB RESPONSIBILITIES.

I work in facilities management as an archaeologist. My main responsibility is dealing with historic buildings along with archaeology and ethnography.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "HISTORIC BUILDINGS"?

Mainly buildings that were constructed by the B.I.A. Most of those buildings were built in the 1930's.

IN WHAT CAPACITY DO YOU CONDUCT ETHNOGRAPHY?

Just a little bit. Let's say we're going to nominate a historic building onto the national registry so we would try to find people that actually went to school there and interview them.

THIS IS OBVIOUSLY MORE THAN JUST A JOB FOR YOU. WHAT KINDS OF THINGS HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOUR CULTURE?

My Navajo has really improved. Before, it was real basic. I could understand but I couldn't speak to my grandmother or people who only spoke Navajo. When I'm out in the field, I come across a lot of old people. If I'm fortunate, I have someone who can speak Navajo better than I can like Tim or Steven. Tim is a traditional culture specialist and then Steven is the program manager of the traditional culture program. They'll tell me place names and what happened there and how it's associated with the ceremony. I wouldn't know any of these things if they didn't tell me. If I read it someplace, it wouldn't be the same.

ARE YOU ANGRY AT YOUR MOM OR GRANDMA FOR NOT TEACHING YOU ANY OF THOSE THINGS?

That's how I feel right now. I should have at least been taught to speak Navajo. That wasn't always around me.

AND YOU'RE TRYING NOT TO REPEAT THE SAME MISTAKE WITH BUZZ?

Yeah. I don't know how to speak Navajo that well, but I try to teach him simple things that I know. And he was taking a Navajo class in kindergarten. Coming home, he'd tell me "Oh, mom, I learned this today!" I think that's a good start for him.

IT'S FAIRLY OBVIOUS THAT LITTLE BOY IS THE CENTER OF YOUR WORLD. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON MOTHERHOOD?

I hear people tell me I'm too overprotective, that I worry too much about him. Even when I'm with him, I'm always on my toes to make sure he's not hungry and just motherly things like that.

IS THAT BECAUSE YOU AND YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND COUSINS BASICALLY GREW UP LIKE A PACK OF WOLVES?

(Laughter) I don't want him to experience what I went through in terms of my mom and dad not being around. I want to be there for him.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

I think I'm on my way. There was this one incident. After Marty got into his accident, my mom said we should go to this medicine man. We went over there and he knew everything! He said he would walk in a month and feel like this. Everything he said came true. I think that's when I realized there was a higher power out there somewhere.

HOW DID THIS EXPERIENCE CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

It didn't really. After that one incident, it didn't happen again.

WHEN YOU ATTEND CEREMONIES AS PART OF YOUR JOB, ARE YOU THERE AS AN OBSERVER OR DO YOU ACTUALLY PARTICIPATE?

The people I'm with usually want me to participate. It's more of a teaching experience for me.

DO YOU EVER FEEL ANYTHING?

The only time I felt something was when we were doing a sandpainting for the *yeibechee* dance. That was so weird because the people were actually laying there on the mats and stuff. I didn't feel like I was worthy enough to look at them.

HAVE YOU BEEN TO PEYOTE MEETINGS?

I don't go to peyote meetings. Those kind of people are just lost. I don't really like peyote because I think of Jesus and the Christian sacrament. I don't believe in that.

WHAT TURNED YOU AGAINST CHRISTIANITY?

Just the thought of Jesus Christ and how so many people were killed because of him and what they did to us. Jesus Christ wasn't here when we started our existence. He's not in our oral history.

* * * * *

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU TO BE NAVAJO?

I know a lot of people have livestock and they live off the land and that's how they see themselves: as people of the land. But I've never owned a sheep in my life. (pause) I asked this same question to a couple of people. They say if you learn the language, everything will come easy for you. I think that's where I'm stuck. So I can't really describe it to you. I know everything has to be in balance: night and day, good and evil.

WHAT ARE SOME SPECIFIC TRAITS OF A TRADITIONAL NAVAJO?

For a female, I think making bread is very important especially with in-laws. If I go to Marty's house, they judge you on that. Also, going through the *kinaalda* is uniquely important for a female.

WHAT ABOUT THE BIOLOGICAL QUESTION IN TERMS OF HOW MUCH BLOOD QUANTUM YOU NEED TO HAVE IN ORDER TO QUALIFY AS A NAVAJO OR AN INDIAN?

I would think at least a fourth. And it has to be through the mother. That's very important. I've really thought about this a lot. I was speaking to other people who are more traditional than I am and they said, "Language is the most important and then the land and then the ceremonies. That would make you Navajo." And I'm like, "Well, I don't know very much Navajo. I don't know enough about ceremonies or the land. So am I Navajo?" They're like, "Yes, you are because your grandmother is a full-blooded Navajo."

SO ALL THE OTHER STUFF IS INCONSEQUENTIAL OR AT LEAST SECONDARY TO BIOLOGY?

That's what I'm confused about. (pause) I hate to say it, but biology overrides everything else.

HOW DO YOU HOLD ONTO THESE TRADITIONAL BELIEFS IN A MODERN WORLD?

I think we have to compromise. Not the traditional side because that has been here for so long. Now we're in the future and I think we need to choose.

WHICH SIDE HAVE YOU CHOSEN?

I think I'm in the middle. I'm trying to reach toward the traditional, but I'm leaning more to the modern.

JUST AS A SUPERFICIAL EXAMPLE, LOOK AT YOUR HOUSE. EXCEPT FOR THE CRADLE BOARD AND A COUPLE OF RUGS, NOBODY WOULD THINK AN INDIAN LIVES HERE. EXPLAIN WHY YOU DECORATED YOUR HOUSE IN THIS WAY?

I looked at a lot of magazines and I just pick out what I like. And I watch "Martha Stewart" and "This Old House," you know, how they renovate old homes. I watch Bob Villa, too.

Regina

AGAIN, I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW YOU CAN HAVE SUCH
CONTEMPT FOR WHITE PEOPLE YET DESIRE THEIR MATERIAL
CULTURE.

I don't really see any problem.

WHEN TIM AND STEVEN COME OVER, DO THEY TEASE YOU?

Yeah, they do! They don't make fun of me. They're just like "Man, you're weird." And they say things to me like "There's more important things out there you should worry about than buying things for your house." And they're always asking me, "Why do you need this car?"¹⁰

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THAT?

That's what I like. I'm sorry if you don't like it. That's me. But they don't care about money the way I do.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE BEING PULLED IN TWO DIFFERENT
DIRECTIONS?

I don't feel like I'm being pulled. Well...I guess I do but not in this everyday life. The only time I feel like I'm traditional is when I'm at work and that's weird. And when I come home...

IS THAT YOUR WAY OF HAVING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS?

I think so.

HAS BEING CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE CAUSED DAMAGE TO YOU
ON SOME LEVEL?

The only time I don't feel okay is when I'm at work. At work, I'm trying to take in as much information as I can. People tell me I belong there and that it's my right to know all these things, but there's just something there. I don't know the language and I feel more comfortable over here. There were a couple of time where I was in this hogan and these old men were talking to me in Navajo. I was trying to understand but they knew I didn't. I felt really bad and it was like I don't belong here.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE LEADING A DOUBLE LIFE?

Yeah. They don't come together. A couple of times, I've heard Tim and Steven say "Stay Navajo first and foremost. You have to be Navajo *all* of the time."

WHAT DID THEY MEAN BY THAT?

You speak Navajo, your beliefs, just your outlook on life. We were stuck in the mud and I joked about converting to Christianity. I was like "Please, God, help us out. If you let us out, I'll go to church on Sunday." They thought I was serious and they were like "You're Navajo first and don't forget that."

ISN'T THERE SOME AMBIVALENCE ABOUT BEING *TOO* TRADITIONAL? BECAUSE AS MUCH AS YOU WANT TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE AND KNOW ABOUT THE CEREMONIES, YOU DON'T WANT TO BE CONSIDERED A "JAAN."¹¹

A few years ago, I would have laughed at people who couldn't speak English correctly or smelled like sheep. But, today, that's the kind of life I want.

NO WAY! TELL THE TRUTH.

Well, at least have livestock or a hogan.

EVEN IF IT MEANS LOSING THE MERCURY COUGAR?

(Pause) I want both.

DO YOU THINK THAT IN THE PROCESS OF TRYING TO HAVE BOTH, YOU MAY BE INEVITABLY SACRIFICING ONE FOR THE OTHER? ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE SAYING "YOU CAN'T HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO?"

I think it's possible to have a nice house and have your hogan outside and your livestock. There are people I know at work who are pretty well off and who are educated and they have both.

PERHAPS THIS IS THE WAY THE CULTURE WILL SURVIVE: PEOPLE LIKE YOU WHO HAVE SHEEP AND A HOGAN IN THE BACKYARD IN ADDITION TO A FAT RIDE IN THE GARAGE.

I think it *has* to be this way. We're living in a world with television and new vehicles. There's no turning back. And then there's the traditional side. We have to bring it together in order to survive. It's possible if you really want to. For me, the traditional side has become very important and I want to hang onto that. And then there's me again who likes the nice things. And I want both. And I know I can have both if I really want it. But that's not true for everybody.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR NAVAJOS?

According to oral history, when we do not know our language any longer and when we don't know our ceremonies or whatever, the end of the world will come. That's what I've heard the old people say.

IS THE END NEAR?

That's where we're headed. I think that's why I can live in both worlds because I know things are changing. The younger generation is not even bothering to learn Navajo. They don't want to. They don't think it's important. It's just a matter of time. (pause) I just finished reading Son of Old Man Hat and what surprised me is that they were the type of family that would share everything they had because I wasn't brought up like that. They were really unselfish people. They would try to help others by giving them so many sheep and when they'd come over, they'd feed them. It was never like that when I grew up.

HAVE YOU TRIED TO INCORPORATE THAT SPIRIT OF SHARING INTO YOUR ADULT LIFE?

No, not really.

UNLIKE OTHER PARTS OF THE REZ, EVERYBODY LIVES VERY CLOSELY HERE. ARE YOU FRIENDLY WITH ANY OF YOUR NEIGHBORS?

I don't even talk to any of them! Even when I'm with people I work with, they want to know what peoples' clans are so, you know, "Oh, you're my brother" or "You're my sister." They embrace them as part of their family. I'm not like that. The clan is the last thing I would ask.

DO YOU EVER LONG FOR THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY YOU READ ABOUT IN THE BOOK?

I guess I admire it.

ARE YOU WILLING TO TAKE THAT NEXT STEP AND REPLICATE IT?

I try to. People that I've met, you know, I've tried to acknowledge them as if they were part of my family. But it's hard. I've never lived like that before.

WHAT'S IT LIKE WHEN YOUR COUSINS OR OTHER RELATIVES COME OVER TO VISIT AND SEE ALL THESE NICE THINGS?

There's envy. With Irma's girls,¹² I could sense it. They're like "Oh, everything's nice" and "I like your car. Can I sit in it?"

HAVE THEY EVER ASKED YOU FOR A LOAN?

They've put me in that position before.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

I have bills. I have a house to pay for, a car to pay for, all these things to pay for. If I had extra money, I would give it. I think they think I'm lying.

HAS THAT AFFECTED YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM?

I think so. I try to stay away as much as I can because I don't want to be caught in that position again.

DOES THAT BOTHER YOU AT ALL?

I try to bring that up with my mom. Last week, my mom caught a ride with me to work. She was saying, "Oh, grandma came over and she wanted something from me." And I was like, "You're supposed to help your mom." And she said, "Every time I see her, she just wants something." I'm like, "So? She's your mom." And she goes, "I'm not as close to my mom as I should be." Then I said, "You know, mom, I think I'm the same way as you." She just kind of looked at me weird. I said, "Mom, I'm serious."

WHAT WAS HER REACTION?

She was just stunned. She's like "I didn't know you felt like that." I said, "I do. I know you're so involved with Virgil and you've always put us second to your men." I've always felt like that.

DO YOU THINK YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MOM WILL
EVENTUALLY MIRROR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR
MOM AND YOUR GRANDMA?

I've thought about that. I don't know. What she said was "I guess I know which daughter is going to take care of me. I know how you, Tashina, and Thelma are just going to leave me and Sharmaine is the only one that's going to take care of me."

MARTY DESCRIBED YOU AS BEING "JUST LIKE HER MOTHER."
WOULD YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THAT STATEMENT?

I agree. Every day, I find myself doing things my mom would do.

ARE THERE CERTAIN THINGS YOU PURPOSELY WANTED TO DO
DIFFERENTLY FROM YOUR MOM?

The way my mom was involved in different relationships. I didn't want to expose that to my son and make him feel neglected the way I was. That's one thing I don't want to do.

IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU MOST SIMILAR TO HER?

I used to always hear Irma's girls talk behind my mom's back saying, "She's too materialistic." And they ended up saying those things about me. That made me think about it and I didn't want to be like that.

DO YOU THINK YOU'VE SUCCEEDED?

No, because I like nice things. (laughter)

IS PART OF THE REASON YOUR COUSINS SAID THAT ABOUT YOU BECAUSE YOU DENIED THEIR REQUESTS FOR LOANS?

I think so. I wish it was different. I know most of my cousins are close, and I'm not as close to them as I want to be. I want to help as much as I can but, right now, I'm still trying to get my life straightened out.

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WHAT IS YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY OF WATCHING TELEVISION?

I was in second or third grade. I remember watching cartoons like "Tom and Jerry" and "Inspector Gadget." It just took me to another place from, you know, my life. Like I remember watching "Three's Company," and I couldn't believe how these people lived. It was really different from me. Here's three people living together, two females and one male, and they're White people and they live in this cool house by the beach and I live out in the desert.

HOW MUCH TELEVISION DID YOU WATCH AS A CHILD?

Just after school, maybe two hours a day. I really didn't watch that much television but, as I got older and we got electricity, that's when I started watching more and more television. Right now, I think I watch the most television because I have a satellite. There's so many channels to watch. When I get home from work, it's time for me to relax and I'll watch whatever.

Regina

TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE SHOWS.

When I'm watching TV, I like to watch The Learning Channel, Discovery Health,...

YOU'RE LYING! I KNOW YOU DON'T JUST WATCH EDUCATIONAL CHANNELS!

(Laughter) I don't get any movie channels. I'd like it to be a learning experience. I've always wanted to go into the medical field. Like Trauma in the E.R., I love that. But I can't watch it that much because Marty doesn't like it.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THAT. WHO CONTROLS THE REMOTE?

Whoever gets on the couch first. That's how it works. But if I know he really doesn't want to watch something, I'll just watch it for awhile and then I'll give him the remote.

BESIDES THESE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS, WHAT ELSE DO YOU ENJOY WATCHING?

Probably sit-coms.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE MOVIES?

The Color Purple, Terms of Endearment, Fried Green Tomatoes, Thelma and Isabelle, Steel Magnolias, Beaches....

I'M NOTICING A PATTERN HERE. ALL OF THE MOVIES YOU MENTIONED REVOLVE AROUND STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS. WHY DOES THAT APPEAL TO YOU?

All the women in these movies, they're just different from me. They do what I don't think I would ever do. I think it's because I'm afraid or I'm not really outspoken. I keep a lot of things to myself.

BE MORE SPECIFIC.

Like Celie in The Color Purple. She's a tough lady. She went through a lot, like being beaten all the time, and overcame it. She's just a strong person.

DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH HER AT ALL?

Not really. I think I would identify myself more with the mother in Steel Magnolias. Sally Field plays the mother and she's really overprotective of her daughter who was Julia Roberts. And she went through a lot. Then Julia Roberts comes down with some kind of disease and dies. Her mom was always a big part of her life. (fighting tears) That's who I identify with.

HOW DO YOU EMOTIONALLY CONNECT WITH THESE CHARACTERS
DESPITE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOU AND THEM?

I don't know. (pause) I'll bring up Steel Magnolias again. Julia Roberts dies and she's in the gravesite. Her mom is just going crazy because her daughter died and she starts crying right there. I think it has a lot to do with how I've lost people in my life like my aunt and a couple of my uncles. That's how I bonded with her, through my own experiences. I knew exactly what she was feeling at that time.

I'M TRYING TO RECONCILE YOUR OBVIOUS ANTI-PATHY TOWARDS
WHITE PEOPLE WITH YOUR ABILITY TO MAKE A STRONG
EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT WITH THESE WHITE CHARACTERS.

It doesn't matter.

DO YOU SEE ANY KIND OF CONTRADICTION THERE?

No, I don't. Most of what's out there on television is mainly White people.

DO YOU THINK IF YOU EVER GOT TO KNOW WHITE PEOPLE ON
THAT KIND OF PERSONAL LEVEL THAT THEIR WHITENESS
WOULDN'T BE SUCH A BARRIER?

Yeah, maybe if I got to know them then I wouldn't look at their skin color. But that's still not enough to make me want to get to know them.

Regina

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WHY DO YOU THINK THERE AREN'T ANY INDIANS ON TV?

Because of what the public wants to see, except for maybe *Smoke Signals* or something like that. Native Americans are so...we're a minority.

DID YOU LIKE *SMOKE SIGNALS*?

Yeah, I liked the humor in it. Like those two women in the car driving backwards. (laughter). But it's also weird because if you look at the artist or the producers that are native, people view them as sell-outs because of who their audience is.

DO YOU THINK OF NATIVE ARTISTS AS SELL-OUTS? SPECIFICALLY, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON SHERMAN ALEXIE?

I don't know. (pause) Did he grow up on a reservation? I think where you come from has a lot to do with it.

IN GENERAL, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY NATIVE AMERICANS HAVE BEEN REPRESENTED BY THE POPULAR MEDIA?

I don't think they're really depicted as, you know, like me. They're either a brave warrior or a drunk. It's not correct.

HOW WOULD YOU PREFER INDIANS BE DEPICTED?

Not at all.

EVEN IF IT'S OTHER INDIANS DOING THE DEPICTING? MORE AND MORE, NATIVE PEOPLE ARE TAKING CONTROL OF THEIR OWN REPRESENTATION.

I think that's better, but that really doesn't interest me. As long as I know who I am and I know who my family is and I know where I live, that's what matters.

I THINK THAT'S THE OPERATIVE PHRASE: "AS LONG AS I KNOW WHO I AM." BUT FOR A LOT OF INDIANS, ESPECIALLY THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS, THAT ISN'T THE CASE. IN *SMOKE SIGNALS*, FOR EXAMPLE, THOMAS ADMITS THAT WHAT HE KNOWS ABOUT BEING INDIAN WAS LEARNED FROM WATCHING *DANCES WITH WOLVES* FIFTY TIMES.

That's funny because I remember doing that in college. It was during that whole *Dances with Wolves* period and I got into powwows and I would wear my turquoise earrings or my dreamcatcher necklace or something...the feather in my car. I remember buying a choker! (laughter) If I had one of those, people would know. And to know that I'm in A.I.M., you know, so leave me alone.

DO YOU REMEMBER SPECIFIC INSTANCES WHERE YOU PLAYED UP THAT ROLE?

When we went on protests. We were told not to say anything, just stand straight and no expression on your face: the stoic Indian.

DID THAT WORK?

I think so because nobody bothered me. (laughter)

HAVE YOU CONTINUED PLAYING THE STOIC INDIAN WHEN YOU'RE AROUND PEOPLE YOU DON'T KNOW?

It depends on who I'm with. I'm more outgoing when I'm out with my friends. I can be loud, I can laugh as hard as I want and I don't care if anyone looks at me. But if I'm by myself, I think I put up that front if I don't want to be bothered.

* * * * *

DO YOU THINK TELEVISION HAS ANY EFFECT ON THE WAY PEOPLE ACT?

I think so. A lot of these teen-agers nowadays, they watch these gangster movies and I know they try to be like that: the way they dress, their attitude,

Regina

the way they carry themselves. Marlin and Chucky are like that, and I know they learned it from watching TV.

WOULD YOU GO SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT TELEVISION IS TO BLAME FOR ALL THESE SOCIETAL ILLS LIKE TEEN PREGNANCIES AND SCHOOL SHOOTINGS?

No. I think it comes down to your family, the way you were raised. If you're taught the right way, it shouldn't make any difference what you watch on TV.

THINK BACK TO YOUR CHILDHOOD. IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU THINK YOU WERE INFLUENCED BY WHAT YOU SAW ON TELEVISION?

(Pause) I was probably most influenced when I was in high school. Like with "Beverly Hills 90210," I looked at their clothes, how they wear their hair and make-up, and the way they talk.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO SOAP OPERAS?

I think because I wanted to be older and have all these men after me. (laughter)

WHEN YOU WOULD WATCH THESE SOAP OPERAS AND NOTICE THE BIG GULF BETWEEN THE WAY THEY'RE LIVING AND THE WAY YOU'RE LIVING, HOW DID YOU FEEL?

I didn't feel ashamed. I felt like if I wanted that, I could get it.

DO YOU SEE THE CONTRADICTION HERE? AT THE SAME TIME THAT YOU DISLIKE WHITE PEOPLE, YOU WANT WHAT THEY HAVE.

There's no contradiction. I don't see it. I don't want to be like a White person. They may have nice things and I want those nice things but that doesn't mean I want to be White.

I KNOW THAT'S THE WAY YOU FEEL NOW. BUT THINK BACK TO THOSE FORMATIVE, TEEN-AGE YEARS. WAS THERE ANY PART OF YOU THAT WANTED TO BE LIKE THE PEOPLE YOU WATCHED ON TELEVISION? DID YOU WANT BRANDON¹³ TO BE YOUR BOYFRIEND?

(Laughter) I think I admired what they had and that was it.

BUT YOU DON'T WATCH A SHOW TO SEE THE THINGS THEY HAVE BUT BECAUSE YOU BECOME INVESTED IN THE CHARACTERS.

I don't remember.

WHAT IS THE APPEAL OF WRESTLING TO YOU?

The Rock! (laughter) There's always a storyline behind it and there's all these different titles. It's kind of like a soap opera, too. And these people are so devoted to their bodies. Then they brought women into it.

YOUR FANATACISM FOR WRESTLING HAS REACHED A POINT WHERE YOU ACTUALLY PAY TO ATTEND MATCHES.

Only when they're around here, like maybe once a year.

IS THERE ANYTHING ON TELEVISION YOU FIND OFFENSIVE?

Not really. Nothing would shock me. But one day, Chucky brought over—what was it called?—*Death Row Uncut*.¹⁴ I really didn't like it. It just drove me nuts to have all these boys watching it. And all these women, it so grossed me out!¹⁵

DO YOU SET ANY RULES ABOUT WATCHING TV AS FAR AS YOUR SON IS CONCERNED?

I have rules. Most of the movies that show on HBO or are rated R, and he knows he can't watch those kinds of movies. He knows when to cover his eyes. And I don't want him watching horror movies like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or something like that.

WRESTLING OBVIOUSLY DOESN'T BOTHER YOU.

I don't have a problem with it. I've explained it to him and he knows that it's just entertainment.

DO YOU FOLLOW ANY RITUALS ASSOCIATED WITH WATCHING TV?

In my house, everything has to be clean. If the carpet's dirty or needs to be vacuumed, you can't watch TV. I was always brought up like that: if you're a woman, you have to keep your house clean.

WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH WATCHING TV?

That's the place in the house where everyone spends most of their time. If it's not neat, nobody can relax.

HAVE YOU EVER PURPOSELY TURNED OFF THE TV JUST TO SEE HOW YOUR LIFE WOULD BE DIFFERENT?

No, I never tried that. I'm comfortable. I know I watch too much television and I want so much to turn the TV off and do other things, but it just doesn't happen.

HOW STRONGLY DO YOU WANT IT TO HAPPEN?

Not strongly enough since I'm not doing anything about it.

DO YOU THINK TELEVISION HAS BEEN GOOD FOR NAVAJOS?

I think we would have been better off without it. People would be more concerned with the important stuff like the language and the ceremonies.

IN WHAT WAYS HAS TELEVISION CHANGED THE CULTURE?

You turn on the TV and you see nice houses and the nice car parked outside with the mother and the father and the children and that's it. I think it has made people more individualistic by creating desire for nice things. But it's not just television. The boarding schools and the churches tried to take away our language and our religion.

IS THERE ANYTHING CULTURALLY UNIQUE ABOUT THE WAY NAVAJOS WATCH TELEVISION?

That's a hard question. It's funny when my grandma watches TV like soap operas or something. She's like "What's going on?" and my aunt would interpret for her. It's funny how it came out in Navajo. The translation of it is "She's fucking this guy" and my grandma's freaked out and she really gets into it. It's funny just to see her expression.

WHAT ELSE IS DIFFERENT?

The only thing I can think of is taboos. Like my grandma can't watch a snake on television or she can't watch dead bodies. That's taboo.

IS THAT TRUE FOR LESS TRADITIONAL NAVAJOS SUCH AS YOURSELF?

I know I'm not supposed to watch those things.

WOULD YOU TURN THE CHANNEL?

I probably would turn the channel.

HAVE YOU TURNED THE CHANNEL?

No. (laughter)

COMMENTARY

"That's not Pocahontas! That's Jennifer Lopez!" -Chris Rock, Bigger and Blacker (Bull & Truesdell, 1999)

Regina is employed as an archaeologist for the Navajo Nation's Historic Preservation Department (HPD), the institution through which every researcher must first receive permission before carrying out ethnographic research on the reservation. As such, she was already aware of my research before I asked for her participation in my study because she had read my permit proposal. The tables were turned.

Perhaps because Regina knows first-hand what it is like to be on the other side of the anthropological gaze, she is mindful of the discipline's shameful legacy towards native peoples. In particular, she reports having very negative feelings about interviews. There is a policy at HPD not to tape record any interviews because they are regarded as "sensitive information." Regina has witnessed numerous incidents of "outsiders" purposely misinterpreting and distorting interview data in order to accomplish their own self-serving goals. Although a card-carrying member of the anthropological community, her loyalties definitely lie with the objects of anthropological study.

Anthropology, and particularly archaeology, has traditionally been held in low esteem by Native Americans for both cultural and political reasons. Indians often view anthropology and its practitioners as intrusive and arrogant, and not particularly sensitive to native points of view. The sub-field of archaeology is seen as especially guilty, as recent controversies surrounding repatriation and reburial of excavated human remains demonstrate. As a result of this conflict of values, anthropology and archaeology have historically been rejected by Indian students as potential professions, and by Native Americans generally as irrelevant fields of study.

In her aptly titled article, "Learning to be an Anthropologist and Remaining 'Native,'" Beatrice Medicine (1978) reflects upon the ambiguities inherent in these two roles. She describes how other Native Americans teasingly sang Floyd Westerman's (1969) song "Here Comes the Anthros" whenever she attended Indian conferences. The song is a Native American critique of anthropology as a discipline deeply rooted in colonialism, which is conveyed in the following verses:

*And the anthros still keep coming like death and taxes to our land
To study their feathered freaks with funded money in their hand.
Like Sunday at the zoo,
The cameras click away,
Taking notes and tape recordings of all the animals that way.
And when back they go to write their book,
And tell the world there's more.
But there's nothing left to write,
It's all been done before.
Not a cent of funded money
That the anthros didn't spend
Was ever given to their disappearing feathered friend.
And the anthros keep on digging*

*In our sacred ceremonial sites.
 As if there was nothing wrong,
 And their education gives them the right.
 But the more they keep digging,
 The less they really see.
 Cause they got no respect
 For you or for me.*

By rendering their past intractable through heavy jargon and lack of access, anthropologists are widely perceived in native communities as taking (or stealing) private information and resources back to their ivory towers, never to be heard from again.

For Regina, the “anthro” is not an alien or evil concept in and of itself. Both she and her cousin majored in anthropology in college, and Regina is currently employed as an archaeologist with the tribe. In both academic and professional contexts, she has interviewed other Navajos (including her relatives). Unlike Medicine, Regina has stated that other Indians have never voiced any negative comments about her choice of major or vocation. Like Medicine (1978), she “went into anthropology as a means of helping their people” (p. 184).

Cat's in the Cradle

Regina is Isabelle's first child, and she was born when her mother was only seventeen years old. As the eldest child, she has always been held to higher standard than her younger siblings, particularly with regard to education. Because of the regretful circumstances surrounding her arranged marriage, Isabelle wanted her daughter to have more opportunities than she did. In many ways, she has lived vicariously through Regina.

In Navajo families, the oldest child is entrusted to take care of his or her brothers and sisters. According to Witherspoon (1975), younger siblings are subordinate to older siblings, and in many situations the eldest sister serves as a second mother. As the firstborn, she was the glue that was supposed to hold the younger children together. Especially in a large family, being the oldest child entails a great deal of responsibility. Regina had to make sure the kids woke up for school, took their showers, and brushed their teeth. Since her mom was frequently away from the home, she often had to assume the parental tasks of cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Her younger sister, Sharmaine, was born when she was twelve. Many people, including myself,

thought that Regina was her mother, which, for all intents and purposes, she was. All of these pressures and responsibilities did not allow her the freedom to be “just another kid.” This is the reason why she tends to be much more outgoing in the company of her friends than her family members.

Regina’s feelings for her mother run the spectrum from gratitude and appreciation to bitterness and outright contempt. On the one hand, she recognizes the strength and determination it took for her mom to overcome so many obstacles. As a Mother’s Day gift, Regina presented Isabelle with a plaque titled “For My Mom with Love”:¹⁶

*Mom, you’re always there to help,
No matter what life brings,
To laugh with me, be proud of me,
And share the happy things.
But even more importantly,
You’re there when plans go wrong,
To help me work things out
When disappointments come along.
And so, this comes to than you, Mom,
And tell you lovingly,
You’re very special in my life
And very dear to me.*

Regina whole-heartedly agrees with the pre-inscribed sentiment expressed on the plaque even if the words are not her own.

On the other hand, she still harbors resentment against her mother for being unfaithful to her father, and she blames Isabelle for their divorce. Along these same lines, Regina remains hurt and angry that her mom cared more about her boyfriends than her kids: “She always put her men before us.” One day, she informed her mother of how she felt. Isabelle was alarmed to learn that her daughter did not consider herself to be close to her. This sudden realization is well articulated in the last verse of the famous Harry Chapin song, “Cat’s in the Cradle,”¹⁷ about a father who neglected his son only to have the same thing done to him when the boy became a man:

*I’ve long since retired and my son’s moved away.
I called him up just the other day.
I said, “I’d like to see you if you don’t mind.”
He said, “I’d love to, dad, if I could find the time.*

*You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kid's got the flu,
But it's sure nice talking to you, dad.
It's been sure nice talking to you."
And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me,
He'd grown up just like me.*

Indeed, Regina's relationship with her mom mirrors Isabelle's relationship with Elsie. There are a number of striking parallels between mother and daughter: both are self-described "daddy's girls," both feel alienated from their own mothers, both are estranged from their extended family members, both isolate themselves from outsiders, and both have a reputation for being materialistic. Yet, in spite of all their similarities, Regina does not feel like she can confide in or even talk to her mother about personal issues. She has vowed not to follow in her mom's footsteps by being a better mother to her own son than Isabelle was to her.

Regina concealed her pregnancy from everybody, but she specifically kept it hidden from her mother. She was so fearful of disappointing her mom that she did not inform Isabelle until after she gave birth. Even then, Regina did not tell her directly but appointed her boyfriend to make the dreaded phone call from the hospital. One of Isabelle's favorite stories is describing her astonishment upon receiving news that she had just become a grandmother: "I felt so shocked that I dropped the phone!" She laughs about the incident now, but there was nothing funny about it at the time.

Based on her own experience, Isabelle had repeatedly cautioned her daughter about the pitfalls of early motherhood. Having a child so young, she warned, meant being condemned to a life living on welfare. Worst of all, it would entail throwing away the valuable opportunities provided by a college education. Regina was determined to prove her mother wrong by diligently earning her degree on schedule while balancing all of the responsibilities of motherhood.

Although her pregnancy was unplanned, having her son has brought meaning to Regina's life and defined who she is as a person.¹⁸ Nobody can dispute her dedication as a parent. She has committed herself to always being there for Buzz¹⁹ in contrast to the chronic absenteeism that she experienced as a child. In some ways, Regina's bond with her own child compensates for the lack of a bond with her mother. In essence, every fancy outfit and every new toy²⁰ serve as a not-so-subtle way of upstaging her mom. The compulsion to demonstrate maternal superiority is most evident in the adversarial relationship between Buzz and Jerrold, Isabelle's youngest son who is only one year older

than his nephew. Although she will never admit it, I know that Regina takes tremendous pride in the fact that her child is better dressed, better behaved, and performs better in school than her mom's child—despite the fact that the latter happens to be her brother.

As much as Regina makes a concerted and deliberate effort to be different from Isabelle, mother and daughter have much in common. As Marty asserts about his common-law wife: "Basically, she's just like her mom." Perhaps the trait that Regina has inherited most from her mother is an individualistic mindset.

Individualism

Regina freely admits to being materialistic. When asked to describe herself, one of the first traits she mentions is her desire for material possessions: "I like nice things." Moreover, she is not accustomed to sharing any of her "nice things" with others. After reading *Son of Old Man Hat*, an autobiography of a nineteenth century Navajo, she became intrigued by the selflessness of her ancestors: "What surprised me is that they were the type of family that would share everything they had because I wasn't brought up like that." Lilly George, a Navajo elder, reflects on the way things used to be and laments how these seem to have changed:

During our younger days, people in our area helped one another a lot. It was just a general practice they had. In the old days, even if a stranger came to the house, we would feed them and give them coffee. People are not like that anymore. No one feels compelled to assist others any longer. Families would rather be responsible for their own immediate family these days, not for their relatives. This probably has something to do with the current economic situation...Most people in the younger generation speak English, and they think in the English way. Kids will not spend a night in their grandparent's hogan; they are anxious to get home into the "modern world." You hear people saying that their kids are not listening to them. Sheep are going out, and we have a lot of land disputes. When someone says, "This land is ours," others say "No." Few people are farming anymore. Instead, most people look to work for their livelihood (cited in Ritts, 1989, pp. 361-362).

George alludes to the shift from horticulture to wage labor that has significantly reduced mutual aid and cooperation between Navajos. Economic inequality has torn away at the fabric of community. Even those who belong

to the same kinship network ignore their traditional obligations to one another. For example, Regina admits to avoiding her cousins because she does not want to be burdened with their requests for monetary loans: “I try to stay away as much as I can because I don’t want to be caught in that position again.”²¹ While she claims to long for the “good old days” when everybody helped each other, she is not willing to sacrifice her individual stake for the common good.

Regina also describes herself as “a private person” who has a tendency to detach herself from most people. Only a select few are allowed to penetrate her protective shell. Her “small circle,” as she calls them, is limited to certain immediate family members and a few close friends. Everybody else is kept at safe distance. Her aversion for outsiders is not just limited to Anglos but also includes other Navajos.

She presently lives in a government subsidized housing area. Unlike the rest of the reservation where families live together in matrilineal residence units that are separated miles away from their nearest neighbors, residents of Twin Lakes Housing live in tract homes arranged directly next to one another. The closer geographic proximity has not translated into an increased sense of community. In fact, neighbors rarely even talk to one another. Regina has lived in the area for over four years, and she still does not know the names of any of the people who live next to her.²² Navajos have been moving from rural residences into reservation communities for a long time, but the past twenty years have truly witnessed a transformation of the Navajo social landscape (Iverson, 2002).

Cultural Authenticity

Within American popular and elite culture, Indianness is more than an ethnic assignment. There has been a lot of talk recently about who and what constitutes an Indian. Invariably, traits are defined in opposition to those of the dominant society. To qualify as a *real* Indian, one is compelled to fit one of the binary oppositions or cease to be (Duran, 1996).

Among my informants, Regina is the most consciously aware of being Navajo and how her racial identity marks her as fundamentally different from the mainstream society. Concerned that Navajos are increasingly having children with those outside of their race, she also emphasizes the importance of preserving the culture by keeping bloodlines pure. The popularity of all things and people (called) “Indian” in recent years has similarly sounded a

panic alarm. After half a millennium of contact with White culture, the line demarcating the genuine from the spurious has become ever more blurred.

FAKES, WANNABES. AND PRETENDERS

The appropriation of Native American culture is nothing new. National organizations such as the YMCA, for example, has appropriated Indian folklore for many of their activities, the most prominent of which is the Indian Guides and Indian Princesses program. Similarly, the Smoki People—White men and women from Prescott, Arizona—reenact the Hopi Snake Dance as well as other rites and ceremonies of Southwestern Indians every year (Jojola, 1998). The increasing appropriation of Native American spirituality has been exacerbated by Hollywood's tendency to promote native religiosity as a commodity in recent films.²³

More commonly, many athletic organizations, amateur and professional alike, have appropriated the image of Indians for their team mascots.²⁴ Monikers like "Redskins," "Chiefs," "Seminoles," "Braves," and "Blackhawks" prominently decorate football, basketball, baseball, and hockey jerseys. Far from benign, some of these team mascots are personified through idiotic characters such as Willie Wampus (Marquette University) and Chief Wahoo (Cleveland Indians). These, in turn, give way to demeaning gestures such as the "tomahawk chop" and the war chant of the Atlanta Braves fans.

Philip Deloria uses the term "playing Indian" to characterize the appropriation of an Indian identity by non-natives as a sort of cultural cross-dressing in which a White identity is really more affirmed than transgressed (1988). Perhaps no other collective entity has been more associated with playing Indian than the Germans, who claim a unique relationship with the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas and see themselves as the "Indians of Europe." Some nationalist intellectuals have traveled to great lengths to establish such a link, even so far as to imply consanguinal ties.

Hartmut Lutz (2002) argues that Indian mythology served a kind of redemptive function for Germans by allowing them to identify with the victims of history rather than with the victimizers.²⁵ He refers to his countrymen's fascination with Native American culture as "Indianthusiasm," which he defined as "a yearning for all things Indian, a fascination with American Indians, a romanticizing about a supposed Indian essence" (Lutz, 2002).²⁶ This practice of cultural transvestism actually encompasses a number of distinct, although related, practices which range from children playacting as

Indians to more serious attempts to imitate specific indigenous cultures. The latter is the goal of *Indianer* clubs, where members don feather headdresses and reenact native ceremonies. Indian hobbyism seems to provide a relief from modern alienation by allowing hobbyists to act out an exotic, utopian identity. Some of these hobbyists believe that they are more “Indian” than the Indians themselves.

Perceptions of a brotherhood are decidedly one-sided as few Native Americans are aware of this supposedly special relationship between Germans and themselves. Marta Carlson, a Yurok Indian and a doctoral student in anthropology, offers a rare Native American perspective of this relationship. As part of her ethnographic fieldwork, she traveled to Germany in order to investigate how hobbyists were appropriating Indian culture and spirituality through their club practices. Carlson (2002) was initially dazzled by the “instant status and admiration” accorded to her by virtue of her authentic Indianness (p. 214). Her cheerful mood quickly turned to anger, however, after witnessing how their practices were trivializing her heritage: “What all of these hobbyists are doing is making entertainment out of genocide” (Carlson, 2002, p. 215).

Numerous individuals have parlayed a fabricated Indian identity into personal and commercial success. Any list of “great pretenders” who have relied on an ethnicity by consent rather than descent has to begin with Sylvester Long. Motivated by crossing the limitations placed upon him as a “colored” man, this former janitor transformed himself into Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance and took full advantage of the opportunities afforded him by re-inventing himself as a Native American. His Forrest Gump-like credentials are exceptional by anyone’s standards: graduate of Carlisle Indian School and St. John’s Military Academy, presidential appointee to West Point, decorated war hero, Hollywood movie star, respected journalist, best-selling author, and Indian advocate and activist (Smith, 1999).

More than forty years after Long Lance’s death, Forrest Carter was born with the publication of *The Education of Little Tree*, an award winning and best-selling novel about a Cherokee orphan raised by his grandparents in the mountains of Tennessee during the Great Depression. The novel was originally billed as an autobiographical account until the true identity of the author was revealed to be Asa Carter, a former Ku Klux Klan member, violent White supremacist, anti-Semite and speechwriter for former Alabama Governor George C. Wallace, who coined the phrase “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” (Weinraub, 1997).

Likewise, as previously mentioned, a recent investigative report alleges that perhaps the most recognizable Indian of all, Iron Eyes Cody—better known as the “Crying Indian” whose tear-streaked face became a familiar anti-littering image during the 1970s—was not a Cherokee from Oklahoma, as he had proclaimed, but actually a full-blooded Italian born in Louisiana.²⁷ He simply manipulated his resemblance to the stereotypical image of the “White Man’s Indian” for financial gain.

Among more assimilated Native Americans, there is a greater tendency to wear their racial identity as a public marker for all to see.²⁸ They have learned from the gullibility of their predecessors and have developed, through trial and error, a method of interacting with members of the dominant society that manipulates White liberal guilt to their own advantage. In public forums such as academic conferences or film festivals, for example, non-natives will rarely question much less rebuke a native scholar or filmmaker for fear of being branded with a scarlet “C” for “colonizer.” A long history of colonialism has granted Native Americans with a de facto “Get out of jail free” card.

Sherman Alexie may be the most outspoken member of the “Angry Indian” constituency. He is not only the most well-known Indian author, affirmed by his recent selection as one of *Granta* magazine’s “20 Best American Novelists Under 40,” but his additional hats as screenwriter, director, activist, and stand-up comedian render him the most public Indian persona today. As the self-appointed cultural gatekeeper for his people, Alexie has stated that one of his primary goals was to take away from so-called White experts the responsibility for describing contemporary Indian culture (Spencer, 2000).²⁹ His aim is not to avoid criticism of Indian society but to make sure that it is Indians doing the criticizing and interpreting.

One of Alexie’s ongoing complaints is with people who try to benefit from all things Indian without experiencing any of the pain (Egan, 1998). A case in point is Ian Frazier, whose book, *On the Rez* (2000), was the subject of a scathing review. To begin with, Alexie (2000) took umbrage with the title: “I laughed out loud. A White man using the word ‘rez’ to describe the reservation is the equivalent of a White man using the word ‘hood’ to describe a Black inner-city neighborhood” (p. 3). Not only has Frazier not earned the right to call the reservation “the rez,” according to Alexie, his account of his time spent among the Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge Reservation is more about who he believes them to be rather than who the Oglalas believe themselves to be.³⁰

Alexie’s criticism of Frazier essentially revolves around the age-old dilemma of the “right to write.” If we hold to his position that only Indians

have the right to write about Indians, then it becomes necessary to define who qualifies as an “Indian.” Since the vast majority of Native Americans are not full-bloods, then does that mean that a person who is half-Indian is only allowed to write about other half-bloods? Any discussion about how to demarcate legitimacy in this way invariably raises more questions than answers.³¹ Taken to its logical extreme, Alexie’s mandate would severely limit the range of most authors—including himself. Yet he apparently considers himself to be exempt, as he frequently inhabits the fictional minds of Whites.³² These portrayals have been criticized as negatively one-dimensional.³³ Alexie himself concedes that one of the short stories in his latest collection suffered from his reluctance to probe further into a pivotal White character.³⁴

Like Alexie, Regina is fiercely protective of her Indian identity. If so many people are so interested in Native American culture that they will appropriate its elements or fabricate their own membership, then being Indian, she reasons, must hold something of value. Regina realizes that she occupies a position of proprietary privilege because this is the first time she owns something that “they” want—and she is not willing to share it. Similar to a nineteenth century homesteader staking claim to his parcel of land, she lays claim to her Indianness by symbolically and defiantly planting a “No Trespassing” sign that forbids access to all outsiders.

The College Years

Regina acknowledges that her animosity towards Anglos crystallized during her college years: “It didn’t really bother me until I got into college and I was surrounded by all these White people. It just turned into hate and I didn’t want to be with White people.” This was her first prolonged exposure to the outside world. Raised in an environment where nearly everybody is Navajo, being Indian was never a high priority and was even taken for granted. It was not until she left the cocoon of the reservation and found herself in the minority that she suddenly awakened to the differences.

Culture shock is common among Native American students in college and plays a significant factor in their historically low enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. Reservation Indians who leave for college often struggle to adjust to a world so dissimilar from their own. Colorado College actively recruits top Native American students such as Regina and makes a conscious effort to ease their transition by providing cultural and academic support specifically tailored for Indian students. Before the school year even begins,

the college also sponsors a three-week summer orientation program to help incoming freshmen learn their way around campus and acquire a taste of academic demands. As a graduate of the college, I can attest to its “Indian friendly” climate.

Significantly, Regina concurs that her contempt for Anglos was never the result of mistreatment. In fact, everybody on campus—students and professors³⁵ alike—was *overly* nice to her. A conspicuous segment of the student body consists of “granolas”: Birkenstock-wearing, hacky-sack-playing, urinate-at-least-three-times-before-flushing ultra-liberal environmentalists. Given their rejection of urbanism, technology, popular culture, and the sins of their ancestors, it comes as little surprise that they would embrace Native Americans.³⁶ She remembers a typical reaction upon informing a classmate of her native ancestry: “Wow, you’re cool!”

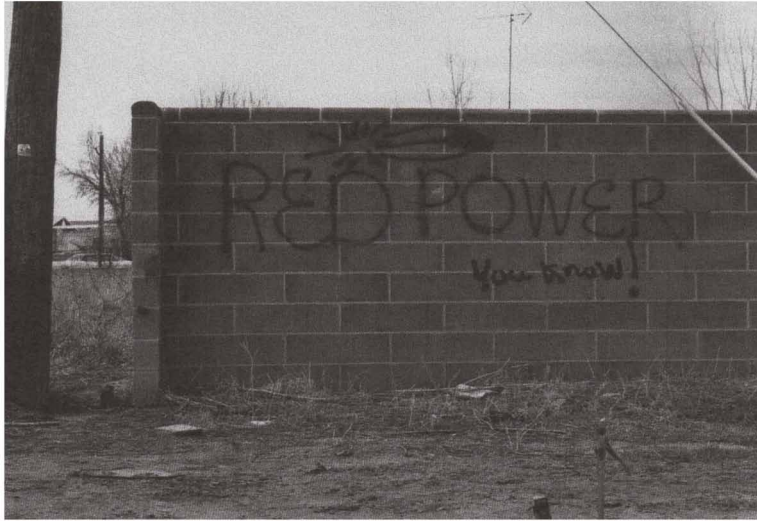
Fascination with Indian culture was certainly not limited to the campus. A multi-ethnic group who called themselves the “Rainbow Tribe” would dress up in Native American garb and perform native dances and ceremonies around town. In an attempt to congregate with real natives, Regina became active in the powwow circuit in Colorado only to find a bunch of “blonde-haired, blue-eyed Indians” who were fixtures at these tribal gatherings. Witnessing all of this appropriation, exploitation, and commodification, Regina seethed in anger that her culture was under siege by hippies, tourists, and wannabes.

Concomitant with her deep anti-White sentiments was an infusion of Indian pride. The two often go hand-in-hand, as this graffiti on a wall in Fort Defiance, Arizona indicates:

Figure 1. “Honkies are Fuckers.”
(Reprinted from Gaede, 1988)



Figure 2. “Red Power.”
(Reprinted from Gaede, 1988)



Regina found “red power” by becoming a member of the American Indian Movement. Always shy and non-confrontational, joining A.I.M. gave her the strength and confidence to stand up for her beliefs that culminated with her affixing the following bumper sticker on her car: “YOU ARE ON INDIAN LAND.”

Similar to the Black Panthers, A.I.M directed its energies towards the needs of the Indian community through protests, marches, and occupations. At the basis of the movement was a fundamental reconceptualization of Native American identity. Members liberated themselves from trying to become White to embracing their Indianness. No longer willing to accept assimilation and integration as the only valid models for race relations, they considered alternative views of the Indian experience (Browder, 2000).

The organization, however, is largely snubbed by reservation Indians such as Regina’s friends: “Right now, the people I associate with really don’t like A.I.M. They feel it’s just for urban Indians who have lost their identity.” For those who already know who they are—their sanctimonious, “redder-than-thou” reasoning follows—militant groups are unnecessary, irrelevant, and even frivolous. It is no coincidence that the “Indian Pride” contingent are overwhelmingly comprised of urban Indians who have never stepped foot on a reservation and/or learned about their native ancestry in later life. Most “Rez Ind’ns” could care less about protesting Native American mascots, for

example, because they have slightly more pressing concerns such as food and shelter. The most radical have always tended to be the most educated and urbanized, as Lindsay Anderson's wall slogan from *Oh, Lucky, Man* declared: "Revolution is the opiate of the privileged" (personal communication with Jay Ruby).

Along these same lines, there is a certain irony to Regina's hatred of Anglos. She admits that she first cultivated this stance in college after learning "about what they did to us." But she learned these lessons from listening to her (mostly) White professors and reading books by (mostly) White authors. Moreover, the only reason she was able to attend a private college in the first place was because of a scholarship sponsored by the federal government to provide educational opportunities for gifted Native American students. In other words, her contempt was enabled by the very people she feels such contempt for.

Home Sweet Home

The Navajo practice of burying a baby's umbilical cord, in a location considered by the parents and grandparents to be the most beneficial to the child's future,³⁷ securely anchors that person to a particular place. Indeed, where one's cord is buried is one's true home. Navajo people associate a deeply held sense of belonging with the places where their cords are buried, and many feel it is contrary to the "natural order" for the connection between individual and place to be severed under any circumstances (Schwarz, 1997).³⁸

According to 2000 census figures, reservations across the country are getting a boost from Indians returning home (Walker, 2001). There is a long and distinguished legacy of Navajo men and women who left the reservation in search of additional training and education and then returned home prepared to contribute to the Navajo future.³⁹ While some came back after struggling financially and culturally away from their ancestral homelands, Regina returned to where she was born not because she failed but because that is the way she always planned it all along. She is among those who persevered to complete their education and then used that "book knowledge" to serve their people. In the process, they have come full circle. Whereas Indian boarding schools were originally founded to encourage assimilation and stamp out indigenous cultures, Native American students are now using education as a tool to reclaim sovereignty for their respective tribes.

Working Girl

Regina *loves* her job. Her choice in vocation is certainly atypical. As an archaeologist, part of her job responsibilities includes reburials of human remains. Traditionally, Navajos are supposed to avoid anything associated with the dead. Yet since childhood, she has not heeded this taboo. Regina recalls how she would go scavenging for Anasazi pottery with one of her mom's boyfriends. Likewise, I used to take the kids hiking in the nearby canyons where we would occasionally encounter petroglyphs and potshards. While the other children were terrified, Regina intently handled every artifact we came upon and calmly responded to the shrieks of her young relatives by defiantly declaring, "I don't believe in that stuff."

Ironically, her job has taught her to become mindful and respectful of Navajo traditions.⁴⁰ Much more than just a source of income, her work serves as the primary means of re-claiming her history. Under the tutelage of her co-workers, Regina has learned about many aspects of Navajo culture that she was never aware of previously. In both a professional capacity as well as out of personal interest, she has attended numerous ceremonies and dances. She has also improved her fluency in the language, which she believes is the key to understanding the culture as a whole. Although Regina is grateful to be the beneficiary of all this knowledge, she is also angry that she had to learn these things from others instead of being taught by her mother or grandmother. In many ways, Regina admits to feeling like she leads a "double life" in terms of learning about her traditional culture at work yet still wanting all the material trappings of modern society at home.

Between Two Worlds

Bataille and Sands (1984) identify the three major steps in the circular journey of American Indian women's autobiographies: tradition and culture contact, acculturation, and return to tradition. For example, Anna Moore Shaw's *A Pima Past* (1974) and Lucille Winnie's *Sah-Gan-De-Oh: The Chief's Daughter* (1969) are narratives of women born into tradition tribal societies who must come to terms with the impact of White culture on their people and their own lives. Both autobiographies testify to the strength and endurance of Indian women as they face drastic changes in their own cultures and work to preserve their traditional values and ways in themselves so that they may pass them on to their children. This circular journey does not apply to Grandma Elsie

or even Isabelle, but it is relevant to Regina. Although in her case, the path follows more of a semi-circle as she has skipped the first step and proceeded directly from acculturation to a return to tradition.

While it appears that every encounter between the traditional and the modern results in the capitulation of the former for the latter, being caught between two worlds is not always a formula destined for failure. Native Americans do not necessarily have to reject their cultural values in order to adjust to mainstream society. Nowadays, Navajos who are familiar with both worlds realize that it is possible to have their cake and eat it too. Younger Indians, in particular, are increasingly deciding that they can keep their culture alive by modernizing it.

On the traditional-modern continuum, with Grandma Elsie and Chucky occupying opposite ends of the scale, Regina finds herself “somewhere in the middle.” She grew up denying and even ashamed of being Navajo but has gradually learned to embrace her native heritage. Regina now actively seeks to understand the more “traditional” aspects of her culture and incorporating these into her modern lifestyle.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the material culture of her house. It is obvious that Regina has invested a lot of time, energy, and money into making her home a reflection of how she wants to be seen. Indeed, the way she has decorated her house is a public statement of identity.⁴¹ Twitchell (1999) contends that the power of commercial branding has rapidly moved outward from the face to the body to the choice of vehicle and now to the inside of the house. Regina has always preferred focusing on exterior manifestations of her personality. Buying new curtains, for example, is much easier than losing twenty pounds.

Regina has designed her home in a way that combines both modern and traditional elements. Following a basic black and white color scheme, the “art deco” inspired interior of her home could easily be mistaken for the apartment of a Greenwich Village artist—except for the Navajo cradleboard and several Navajo rugs woven by her grandmother interspersed throughout. She counts Martha Stewart and other hosts of home remodeling cable programs as influences. Although it seemed strange to me that she could express such hatred for Whites yet want to emulate their style, Regina perceives no apparent conflict or compromise.

Her rationale for decorating her home likewise applies to the way she wishes to “decorate” her life: “I just picked out what I like.” Regina does not consider the dilemma between the traditional and the modern to be an either/or choice. Instead, she sees them as obvious complements to one another. “I

want both,” she stated confidently. From the modern world, she has selected education, wage labor, and material possessions. From the traditional world, she is learning about Navajo ceremonies, stories, and her native language. Past the point of no return, Regina realizes that incorporating aspects from both worlds is not only possible but also *essential* to the continued existence of the Navajo as a people.

Television

Regina is, by far, the most avid viewer among the five informants in my study. Watching TV is the unrivaled consumer of her leisure time. Access to a satellite dish has provided her with an enormous array of channels from which to choose. As a result, the television set is almost always on if somebody is home. Even if nobody may be watching, the TV will still be turned on in order to provide background noise.

For Regina, watching television functions as an escape from reality. TV has had this therapeutic effect ever since she was a child watching cartoons: “It just took me to another place from, you know, my life.” Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan (1985) contend that the viewing of television is a kind of liminal activity in which masses of people routinely—even ritualistically—disconnect themselves from their everyday concerns, enter into a protected “time out,” and allow themselves to be transported symbolically elsewhere.

It is this desire to be like the glamorous, confident, and conceited personalities who inhabit the world of advertising that compels the consumer to want the products that they have. Advertising works by conveying the idea that a product will bring happiness and fulfillment to the purchaser. Conversely, consumers have become convinced that they are inferior if they do not have an endless array of new products. In addition to creating demand for certain products, advertising contributes more generally to materialistic attitudes. Twitchell (1999) speculates that the roots of materialism lie in unresolved childhood problems: “People whose parents withheld attention and affection or set impossible standards may feel driven to purchase power, control, and prestige” (p. 252). This certainly appears to be true in Regina’s case.

In many ways, subjectivity is negatively influenced by consumer culture. People suffer from mediated desire when subjective yearnings are not their own but rather have been instilled externally. In Buddhism, the first of the “Four Noble Truths” states that desire causes suffering. The quest to emulate

an idealized other leaves the self empty, broken, and out of touch with its own subjectivity.

Mass mediated standards of feminine beauty invite comparisons that viewers such as Regina cannot live up to. Trying to emulate the air-brushed perfection of models who exist only in the world of advertising inevitably leads to feelings of failure and, ultimately, to loss of the self. Most of the women that Regina sees on the small and big screen are almost the complete opposite of the women she sees around her on a daily basis. Unlike the women she knows who are barely able to hold things together while dealing with the shortages of financial resources, the Hollywood celebrities wear lavish clothing, have romances with handsome leading men, and travel to exotic locations. Behind the dream images of glamour that set standards of appearance lay the nightmare of rejection that would ensue when one did not conform to those standards.

There are tremendous sociocultural pressures on young women to try to attain the body shapes that are dictated by media norms. Television serves as an important source of information about foods and eating habits. The impact of food advertising and the image of women in programming and advertising are coming under increasing scrutiny as pediatricians and public health officials try to understand why adolescent girls continue to suffer from a variety of eating disorders (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002).⁴² The rail-thin bodies depicted on television are believed to send many girls into a tailspin of anger and dissatisfaction about their weight and appearance.

From her earliest memories of watching television, Regina has been similarly struck by the discrepancy between her life and the idealized lifestyle shown on the screen: "I remember watching *Three's Company* and I couldn't believe how these people lived. It was really different from me. Here's three people living together, two females and one male, and they're White people and they live in this cool house by the beach and I live out in the desert." The reason that she harbors such venomous feelings against outsiders is precisely because she has felt like an outsider for her entire life.

Regina did not feel like she belonged with the rest of the student body while away at college. She was not only a minority in terms of race but also in appearance and income level. Besides not looking like the other girls, it was daunting being a student on scholarship surrounded by rich kids whose parents could afford the tuition for a private college education.⁴³ Regina claimed that she felt no desire to socialize with any of her classmates. But her isolationist foreign policy also served as a self-defense mechanism: in a pre-emptive strike, she rejected Anglos before they could reject her. Thus,

she developed a deep animosity towards White people—and White women in particular⁴⁴—in order to compensate for her own perceived inadequacies.

INTERNALIZING STEREOTYPES

With few exceptions, the image of the Indian has been stamped onto the public consciousness from the “outside,” that is, by non-Indians. However, Indians have also been influenced by these images. “The only thing worse than Indians on TV is Indians watching Indians on TV,” utters Thomas Builds-The-Fire in *Smoke Signals* (Estes & Rosenfelt, 1998). Ironically, earlier in the film, the same character conceded that the only thing he knows about being a “real Indian” was learned from *Dances with Wolves*, which he sheepishly admitted to having watched over a hundred times. His friend, Victor, takes it upon himself to teach him “Indian 101.” His first words of advice: “Stop grinning like an idiot! Get stoic.” In addition, a proper countenance is necessary whenever dealing with Anglos: “White people will run all over you if you don’t look mean. You got to look like a warrior.”

There are numerous instances of how Indians have adopted and manipulated White stereotypes of Indians, turning them into psychological weapons with which to fight back. Deidre Evans-Pritchard (1989) shares an incident in which a group of Navajo men were hanging out in front of a trading post talking and joking around. However, whenever a car full of tourists rolled in, silence would immediately descend. Frequently, the tourists would ask to take pictures of the most “Indian-looking” of the men and try to make conversation. The Navajos remained silent, but as soon as the tourists left, everyone would burst out laughing (Evans-Pritchard, 1989).

The stereotype of the “stoic Indian” as the sullen, brooding, threatening Indian of literary and screen fame provides a posture that many Indians have adopted to avoid Whites or even taunt them (Betaille & Sillet, 1980). Navajo cartoonist Vincent Craig, for instance, portrays one of Joe Frybread’s typical encounters with an Anglo:

While the White man and the Indian both speak English, the two voices never interact in dialogue. Instead, one chatters patronizingly as the other thinks ironically to himself. This is a classic example of what I call “The Bromden Complex.”

Figure 3. Vincent Craig Cartoon of Joe Frybread and Tourist.
(Reprinted from Lincoln, 1993, p. 99)



The Bromden Complex

Ken Kesey's book, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), tells the story of Randle Patrick McMurphy, a con man who feigns mental illness in order to serve his jail time in a mental hospital rather than prison. The acrimonious conflicts between McMurphy and Nurse Ratchet, the overseer of the ward, as well as his entertaining antics are familiar to many through the excellent film adaptation starring Jack Nicholson in the starring role. However, what the film fails to capture from the book, is the voice of Chief Bromden.

Everybody assumes that the "Big Indian Chief" is deaf and dumb only because he *chooses* not to speak. Yet, he never intentionally set out to deceive anyone. Instead, it was other people who started treating him as if he were too stupid to understand what was happening:

I remembered one thing: it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at

all. It hadn't been just since I came in the hospital, either; people first took to acting like I couldn't hear or talk a long time before that (Kesey, 1962, p. 175).

Bromden reminisces back to his childhood, when White men in Stetson hats who visited the reservation would insult Indians in front of him. When he attempted to speak up to defend his people, they simply ignored him. He has felt invisible and inconsequential ever since.

The fact that Bromden could actually hear is what made him such an excellent choice as the book's narrator. He uses the perception that he is deaf and dumb to his own advantage. Almost like the invisible man, Bromden is able to gain access to situations that would normally remain strictly off limits to patients and to eavesdrop on private conversations because everyone thinks that it is safe to talk freely around him. As a result, he is the only one who knows everything that is happening. Bromden recognizes the inherent irony: "I had to keep on acting deaf if I wanted to hear it all" (Kesey, 1962, p. 114).⁴⁵

Like Bromden, Regina has appropriated popular stereotypes of Indians as a way of dealing with Whites.⁴⁶ She describes the instructions given to her when she took part in an A.I.M. sponsored protest: "We were told not to say anything, just stand straight and no expression on your face: the stoic Indian." The success of that role-playing incident has shaped her future interactions with Anglos. To this day, Regina will employ that strategy whenever she "does not want to be bothered." She also fondly recalls a "*Dances with Wolves* phase" of utilizing commercialized markers of identity such as powwows, turquoise jewelry, and a feather hanging on her rearview mirror as ways of announcing her Indianness to the world.

Incidents such as these demonstrate the ways in which she employs mass mediated images as a resource in negotiating issues of cultural difference and identity. Born and raised on a reservation yet exposed to a radically different world outside its borders, Regina has been torn by a confused sense of identity and troubled by conflicting allegiances. She approaches the viewing context with two distinctive reservoirs of cultural knowledge and experience: one based on native culture acquired through socialization in the home and local community and the second based on socialization in mainstream institutions, particularly in school and among her peers. However, these reservoirs are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily oppositional but interact with and condition each other. They are the symbolic systems through which young Navajos like Regina actively and creatively construct, integrate, and transform their social lives.

RESPONSE

Unfortunately, Regina had nothing to contribute for this section. While Isabelle's reticence was fairly predictable, her daughter's continual snubs were far more disheartening. Regina was the one participant in this study from whom I expected a great deal of critical feedback. Her decision to decline any comment was especially surprising given her statements regarding the duplicitous tactics of anthropologists when interviewing Indians.

I sensed some degree of resistance, however, from the very beginning. A couple of weeks after I handed Regina a copy of her interview transcript, I contacted her to see if she finished reading it yet. At first, she claimed that she had been "too busy." A few more weeks and lame excuses later, Regina informed me that she had "misplaced" the transcript. This type of run-around continued until it became painfully obvious that she was not planning to complete the task no matter how much I pestered her to do so.

Through my research assistants, I heard that she regretted some of the negative statements she had made about her mother and feared that her mom would find out. Unlike Delbert who feared retribution from Isabelle, Regina was probably more concerned that she would hurt her mother's feelings. In particular, she might have experienced a bout of "narrator's remorse" for telling me about Isabelle's extramarital affairs and, in the process, airing her family's dirty laundry in a public forum when she would have preferred that it remained private. This is all speculation on my part, as Regina never said anything to me directly.

In her defense, Regina was undergoing a very difficult period in her life. Although I was not aware of it at the time, she was having problems in her relationship with her common-law husband and was in the midst of a painful separation. Needless to say, she was in no mood to be interviewed. Moreover, because of the change in her domestic status, it would violate cultural prescriptions—or at least raise eyebrows and stir gossip—for me, as a married man, to be spending time with her alone. Once I learned of her circumstances, I immediately backed off to give her time and space to be alone.

Apparently, she did not want to be alone for long. After several months, Regina entered into a romantic relationship with her co-worker, Tim. Subsequently thereafter, every time I contacted her to arrange a meeting, she would reply that she had to travel somewhere for her job. I would discover later that Regina was actually with her new boyfriend, with whom she has become inseparable. But it was not just me that she was neglecting. Her

mother, who describes her daughter's state of mind as being "crazy in love," and siblings lament that they never see or hear from Regina anymore except when she drops her son off at the house for one of them to baby-sit.⁴⁷

Like Regina, Tim is college-educated and returned to the reservation to help his people. Tim has had a profound influence on Regina even before they became romantically involved. On the few occasions I have met him, I perceived some tension on his part that exceeded the aloofness typical of most Navajos. Although I have no direct evidence, I suspect that he discouraged Regina from talking to me lest she give away any more trade secrets to an outsider. My suspicions were verified every time I attempted to schedule a meeting with her only to be rebuffed. In her indirect way, Regina made it perfectly clear that she had nothing more to say.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Colorado College is also my alma mater, and we overlapped there for one year. Some of her family members claim that her primary motivation for enrolling was to follow me there.
- ² Her brothers, who double as my research assistants, also told me that she used to show these pictures to her friends and identify me as her boyfriend.
- ³ Since Marty was sitting nearby and within earshot, Regina could not speak freely and honestly about their relationship.
- ⁴ She is referring to an Upward Bound program for outstanding students in math and science nationwide that she attended during the summer after her junior year of high school. Of the approximately 500 students who participated, Regina estimates that “only about 10” were Native American.
- ⁵ Patty is her first cousin on her mother’s side. As members of the same clan, they are considered sisters. However, they have never had a close relationship, and several family members were surprised that Regina chose to follow Patty to the same college.
- ⁶ Unlike Regina, her cousin did not adhere to the same separatist leanings. Patty is much more outgoing, due largely to her more attractive appearance. (Unlike Regina, she is tall, slender, and fair complexioned.) She was a very popular figure who was active in the college community. Patty joined a number of student clubs, pledged a sorority, and played on the college basketball team. As the president of the Native American Student Association, she became the de facto spokesperson for the other Indian students—a role she relished.
- ⁷ In the class I took with her, the professor let her get away with murder. She would show up for class at least an hour late every day and then leave without ever saying a word. She also did not turn in any of her assignments on time, if at all. I am sure that this professor thought that

she was helping Patty by giving her preferential treatment, but she actually hurt her by holding her to a lower standard. Although Patty never graduated, she mastered the art of parlaying White liberal guilt for her own personal advantage.

8 The back of her Ford Escort exhibited a bumper sticker that defiantly declared “You Are On Indian Land.”

9 The Rainbow Tribe consisted of non-Indians—primarily Anglos—who would dress up in Native American garb and perform native dances and ceremonies in public.

10 Regina drives a Mercury Cougar, the monthly payment for which is nearly five times what she pays to live in her federally subsidized home.

11 This is the Navajo word for an individual who is completely alienated from the modern world. A “jaan” is somebody who is unfamiliar with the cultural mores of the dominant society. It is always used pejoratively. A counterpart in English would be “redneck” or “hillbilly.”

12 Irma is Regina’s maternal aunt. She has six daughters (one of whom is Patty). Again, according to the Navajo clan system, Irma is her mother and her cousins are her sisters.

13 Brandon, played by Jason Priestley, was the name of the lead character in “Beverly Hills, 90210.”

14 The video is a collection of uncensored rap videos produced by Death Row Records featuring rappers Snoop Doggy Dogg and Dr. Dre. It also includes a number of humorous skits with profanity, violence, and nudity.

15 Ironically, Regina applauds the same gratuitous dehumanization of women in professional wrestling.

16 Isabelle was so touched by the plaque that she placed it as the centerpiece of her glass display case—for everybody to see.

17 Originally found on the album *Verities and Balderdash* (1974).

18 When I asked Regina to describe herself, the first thing she mentioned was being a mother.

19 The boy is named after his father, but everybody calls him “Buzz” after the popular character, Buzz Lightyear, in the film *Toy Story* (Arnold, B. et al., 1995).

20 Ever since Buzz was born, Regina has dressed him exclusively in designer clothing. Indeed, he is no doubt the only kid at his reservation school who seems to wear a different Tommy Hilfilger outfit every day. Among family members, Regina has developed a reputation for spoiling her son by buying him whatever he wants. Buzz is keenly aware of his privileged

- status, as I have often overheard him bragging to his playmates: “My mom buys me lots of stuff.”
- 21 Traditionally, the social isolate was considered the epitome of the uncooperative Navajo (Lamphere, 1977). Today, acting in terms of one’s own desires rather than those of one’s kinsman is regarded as par for the course.
- 22 About a month after she moved into her house, I asked Regina if any of her neighbors came by with a cake to welcome her to the neighborhood. She just laughed.
- 23 The opening scenes of *Thunderheart* (De Niro et al., 1992), for example, depict the Ghost Dance, a revivalistic movement that swept the Plains Nations during the late 1800s. Because of the seriousness of the ceremony, many Native Americans felt that it should not have been portrayed on film (Rony, 1994).
- 24 The Alliance Against Racial Mascots introduced legislation that would make California the first state in the nation to banish all Native American mascots from public schools (Bustillo, 2002, p. 1). The bill was subsequently defeated by state lawmakers. The issue gained national attention when an intramural basketball team at the University of Northern Colorado named itself the “Fightin’ Whites”—and adopted a logo of a cartoonish White man straight out of the 1950s—to protest a local high school’s mascot, the Fightin’ Reds. As a way of capitalizing on the publicity, the team started selling T-shirts and other forms of memorabilia featuring the logo and the phrase “Everythang’s gonna be all White!” on its Web site. Ironically, the majority of customers are Whites who find the items to be funny (Wadhams, 2002).
- 25 Similarly, Zantop (2002) recognizes a connection between a collective sense of inferiority resulting from military and political defeat and a collective identification with “the Indian” as the underdog.
- 26 The individual most credit for promoting “Indianthusiasm” is Karl May, the most widely read German novelist of all time and author of the popular *Winnetou* trilogy. With eighty to one hundred million copies in twenty-eight languages, May’s works have generated a whole culture industry that almost obsessively reiterates and thereby reproduces the idea of a special affinity between Germans and Native Americans based on mutual recognition and shared experiences (Zantop, 2002).
- 27 This revelation has not stopped an environmental organization from resurrecting his image in a public service announcement to once again combat pollution.

- 28 In contrast, less cross-culturally savvy Indians are not as cognizant of how their racial identity distinguishes them as different or unique. Delbert, for instance, could care less about the appropriation of native culture, as evident in his ambivalent response to learning that Iron Eyes Cody was actually Italian: “I don’t give a shit.”
- 29 Alexie has been particularly vocal in his attacks on Barbara Kingsolver, the best-selling author whose books include *Pigs in Heaven*, a novel about a single White mother and her adopted Cherokee daughter: “When you finish writing about Indians, you get up from your typewriter and you’re still White. When I finish, I have to go out and buy groceries as an Indian” (Egan, 1998, p. 16).
- 30 Of course, the same thing can be said for *any* representation regardless of who is doing the representing.
- 31 If a White author is deemed unqualified to depict a Native American cultural tradition, would a Cheyenne author also be considered unqualified to depict a Navajo or Inuit cultural tradition? Moreover, how can this view be reconciled with other separatist perspectives, such as the radical feminist argument that men are unqualified to depict female characters? It becomes increasingly problematic to set the parameters so that, ultimately, only brown-haired, blue-eyed Polish lesbians can acceptably represent or even comment upon other brown-haired, blue-eyed Polish lesbians. Obviously, the ludicrousness of this statement should demonstrate that the act of representation can and should not degenerate into psychoanalysis.
- 32 This double standard is similar to how Whites are strictly prohibited from using the word “nigger” but Blacks are free to use slurs such as “honkie” and “cracker.”
- 33 *The Rocky Mountain News* gave a generally favorable review to Alexie’s novel, *Indian Killer*, but stated that the author’s “general depiction of most Whites in this book is revolting—crude, bigoted, pompous, cowardly caricatures” (cited in Egan, 1998, p. 16).
- 34 The story, titled “Can I Get a Witness?,” is about an office worker who survives a suicide bombing at a Seattle restaurant and then uses that as the impetus to walk away from her life. In retrospect, Alexie feels that he did not dig deep enough into the story’s male character, a White man who designs violent video games, including one in which the gamer plays a terrorist who shoots civilians: “I needed more of him. And I didn’t do it. I stayed away from it because he’s White” (Ulin, 2003, p. 4). However, Alexie has apparently learned from the experience. He told a newspaper reporter that he is currently writing a story about a

- White supremacist which, when completed, will be the first piece of his writing in which no Native Americans appear (Ulin, 2003).
- 35 Regina has admitted to receiving special treatment from the faculty, which is hardly a revelation. In his life history, *A Zuni Life*, Virgil Wyaco (1998) stated: "A lot of anthropologists at the University [of New Mexico] were good to me because I was an Indian" (p. 45). He mentioned Dr. John Adair, in particular, for providing him free meals.
- 36 I vividly recall one Anglo female student who aspired to one day live on an Indian reservation because "the land and the people are so spiritual."
- 37 Placement of a child's umbilical cord has a profound effect on the child's future occupation and personal proclivities. If a family wants a boy to be good with livestock, his parents or grandparents will bury his cord in a sheep, cattle, or horse corral. Similarly, if parents want their daughter to become a good homemaker, they will bury her cord inside the hogan (Schwarz, 1997).
- 38 Witherspoon (1975) describes the Navajo's powerful connection to his or her home: "For a Navajo, there is no safer, more secure, and more wonderful place to be than close to Earth Mother within the boundaries of the sacred mountains...Only when he travels outside the boundaries of the sacred mountains does a Navajo feel he is in potentially dangerous land. On many occasions I have noticed a real and definite change in the attitudes, speech, and temperament of Navajos when they reenter Navajoland from travels and activities in the outside world" (p. 68).
- 39 For example, Glojean Benson Todacheene graduated from the University of New Mexico and came back to teach at Shiprock High School, Betty Reid graduated from the University of Colorado and began her career in journalism as a reporter for the *Gallup Independent* and the *Navajo Times*, and Taylor McKenzie earned his medical degree and started working as a physician for the Indian Health Service (Iverson, 2002, p. 257).
- 40 Regina now participates in a cleansing ceremony every time that she comes into contact with the deceased.
- 41 John Honigmann (1954) concurs that the look of a home reflects who people are: "An inspection of material culture may contribute insights into character structure and reveal emotional qualities...Type and number of possessions may reveal drives and aspirations in a class structured community" (p. 134 cited in Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 46).
- 42 TV presents viewers with two sets of conflicting messages: one suggests that we eat in ways almost guaranteed to make us fat while the other

- suggests that we strive to remain slim. Indeed, most food commercials consist of thin women promoting fattening and unhealthy snacks.
- 43 Her scholarship covered all tuition, books, and living expenses. There was also enough money left over that every time Regina received her monthly check, she would embark on a lavish spending spree that sometimes included taking her mom's jewelry out of pawn. Isabelle often brags that she did "not pay even one penny" for her daughter's college education. In contrast, my parents forked over a tidy six-figure sum for the same degree.
- 44 In Sherman Alexie's (1995) novel, *Reservation Blues*, an Indian woman named Checkers expresses her hatred for White women: "Those White women are always perfect, you know? I'd be all brown-skinned in my muddy brown dress" (1995:139). Later, it is revealed that her contempt was born out of jealousy as Checkers makes the following admission: "I wanted to be just like one of those White girls" (p. 141).
- 45 The character of Chief Bromden is widely regarded as one of the most accurate literary depictions of Native Americans. There is an interesting side note, however. In a later interview, Kesey admits to "having never known an Indian before" and that the character of Chief Bromden was guided by "a certain spirit" (cited in Shanley, 2001, p. 28). That spirit, no doubt, was the stereotype of the stoic Indian.
- 46 Corliss Joseph, the main character of the opening story in Sherman Alexie's (2003) novel, also admits to manipulating stereotypes to her own advantage: "If white folks assumed she was serene and spiritual and wise simply because she was an Indian, and thought she was special based on those mistaken assumptions, then Corliss saw no reason to contradict them. The world is a competitive place, and a poor Indian girl needs all the advantages she can get" (p. 11).
- 47 Ironically, Regina is following in her mother's footsteps into the one area where she promised herself that she never would: putting a man before her child.

Chapter 6

Chucky

ABSTRACT

Chucky is the product of an interracial union; his mother is Navajo while his father is Black and Mexican. Along with his three siblings, he was placed in the custody of his maternal aunt, Isabelle, because of a very tragic incident. At the age of five, he witnessed his father murder his mother. Despite all the turmoil, Chucky is remarkably well adjusted and level-headed. Unlike many of his peers, he has managed to stay out of any serious trouble. He has chosen to respond to heartache with humor, and he has developed a reputation as a prankster. With his gregarious personality, it is no surprise that Chucky is among the most popular students in his high school, which is no doubt buttressed by his standing as a star basketball player. Along with rap music, basketball is his chief coping mechanism for dealing with his adolescent angst. This chapter introduces Chucky.

PROFILE

Like all children of mixed ancestry, Chucky has struggled in coming to terms with his racial identity. As a child, he would regularly come home crying because his classmates at the reservation grammar school teased him for being “Spanish.” Even his own Navajo cousins would jokingly call him names like “Tyrone Hernandez” to mock his Black and Mexican ancestry. His struggle has been greatly exacerbated by being caught in the middle of a heated custody battle between his paternal grandmother, who is Mexican, and his mother’s Navajo relatives. Although his maternal aunt was granted full

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3420-5.ch006

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custody, Chucky still has regular visitations with his paternal grandmother. For more than a decade, he shuttled back and forth between the reservation and his grandmother's home in Gallup. In the process, Chucky has been literally pulled apart in two separate directions.

Nature of Relationship

Given his suspicion of adults and negative past experiences with interviews, Chucky's participation in this study would not have been possible if not for the fact that I have known him since he was four years old. He has grown from a toddler to a young man before my eyes. As a youngster, he considered me his "best friend" and would follow me wherever I went. I would occasionally take him bowling or to the movies. We have also played countless games of one-on-one basketball, which I used to dominate until he hit a major growth spurt.

With his baggy pants and skull cap, people who do not know him usually think that he is a gangster. He certainly looks, talks, and acts the part, especially in the company of his friends, or "bros," as he calls them. Standing over six feet tall, Chucky projects an intimidating presence. As hard as he appears on the outside, however, he is actually quite tender on the inside. In front of me, he dispenses with the "thug" attitude and is surprisingly thoughtful. In fact, during my visits, he always insists that I occupy his room—an incredibly generous gesture since his room serves as his private sanctuary. There are times when he flashes his boyish smile and, in that moment, he instantly transforms from a hard-core gangster to that little boy who used to follow me around like a puppy dog.

But it took awhile for Chucky to put his guard down around me. We were close when he was a young child, and then I resurfaced when he was in his teens. The gap in between represents a crucial stage of development. Initially, Chucky was understandably wary and cautious in my presence. Despite my repeated assurances of confidentiality, he feared that I would relay what he said to his mom. Rather than seeing me as somebody he could trust, he viewed me as an undercover spy. The breakthrough, as it were, happened by accident when I invited him to come along on a trip to Las Vegas that I had sponsored as a gift for his older brother's (and my research assistant's) 21st birthday. Spending four days together in Sin City turned out to be a true bonding experience. Afterwards, I became one of his "bros."

I have spent far more time with Chucky than any of my other informants. Together with his brothers and male cousins, we have passed innumerable hours just “kicking back,” a lump category that includes activities such as cracking jokes, watching TV, listening to music, and playing video games. Although I rationalized this behavior as being an important component of my research, I have to admit that spending so much time in the company of those much younger than me was rejuvenating. It made me feel like a teenager again.

TRANSCRIPT

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN INTERVIEWED BEFORE?

Yeah.

FOR WHAT?

For, like, concerning my mom and my dad.

YOU MEAN THE COUNSELING?

Yeah. He asked me where I wanted to live and all that.

AND HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING INTERVIEWED?

It really didn't bother me. I answered the questions truthfully.

ARE YOU USED TO SHARING YOUR FEELINGS WITH OTHER
PEOPLE?

Yeah.

WHO DO YOU TALK TO?

Well, my dad, my sisters, my friends.

WHEN YOU SAY YOUR SISTERS, YOU MEAN...

Tashina and Thelma.¹

YOU DON'T TALK TO ANY OF YOUR OTHER BROTHERS AND SISTERS?

Nuh-uh.

WHY IS THAT?

Cause before I told Marlin something and then he told my mom, so I know not to go to him anymore.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?

Funny, outgoing, athletic, a little self-centered. I stereotype a lot. Kinda shy but when you get to know me, I'm someone different. And then when you really get to *know me* know me, then I'm someone different again.

WHY DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF SELF-CENTERED?

Because all I think about is myself. But that's sometimes, though.

LIKE WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT?

My basketball games, how I did this, that, the way I shot. Yeah, I'm big headed.

YOU DIDN'T MENTION HOW OLD YOU ARE OR THE FACT THAT YOU'RE MALE.

I'm a boy. You could tell from my voice. OK, I'm a male, I'm 15, I'm not understood sometimes.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

The way I think. People think the way I think is kinda dumb because of the things I do like rap or play games and all that. The way I dress. Like a lot of dudes, before they knew me, they'd say stuff behind my back but when I get to know them, they change their mind about me. Cause of the way I dress, they think I'm trying to be gangster. Everybody thinks that I'm like a troublemaker and all that.

WHEN YOU SAY “EVERYBODY,” YOU MEAN YOUR TEACHERS?

Nah, my teachers are all right with me, but my mom, my aunties. They’re hardly around me, but they’re judging from the way I’m dressed and all, the way I’m acting out in public.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU ACT OUT?

I like making people laugh, but they say I’m a troublemaker and go live with your grandma and yadda yadda.

WHO SAYS THAT TO YOU?

My mom. She makes it sounds like I’m always going out, smoking weed, drinking.

WHY DOES SHE THINK THAT? I MEAN, THERE HAS TO BE A REASON.

Yeah, there’s a good reason: my dad because he’s a killer. She says, “Aw, you’re just like your dad.” But how can I be like him? I didn’t grow up around him.

YOUR MOM SAYS THAT TO YOU?

Yeah, like “You’re going to grow up and be a killer like your dad.” (looks at floor) She don’t want to put up with me no more and she wants to bring me back to my grandma.

HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?

(Pause) To grow up here and have someone take care of you and, all of a sudden, she’ll say “Go live with your grandma,” you know, that hurts. But I block it out. I just tell my friends about it. They give me some words to get it off my mind and stuff, forget about it. Through basketball, it helps me get through it.

WHAT ABOUT NOW THAT YOU DON'T HAVE BASKETBALL, HOW DO YOU GET THROUGH IT?

(Nods toward stereo)

MUSIC HELPS YOU? WHO ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE RAPPERS?

Tupac Shakur, Machavelli, DMX, Xibit, Hot Boys. They rap about what they went through and how they got through it.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE RAP SONG?

I have a lot.

IS THERE ONE THAT YOU LISTEN TO WHEN YOU'RE FEELING DOWN?

Yeah. Scarface featuring Tupac, "Smile."

HOW DOES IT GO?

Tupac says there's going to be a lot of things going on that's going to make it hard for you to smile but, through all of it, you got to keep your head up and smile.

WHAT'S ANOTHER ONE YOU LIKE?

"Angel" by DMX.

HOW DOES THAT ONE GO?

That's about talking to Judas and all this. It's about what he's going through, like his struggles and he wants to give up but God encourages him.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?

Yeah.

Chucky

THE CHRISTIAN GOD?

Yeah.

BUT YOU DON'T GO TO CHURCH.

Nah. If you just believe in him and pray, that's all you need to do. I don't really consider myself Christian. Either way I'm Christian or Catholic, I could still believe in God so it really don't matter. As long as I believe in God, it really doesn't matter if I believe in St. Charles and all of this.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE TRADITIONAL NAVAJO CEREMONIES
WITH THE MEDICINE MEN AND ALL THAT?

Nah.

SO WHEN THE MEDICINE MAN COMES OVER AND PRAYS OR
SINGS, DO YOU GO OVER THERE?

Nah, it's boring sitting there. I don't understand Navajo, too. If I understood, I'd probably go there.

YOU TOLD ME YOU DON'T EVEN BELIEVE IN SKINWALKERS.

Not until I see something. I've never seen a skinwalker face to face.

YOU ALSO DIDN'T MENTION ANYTHING ABOUT BEING NAVAJO.
IS THAT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Nuh-uh. Cause some people, like, if I mention I'm a Navajo, they're going to think I herd sheep or make jewelry but that's not how I am. I don't know no Navajo.

THEN HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN TERMS OF RACE?

Black.

YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF BLACK?

Cause all the music I listen to is Black people. They're the dominant race in basketball. They're famous, they got money, they're popular.

DO OTHER PEOPLE CONSIDER YOU BLACK?

Some of them do like my sisters. My grandma calls me Black and Navajo.

WHAT ABOUT THE KIDS AT SCHOOL?

Yeah, they know I got a little Black in me.

BUT IT'S NOT LIKE "OH, CHUCKY, HE'S BLACK" OR IS IT?

My personality, yeah, but my features, they say I'm Mexican. Seeing me, if they're with a friend and I'm walking by, then they'll say "Aw, he's a Mexican." But when they get to know me, they'll see that I have that Black in me.

EVEN THOUGH YOU GO TO AN ALMOST ALL NAVAJO SCHOOL,
THE KIDS STILL THINK YOU'RE MEXICAN?

Yeah, there's a bunch of Mexicans out here. They like Navajo women. There's also a Black guy I know at school.

HOW IS SCHOOL? WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE FOR YOU?

It's fun. My teachers are all right; my friends are always there for me. It's all right.

BEFORE THIS YEAR, YOU WERE DOING PRETTY GOOD IN SCHOOL
IN TERMS OF GRADES. WHAT HAPPENED?

I just messed up my first semester because my grandma said I couldn't play basketball. So if I'm not going to play...

Chucky

SHE SAID YOU COULDN'T PLAY AT ALL OR JUST ON SATURDAYS
WHEN YOU'RE OVER THERE?

When I'm over there.

BUT THERE'S STILL A LOT OF GAMES THAT YOU COULD PLAY.

Yeah, but my coach says don't even join if you're not going to be able to
go to all the games and practices.

SO WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT YEAR?

My grandma already said I could because my dad got mad at her.

WHAT DOES BASKETBALL DO FOR YOU?

It keeps me occupied. It keeps my mind off my worries and all. Plus, after
the game, it makes me feel good.

NOW THAT YOU'RE NOT PLAYING BALL, ARE YOU HITTING THE
BOOKS?

Yeah, everybody got mad at me.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE CLASSES?

They're all boring.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS.

I tell them a lot of things. They can keep my secrets and all. They're funny.
They're just like me.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE GIRL SITUATION?

(Big grin)

* * * * *

TALK ABOUT YOUR LIFE. YOU'RE ONLY 15 YEARS OLD BUT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH MORE THAN WHAT MOST TEENAGERS HAVE BEEN THROUGH.

When I was about four or five, my mom died. A little before that, I got in a car accident.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CAR ACCIDENT?

I'm not sure if it was one of my mom's friends, but she was coming back from Gallup and taking us over here. She was drunk and just started swerving and, next thing you know, all I remember is waking up on the floor. The car was tipped over. Then these guys pulled up in a truck and took us to my grandma's and we called the cops and the ambulance came and took us to the hospital. The next thing you know, I'm in a room with IVs in me and stuff. I had complained of my stomach hurting, and they thought I had internal bleeding so they cut me open and checked but there was nothing wrong. So they sewed it back up and stapled it. When I got my staples taken out, I remember it hurt real bad.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR MOM?

(Pause) She's my mom. I don't really remember.

YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT HER AT ALL?

I remember when she was going to the store with Tashina and I wanted to go. She kept going but my dad called her back and I went.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED ON THAT DAY YOUR MOM PASSED AWAY?

I remember coming to my grandma's, but that's all.

YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE FROM THAT DAY?

Nope.

Chucky

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH IT?

You mean things like my mom dying and all?

YEAH, THAT'S SOME HEAVY STUFF FOR A LITTLE KID TO BE GOING THROUGH.

I just drop it and talk to my friends about it. And, like I said, listen to music, play basketball.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE IF SHE DIDN'T PASS AWAY?

Probably living in Gallup.

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP LIKE WITH YOUR DAD?

It's all right.

YOUR GRANDMA WOULD TAKE YOU TO VISIT HIM WHEN HE WAS INCARCERATED. WHAT KIND OF STUFF WOULD HE SAY TO YOU?

Like how I'm doing in school and basketball and, you know, over here, and that he misses me and all that.

DO YOU FEEL CLOSE TO YOUR DAD?

Yeah, in a way.

ARE YOU OR WERE YOU ANGRY AT HIM?

Yeah.

WOULD YOU SAY YOU'VE FORGIVEN HIM?

Yeah. It took a long time. I just forgave him. I didn't tell him I forgave him. I just did.

HAS HE EVER ASKED YOU FOR YOUR FORGIVENESS?

Nah.

HAS HE EVER TALKED ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED?

Only once. He said it wasn't his fault.

YOU'VE SEEN HIM SINCE HE HAS BEEN OUT, RIGHT? HOW MANY TIMES?

Twice.

ONLY TWICE? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

It was all right. It wasn't really fun.

WHAT KIND OF COUNSELING DID YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH?

It was like every weekend.

DID YOU MEET WITH THE SAME PERSON EACH TIME?

Nah, first it was a man, then a lady, and another lady.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE THEY HELPED YOU?

No. Cause all the stuff I told them, they told my mom.

DID YOU ASK THEM NOT TO TELL YOUR MOM?

Yeah.

TALK ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ISABELLE?

It's all right sometimes.

Chucky

IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE IT'S ALL RIGHT. WHAT DO YOU THINK
THE PROBLEM IS?

My dad.

CAUSE HE'S OUT NOW?

Yeah.

SO BEFORE HE GOT OUT, YOU GUYS DIDN'T HAVE THESE KIND
OF PROBLEMS?

Not as much.

YOU'VE LIVED WITH ISABELLE AND THESE GUYS FOR OVER TEN
YEARS. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE
LIVING HERE?

It has its ups and downs. Sometimes, I like staying here. Sometimes, I
don't like it. Most of the time, I do. Like when I be going to my grandma's
on the weekends, I wouldn't want to go.

WHAT'S IT LIKE AT YOUR GRANDMA'S?

It's boring. I just sit there and watch TV and eat. There's nothing to do. I
don't have any friends out there.

ARE YOU CLOSE TO HER?

Yeah.

HOW COME YOU DON'T LIKE GOING OVER THERE?

Cause all she does is ask me what Isabelle is saying about her, and she
puts Isabelle down and all that.

WHAT KIND OF THINGS DOES SHE SAY?

Like "She's a witch" and all that.

WHAT DO YOU SAY WHEN YOUR GRANDMA SAYS THAT?

I don't listen to her. Sometimes I'll stick up for Isabelle. Other times, I'll just go to my room. I don't like being there when they talk all that. It makes me feel bad and stuff.

HAVE YOU TOLD YOUR GRANDMA THAT ISABELLE TOLD YOU TO GO LIVE WITH YOUR DAD?

Yeah.

WHAT'D SHE SAY?

She said "Next time, tell her you will."

HAVE YOU?

When I'm about to, then she says "Why you leaving?," yadda, yadda, yadda. Thelma gets mad at me. She says we need each other. She says she went through the same thing I'm going through, you know, the same thing my mom's saying to me and all that. We both feel really depended on.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

Like taking care of the kids.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE THE FOUR OF YOU GUYS WERE TREATED DIFFERENTLY THAN THE OTHER KIDS?

Yeah. Like right now, Jerrold, he picks on Deebo and if Deebo says something to him or tells him to leave him alone and Jerrold wouldn't stop and Deebo made him cry, my mom would get mad at Deebo.

WHAT ABOUT YOU? DID YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WERE ACCEPTED AS ONE OF THE KIDS OR LIKE AN OUTSIDER?

Both at the same time. When my mom would get mad at me, I felt like an outsider and all that. But at birthday parties or when I'm like happy, then I feel like I'm a part of the family.

Chucky

WHAT ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OTHER FIVE KIDS.
DO YOU FEEL LIKE THEY ACCEPTED YOU AS A BROTHER?

Marvin, Marlin, and Regina did.

BUT SHARMAINE AND JERROLD DIDN'T.

Uh-uh, I don't think so. When I try to talk to Sharmaine sometimes in the morning, she ignores me.

* * * * *

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE NAVAJO?

Yeah. Well, at different times, I feel different. I feel Navajo, I feel Black, I feel Mexican. Sometimes, I even feel blonde when I do stupid things. (laughter)

WOULD YOU SAY YOU'RE PROUD TO BE NAVAJO?

It really don't matter.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO BE NAVAJO?

(Pause) I don't know. If I herd sheep and woke up every morning and visit the sun.

SINCE YOU DON'T DO ANY OF THAT STUFF, HOW DOES THAT
CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE YOURSELF AS BEING A NAVAJO?

It doesn't.

DO YOU HAVE OR HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY NAVAJO ROLE
MODELS?

Uh-uh. Nobody. My uncles, nope. My aunties, nope.

DO YOU EVEN *KNOW* ANY FAMOUS INDIANS?

Geronimo, Manuelito, Cochise...Chief Joseph. There's a lot, dude.

YOU DON'T CONSIDER ANY OF THESE PEOPLE ROLE MODELS?

No, cause they're old school. It was a long time ago. They have nothing to do with me.

DO YOU SEE ANY PROBLEM IN INDIAN KIDS NOT HAVING OTHER INDIANS TO LOOK UP TO?

Yeah, they all want to be something else.

LIKE WHAT?

Black, Mexican, White.

IF YOU LOOK AT THE WALLS IN YOUR ROOM, IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS WHO YOUR ROLE MODELS ARE.²

I like what they do.

WHY AREN'T THERE ANY PICTURES OF INDIANS ON THE WALL?

There's no Indian rappers.

WHAT ABOUT NATAY?

He sucks, dude. He can't rap.

THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE RAPPERS. WHAT ABOUT NOTAH BEGAY?

He's only getting fame cause he's Navajo. And I don't care about golf. I hate golf. It's the worst sport in the world.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE SOMEBODY FAMOUS. IS THERE ANYBODY IN YOUR FAMILY THAT YOU ADMIRE?

In my family? Nobody.

THERE WAS AN ARTICLE IN THE ALBUQUERQUE NEWSPAPER NOT TOO LONG AGO ABOUT SOME OF THE PROBLEMS NAVAJO YOUTHS ARE FACING TODAY LIKE GANGS, DRUG ABUSE, AND TEEN PREGNANCY. THE ARTICLE SAID THAT A BIG REASON FOR THESE PROBLEMS WAS THAT A LOT OF THE KIDS OUT HERE DON'T HAVE ANYONE TO GIVE THEM GUIDANCE. WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THAT?

I don't know. Where I go to school, there's no problems over there: no gang problems, no bombings, or anything. It has nothing to do with me so I don't care.

WHAT IF IT HAPPENS TO ONE OF YOUR BROS?

It's his fault. It's not like I didn't advise him. I told all my closest friends not to be having sex unprotected and all that. Like my friend—he's sexually active—I told him already. Cause he's good at basketball, I said "I need you on the court."

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO STAY STRAIGHT AND AVOID MOST OF THESE PROBLEMS WHEN A LOT OF THE KIDS OUT HERE CAN'T?

My brothers. They get after me and stuff. They get mad at me if I talk back to my mom. Now, I do what my mom says and I don't give her no hard times.

WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOUR BROTHERS TO BE YOUR ROLE MODELS?

No, they just guide me. I respect them but they're not my role models. A role model is someone I want to be like and act like, someone who I look up to.

THEN WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS?

Nobody. I just want to be different, dude.

WHERE DID YOU LEARN WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT BEING NAVAJO?

Probably from my mom. She told me to have respect and yadda yadda.

WHEN YOU SAY “YADDA YADDA,” IS THAT BECAUSE YOU DON’T TAKE WHAT SHE SAYS SERIOUSLY?

I take it seriously, but I don’t want to explain it. You already know it.

I WANT YOU TO TELL ME IN YOUR OWN WORDS. I CAN’T TALK FOR YOU.

Yeah, you can. I’m giving you permission. (pause) OK, run towards the east in the morning before the sun comes out, talk to the sun...that’s all I could think of. Oh, yeah and when we have peyote meetings, she’ll tell me little things like you’re supposed to always turn your body towards the east and all that.

WERE THE PEYOTE MEETINGS GOOD EXPERIENCES FOR YOU?

When I was younger, it wasn’t because I was bored having to stay up all night. Now, it’s interesting to me cause when they turn off the lights, you think something’s going to happen. But I haven’t seen anything.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS UNIQUE ABOUT BEING NAVAJO?

Related to Code Talkers, that’s about it.

WHAT ABOUT SPECIFIC TRAITS? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO KNOW TO BE NAVAJO?

Where we came from, you need to know about the four sacred mountains, the story of the different worlds, all those stories...how to dress like one.

HOW DO NAVAJOS DRESS?

Those polyester shirts and khakis. And moccasins, dude.

(LAUGHTER)

I don’t know! I’ve never really dressed up like one.

Chucky

BY YOUR OWN DEFINITION, ARE YOU NAVAJO?

I'm Navajo *biologically* but not culturally.

SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT BEING NAVAJO?

I'll get a Navajo girl, dude. She'll teach them. They'll go to her for Navajo guidance and they'll come to me for other things like problems in school, dating—all that stuff.

DO YOU THINK BEING NAVAJO WILL BECOME MORE IMPORTANT AS YOU GET OLDER?

I kinda doubt it. I don't got the time to do all that.

BUT YOU HAVE TIME TO BE BLACK?

I could communicate with them.

WHAT BLACK PEOPLE DO YOU KNOW?

My uncles, my friends. I know some people in Gallup that are Black.

AND THE WAY YOU ARE WITH THEM IS DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY YOU ARE WITH OTHER NAVAJOS?

Yeah, my actions. Like say I could tease about something with my Navajo friends but with them, I couldn't. When I'm with Black people, I'm a little quieter. Then with Navajos, I'm funny and all that.

I WOULD THINK IT WOULD BE THE OPPOSITE SINCE MOST BLACKS I KNOW ARE OUTGOING WHILE MOST NAVAJOS ARE KIND OF SHY. WHY DO YOU THINK YOU'RE QUIETER WITH BLACK PEOPLE?

I don't know. With a lot of my Navajo friends, I could communicate with them by acting Navajo. With my Black friends, you know, I try to be all hard, try to be all gangstered out. (pause) But I feel like I'm really different from

the people around here, like my personality and thoughts. Like I'll tease about something and they don't know what I mean. They don't get it. But if I tell my uncle,³ he'll get it. He knows more about what I know about: music, movies, Black people.

YOU REALIZE YOU JUST CONTRADICTED WHAT YOU SAID EARLIER.

I'm a split personality, dude. I have a whole bunch of personalities, and I use them at the right time.

TALK ABOUT YOUR DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES.

At times, I'll think my funny person is me but, at other times, I'll think my serious person is me. Sometimes, I'll get real mad. You know how people get mad and do something stupid? I don't do that. I just sit there and think for a long time. Then I'll cool down.

WHO DO YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE WITH: BLACKS OR NAVAJOS?

It's fifty-fifty. They both make me.

WHEN YOU'RE AROUND PEOPLE YOU DON'T KNOW, I'VE NOTICED THAT YOU BECOME REAL QUIET.

Yeah, cause I'll be annoying, dude. I don't want people I don't know to get the wrong impression.

WHY DO YOU CARE WHAT THESE PEOPLE THINK ABOUT YOU?

I don't. I guess I think you guys are going to feel uncomfortable around me if I start acting crazy. (pause) OK, I'll tell you, dude. If I get wild, it seems like I'm wanting attention. I don't like people staring at me.

BUT YOU CRAVE ATTENTION. THAT'S WHY YOU ACT SO GOOFY ALL THE TIME.

That's only with people I *know*.

Chucky

ARE PEOPLE REALLY STARING AT YOU OR DO YOU THINK THEY'RE
STARING AT YOU?

Either way, it's still a threat.

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT WHITE PEOPLE?

I don't like them. Cause they're all cocky, they think they're all that.

WHERE DID YOU GET THAT IMPRESSION?

Some White people I seen at stores...TV shows.

DO YOU HAVE ANY WHITE FRIENDS?

Nope.

WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING BALL AGAINST A WHITE SCHOOL, DO
YOU TALK TRASH TO THEM?

Yeah.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Just a bunch of stuff.

WHAT DO THEY SAY TO YOU?

Like "Go back to the rez," yadda, yadda.

AND WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT?

Get off our land! Go back to England and take your germs with you!

* * * * *

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS OR YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

I want to play in the NBA.

AND IN THE EVENT THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN?

I don't know. I got too much things to do before I worry about the future.

DO YOU THINK YOU'LL STILL BE LIVING OUT HERE?

Hopefully not.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?

In some big city working as a x-ray technician. (laughter)⁴

ARE YOU PLANNING ON GETTING HITCHED WHILE YOU'RE YOUNG?

No plans.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE?

A nice one. Someone who helps others and has a lot of friends.

I THINK YOU'RE LIKE THAT ALREADY. WHAT KIND OF FATHER WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE?

I never really thought of that. (Pause) I don't know.

* * * * *

I HEAR YOU'RE DOING A LOT BETTER IN SCHOOL? WHAT HAPPENED?

They finally got to me. Everybody expected me to keep doing bad, especially my mom.

YOU WERE OUT TO PROVE EVERYBODY WRONG?

Yeah.

Chucky

HOW'S EVERYTHING ELSE BESIDES SCHOOL?

I had visitation with my dad this weekend.

WHAT DID YOU GUYS DO?

The first day we went there was on Friday. We didn't have much time to do anything so we just watched movies. On Saturday, we went to the community center and played ball for about a hour. My brother was playing with his cousins. Then we went back home and stayed home from there. Today, we went to Sally's, that's a hair place.⁵ That's all we did.

ARE YOU FEELING CLOSER TO YOUR FATHER?

Yeah. I feel better staying at his house cause he's got a Playstation there. I feel closer when I'm playing games with him and visiting him.

DO YOU THINK YOU CAN LIVE WITH HIM NOW?

Nah. I don't mind visiting him but I can't live with him. I've grown up here and I'm going to miss it too much. I have too many friends here. It'd be weird just going over there and starting all over. He understands. Before, he didn't agree with me but now he kinda understands. It's a lot off my back. I thought he was going to be mad at me, but I guess I got through to him.

HOW ARE THINGS WITH YOUR GRANDMA?

It's cool, too. I like staying with her. I like talking to her. I help her out sometimes. I'm doing better with her.

I HEARD YOU DON'T LIKE VISITING HER THAT MUCH.

Sometimes, I don't. But once I get there, I'll get used to it and sometimes, I won't want to leave.

YOU ARE LITERALLY TORN BETWEEN TWO FAMILIES. DO YOU
FEEL LIKE YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF A TUG-OF-WAR?

Not no more. I used to be until I decided I'm not going to be staying over there at my grandma's. Since then, my grandma's been laid back about it. She knows I'm not going to come over there and live with her. This family over here knows that I want to stay here. I've grown up here and I'm just used to here.

IT SOUNDS LIKE EVERYTHING'S COOL RIGHT NOW.

So far.

DO YOU THINK SOMETHING BAD IS GOING TO HAPPEN?

It's just a feeling cause whenever something good happens, something bad is going to happen again. Like when my mom won custody over me, that's when all the fuss started. And when I had a good summer, I had a bad school year. That's the way it's always been.

* * * * *

WHEN IS THE FIRST TIME YOU REMEMBER WATCHING TV?

The earliest I remember was watching "Sesame Street" when I was four.

WHAT DID YOU THINK?

I liked it. I think everybody liked it.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU WATCH TV NOW?

Three hours. When I come home, I watch "BET Live." That's Top Twenty Countdown. Then I watch two movies.

Chucky

WHEN DO YOU DO YOUR HOMEWORK?

Right after I do my chores. I get home at about four, then I watch TV until five, and then I'll do my chores. I'll be done at about 5:30. Then I'll do my homework. That'll last me up until like 6:00. Then I'll watch some movies.

HOW DO YOU WATCH TWO MOVIES AND STILL GO TO BED BY NINE?

I don't finish them. Sometimes, I'll just turn it off and leave it at that point.

YOU DON'T GET BORED WATCHING THE SAME MOVIES DAY AFTER DAY?

Not *Scarface*, not *Gladiator*, not *13th Warrior*, not *Death Row Uncut*, not *Ball Blockin'*.

WHAT ABOUT DURING THE WEEKENDS WHEN YOU HAVE MORE TIME?

About seven hours. One time, last weekend after school, I watched TV all day on a Saturday from like eight until ten.

TEN AT NIGHT? FOURTEEN HOURS!

Yeah. (laughter) It was me, Alan, Marlin. Marvin walked out after about five hours.

YOU WATCH EVEN MORE TELEVISION DURING THE SUMMER.

At my grandma's, yeah, because I don't have very much things to do. There's a basketball goal outside but the right side, I only have about that door to here to shoot it—not that big. It would be nice if they put up a court or something.

DID YOU WATCH MORE TV WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER?

I think when I was five or six, I watched a lot. Then seven through ten, I played outside. We all had that phase where we go up to the mountains, you know, nothing interests us. Now, I'm starting to get back into it.

WHY'D YOU GET BACK INTO IT?

Bored, not wanting to go up to the mountains anymore.

WHERE DO YOU USUALLY WATCH TV?

In here⁶ about three-fourths of the time.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE TELEVISION SHOWS?

"Direct Effects" and "BET Top 10 Live" and ghost stories like "Unsolved Mysteries" and things that have to do with myths and all. And basketball, of course.

YOU DON'T WATCH ANY OF THE MAJOR NETWORKS?

Nope.

BESIDES MUSIC VIDEOS AND SPORTS, YOU DON'T WATCH ANY SIT-COMS OR DRAMAS?

I have but I don't like them. I like "The Simpsons" but that's about it.

WHO ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE CHARACTERS ON TV?

(Pause) Nobody.

WHAT ABOUT VIDEOS? DO YOU WATCH THESE SAME THIRTEEN VIDEOS DAY AFTER DAY?

No, sometimes I put them back and get some more from my mom's room.

Chucky

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE MOVIES?

I like *Titanic*, I like *Braveheart*, I like *Scarface* a lot. I like mob movies, too. I like some love movies if they're interesting. Like *Best Man*, that was all right.

ARE THERE CERTAIN CHARACTERS IN THESE MOVIES YOU LIKE?

Yeah: Smokey on Friday.

WHICH ONE IS SMOKEY?

Chris Tucker. I liked him in *Rush Hour*, too, and *Money Talks*.

WHAT IS IT YOU LIKE ABOUT CHRIS TUCKER?

He's funny. He's rich.

WHO ELSE?

Mel Gibson's all right. I like Al Pacino. And Johnny Depp.

WHAT KINDS OF TV SHOWS OR MOVIES DON'T YOU LIKE?

I hate soap operas. They're so predictable. And I don't like "Friends."

WHY NOT?

They never really attracted me. It's just White people. I can't get into it.

DO YOU EVER SEE YOUR OWN LIFE ON TV OR IN THE MOVIES?

Nah, never. I don't picture myself like those people in the movies.

YOU NEVER CONNECT TO A SHOW OR A MOVIE THE WAY YOU
CONNECT TO YOUR MUSIC?

They can't act. I could tell they're acting. I'm telling you now: I've never seen a real good movie. It's all fake.

DO YOU FEEL THAT WAY BECAUSE YOU'VE BEEN LIED TO IN THE PAST?

Yeah. Everybody lies around here. All my friends, you know, they're always joking around. And coming from my teachers, I *kinda* believe them but, then again, they're at Tohatchi [High School]. Why would someone from Tohatchi know, you know? If this guy has all the answers, then what is he doing here? I'd think twice before believing them. It's all just stories, man. I have to have the hard facts, you know. I can't believe in anything because somebody says. I'm cautious.

WHAT ABOUT THINGS THAT YOUR FAMILY TELLS YOU?

I don't believe them, either. Cause they're always gossiping, you know. I hear my mom saying all sorts of stories about me. I hear her telling somebody something, and it's a whole different story, man. Like when I got a D in a class, she was telling everybody I was failing all my classes. It changed that much! Then that person will tell another person even worse. Yeah, I think twice.

EXCEPT FOR THE GOSSIPING, DO YOU CONSIDER THE ADULTS IN YOUR LIFE TO BE DEPENDABLE?

They haven't in the past. Like when I was playing ball, my mom told me she'd show up but then she wouldn't. She'd be like, "Oh, son, I'm sorry" and give me some excuse. Then I'd find out she was just staying home and chilling with Virgil. Stuff like that. Same thing with my parent-teacher meetings. This past year, she told me she was going to go but she changed her mind last minute because she had to work late.

DO YOUR SUSPICIONS CARRY OVER TO WHEN YOU WATCH TV?

Yup, I criticize movies a lot, man, because I relate it back to me. Like when I see a kid messing around and not doing his work but his parents still be supporting him and shit. That ain't true! But I don't have anything against them. I just worry about myself.

* * * * *

Chucky

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY INDIANS ARE SHOWN ON TV OR IN THE MOVIES?

They portray us like savages. They make it seem like they were all innocent like they were just walking around and we'd start shooting at them for no reason. Don't get me wrong. I guess that happened, but not *all* the time. Like in Black Robe, they make it look like Indians are evil and all.

WHAT OTHER INDIAN MOVIES HAVE YOU SEEN?

Last of the Mohicans. That was all right. And I Will Fight No More Forever about Chief Joseph. But he was played by some White guy with a lot of make-up. And Smoke Signals. That was boring.

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

I didn't have no interest in it.

DID IT MATTER TO YOU THAT SMOKE SIGNALS WAS THE FIRST MOVIE WRITTEN, DIRECTED, AND STARRING NATIVE AMERICANS?

It doesn't matter. It's not going to have any impact because they're still going to think we're savages.

WHO WAS ACTING LIKE A SAVAGE IN THAT MOVIE?

Nobody.

THEN WHY WOULD YOU SAY THAT PEOPLE WOULD STILL SEE THE CHARACTERS AS SAVAGES?

Because they're Indians. It's because we're brown, our hair's long, and we have feathers. It's the same way the cops see me.

THAT'S BECAUSE YOUR PANTS HANG BELOW YOUR ASS CRACK!

Even though.

* * * * *

DO YOU EVER SEE ANYTHING ON TV AND THINK, “DAMN, I WANT THAT”?

Yeah, jewelry. I like jewelry, I like cars, some of the houses.

DOES WATCHING TV EVER MAKE YOU FEEL GREEDY?

No, it can make you work for it and it can make you kill for it. I’m happy with what I have here but, if I could have all that, I’ll take it. If I have a chance to get it, I’ll get it.

DO YOU THINK WHAT’S ON TV IS REALISTIC?

No, most of it’s fake.

WHAT’S NOT FAKE?

Trauma in the ER on TLC. And Unsolved Mysteries.

WHAT ABOUT MUSIC VIDEOS? DO YOU THINK THOSE GUYS REALLY LIVE LIKE THAT?

Yeah, because MTV’s Cribs takes us into their lives.

HOW ABOUT THE WAY THEY ACT IN THE MUSIC VIDEOS?

Some of them are real like Shyne.⁷ He was spitting about how he wasn’t going to take any bull from anybody. But some of them are fake like Master P. They’ll be rapping about “I’ll step up to you” but when the time comes, they’ll back down.

WHAT ABOUT THE WAY THEY TREAT WOMEN IN THE VIDEOS?

Yeah, that’s true. If the girls let them, yeah. I’m not saying you should grab any girl and start banging her right there. But it’s her body. I mean, would you like someone telling you how to live your life?

Chucky

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S ALL RIGHT AND WHAT'S NOT?

If she lets me. And if I want to.

DO YOU WANT TO?

No, I ain't into that player crap. Not no more.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT THESE MUSIC VIDEOS?

It's all about having fun. Wouldn't it be nice for you to have a friend and say, "Aw, I could get her" and then you guys try it. And if you don't, that's funny. Then that guy is laughing about you guys because he knew he could.

I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT THAT WAY.

Because you stereotype.

IS THERE ANYTHING ON TV YOU FIND OFFENSIVE?

Some TV shows that show how Indians are, their accents. Like in *King of the Hill*, every time that Indian guy talks, a flute starts playing in the background. It's funny, though.

ARE YOU MORE OFFENDED WHEN THEY STEREOTYPE INDIANS
ON TV OR WHEN THEY STEREOTYPE BLACKS?

Same.

DO YOU THINK PEOPLES' ACTIONS ARE INFLUENCED BY WHAT
THEY WATCH ON TV?

Those people who want to be popular. They'll watch MTV and they'll try to fit in like that. Then it won't work out so then they'll start listening to Marilyn Manson and start acting stupid.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Nah.

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU DRESS THE WAY YOU DO?

Magazines. In the music videos, they're always moving around and I don't really get a good look at them. In the magazines, they're just standing still and you could see them.

WHY DO YOU LIKE TO DRESS THIS WAY?

Cause it appeals to me. I like this appearance. It's not because I'm trying to be like Tupac or anything. I just like the way it looks. That's it. Why does there have to be a reason? *I* like it. I could care less if *you* like it.

THE WAY YOU DRESS, THE WAY YOU TALK, THE WAY YOU ACT
ALL MAKES PEOPLE LOOK AT YOU IN A CERTAIN WAY. IF
YOU'RE TRYING TO JUST BE YOURSELF, WHY BE DIFFERENT
IN THE SAME WAY AS EVERYBODY ELSE? EVEN THOUGH
YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT IT, I THINK YOU *LIKE* THAT PEOPLE
SEE YOU AS THUGGED OUT.

Not even, bro! I don't like being stared at.

WHO DO YOU THINK IS STARING AT YOU?

I'm not saying they are. It just *feels* like it. I'm not sure if they are cause I don't look around.

IT WOULD BE ONE THING IF YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE TO DRESS
LIKE THIS OR YOU MADE IT UP. YOU LEARNED ABOUT IT
FROM MAGAZINES, MUSIC VIDEOS, WHATEVER. THERE ARE
COUNTLESS PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WHO DRESS
EXACTLY THE SAME WAY AS YOU, TALK THE SAME WAY,
LISTEN TO THE SAME MUSIC.

So? What's your point?

* * * * *

Chucky

DOES YOUR MOM OR YOUR GRANDMA PUT ANY RULES ON YOU ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN WATCH ON TELEVISION?

At my grandma's, I can't watch movies that cuss too much.

WHAT ABOUT THE SEX AND THE VIOLENCE?

She don't mind. The sex is the part that I like. She knows that I'm not going to go out there right after and start (thrusting pelvis).

AND OVER HERE YOU CAN WATCH WHATEVER YOU WANT?

Yup, as long as I don't perform it.

WHEN YOU HAVE KIDS, WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE GOING TO BE ABOUT HOW MUCH AND WHAT THEY COULD WATCH?

I'm going to enforce rules. The mistakes I made, I'm going to try to make them not make the same stupid mistakes like messing up on grades. They can only watch two hours a day, but they have to do their chores first. And no Rated R movies until they're fifteen. I'll tell them what they do on TV shouldn't be done in real life.

DOES ANYBODY EVER TELL THAT TO YOU?

My Auntie Trisha. Like after a movie, she'll ask me, "Can that really be done?"

IS THERE A CERTAIN RITUAL INVOLVED WHEN YOU WATCH TV?

The lights need to be off, my room needs to be clean and I need to be comfortable sitting down.

WHAT ARE YOUR OVERALL FEELINGS ABOUT TV?

I don't love it. I like it.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MORE THAN TV?

Music, basketball, my girlfriend. And that's it.

IF TELEVISIONS SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED, HOW WOULD YOU SPEND YOUR FREE TIME?

Playing basketball, listening to music, probably spend more time with my family. Look at them (referring to brothers in next room watching a video). If it wasn't there, they'd probably be raking or helping out or something like that. But it's too late, dude.

DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT TELEVISION?

Yeah, probably, in a way. It's there for me when there's no one around me. Like when they go out to eat or they're going to visit someone else, I'll be home alone and I'll just be sitting here. (pause) It also lets me know what's out there. I'm going to be in the world one of these days. If there was no TV, I would probably never see the city of Los Angeles. It prepared me in case I ever go there someday.

DO YOU THINK TELEVISION HAS BEEN GOOD FOR THE NAVAJO PEOPLE?

In some ways like when they advertise machines that do the work for old people. It's also been bad because some kids will watch rappers and want to be like them and they'll do the things they see.

YOU'RE NOT ONE THESE KIDS? WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT?

Cause I'm me. I don't want to be nobody else. I swear, if I could be somebody else, I wouldn't be. I'm satisfied with the way I am. What's good or bad for other people really don't matter to me as long as I'm doing good.

YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT ANYBODY ELSE?

My family, that's it. And my friends, too.

THAT'S IT? I THINK YOU NEED SOME COMPASSION IN YOUR LIFE.

They don't care about me!

DO YOU THINK THE WAY NAVAJOS WATCH TELEVISION IS
DIFFERENT FROM THE WAY OTHER PEOPLE WATCH IT?

Yeah. When I go to my grandma's, the kids will be playing with their toys *and* watching TV. This is in Gallup. But when I go over to my auntie's at Fort [Defiance], I try talking to one of my cousins. Her mouth is wide open looking at the TV. "Natalia!" She can't hear me. I have to tap her. They're still amazed by TV. It still captures them. It's still something new to them. Think about it. With other families, they play their DVDs. The first day, they're amazed. The next week, they're *aaahh*. The next month, it's no big deal. But when it finally goes over to them, they're still amazed by it. And I don't think we get the same impression. Like if there's a movie showing a guy shooting another guy on the top of a building, other people would be like "Aw, cool!" But Navajo people who have respect and are one with nature and all would probably think, "That guy's stupid." So I guess it depends on how you've grown up.

COMMENTARY

"The only thing worse than Indians on television is Indians watching Indians on television" -Thomas Builds-The-Fire in Smoke Signals (Estes & Rosenfelt, 1998)

Needless to say, the murder of Chucky's mother at the hands of his father has had a profound impact upon his life. I remember his preoccupation with death in the years following the incident. Chucky was ordered to undergo counseling several times a week, but he doubts whether these sessions proved to be beneficial. Moreover, the counselors betrayed his trust by relaying confidential information to his adoptive mother, which has made him more suspicious of adults in general and White people in particular.

Chucky attributes the wide discrepancy between our private conversations and the tape-recorded interviews to these feelings of betrayal. Normally talkative, he would suddenly turn very guarded and laconic as soon as I turned on the tape recorder. Once I turned the machine off—I usually ended the

interviews prematurely due to his lack of enthusiasm—he would invariably begin opening up again. After one such incident, I inquired about this sudden change. Chucky admitted to being nervous around the tape recorder: “I don’t know who’s going to hear this.” I reminded him of the confidentiality agreement that we had reviewed beforehand, to which he replied: “That’s what the counselors said.” The commentary that follows includes information gleaned over the course of our relationship, which sometimes contradicts what he had stated in the recorded interviews.

INDIVIDUALISM

Typical of most teenagers, Chucky often complains about being misunderstood by those around him. He dismisses those who presume that he is a troublemaker and a gangster just because of the way he chooses to talk and dress. But he is not so flippant when it is his own family who subscribes to these stereotypes. The biggest culprit is his maternal aunt, Isabelle, who gained custody of him after his mother’s death.

Chucky has had a strained relationship with Isabelle, whom he calls “mom,” ever since he, along with his two older sisters and younger brother, came to live with her. To this day, he feels like he was never fully accepted as a member of the family. Even though Isabelle is Chucky’s mother according to Navajo clan ties, she has treated him differently because he is not her biological child. The double standard is clearly evident when it comes to enforcing rules among the six “real” children and the four “inherited” ones. While Isabelle will severely punish Chucky for one transgression, the same act committed by one of her biological children will only elicit a stern verbal reprimand. Furthermore, in any dispute involving a member from each sibling group, she will always side with her own child. Isabelle consistently gripes to me (and anybody else willing to listen) about the difficulty of raising four additional children, and she often expresses her regret about her decision to take custody of them. Ever since Chucky reached puberty and started acting out, she has been ready to throw in the parental towel. In moments of anger and frustration, Isabelle will even tell him to go live with his paternal grandmother.

Chucky’s time with his Grandma Juanita is usually less turbulent. Because he only visits her every other weekend, they treasure the limited time they have with one another. Like any grandmother, Juanita showers her grandsons⁸ with attention and allows them to do basically whatever they want. She plays

the role of “good cop” to Isabelle’s disciplinarian role as “bad cop.” Her leniency is motivated, in part, by trying to win her grandsons’ allegiance while simultaneously turning them against their Navajo relatives. Juanita has sought to gain full custody of her grandsons, alleging that Isabelle has physically and emotionally abused them. Amidst all the bad blood, Chucky finds himself in the middle of a tug-of-war.

The adversarial relationship between the two families has been complicated by the re-emergence of Chucky’s father into his life. After serving only half of a sixteen-year sentence, Charles Senior was paroled in the spring of 2000. The Benally family was outraged by the early release and mobilized against it by holding a news conference, distributing a petition, organizing a protest rally, and summoning the Navajo Nation to forbid him from entering reservation lands. His grandmother has taken Chucky to see his father, who is currently living in Santa Fe, on numerous occasions. He admits that the visits were initially awkward but that he is gradually growing closer to his dad.

To some, Chucky is a reincarnation of his father not only because they share the same name and similar physical features but also because both have a reputation for mischief and joking around. The perceived resemblances are not always so positive. During angry outbursts, Isabelle has told Chucky that he is “going to be a killer just like your dad.” The cumulative effect of being constantly reminded of his genetic connection to such a violent man is very damaging. Chucky often feels disposable, unwanted, and all alone. He seeks solace and comfort in the words of others who have been in his shoes, which is why he feels such a strong connection to rappers. It comes as no surprise that Chucky has adopted a “me against the world”⁹ attitude.

Big Pimpin’

Participating in hip-hop culture not only involves a distinct way of talking and dressing but, more importantly, a certain attitude and outlook on life. Although Chucky is unable to relate to the prosperous Whites he sees on television, he can easily identify with successful Blacks: “If it could happen to them, it can happen to me.” The most pervasive purveyors of hip-hop artists’ extravagant lifestyles are music videos, which are essentially commercials within commercials.¹⁰ Speech patterns, fashion trends, and even certain behaviors have become “advertised” via music videos (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). At a cost of over one million dollars, Jay-Z’s “Big Pimpin’”¹¹ was the most expensive music video ever made. The video features yachts, mansions,

Bentleys, and scantily clad women in a non-stop party atmosphere. Such a spectacle is what every inner-city—and reservation—youngster longs for: a world in which the champagne flows freely, all the cars have shiny rims, and the only thing thicker than the gold chain around his neck is the wad of cash in his pocket.

Conspicuous consumption has become so pervasive in the hip-hop community that it has developed its own lexicon dedicated to the celebration of wealth. In addition to the aforementioned “Big Pimpin’,” “flossin’” refers to flaunting one’s worth in the most explicit way. “All About the Benjamins” alludes to the primacy of money, as it is Benjamin Franklin’s likeness that appears on the one-hundred-dollar bill. “Bling Bling” applies to any flashy item, but particularly jewelry. To be “Ghetto Fabulous” is to engage in a lifestyle, expressed primarily through one’s fashion choices, that celebrates new money, personal independence, and a distinct lack of interest in whatever the mainstream style mavens identify as “good taste.” Not coincidentally, all of these terms originated as titles of popular rap songs.¹²

One special episode of MTV’s *Cribs*¹³ included an all-star montage of a dozen hip-hop artists, including such rap luminaries as Snoop Dogg, Ice-T, and Master P., living out their music video excesses. Hosted by Jay-Z, the program featured each rapper proudly showing off the trappings of living large such as Xzibit’s 73-inch projection television, Ice-T’s pool house with remote-controlled retractable roof, and Master P’s solid gold toilet. Every single one of these individuals grew up in impoverished circumstances. Now that they have money, they are more than happy to flaunt their wealth for everyone to see by positioning themselves as marketable success stories. On *Diary*,¹⁴ another MTV program, rapper Ja Rule admitted to spending over a \$100,000 on a customized Bentley. Unlike his cohorts, however, he did not boast about the purchase. In fact, he seemed fully aware of the impracticality: “Ten years ago, I swore to myself that I would *never* buy such an expensive car. I don’t care if I had a billion dollars.” In the end, Ja Rule blamed his humble beginnings: “When you come from the hood and you never had nothing, you don’t know how to act!”¹⁵

Many of these rappers are following the example set by a fictional movie character. *Scarface* (Bregman, M. & De Palma, B., 1983) tells the story of Tony Montana, played brilliantly by Al Pacino, a former prisoner who arrives in Miami as part of the Cuban crime wave. He and his friend, Manny, start selling drugs and eventually become kingpins in the cocaine trade. Although Montana’s search for money and power ends tragically, the film’s anti-establishment, rags-to-riches story struck a chord with young audiences,

particularly African American males. Many have seen it dozens of times and can recite the film's dialogue verbatim. In the previously mentioned episode of *Cribs*, virtually every rapper mentioned *Scarface* (Bregman, M. & De Palma, B., 1983) as their favorite movie of all time. Not only do they all have a copy of the film but memorabilia such as framed movie posters. One dedicated fan even has a glass-enclosed case of a cigar actually smoked by Pacino in the film. Another, Silkk the Shocker, claims that the movie plays all day, every day at his house. He explains why Montana serves as such a role model: "He started from where I started from: nothing. He made his way to something—just like me."

Chucky also lists *Scarface* (Bregman, M. & De Palma, B., 1983) among his favorite films. He likewise identifies with the character of Tony Montana, as well as the rappers who live the same decadent lifestyle, to such a degree that he envisions the same kind of wealth and success for himself. At the time of this writing, Chucky is a few months away from graduating from high school. With an uncertain and unplanned future looming, I offered to help him find a job in Albuquerque. He informed me that he would not even *consider* a job that paid less than ten dollars an hour, apparently not realizing that this kind of salary demand from a teenager who just graduated from high school with no job experience and no marketable skills to speak of is slightly unrealistic. Chucky does not seem to be aware that employment opportunities are limited when one's only talents consist of playing video games and rolling joints. But, in his mind, why should he work some menial minimum wage job when Master P. is sitting on a solid gold toilet? Evidently, contrary to the aphorism, beggars *can* be choosers.

CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY

Chucky unabashedly considers himself to be Black, despite the contradiction of his phenotypical features.¹⁶ All of his role models are African Americans, which is obvious by the material culture of his bedroom. The walls are covered with posters and photographs of his favorite basketball players and rappers. As is the case for most adolescents, his room serves as a private sanctuary all his own. Chucky keeps the small area meticulously clean: the bed is always made, the floor is cleanly swept, and his dozen pairs of shoes are neatly arranged. Although the only furniture consists of a bed, a television, a dresser, and a recliner, he rearranges these so frequently that there seems to be a new floor plan every time I see his room.

Not surprisingly, Chucky's wardrobe is comprised entirely of hip-hop attire: athletic jerseys, Ruff Ryder outfits, and "wife beaters"¹⁷—all of which are many sizes too big. His pants and shorts are similarly baggy and belted well below waist level in order to expose his boxers. Chucky takes tremendous pride in his belief that he is the flashiest dresser in school.

Rez Ball

Basketball is far and away the most popular sport on the reservation. Nearly every home has a basketball goal—even if it is little more than a makeshift milk crate with the bottom cut out—attached to a chimney, carport, or utility pole. The reasons for its popularity are obvious. Unlike other sports such as football or baseball, basketball does not require a lot of additional equipment or people to play. All you need is a ball and a hoop (which can be fashioned out of almost anything), and you can just as easily play with ten others as you can by yourself, which is the same reason basketball is so popular in the inner city.

High school basketball games on the reservation are really the only show in town. On Friday or Saturday nights during the season, it is not surprising to see the gymnasium filled to capacity by fans, some of whom have driven well over a hundred miles to see the game. Navajos joke that when one of the local teams qualifies for the state championship tournament in a big city like Phoenix or Albuquerque, the reservation seems empty. Basketball is a unifying force that brings pride to the community. The fans are boisterous and the cheering often reaches a feverish pitch. Even normally reserved elders will curse out the referees for making what they consider to be a bad call. I know many dedicated parents who pride themselves in having attended every single game of their child's high school career but who have rarely, if ever, appeared for conferences with teachers to discuss the same child's academic progress.

To be a standout basketball player is to be something of a celebrity on the reservation. The top players attract a great deal of coverage by the local press. However, feats on the hardwood are primarily spread through word of mouth, as everybody knows the names of the best players. The Johnson family has a reputation for producing "ballers." Virtually every family member, both male and female, was the star on his or her respective team.¹⁸ Both of my research assistants, for instance, led their high school squads to the state championship tournament for consecutive years.

Chucky is the latest in line to follow this illustrious legacy. Family members are unanimous in their assessment that he may be the best one yet. (They joke that Chucky has an extra advantage because he has more Black blood.) He performed up to his potential with a successful freshman campaign, when he was selected the most valuable player on a team that lost only once throughout the season. Expectations soared for the following year. Chucky worked very hard during the summer to hone his basketball skills in anticipation of being promoted to the varsity squad. These hopes were dealt a crushing blow when his grandmother informed him that he would not be allowed to play in games on the weekends that he was scheduled to visit her. When Chucky relayed these restrictions to his coach, he was told that he could not play on the team unless he committed to *all* of the games and practices.

After realizing that he could no longer play basketball, Chucky claims that he purposely stopped trying in school as a form of protest. He saw no purpose in maintaining a minimum grade point average so he sabotaged his class work by flunking almost every one of his courses. His mother punished him for receiving such poor grades, which triggered delinquency in other areas as well such as smoking marijuana and staying out past his curfew. Chucky reached a low point. Seeing how depressed he had become, his grandma finally relented and allowed him to play the next year. The concession sparked a sudden and remarkable turnaround. Chucky began working harder in school, which translated into respectable grades. This, in turn, resulted in a better relationship with his mom. In a very real sense, for Chucky, the Nike slogan is true: Basketball *is* life.

Hoop Dreams

As was the case for William Gates and Arthur Agee, the two boys profiled in the award-winning documentary (James et al., 1994) and follow-up book, basketball means everything to Chucky. Although the two boys lived in housing projects in Chicago and Chucky lives on a reservation in New Mexico, they share many similarities. In terms of personality, Chucky is much closer to the gregarious Arthur than William, who is more reserved. Both Chucky and Arthur use humor to hide pain and basketball as an outlet:

Arthur wished he had a friend to talk to, but he kept those late-night arguments [between his parents] to himself...If he told his friends, they might realize that his clowning was a mask. That he strutted the school stage, innocent and carefree, because inside he hurt. He made them laugh with him because he

feared they might laugh at him. If you believe in nothing, he thought, you'll never get hurt. And he believed in nothing except the game. As jaded as he was, he still believed the game was real. You either could play or couldn't (Joravsky, 1994, p. 50).

Like Arthur (and William), Chucky cannot imagine anything else that he wants to do with his life than to be a professional basketball player.

Unfortunately, there is little likelihood that his hoop dreams will come to fruition. Athletic skills developed on the reservation are usually contained within its boundaries. While the talent certainly exists—a fact underscored by the numerous state basketball championships reservation high school teams have won—only a handful of Indian athletes have even made it to the college level. After starring at Window Rock High School, Ryneldi Becenti became the first Navajo basketball player to play an important role on a university team when she suited up for the Arizona State University Lady Sun Devils in the early 1990s (Iverson, 2002). Fewer Navajo men, who are disadvantaged by height and by an unwillingness of coaches to recruit Native American players, have followed Becenti's lead into major college basketball. The majority of college coaches believe Indian athletes cannot resist alcohol or adjust to life outside the reservation and fear that they will ditch their scholarships once they get homesick.

Rap Music

Rap music, and hip-hop culture more generally, is one of the most important cultural phenomena of the last century. Originating in African American urban street culture of New York in the late 1970s, rap was fed through a wide variety of former musical and oral-culture roots, such as verbal insult games (Dyson, 1993). From its beginnings as rhythmic, repetitive speech layered over “samples” of rhythm and blues music hits selected by DJs at dance parties, early rap music evolved into a multigeneric form that has significantly influenced the music, fashion, and advertising industries (Zook, 1995).

Forms of musical rebellion have always been controversial and problematic to adult society. Rap, however, has aroused far greater fear and loathing in White middle America than even the most rebellious forms of rock, such as punk and heavy metal, largely because of its association with the overtly expressed social anger of disenfranchised Black urban youth. In her study of the meanings of rap music in contemporary America, Tricia Rose (1994)

argues that rap should be understood as a mass-mediated critique of the underlying ideology of mainstream American society.

As the voice of the powerless and dispossessed, rap music presents an alternative interpretation of the ways power and authority are structured in contemporary society. Indeed, rap music started as a critique of institutions such as the criminal justice system, the police, and the educational system, all of which are reinterpreted as sites that both exhibit and reproduce racial inequality (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003). It is a form of talking back—literally. Chuck D, front man for the group “Public Enemy,” has called rap “the CNN of the ghetto.” Tragically, from these political beginnings, rap has turned into a multi-billion-dollar global phenomenon driven almost exclusively by sex, violence, and materialism.¹⁹

Rap music appeals to multiple audiences with different social identities and relationships to the street culture from which hip-hop came.²⁰ Yet the ideology of rap music has always been most accessible to those who can relate to the underlying disenfranchisement that forms its roots. Although both may enjoy the music, Black youth may interpret the meaning of rap in ways very different from their White counterparts. Red youth, however, can connect with the anger and rejection at the heart of rap music. Most reservation youngsters have had a similar upbringing as their inner-city brethren. If one of the critical functions of music is to divide the cultural world into “us” versus “them,” then Indian rap fans align themselves with the underdog.

While young fans of rock music generally do not pay close attention to the lyrics, this is not the case with devotees of rap. Chucky, for instance, feels that “the words are more important than the beats.” He often uses the medium to communicate his own ideas, thoughts, and feelings as if he was writing in a journal. He has allowed me to include one of his raps here:

*Never let ‘em see you sweat
It can really leave a mess
I went through it all
From my mom dying
Through it all
Ever since I was small
But I always maintain
Doing my work and everything
I’m wise but still young
I love to have fun
Playing ball is what I do*

*Getting crossed over ain't for me
It's for you*

It is clearly evident that adolescent music fans such as Chucky infuse their favorite music with meaning.²¹

During his darkest moments, Chucky turns to rap music as a form of therapy. He listens to one song in particular when feeling down: “Smile for Me Now” by Scarface featuring Tupac. He will focus intently on the lyrics and find inspiration in them:

*There's gonna be some stuff that you're gonna see
That's gonna make it hard to smile in the future
But whatever you see, through all the rain and pain
You gotta keep a sense of humor
Gotta be able to smile through all this bullshit
Remember that
Just keep ya head up*

These words of encouragement may sound like standard advice, but their power rests in the source. The call to “keep ya head up” means much more because of the individual saying it. Chucky feels like these rappers were once in his shoes. In many ways, they have lived parallel lives: a dead mother, father in jail, growing up in poverty, nobody understanding them. There is a powerful connection here at a transcendent level. While Chucky cannot relate to the incessantly cheery White people on *Friends*, he can easily identify with the Black rappers and basketball players that he has come to know through the media.

Black and Red

Historically, Blacks and Indians have shared a common and unique bond. Both were forcibly removed from their native lands and subjugated by their common colonizers as second-class citizens. As a result, each race finds solidarity in the other's history of oppression.²² The shared Indian-African experience of sexual violence, capture, enslavement, and racial marginalization suggested a unified field of analysis (Brooks, 2002). In fact, Russel Barsh (2002) maintains that African American and Indian communities were so extensively intertwined by kinship and employment that they “should be considered together as a single antebellum socioeconomic class” (p. 81).

For centuries, African Americans have appropriated Native American culture. Many profess to have some Indian ancestry, as a high percentage of African Americans proudly acknowledge a grandmother or great-grandmother who was Blackfoot, Seminole, or Cherokee. While widespread intermarriage between Blacks and Indians is certainly supported by the historical evidence,²³ there is a more practical reason for the prevalence of African Americans claiming kinship with Native Americans.

Within Black communities, a certain level of prestige is associated with having Indian ancestry.²⁴ In “‘African and Cherokee by Choice’: Race and Resistance Under Legalized Segregation,” Laura Lovett (2002) shows that Black men and women could inject a tinge of romance and danger into local narratives with the recovery of an Indian progenitor (usually Cherokee) and in so doing counter some of the most damaging psychological poison of regional White racism. Any Indian blood bequeathed to its recipient those racial characteristics thought to be innate in Native Americans: a heroic commitment to liberty, connection to the land, and an aristocratic opposition to “progress” (Lovett, 2002). Individuals and families classified as “colored” used Indianness, as they understood it, to undermine the very definition of the racial category assigned them by segregation.

While claiming Indian ancestry proved to be a useful foil against racial stereotyping for Blacks, even one drop²⁵ of Black blood was believed to contaminate the Indian gene pool. In fact, one of the main reasons why the Lumbees have not gained federal recognition is that they have too much mixture with Blacks.²⁶ Consequently, many Native American groups took steps to distance themselves from African Americans.²⁷ Native people understood that being labeled colored carried a greater social stigma than being called Indian, and they took the initiative to define themselves as “not Black.”

The tide is beginning to change as a growing number of Navajo youths have co-opted elements of hip-hop culture such as music, clothing, and language. For members of the Johnson family, embracing their Black heritage appears to fall along generational lines.²⁸ Older members such as Delbert and Isabelle, who are biologically one-eighth Black, completely disassociate themselves of any connection. But their children, despite having even less ancestry, proudly wear the tag of being “part Black.” I distinctly remember a conversation among the kids about how each inherited certain Black features: Al referred to his big lips, Marvin alluded to his height, and Thelma jokingly pointed to her head “because I’m stupid.” Instead of the ever-popular “Cherokee Grandmother Syndrome,” here is a rare case of the “Black Grandfather Syndrome.”

Learning to be “Navajo”

During the interview, Chucky made an important distinction between a “biological Navajo,” which he is, and a “cultural Navajo,” which he does not consider himself to be. Because of his strong identification with Black culture, Chucky is almost totally estranged from any concept of being Indian. In fact, his alienation is so complete that most of what he knows about being Indian was learned from television and movies. In a very real sense, Graham Greene has replaced grandpa as the mass media has become the modern storyteller. Having internalized popularized images of “Indianness,” Chucky subscribes to a stereotypical understanding of Navajo culture, evident in his comments that being Navajo entails herding sheep, running towards the sun, and dressing in polyester shirts and khakis.

Sadly, such indifference is common among members of his generation. As a way to combat cultural ignorance and apathy, reservation schools have begun to incorporate aspects of Navajo culture into the curriculum. At the reservation high school, for example, all students are required to take two years of Navajo language, and they can also choose from a variety of culturally themed electives ranging from jewelry making to tribal government.

Fearing that they were losing their way of life, Tuba City High School hired Roger Dunsmore, a retired professor from the University of Montana, to help preserve Navajo culture (Meyer, 1989). His presence threatened to split the school, its faculty, and the surrounding community. While supporters applauded Dunsmore’s efforts to incorporate Navajo elements into the classroom, detractors felt that such “extracurricular” teaching would distract students from learning the standard curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic.²⁹ The newspaper article covering the controversy, however, made no mention of questioning Dunsmore’s authority as a White man teaching Navajos to become more Navajo.

For his part, Dunsmore acknowledged the importance of Navajos leading the way to restore Indian identity:

Kids have to see that this really matters. Otherwise, what you are doing is killing the Indian part, you’re fragmenting the cultural wholeness that these kids bring to their experiences. And to shatter that in order to make a White person out of them leaves them much less capable of learning. It has to do with confidence, with their self-esteem. Otherwise, they get torn apart... They’re caught between cultures (Meyer, 1989, p. 26).

He also told the students that knowing who they were was as important as learning English and math in order to be part of the White man's world: "You do not have to make a choice between being Indian and being successful. You can be of two minds. In fact, you must be both" (Meyer, 1989, p. 26).

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

In the decade since the Navajo curriculum has been in place, it has not made much of an impact. Tests scores show that academic achievement at Tohatchi High School, like other reservation schools, falls well below national standards. Few go on to college, and those that do rarely stay long enough to earn their degree. Gangs, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency are so commonplace that many struggle just to finish high school.

While crime rates have decreased elsewhere in the United States, the nation's Indian reservations became even more dangerous, particularly for teenagers. Isolated, impoverished, and disconnected both from their traditional culture and Western society, some Indian youth have grown increasingly violent, drug-dependent, and depressed. Above all, there is an overwhelming sense of hopelessness, as young people claim to have nothing to look forward to. With jobs scarce on reservations, poverty and unemployment levels are the highest in the nation. Alcoholism has long been an epidemic and incidents of domestic violence are soaring. Add cultural confusion to the mix, and the result is a generation trapped between two worlds.

Lost Generation

The lack of role models for contemporary Indian youth is powerfully demonstrated in a scene from *Smoke Signals* in which a drunken Arnold Joseph asks his ten-year-old son, "Who's your favorite Indian?" to which the little boy responds: "Nobody. Nobody. Nobody." Chucky likewise claims that there is not a single Indian that he wants to emulate.

As such a big fan of rap music, it would seem logical for Chucky to admire—or at least respect—Natay, the most prominent Navajo rapper performing today. A former gang member turned gangsta-rapper, Natay has released two CDs, "A Place Called Survival" and "TNT (True Native Thugs)." Rather than write songs about reservation life (he grew up in Albuquerque), Natay

chooses to write about life on the urban streets. But he apparently has little credibility among reservation youths. As his dismissive laughter indicates, Chucky views Natay contemptuously as a no-talent wannabe.

Golfer Notah Begay III, the only Native American on the PGA Tour, is certainly worthy of role model status. The Stanford University graduate won four tournaments and earned more than three million dollars in his first two seasons on the tour. At one point, he was ranked among the top twenty golfers in the world. He has been slowed recently by a back injury and a drunken driving conviction. But Chucky could care less about Begay or the sport of golf as a whole.

Alcohol has similarly contributed to the downfall of the one person Chucky did idolize when he was younger. Jarvis Mulahoon was a standout basketball player from a nearby reservation high school whose exploits on the hardwood were even featured in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*. After a prolific prep career, Mulahon was recruited by legendary coach Clem Haskins to play basketball for the University of Texas at El Paso, joining only a handful of Navajos to play at the Division 1 level. His college career, however, was mediocre at best, and he left UTEP without earning his degree. When I asked Chucky about Mulahon's whereabouts, he bluntly answered: "Jarvis is all fat now, and all he does is drink."

Clothes and fashion have long been important features of the way that young people have expressed collective and individual identities. Consumerism propagates the idea that people can purchase an identity. This appeal obviously works because advertising sells products that supposedly affect the self-image of the buyer. For example, Chucky does not buy a pair of baggy pants because of any inherent value in the physical nature of the pants but because he identifies with hip-hop culture. In buying these pants, he is expressing his desired identity. He is unwittingly subscribing to the contradictory advertising message of "conform and be different" (Andersen, 1995, p. 114). Lifestyle conformity packaged as individualism is only the latest manifestation of this contradiction.

In fashion, individualism has been colonized by corporate interests as counterculture has been mainstreamed. In *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank (1997) shows how the advertising industry co-opted a rebellious youth culture, developing new marketing campaigns that build on the discourse of rebellion and liberation to promote new forms of "hip consumerism." Body piercing, scarification, and tattooing are not so much the signs of rebellion as of the colonization of the only personal space left (Twitchell, 1999). There is a constant tension between the desire for group belonging and the promise

of individual expression. As a result, rebels must obey the rules of the image or risk not being recognized as rebellious.

There is no denying that Chucky does seem to be creative with consumer commodities and uses them to fashion an identity for himself. The music that he chooses to listen to is outside of the mainstream. And he adamantly insists that his fashion choices are an expression of his individual taste. But both of these are very commonplace signifiers of difference and all the images that he uses can be seen in music videos and magazines. In fact, Chucky admits that his inspiration for clothing ensembles comes from magazines.³⁰ Upon closer examination, his individual style is characterized not by creativity and resistance but acquiescence and conformity.

TELEVISION

Chucky's generation, which has sometimes been called the "Nintendo Generation," has been inundated with various forms of technology and information-laden mediums since they were born. They were born into a world of microwaves, DVDs and Gameboys. Technology, in many ways, has and will shape this generation. The average child watches more than 2 ½ hours of TV per day, and one out of every six children in the country watches more than five hours a day (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Media use is becoming increasingly private as children retreat to their bedrooms to watch TV or listen to music alone. With so many unsupervised and unmonitored hours in front of the tube, experts fear that young people are being negatively influenced.

As violence permeates society, government officials need an explanation or, more accurately, a scapegoat. Violence on television is usually at the center of this debate because it is so accessible to children. The American Psychological Association estimates that an average American child will witness 10,000 murders, rapes, and aggravated assaults on television per year (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002). As that statistic indicates, an enormous amount of research has been done on the effects of media violence on children. Some researchers contend that violent programming contributes to real-world crime and aggression. DeGaetano and Bander (1996), for example, assert that "a large body of evidence indicates that screen violence is a significant contributing factor to violent behavior" (p. 59).³¹

George Gerbner (1994) and his team of researchers have examined the impact of television for the past several decades. They argue that, through its habitual and almost ritualistic use by viewers, television plays a homogenizing

role for otherwise heterogeneous populations. They also suggest that immersion in television culture produces a “mainstreaming” effect, whereby differences based on cultural, social, and political characteristics are muted in heavy viewers of television. The end result is that heavy television viewers internalize many of the distorted views of the social and political world presented by television, leading them to believe that crime and violence occurs much more frequently than it does in real life.

One study after another continues to highlight a correlation, if not a causal link, between television viewing and aggression. Any statistical relation between aggression and viewing TV violence almost completely disappears when corrections are made for other factors such as a child’s intelligence and preexisting level of aggression (Heins, 2001). Beyond their inconsistency, all the experimental studies have the same fundamental flaw: they don’t account for the powerful effect called “researcher expectation,” whereby the subject easily guesses what the researcher wants him or her to do and behaves that way.

The notion that media content is related to people’s perceptions of reality is not limited to television. In recent years, the popularity of violent video games has also elicited a collective panic. The National Institute on Media and the Family warned that video games are featuring increased violence against women and called on retailers to do a better job of keeping such games out of the hands of children (Frommer, 2002). The typical goal of these games is to maim or kill the enemy and, in many cases, players can choose the level of realism of the battle, including very graphic portrayals of injuries. One game specifically targeted is called “Grand Theft Auto: Vice City” wherein participants score points for having sex with a prostitute and gain additional points for killing her. The game includes scenes in which blood splatters out of a woman’s body as the player beats her to death. Although the game is rated M for mature audiences (over the age of 17), children have no trouble buying it.

Chucky’s favorite leisure time activity, after basketball, is playing video games. He prefers violent role-playing games such as “Hitman” and the aforementioned “Grand Theft Auto.” During his gaming sessions, he will always turn on the stereo to play rap songs with violent and misogynistic lyrics for “mood music.” With such sensory overload, some so-called media experts might expect him to proceed directly to the nearest public gathering and commit a series of sexual assaults before opening fire.

Chucky scoffs at and resents the mere implication that playing violent video games or listening to gangsta rap will either directly or indirectly lead him to commit violent acts. He vehemently dismisses any connection as

“stupid” before firing off his favorite admonishment: “You like to stereotype.” His retaliatory reaction is the result of his own experiences as the victim of stereotyping. Widely perceived as a troublemaker by his family and a gangster by strangers because of the way he chooses to dress, Chucky understands first-hand the importance of not judging a book by its cover: “Just cause I like to sag don’t mean I’m no thug.” More significantly, he has lived with the violent legacy of his father and repeated reprimands from his adoptive mother that “You’re going to grow up and be a killer like your dad.”

This is far from the case. In temperament and character, Chucky is extremely placid and laid back. He prides himself in his ability to “get along with everybody.” In fact, I have never witnessed him display an act of aggression, as he prefers to keep angry emotions inside. A specific incident involving a wounded dog demonstrated his predilection against violence. One winter morning, we opened the door to find a hyperventilating dog that had recently been shot sprawled on the front porch. As much as he hated seeing an animal suffer, he absolutely refused to shoot the dog to take it out of its misery. “I hate guns,” he muttered repeatedly. What Chucky means, of course, is that he hates *real* guns. And that is precisely the point: he knows the difference between make-believe entertainment and real-life consequences.

Chucky possesses highly sophisticated interpretive skills developed over a lifetime of watching television and movies. He has reached the point where he can anticipate different plot events and predict logical outcomes as a story line unfolds. His ability to differentiate between possibility and probability has also caused him to become a bit jaded, as evident in his statement that he has “never seen a good actor.” Chucky evaluates performances according to believability. One of the most important yardsticks to measure the authenticity of media content is whether the characters or events depicted are possible in real life.

With his unique life experiences, Chucky brings a much broader knowledge base from which to draw in interpreting and evaluating mass mediated images. During a discussion of various TV programs, he itemized a list of topics—sex, drugs, domestic violence (including murder), and a custody battle—each of which he has actually experienced. But his use of television has not helped him resolve his fears and anxieties about these matters. Cop shows sometimes depict domestic violence, but they do not really get at the kinds of intimate things he has witnessed. Rather, TV shows cover these issues in, to use his words, a “fake” and “not believable” way. Equipped with his growing realization of the bifurcation between the “reel” and the

“real,” Chucky has looked less and less to television of any genre to help him understand the world around him.

At the same time, Chucky’s continual assertions that he is not personally affected by the mass media is indicative a common phenomenon in which people routinely report that others are more strongly influenced by the media than they themselves are. The belief that “everyone is influenced by the media except for me” is particularly prevalent among teenagers. For teens, the very idea that something as simplistic and ordinary as the media could influence them is insulting as they are far too “sophisticated” to be so easily swayed. So when Chucky is asked about the influence of television, he acknowledges its role as an important source of information but is quick to point out that the media have no influence on *his* behavior. Such a defiant proclamation is typical of adolescent machismo at work, for admitting that the media influences his values or ideas would mean that he is not invulnerable after all. Whether Chucky is willing to admit it or not, his exposure to the mass media has served as a central means by which he has learned and internalized the values, beliefs, and norms of popular culture.

RESPONSE

Chucky expressed absolutely no interest in responding to his interview transcript. My repeated instructions to review the transcript and provide comments were greeted with persistent moaning that “it’s too much like school.” Faced with no other alternative, I decided to give him an “oral exam” by briefly summarizing what I wrote so that he could at least react verbally. Most of what I said only elicited insouciant silence until I made a reference that he interpreted to be myopic and stereotypical. Suddenly, Chucky had something to say. His scathing critique of the entire research agenda and me, in particular, was eye opening, not to mention ego deflating.

WHY ARE YOU SO SELF-CENTERED?

No one else is going to worry about me. That’s why I have to worry about myself. But just because I’m worrying about myself all the time doesn’t mean I’m not worried about other people. But, most of the time, it’s safe to say that I’m just worried only about myself.

WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT “ME AGAINST THE WORLD”
MENTALITY COMES FROM?

No, that’s stupid.³² I hate when people do that. Just because I listen to him doesn’t mean I’m trying to be like him, you know. It’s the way you grow up, man. You guys got to get that through your head. The way you grow up is going to affect the way you think. It’s not just music, it’s everything that goes around you. You don’t listen to music 24/7. You put up with your parents, your family members, everybody more than you do listen to music. You can’t just relate everything to Tupac. If I wanted to do like Tupac, I’d be in Gallup right now selling drugs, getting tattoos all over my body, rapping...that’s a person who wants to be like Tupac.

WHO DO YOU MEAN BY “YOU GUYS”?

People like you. The type of people always stereotyping everybody. You like that, man. *Every* time, dude, every time. You stereotype us every day, bro.

ARE YOU SERIOUS? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

(in a mocking tone) “What does that mean?” Think about it, Sam. Have you ever saw a Black guy walking down the street, then you thinking “I bet you that guy is a gangster or I bet you that guy can ball or smoke weed or some shit.” I *know* you would think something like that. I bet you’ve done that before.

WELL, LET’S LOOK AT YOU: YOU PLAY BALL, YOU SMOKE WEED.
EVERYTHING IS TRUE! WHAT ARE YOU COMPLAINING
ABOUT?

But why do you have to make that judgment before you know us, man? Then that leads on to other judgments. (in a nasal voice) “I bet you he has a whole bunch of kids.” See.

I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU SEE ME THIS WAY!

You are, dude. (laughter) You’re just like my teachers and older people like that. They don’t have an understanding of our culture, not *our* culture but *my* culture. Just cause I sag doesn’t mean I’m trying to be gangster, you

know. What if I like it? What if I don't like dressing like you? Can you see me in your clothes, man? (laughter)

I have to admit that Chucky's accusations caught me off guard. All this time, I was under the impression that he thought that I was hip and cool. After all, I am conversant in hip-hop vernacular and current in recent trends in rap music and basketball, not to mention the fact that I am the reigning (and still undefeated) champion of "Knockout Kings" on the Xbox. I figured that I was an honorary—albeit emeritus—member of the fraternity. Apparently, I have been deluding myself all along. Yet I never imagined that he would lump me in the category of "you guys": quick to judge, stereotyping, and hopelessly out of touch teacher-types. Later, Chucky saw that I was seriously hurt by his remarks. He attempted to clarify his statements: "You're only like that sometimes. But when I chill with you, you're cool." His conciliatory words offered little consolation.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Thelma and Tashina are his biological sisters. He also has two female cousins, Regina and Sharmaine, who became his sisters once he was placed into the custody of his maternal aunt.
- 2 The walls are covered with posters of Black rappers and professional basketball players.
- 3 He is referring to his paternal aunt's boyfriend, who is African American.
- 4 This is an inside joke.
- 5 Later, Chucky proudly showed me the hair care products and do-rags that he purchased there.
- 6 "Here" is his room.
- 7 He is the young rapper convicted of the highly publicized shooting incident involving P Diddy and Jennifer Lopez.
- 8 Chucky and his younger brother, Deebo, visit their grandmother together.
- 9 This is the title of one of Tupac Shakur's albums. Tupac is Chucky's favorite rapper.
- 10 Music videos serve as forms of advertising for the music industry. In fact, MTV developed as a result of the opportunities created by the growth of cable television and the music industry's need to develop new ways to promote its music to a young audience (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003).
- 11 From the album, Vol. 3...Life & Times of S. Carter.
- 12 "Flossin Season" is written and performed by Juvenile and appears on *400 Degreez* (1998), "It's All About the Benjamins" is by P. Diddy featuring Lil' Kim, Jadakiss, Sheek, and Notorious B.I.G. from *No Way Out* (1997), "Bling Bling" is by B.G. featuring Big Tymers and Hot Boys from *Chopper City in the Ghetto* (1998), and "Ghetto Fabulous" is by hip-hop artist Ras Kass featuring Dr. Dre, Ice-T, and Mack 10 from the album *The End/Rassassination* (1998). With the exception of "Big Pimpin'," the rest are also titles of straight-to-video feature films.
- 13 *Cribs* can best be described as a modern version of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* that targets a younger and more urban audience. Like its 1980's predecessor, the show offers a voyeuristic glimpse at fabulous, over-the-top mansions that stars use to celebrate their success. It promises an inside look into lives of celebrities—mostly musicians with the occasional actor or athlete—by inviting viewers into their homes as they play the role of personal tour guide.
- 14 This program follows the "behind-the-scenes" everyday life of a celebrity and features numerous confessionals that serve as narration.

- ¹⁵ Unfortunately, but perhaps predictably, the lifestyle of the rich and famous for African American entertainers too often ends up becoming the lifestyle of the poor and once famous as they spend more than they have earned and can no longer borrow to make up the difference.
- ¹⁶ Most people, when they first meet him, usually think that Chucky is Mexican.
- ¹⁷ This is the slang term for sleeveless undershirts, so called because that is what every man who abuses his girlfriend or spouse seems to be wearing when he is arrested on “Cops.”
- ¹⁸ Several, including Chucky’s older sister, Thelma, earned all-state honors.
- ¹⁹ As rapper Ja Rule told *Newsweek* in the October 9, 2000 issue: “What else can you rap about but money, sex, murder or pimping? There isn’t a whole lot else going on in our world” (cited in Strasburger and Wilson, 2002, p. 271).
- ²⁰ I myself used to be one of those suburban kids who the rap industry depended upon for their success. N.W.A.’s *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) was the first rap record I ever purchased. Although Compton was located less than an hour from where I lived, it might as well have been in another universe. Nevertheless, I still felt a visceral connection to the music.
- ²¹ During adolescence, music becomes the preferred medium of choice. As television viewing begins to wane during mid-to-late adolescence, listening to music increases (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Music contributes to the socialization of adolescents by helping them identify with a peer group and serving as an important symbol of anti-establishment rebellion. This iconoclastic nature of rap music plays an important role in adolescent identity formation.
- ²² African American comedian Chris Rock laments about the plight of Native Americans: “The Indians have it the worst, man! When’s the last time you’ve seen two Indians together? I’ve seen a polar bear ride a tricycle in my lifetime, but I ain’t never seen an Indian family chillin’ out at Red Lobster.” From his HBO comedy special, *Bigger and Blacker* (1999).
- ²³ Jack Forbes (1993) has argued that “by the nineteenth century it seems quite certain that Afroamericans, whether living in Latin America, the Caribbean or in North America, had absorbed considerable amounts of Native American ancestry” (p. 270).

- 24 An African American friend once explained to me that Blacks of lighter complexion attribute their skin tone to Indian rather than White ancestry regardless of whether or not the genealogical claim is true.
- 25 The “one drop rule” holds that a person who has one drop of Black blood is Black. White slave owners devised the rule as a way to ensure more Black laborers. Forbes (1990) puts it more bluntly: “The white man doesn’t care if you are part-Irish, or part-Comanche, or if you are descended from the Queen of Sheba; so long as you have a drop of black African blood—that he knows about—you are still a nigger” (p. 34).
- 26 Significantly, while the Black mixture is seen as an impermissible “dilution” of the tribe, their extensive mixture with Whites is essentially ignored. Along the same lines, between 1970 and 1980, the Cherokee Nation became progressively “Whiter” at the same time that it rejected most of its Black citizens (Sturm, 2002).
- 27 In Virginia, the Pamunkeys carried membership cards to assure that they would not be forced into the “colored” railway coach (Lovett, 2002).
- 28 The Benallys trace their Black ancestry to Grandpa Jack, who was half Black.
- 29 Toney Begay, an industrial arts teacher at the high school, voiced his opposition: “If I want my kids to know my culture, I believe it’s my job to tell them. When I send them to school, I want them to learn the requirements to be successful out there in the total society” (Meyer, 1989, p. 26).
- 30 According to Twitchell (1999), no innovation has been more central to the branding of designer fashion than the fashion magazine: “Like the department store window with which it shares many similarities, the magazine photograph fixes objects for public delectation. It shows you not just what to see, but how to see it” (p. 206).
- 31 Instead of providing any citations to document this contention, the authors only offer anecdotal evidence from fictional case studies.
- 32 Chucky’s sudden disdain derives from his belief that my question is a reference to the rapper, Tupac Shakur. *Me Against the World* was the title of one of his albums.

Chapter 7

Conclusion:

The Ethnographic Self and the Personal Self

ABSTRACT

The nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched is critical to understanding the nature of the research as a whole. To be sure, the form that a particular ethnography takes emerges in discourse. An ethnographic interview, for instance, is a highly personal encounter that is shaped by the interpersonal exchange between the ethnographer and the informant. The speaker will only reveal what he or she wants the researcher to know. Therefore, the quality and depth of the relationship between the two individuals determines what will be said. Usually, the longer and more amiable the relationship, the richer and more consistent is the final product. Even if narrators answer a prepared set of questions, how they respond depends entirely on the level of rapport. This chapter explores this relationship.

An oral history interview is a highly personal encounter that is shaped by the interpersonal exchange between the narrator and the editor. The speaker will only reveal what he or she wants the researcher to know. Therefore, the quality and depth of the relationship between the two individuals determines what will be said. Usually, the longer and more amiable the relationship, the richer and more consistent is the final product.¹ Even if narrators answer a prepared set of questions, *how* they respond depends entirely on the level of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3420-5.ch007

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rapport. As Clyde Kluckhohn (1959) has stated: “No two researchers will ever see ‘the same’ culture in identical terms any more than one can step twice into the same river” (p. 254 cited in Pandey, 1972, p. 335).

Strangely, despite all of the uproar surrounding the “crisis of representation” (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) and all of the literature spawned as a result, there has been little more done than just talking about and around it. Countless books and articles are filled with self-righteous theoretical pontifications, but only a minute percentage of these are field-tested. Methodological rigor—or honesty—has not yet come to fruition. Instead, it appears that most scholars are content to continue practicing an academic sleight-of-hand.

If there is indeed such a “crisis” of representation, it seems to me that the obvious solution is to disclose the ways and manner in which the representation takes place. Although revealing how texts are constructed may spoil the aura of inviolability, it also lends credibility to the research. The only honest alternative is to acknowledge our particular role in the ethnographic process. What I am advocating here, of course, is reflexivity. According to Jay Ruby (1980), to be reflexive “is to insist that anthropologists systematically and rigorously reveal their methodology and themselves as the instrument of data generation” (p. 153). More specifically, it is to be accountable to the three components of the communicative process: producer, process, and product (Ruby, 1980). While all ethnographies focus on the last, very little is explicitly mentioned about the first two.

HOW THEY SEE ME

Not only is the ethnographic subject interpreting the native object, but the informants are also interpreting the ethnographer. Triloki Nath Pandey (1972) emphasizes that the people with whom the anthropologist works are usually able to size him up as a person and understand his role in the community. Many ethnographers have described how they felt as if they were under constant surveillance of the natives while in the field (i.e. Adair, 1960; Bowen, 1954; Cushing, 1882²; Maybury-Lewis, 1965; Powdermaker, 1965). William L. Rodman (1993) demonstrates that the interpretive process is a two-way street:

...the people we study study us, even in moments when we do not seek to study. We are not just observers observed; we are interpreters interpreted. To figure out what the devil they think they are up to requires us to try to figure out what they think we are up to—our motivation, purposes, and (sometimes)

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the moral message we bring with us. This is an other side to reflexivity, one crucial to understanding the dialogics of encounters in field research, and one that anthropologists have only begun to explore (p. 189; emphasis mine).

As anthropologists, we have to be more cognizant of how “they” interpret “us.” Often, Bruner (1998) contends, native peoples’ interpretation of their own culture is influenced in profound ways by their interpretations of us.

But how does one go about acquiring such information? It is ineffective to ask informants directly since people generally will not tell you how they *really* feel about you to your face. This is especially true for Navajos, who tend to avoid personal confrontation. Originally, my plan was to recruit my research assistants—who are themselves members of the Benally family—to surreptitiously record comments about me from each of my informants. Upon further consideration (and after a trial run), I decided against this strategy partly for the ethical ramifications but mostly because of the technical limitations of my miniature tape recorder. As it turned out, however, any kind of subterfuge was unnecessary. Information in the form of gossip was relayed to me from all sources. Navajos love to gossip and cause trouble with revelations like “So and so said such and such about you.” Sometimes, these statements are true but, more often, eager messengers purposely exaggerate a kernel of truth and add their own malicious twist just to spread ill will.

For all our similarities and compatibilities, they still considered me to be fundamentally different from them. I am not like the other men on the reservation in that I do not drink, smoke, do drugs, or have illegitimate children by various women. I was a college student when I first met them (and still was a decade later when I conducted my fieldwork), which was as exceedingly rare then as it is now. In a society where alcoholism, domestic violence, chronic unemployment, and parental absenteeism among men are the cultural norm, I served as the only positive male role model for the youngsters in the community.

Even more perplexing in their eyes was the fact that I was a vegetarian. They simply could not comprehend the existence of somebody who refused to eat mutton stew despite their best goading. (“You don’t eat sheep?” they would gasp.) But my peculiar dietary choices did not end there. They also could not understand my aversion to soda, candy, and processed foods—all staples of the contemporary Navajo diet. I must have appeared to be a strange breed, indeed.

Prior to meeting me, they had also never known anyone who espoused anti-materialism, pro-environment views before (which I know sounds odd

given the “children of nature” stereotype). Without being aware of it, I was proselytizing my values and beliefs by disseminating advice at every turn. For example, I constantly would urge the kids to focus more on their schoolwork or I would suggest healthier eating alternatives to the families. Soon, I was being consulted for everything from relationship problems to the best way to change a flat tire.

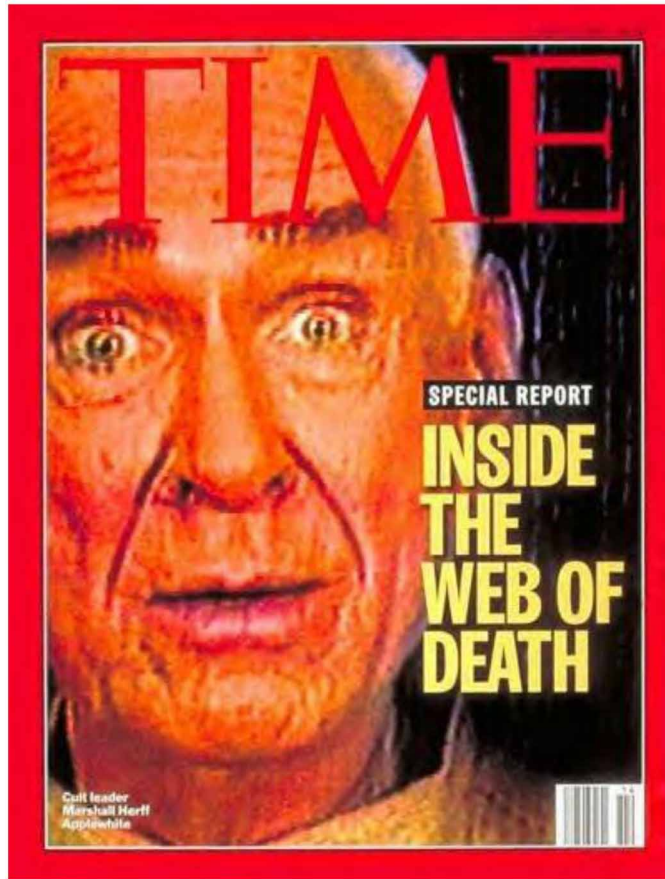
I knew they considered me eccentric, but I never realized just how much so until I learned that they attributed my prolonged lack of contact during the several years I was attending graduate school in Philadelphia to my perishing as one of the members of the Heaven’s Gate cult who committed mass suicide. This religious group, readers will remember, was led by a bright-eyed eunuch named Marshall Applewhite, a.k.a. Do, who convinced his followers to shed their earthly bodies so that they could rendezvous with a UFO traveling behind the Hale-Bopp comet that would take them to a higher plane of existence. It was sobering to realize that, as far as they were concerned, it was not outside the realm of possibility for me to leave this world in a pair of new Nikes in hopes of boarding a magical spacecraft. Although (hopefully) intended to be humorous, the very fact that they associated me with these religious kooks tells me just how strange and “out of this world”—literally—they perceived me.

All of this changed, however, when I resurfaced to do research for my dissertation. This time, I was no longer alone but married with children. But it was not just my change in domestic status but *whom* I chose to marry that made such a difference: an Indian woman with Navajo kids, one of who is named “Hosteen,” the Navajo word for “man.” In fact, my children are related to their relatives who live only a few miles down the road. My change in status from an unmarried outsider to somebody married to an Indian woman with Navajo children narrowed the gap separating us enough that I detected dramatic differences in the way I was henceforth perceived, and thereby, treated. Since they now saw me as being closer to one of “them,” the de-facto neutrality tag that I had enjoyed for so many years was concomitantly revoked. The change was most clearly evident in my relationships with Navajo women, my becoming a subject of gossip, and my unwitting participation in family feuds.

I first noticed a variation in my dealings with pubescent females. There are a wide assortment of aunties and female cousins with whom I had become accustomed to engaging in playful banter. Suddenly, it became inappropriate to be alone with any of these women lest “people talk.” Even females I had known since they were little girls would no longer talk to me in public or

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Figure 1. Marshall Applewhite



private. In fact, Isabelle made the following announcement at a cookout held in my honor: "Sorry, ladies, he's no longer available."

The prescription against being seen alone or overly friendly with a married man gave way to another big change. For the first time (or at least the first time it was brought to my attention), I became the subject of rumors and badmouthing from others. Revelations of this sort were especially disconcerting since I had always tried to be on civil terms with everyone. Except for a few individuals, I thought that I was generally well liked. But my change in status rendered me vulnerable to being judged or even attacked.

On a related note, I also made a concerted effort not to get involved into family politics and intra-clan squabbles. Before, I moved effortlessly between family groups. Every time I made a trip to the reservation, I would routinely

travel the “circuit” by visiting each house and greeting each family member. By virtue of my affiliation with a specific family within the matrilineal kinship group for the purposes of my research, I became identified with them. As a result, I unwittingly inherited their rivalries: their enemies suddenly became my enemies.³ Thus, Isabelle’s ongoing feud with her Aunt Ursula (whom she pejoratively refers to as “Chocolate Sister” because of her dark complexion) translated into Thelma coolly ignoring me when she saw me at the store. This snub was disarming since there was no falling out incident that precipitated such frosty treatment as well as the fact that we always had an amicable relationship before then.

Perhaps another way of looking at this is as an initiation of sorts, a type of cultural baptism by fire. Keith Basso, an anthropologist who has conducted research with the Apache for decades, is proud that he has established a close enough relationship with his informants that he is gossiped about (Lincoln, 1993). But being accepted on such an intimate level necessarily entails a double-edged sword. While it means that they consider me more of an insider, I also lose the privileges and freedom that came along with being an outsider. Just as some doors opened, others closed.

TV SHAME SYNDROME

One aspect of my research involved quantitatively measuring how much television each of my five informants watched in a given day over a period of one calendar year using three different techniques: my observations, a daily log that they maintained, and employing my research assistants as “undercover spies” to surreptitiously monitor their viewing. These different techniques were necessitated by the varying degrees of inadequacy of each. Following Heisenberg, as soon as my informants realized that I was watching them watch television, they deliberately altered their normal behavior. It was as if the appearance of my yellow notepad was an immediate signal to leave the room or find something else to do.

If the scrutiny of my presence served as such a distraction, I reasoned, perhaps they would be more forthcoming if they recorded their own television viewing habits. With this in mind, I provided each of my informants (except for Grandma Elsie who is not literate) with a “TV journal” and instructed them to maintain a daily log of what they watched and for how long. The journals were ineffective because of their lack of diligence in maintaining them. Claiming to be “too busy,” my informants obviously perceived written

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documentation as being too much of a chore. Furthermore, the self-reported entries that they did report indicated even *less* time watching TV than my observations.

Realizing these shortcomings, I next decided to employ my research assistants as “undercover spies.” Their mission was to secretly keep track of their family members’ television viewing. Although they did not take this task very seriously, their findings are by far the most accurate of the three.

While it is true that “TV is bad” is a class-based assumption, my informants seem to have been influenced by my own views—or their perception thereof—regarding television. For over a decade, *before* I began this research, I repeatedly implored the Benally children to stop watching so much television. I remember even ominously warning that the “TV is going to fry your brain cells.” I would also frequently make snide remarks about their tastes in programming.

One of the Benally children lived with my family for almost six months. I am certain that Marlin relayed my “no television” policy for my kids upon returning home to the reservation. Concomitantly, I know for a fact that he proudly shared his newfound enjoyment of reading, which I encouraged him to do instead of watching TV while he was living in my house. On numerous occasions, I have heard Todd chastise his siblings to “turn off the TV and go read a book”—an injunction he has heard from me countless times.

People always talk with a delicate responsiveness to what they think that other people know and believe. John Tulloch (2000) asserts that peoples’ utterances should never be separated from their vivid sensitivity to setting. For example, Regina claimed to prefer educational shows on the Discovery Channel ostensibly because she assumed that the listener (in this case, me) shared in the kinds of distinctions that this utterance conferred and therefore would perceive her as somebody with sophisticated viewing tastes. In a similar capacity, the reason Isabelle conspicuously placed a collection of brand-new—and, I would later learn, never read—books in her youngest son’s room was so that I would think she promoted literacy. The problem, then, of inquiring about tastes is that people like to think about themselves in a particular way that they prefer to present to others as their public self.

It is a simple fact that informants will only disclose what they want researchers to know, and it is only natural for them to want to present themselves as positively as possible. My informants did not want me to look down on them for watching so much TV or to report these “negative” findings to others and thereby cast them in an unfavorable light. Simply stated, the main reason that most of my informants denied both the amount of television and

the type of programming they watched was because they cared about what I thought of them.

HOW I SEE THEM

In spite of all our similarities, I could not help but to notice our glaring cultural differences. Nowhere was this more the case than in our contrasting approaches to financial matters. The Benallys engage in endless contests of one-upmanship with their friends, relatives, and, most often, each other. Indeed, the satisfaction of a new purchase is not complete until the item can be paraded in front of friends and family. Since I have known them, I was always struck by how eagerly they flaunted their new purchases, either individually or collectively, by asking (usually rhetorically) onlookers: “Did you see our/my new _____?” This type of thing is not uncommon, and I suppose it could be attributed to making conversation. More peculiar, however, is their proclivity for volunteering the price of their various purchases, whether it is a new car, an item of clothing, or even groceries. Revelations of this sort are manifested in statements such as, “We just got back from Costco. Two hundred and fifty bucks.”⁴

The Benallys even play a game, which has turned into something of a ritual, on those rare occasions when they go out to dinner as a family. Once the bill arrives, every person sitting at the table (guests included) takes a turn guessing the amount. The “winner” gets to leave the tip. But perhaps the real prize is the satisfaction that they indulged in an expensive meal—and, thanks to the game, everybody knows just how expensive.

Along similar lines, whenever my research assistants receive their paychecks from their respective places of employment, they will cash the entire check—even though they have no intention of spending the full amount—just so they can walk around like some big shot with a thick wad of bills in their pocket. Then they will make sure that everybody nearby will get a good look when they open their wallet to pay for an item (usually something small like a soda). Such exhibitionism is not confined to the younger generation. Every two weeks, I can count on their mother, Isabelle, bragging about the amount of her paycheck.

I consider this type of behavior to be the epitome of tackiness. My family has always subscribed to a strict “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when it comes to all things monetary. While I was growing up, my parents never disclosed to me how much money they made or how much something cost. When I did

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inquire out of curiosity, I was promptly admonished and reminded that it was inappropriate to ask about such things. Moreover, to this day, whenever my family dines at a restaurant with another family, the post-meal ritual consists of the fathers arguing over the bill with each insisting on paying.

INDIVIDUALISM

The adoption of a cash economy has created a wide range in income within kinship groups. Among the members of the Benally family, for example, there is a significant variation in socioeconomic level. Isabelle and her live-in boyfriend's combined monthly income, including wages and child support payments, exceed \$7,000—*after* taxes. Meanwhile, her mother and brother survive on less than that in an entire year.⁵ While Isabelle and most of her children drive their own vehicles and watch their own television sets in their respective rooms, Grandma Elsie and Delbert live in dilapidated housing with no electricity, telephone, or running water. Worse, Isabelle does not allow her mother or any of her siblings to use any of her possessions, such as her washing machine, shower, or telephone.⁶ Not only does Isabelle refuse to share what she has, she openly flaunts her belongings in their presence.

The cash economy created imbalance and conflict within kinship groups as those with money became splintered from those without. Separate classes of “haves” and “have-nots” redefine relations among individuals by categorizing them as either similar or different. Such differentiations with other consumers based upon unshared consumption practices are potentially infinite, and it is this infinite potential that makes it possible for consumers to create for themselves a specific individuality (Foster, 2002). Not surprisingly, prioritizing the wants of the individual over the needs of the group has resulted in deleterious consequences for both. Family unity has weakened, community life has wilted, and religious meaning has waned.

I noticed an endemic greed and avarice from the first time I came to this community as part of the gardening workcamp. Our objective was to plant and grow fresh fruits and vegetables for a people whose diet had become dominated by processed foods.⁷ It was my understanding that the harvest would be rationed among the entire community or at least the whole residence group, which consisted at the time of six families related by clan. To my shock and horror, I learned later that the one family who owned the parcel of land on which the gardening project took place kept *all* of the fruits and vegetables for themselves. The amount of food produced far exceeded the eating capacities

of three adults and four children—who, incidentally, did not even like the taste of vegetables in the first place—yet they allowed most of this precious bounty to rot rather than share any of it with their relatives. When I returned the following summer, I incredulously asked one of the shunned relatives why this particular family did not distribute any of the food that we as the workers had intended for everybody to partake. “That’s the way they are,” she answered, “they’re too mean.” Over the years, I would learn that “that” is the way they *all* are.

The refusal to share is not limited to any one family. In fact, this same woman who cast these aspersions against her frugal clan relatives stored all of her food in her room. Despite living under the same roof as her mother, two of her sisters, and all of their respective children, she only bought and cooked food for herself and her kids—as did her sisters. Instead of everybody eating together, each “sub-family” would take their turn in the kitchen before relinquishing it for the next shift. At the time, I was struck by the oddity of the arrangement but attributed it to a “Navajo” custom that I knew nothing about.

Only later would I discover that Navajos traditionally defined a kinship group as a cluster of people “who cook and eat together” (Lamphere, 1977, p. 75). Moreover, the sharing of food was always considered a symbol of solidarity and a primary social obligation among kinsman. Not to do so was considered an antisocial act of enormous proportions, as Gary Witherspoon (1975) points out:

The refusal to share food is a denial of kinship, and one of the worst things to be said about a person is, “She refused to share her food” or “He acts as though he had no kinsmen”—meaning about the same thing (p. 88).

Such statements no longer carry the weight they once did. I once overheard Isabelle resentfully complain that her elderly mother had asked to “borrow” some hot dogs and Kool Aid because she did not have anything to eat. How Isabelle can spend money so frivolously while her own mother is forced to pawn her few remaining pieces of jewelry to buy wood for heat or how she can eat in front of her nieces and nephews whose only meal of the day was provided by their school is beyond my comprehension.

Unlike the case for contemporary Navajos, sharing remains an essential feature of everyday life for Koreans and Korean-Americans. I was raised in a cultural milieu where hospitality and generosity constituted the essential guideposts of a person’s character. Every visitor to our house is always welcomed with fruit or some other food item. It would be absolutely unconscionable to

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eat in front of another person—especially an elder—without first providing them with a serving.

An example of the mutual trust and cooperation among Koreans is the system of money borrowing known as “gaeh.” A “gaeh” consists of a financial group in which every member contributes the same pre-determined amount of money ranging from a few hundred to thousands of dollars every month. Each member takes turns acquiring all of the money until everybody has had a turn. This pooling of resources amounts to interest-free loans that enables participants to buy a home, start a business, or finance their children’s education. Often credited with helping Koreans to advance financially, this system is predicated entirely on honesty and fairness since no collateral is used.

My cultural background may explain why I am more sensitive to the “every man for himself” ethos commonly displayed by the Benallys. Perhaps another researcher from an upbringing steered more towards a “rugged individualism” orientation may not find their selfish attitudes and practices so bothersome. For example, I doubt that my college roommate, who could not go home during Christmas breaks because his mom and her boyfriend wanted to charge him rent for the two weeks he would be staying at this house, would be as offended and horrified by the hoarding techniques of a mother who to this day maintains a cache of snacks in her locked bedroom because she does not want to share her chips and candy with her own children.

“LOOK AT ME” VS. “LOOK AT ME SEE”

The title of this section is borrowed from Richard Chalfen’s (1981) “socio-documentary” research in which he provided cameras to different groups of Philadelphia teenagers and instructed them to make movies. He found two distinctly different structures of filmic narrative: black and lower socioeconomic level filmmakers preferred to use and manipulate themselves and familiar aspects of their immediate environment (“Look at Me”) while the white and more affluent subjects preferred to use and manipulate images of unfamiliar things and unknown people in areas away from their familiar environment (“Look at Me See”) (Chalfen, 1992).

A parallel relationship exists between my informants and me. The reason that Navajos attribute so much value to superficial trappings such as vehicles, clothing, and jewelry is to validate their public personas. Their consumption practices are symptomatic of an underlying need to reinforce a sense of self. Those who have always gone without will understandably want to acquire as

many things as possible and then show them off. It stands to reason that when a Navajo finally does get her hands on something of value, she will cherish it to the point of exclusion. The rationale follows along the lines of: “Why should I share this with you? I earned it. Besides, you didn’t share yours with me!” Such a mentality perpetuates mutual hoarding and competitive display.

I, on the other hand, come from a privileged background of private schools and piano lessons. For the most part, I did not covet because I always received whatever I wanted. The fact that making a lot of money was never an issue is clearly evident by my choice to devote so many years to studying anthropology, a vicarious discipline that epitomizes the examination “of unfamiliar things and unknown people.” Thus, my dissertation represents a dialogic encounter between two diametrically opposed poles: the “look at me” mentality of my research subjects and the “look at me see” orientation of my research paradigm.

It is very easy for someone like me to ridicule the money management skills—or the lack thereof—of my Navajo informants. Their habits of wasting money on items with the least residual value, paying inordinate interest rates, and not saving for a rainy day provoked alternating feelings on my part of disbelief, distress, and dismay. But you should not judge a person, as the adage goes, until you have walked in his moccasins.

Most of us take having our basic needs met for granted and have no idea what it is like to go without. Native Americans remain the most disadvantaged group in the country both economically and socially. More than half of reservations Indians do not have telephones although that is true for just five percent of all households nationwide, and twenty percent of reservation households lack indoor plumbing while less than one percent of the nation as a whole suffers the same problem (Flynn, 1995). And the Navajos are the poorest of the poor.

Statistics, however, fail to capture the degree of poverty in real life terms. Day to day existence includes conserving every drop of water⁸, subsisting almost entirely on canned or dry goods, spending evenings in quiet darkness, sleeping on a dirt floor, and walking to the outhouse alone in the middle of the night. During my time on the reservation, I have experienced all of these things—but only in small “boy, am I lucky” doses and always with the assurance that I can return to the Shangri-La I call home anytime I wish. The people that live here do not have such an option.

There is validation to the belief that “the only people who don’t care about money are those who already have it.” Indeed, those most dispirited with materialism feel this way not because they have too little, but because

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they have too much. It is an exercise in futility—not to mention the ultimate in snobbery—to convince somebody who has lived his entire life in poverty about the pathology associated with wealth and then ridicule that individual for continuing to adhere to his materialistic aspirations.

POSTSCRIPT

After more than three decades, I know a lot about the individuals whose lives formed the basis of my study—perhaps *too* much. Initially, I believed this familiarity would serve as a tremendous advantage and result in my completing my dissertation quickly and smoothly. It turned out, however, to be much more of a handicap than a benefit. In an article titled “The Paradox of Friendship in the Field,” Joy Hendry (1992) describes the difficulties she experienced as an ethnographer carrying out research in Japan when she turned one of her close friends into an informant. Similarly, a well-established manual for ethnographic research positively warns against turning friends into informants largely because of the confusion of roles that is thought to arise as a result of each side having preconceived ideas about what the relationship should involve (Spradley, 1979). My own experiences confirmed these findings.

Everything changed once this small community transformed from a refuge where I went to relax to a research site where I had to work. Since our entire relationship was based upon fictive kin, it became suddenly awkward to wear the “anthropologist hat.” I had to switch gears from never knowing (or caring) what time it was to being constantly concerned with deadlines. This was exacerbated by the fact that my friends-turned-informants did not take my research seriously. “The rez” consequently became a place I associated with drudgery, frustration, and resentment resulting from missed appointments, lame excuses, and constant requests for “loans” (which always turned out to be “donations”). Indeed, I must confess that my fieldnotes are riddled with Malinowskian outbursts. Once a sanctuary where I used to go to escape, it turned into an abyss I wanted to escape from. Whereas I once took pride in our similarities, I eventually found solace in our differences.

However, it was during one of the Benally family get-togethers that I was reminded of how special this place and the people really are. My fieldnotes took a more benevolent and reflective tone on this day:

It has been awhile since I've seen everyone together like this. It feels good. Playing basketball and volleyball, everybody making fun of each other

and laughing until it hurts, eating together, etc. brings back a lot of nice memories. After all of the “adults” played a game of volleyball, the younger kids got their turn to play. Most of them are the children of the “kids” I knew when I first came here! As I sat watching this next generation of Benallys, I couldn’t help but notice the timeless quality of it all. While the faces have changed, everything else looks, feels, and even smells the same: the mountains looming over the desert landscape, the cool dusk wind against my cheeks, and the familiar stink of sheep from the nearby corral...I feel very blessed to be included.

Although such moments of clarity were few and far between, they were invaluable in helping me to persevere. I noticed that after I stopped trying to force everything, my eyes started opening to what was happening around me. In the course of learning about them, I also learned more about myself. Gradually, the ethnographic self and the personal self merged into one.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This is not always the case as a new relationship with an interview subject may work just as well or better in certain situations.
- ² Frank Cushing (1882), perhaps the personification of the anthropologist “gone native,” acknowledges that the Zunis initially regarded him with suspicion: “Day after day, night after night, they followed me about the pueblo, or gathered in my room. I soon realized that they were systematically watching me” (p. 203).
- ³ During her fieldwork on the Navajo reservation, Louise Lamphere (1977) describes how internal subdivisions within the community affected how she was perceived: “I, in turn, was being associated with their alleged activities simply by living with them” (p. 11).
- ⁴ How much they value an item is in direct proportion to its cost. For example, I gave Isabelle a cappuccino maker for Christmas one year. She did not seem to really like the present until she saw the same item at Costco and learned of its price. Thereafter, I would always overhear her bragging not about receiving a nice gift but how much it cost.
- ⁵ Grandma Elsie relies entirely on public assistance while chronically unemployed Delbert sells the occasional piece of jewelry but, for the most part, leeches off his mother and girlfriend(s) for his survival.
- ⁶ I remember one particular incident when Elroy, Isabelle’s youngest brother, made himself a sandwich from leftovers in his sister’s refrigerator while she was not home. He made me promise not to tell her that he was “raiding the fridge.” When I asked why he seemed so afraid that his own sister would become angry over a bologna sandwich, his answer was simple yet revealing: “That’s the way she is.”
- ⁷ The ultimate goal was for the Navajos to continue raising the crops on their own so that they would eventually become more self-sufficient in terms of food while also vastly improving their diet. After the workcamp folded the following summer due to a lack of funding, the family who

Conclusion

- owns the land abandoned the fields altogether. Nobody has taken the initiative to resume growing any fruits or vegetables since.
- 8 One develops a new appreciation for water when you have to “haul” it in giant barrels from miles away as opposed to simply turning on a faucet. Navajo children as young as five-years-old who are reared in households without indoor plumbing become readily adept at “sucking the hose” to transfer water from a barrel into a smaller container for daily use.

Related Readings

To continue IGI Global's long-standing tradition of advancing innovation through emerging research, please find below a compiled list of recommended IGI Global book chapters and journal articles in the areas of oral history, cross-disciplinary studies, and narratives. These related readings will provide additional information and guidance to further enrich your knowledge and assist you with your own research.

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