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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how American Indians construct and describe their own cultural identities. In particular, it focuses on cultural group identity from the perspective of three American Indians living in an urban setting, and on the ways that cultural identity can be communicated and enacted. Two American Indian women and one American Indian man, aged 25-40, were interviewed. Themes related to the construction of cultural identity were identified, and second interviews were conducted to confirm and enlarge those themes. Major themes were: (1) self-identification as Indian or as a member of a specific tribe versus identity imposed by others, particularly the federal government; (2) use of cultural practices and rituals to affirm identity, communicate it to others, and connect with other Indians; (3) story telling as a means of teaching and learning cultural values and heritage; (4) the tensions of balancing traditional Indian ways with living in the modern American world; (5) shared Native history of language loss; (6) silence as a way of communicating; (7) the importance of spirituality and respect for nature; and (8) perpetuating culture and transmitting it to children by modeling values and practices. (SV)

AMERICAN INDIANS' CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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American Indians' Construction of Cultural Identity

Introduction/Statement of Problem

Throughout history, the American Indian has been portrayed in U.S. American media a number of ways ranging from the noble savage to the peaceful innocent. The goal of this study is to examine how American Indian group members construct and describe their own cultural identities. In particular, this study examines cultural group identity from the perspective of three American Indians who live in an urban setting. The findings from such a small sample can by no means be generalized to include all American Indians, but further insight can be gained adding to the current body of knowledge regarding this cultural group.

The American Indians' voices need to be heard and their stories need to be told. The persecution and discrimination of American Indians in this country was accomplished, in part, through the suppression of the "voice" of the Indian. Given the suppression of that voice, we, three white women, sought in these interviews to let the interviewees teach us about their culture. It was the collective hope of the interviewers to gather information to

promote greater understanding between various U.S. cultural groups.

As non-Indians studying this cultural group we approached our research from an exploratory angle (albeit with specific research questions) in an initial set of interviews. The second stage of the study involved presenting our initial findings to our respondents which let them confirm or deny possible themes; as well as let the researchers pursue issues such as multivocality and dialectical tensions found among the three respondents and within the literature.

A gap in the scholarly literature, which needs to be addressed, is the balance of traditional modes of Indian communication with the tension of having an American identity which values out-spokenness. Another gap that needs to be examined, and which is a goal of this study, is examining the communicative norms and construction of identity for Indians living in an urban setting. The scholarly discipline of Communication will benefit from this study by learning about how the cultural group of American Indians, and in particular, those group members living in an urban setting, construct, communicate, maintain, and perpetuate their cultural identity. Of particular

importance, this study will provide insight into the dialectical tension of living a traditional Indian way of being while living in a modern, urban world. We will also share what contexts affect the communication practices of this cultural group (i.e., historical, political, ideological). Because culture is a dynamic process that is constantly changing, the results from this study will illuminate this process of change.

Conceptualization and Theoretical Assumptions

There are two primary assumptions underlying this study. First, it is assumed that the cultural identity of being Indian is displayed and enacted in American Indians' daily lives regardless of their physical location and proximity to group members. Second, history is intricately tied with American Indians' cultural identity. The cultural persecution and survival of their ancestors as well as themselves, affect current beliefs and values, held by members of this group and the practices they perform, and also affects how they teach others and their children about their culture.

Literature Review

Three articles by Donal Carbaugh, University of Massachusetts, describe the essential qualities of cultural, biological and most important, social identity as the primary influences in the individual's communication. Of particular interest to this study is Carbaugh's (1996) description of how the U.S. government plays a role in recognizing if one is Indian or not based on a 'level of Indian blood' in a person. In the discourse of our respondents there appeared to be a dialectical tension in reference to the U.S. government's recognition of what constitutes an Indian. One interviewee (AI, M) thought the U.S. government created a "controversy" between the full bloods and half bloods in a sort of "haves" and "have nots" type of categorization. Conversely, (AI, F1) remarked that as a benefit of being a full blood Indian, she could request and had received the remains of an eagle from the U.S. government for use in native rituals (pp. 31-32). Carbaugh's (1996) reference to the U.S. government's assumption that they can decide who is an Indian, creates a split and a resentment amongst Indians. This split could affect how full bloods and half bloods communicate with one another, and could cause inter-group dissention and discrimination. This is an area

that needs to be further examined in scholarly literature and popular discourse.

The communication of identity is important to our study of American Indians. Carbaugh (1996) describes the “vantage points” of both how one lives their life and the internal identity of “being” a biological Indian as communication. In the description of “the cultural agent,” Carbaugh (1996) allows for individuality within a cultural stratum. Indians regard themselves as a part of a whole and that whole includes both the tribe and the earth. It is in the earth’s sacred status that necessarily links them with what is fundamentally spiritual. The constant re-enactment of that link is accomplished as they interact with the environment. Animals can be considered kin, brothers or sisters. Elements of nature also have the status of kin as in the examples of Grandfather Sky and Grandmother Earth (Lame Deer, Erdoes, 1972).

Carbaugh (1996) describes cultural “communication form” in terms of symbolizing form including: rituals, myths, social dramas. The “symbols of identity” in the Indian culture are powerful but not necessarily recognized, and even less understood, by white U.S. Americans; such communication acts may be

silence, dreams, visions, and daily individual and communal rituals.

Carbaugh (1996) examines cultural identity and the myriad ways it can be communicated and enacted. This is extremely important in relation to the cultural group we are studying because their ways of communicating, performing rituals, etc. in the course of enacting cultural identity may sharply diverge from those of dominant, mainstream U.S. society. Different ways of communicating need to be recognized and honored. Also, outside factors that influence identity need to be considered such as government policies, environment, biology, psychology, and social-structural.

The Indian's harmony with nature theme appears in Carbaugh's (1995, 1998) articles. Both of these articles incorporate the primal significance of silence as a communicative form, indigenous to American Indians, uncomfortable (if not actually foreign) to white U.S. Americans. Silence and "listening" to nature is paramount to understanding Indian communication. It is through silence and listening that one enters into the ritual of daily life communication.

Our interviewees stressed their connection and harmony with nature as well. Two of our interviewees told stories about communicating with animals, a theme that was also exhibited by Carbaugh (1998), “my grandparents taught me: The people lived in harmony with nature. The animals were able to speak” (p. 161). Silence in this realm was reinforced as a means of communication by our interviewees.

Storytelling as a mode of discourse to teach and explain Indian values and beliefs was a concept we found in our research, and evidenced in Carbaugh’s (1995) research as well. For example, Carbaugh (1995) tells of a speech event between an “old man” and a “visitor” in which the old man tells a story to teach a lesson: “It is important and curious to remember that everything we two-leggeds know about being human, we learned from the four-leggeds, the animals and birds, and everything else in the universe...All these creatures and beings out here talk...Even today. They told our ancestors a lot” (p. 14). The theme of “interconnectedness” between all beings and nature was one that was amply displayed by Carbaugh (1995, 1998), and reinforced by our interviewees discourse. Additionally, storytelling as a mode of discourse to explain concepts and beliefs such as connection with

harmony, nature, and fellow humans was prevalent in our interviewees' discourse.

Valaskakis (1993) also illustrates the relevance of storytelling in Indian culture by explaining that "Indian stories are more than a window on identity. We actually construct who we are in discourse" (pp. 285-286). Valaskakis further demonstrates the power of the Indian connection to earth and nature as well as the storytelling influence in the Indian culture. "Native culture is living traditionalism," invoking the oral tradition, and that "oral traditions of people who are native to this land are a form of discourse that connects them to the land and to the generations that have gone before (Robin Ridington, 1990, p. 290, in Valaskakis, 1993)." This quote encapsulates the theme both of the oral tradition and its integral connection to the earth. Valaskakis' succinct description, "It is the land—real and imagined, lived in heritage and current political process, and expressed in discourse—which constitutes the connection between nature and culture for Indians" (p. 291).

Another literature finding which mirrored our research results, is the theme of living in two worlds, as relayed by Carbaugh (1998), "so today I use my Indian ways to help me communicate in the White man's world and travel through it"

(p. 163). This theme was a prevalent aspect with our respondents, and how they negotiated their daily life, particularly in an urban setting.

Wieder and Pratt (1990) conversely found that “doing or being Indian” could only be done in the presence of other Indians. This finding was not shared by our respondents’ construction of Indian identity in an urban environment. Our respondents found they needed their Indian way of being to balance what is deficient in the modern world. They managed this without being in close proximity to cultural group members.

One communication style Wieder and Pratt discuss is an Indian’s reticence with regard to interaction with strangers (1990). They state that Indians typically do not even speak with strangers much less share intimate life details.

One piece of literature that aptly reinforced our interviewees’ experiences is by Erdoes (1972) who wrote a book about John (Fire) Lane Deer, a Sioux Indian, storyteller, rebel and medicine man. Lane Deer asked Erdoes (1972) to write his story for his people in an effort to clear up many misconceptions about Indians and their practices. The hope was to replace those misconceptions with an understanding of their unique culture,

whose wisdom Lame Deer felt was just coming to be understood, respected and needed. This literature was particularly relevant in our study since learning more about, and understanding, the Indian culture was a primary motivation for doing this research. Also, perhaps one of the reasons our respondents generously participated in this project was to teach more about their culture to promote greater understanding and better communication amongst different cultural groups. As (*AI, M) states, “my mom says, that I’m the teacher of all the kids. I even teach other ethnic groups: African Americans, Anglos, Orientals, Asians, I always tell them, ‘hey this is how our culture is, and it’s kind of similar to what you guys do too’” (p. 5). This quote illustrates the interconnectedness theme, which appears in the literature and the discourse of our respondents. The Indian teaching that we’re all connected even though our practices may be different, the lesson being one should not discriminate against another for being different offers the lesson that one should not discriminate against another for being different.

Lame Deer explains that Indians take part in individual and communal rituals that communicate and comprise their daily lives. He elaborates on a number of different Indian rituals, all of which

incorporate nature. There is a constant energy interchange between earth life and Indians where the Indians draw energies from the earth and return those energies back to the earth (Lame Deer, Erdoes, 1972). “we give back to the earth – that’s why we plant...you take from the earth and you have to give back to the earth” (*AI, M, p. 4). We also saw evidence of daily rituals in the lives of two of our respondents in practices such as burning sage every morning, and offering a bit of food to the spirits at every meal.

Offering a bit of food is giving the spirits a gift. Gift giving, Lame Deer tells us, is an Indian tradition, “but we hold onto our ‘otuhan’ our give-aways, because they help us to remain Indians” (p. 40). The idea of giving, as an Indian way of being, also emerged during our interviews. The Indian culture is not a materialistic one; it is a culture that practices sharing with others, “if you share your food with others, this good spirit will always stay around” (Erdoes, 1972, p. 40).

Erdoes’ (1972) portrayal of Lame Deer’s experiences reinforced many of our findings in this research study. Although written in the late 1960s, it illuminates many real life practices of

Indians still enacted today and the experiences of our interviewees in an urban, modern setting, whether full bloods or non-full bloods.

Methodology

The primary means of collecting data was through qualitative interviews. Respondents were recruited through various networking techniques. To distinguish our respondents from those who live on reservations, we categorize the participants as living in urban settings. Two women and one man between the ages of 25-40 were recruited as respondents. The AIM (American Indian male) worked as an Indian artist and as a skilled tradesman. AIF1 (American Indian female 1) was employed in a professional position. Finally, AIF2 (American Indian female 2) was a student near completion of her Bachelor's degree. AIF1 was affiliated with Cheyenne and Arapaho nations. The AIM1 identifies with Apache and Navaho tribes, and AIF2 is connected to the Seneca tribe.

The process of data analysis and interpretation follows a hermeneutical approach. Given that our overall research question was to find out how American Indians learn about, construct, communicate, and perpetuate their cultural identity, we reviewed over one hundred pages of initial interview data and looked for

discourse examples that answered our research question. After an exhaustive review of the data we identified twenty emergent themes. However, we realized that many of the themes overlapped one another. Therefore, we further examined the data and renamed some of the themes to be more inclusive. We then went back to the data to find the best examples within the refined ten or so themes that emerged that would illustrate our respondents' views, voices, and attitudes in how they construct their cultural identity. The quotes we extracted from the data evidence our interpretations and results. We then went again to our respondents confirm or deny our interpretations in a second interview. (See Appendix A.) From that information we modified our original findings.

Results/Interpretation

Each of our respondents is an individual comprised of many different identities (for example, parent, sibling, daughter/son, worker, student, male, female, United States citizen, and American Indian). We acknowledge that some of these identities may intersect and even cause tension. We also acknowledge that three individuals cannot speak for or wholly represent a diverse cultural group such as American Indians. In this

research project, we focused on how each of these individuals learn, construct, communicate, maintain, and perpetuate their cultural identity as American Indians. Of particular note, is the setting where each of these respondents live (the urban city of Denver) and that too will affect their cultural identity. Given our respondents' diversity and multivocality, we strove to find common bonds and/or differences that illustrate how they construct their cultural group identities; these are dynamic (vs. static) identities affected by numerous variables such as history, politics, traditions, rituals, survival, adaptation, etc. that are still in process. Collier (1994) illustrates how members of groups can demonstrate group membership, "we learn to become members of groups by learning about past members of groups, heroes, important precepts, rituals, values, and expectations of conduct. We are taught how to follow the norms of the group. In this way we perpetuate the cultural system" (p. 37).

By examining themes that emerged in this research study through the lens of the American Indians' voices, we can see some of the ways our respondents learn, construct, communicate, maintain and perpetuate their cultural identity. Some of the respondents strongly identified with the themes, while others not as

strongly or not at all, depending on the theme. The major themes were: rituals and practices; self-identification (avowal) and identity imposed others (ascription); inter-group and outer-group discrimination practices; interconnectedness/respect for nature — animals and fellow humans; mysticism/spiritualism/religious beliefs incorporated into daily life – a way of being Indian that never leaves you; teaching; storytelling as a mode of discourse; and a dialectical tension of living in two worlds, the traditional Indian way of being and life in modern society.

We thought we identified a theme we termed past/present/future link after our initial interviews, but because two out three respondents did not agree with that theme we decided it was invalid. Also, in two out of three second interviews a theme of “giving” as an Indian way of being/cultural practice emerged that we will incorporate into our modified interpretations. Discrimination was also a major issue that came up for all interviewees, but not until the second interview for the Indian male.

(AI, M) and (AI, F2) had similar responses and agreed and disagreed on the same themes during the second interview, and they both added much insight into the cultural practice of giving,

which was an emergent theme in (AI, F1)'s first interview. We developed a key to distinguish the first interview quotes from the second interview quotes. We put an * before all second interviews, and not before first interviews, for example, (AI, M, p. 2) would be a quote from the first interview on page two, and (*AI, M, p. 2) would be a quote from the second interview on page two.

Themes

The American Indians establish their cultural identity by defining themselves, "I'm an Indian and an American Indian and I'm Seneca Indian" (AI, F2, p. 1), "I identify myself as Cheyenne and Arapaho" (AI, F1, p. 1), "I grew up Indian and Chicano too and I'm actually Apache and Navaho, but those names we got from other tribes. Our real name is Nide, Dine" (AI, M, p. 1). The self-descriptions (avowals) of these people assert their group identity as Indians, and more specifically, their tribal identities.

Ascription (identity imposed on cultural groups by others) is also apparent in the discourse of the American Indians, "They call us Indians cuz' they thought we were in India. So, just call us the People" (AI, M, p. 1). This example also shows how avowal and ascription are linked.

The interviewees shared stories of others' negative ascriptions or stereotypes of them based on their cultural membership. For example, one woman relayed, "and I said 'well, you know I'm Indian?' and he said, 'You are?!'...so then like after that he was like afraid to talk to me like I had a knife in my pocket or something" (AI, F2, p. 10). The interviewees preferred to identify themselves versus having others label or identify them. Another example was the male interviewee who took exception to the labels "Navaho and Apache," since "those are just names we got from other tribes" (AI, M, p. 1). He took exception to those terms since in the Zuni language where he stated that these terms originated and that the terms mean negative things like thieves. "Whether a label is created by members of the group or members of another group provides useful information about what the label means and how it is interpreted" (Collier, 1994, p. 41). Our interviewees preferred their own identifiers (Indian, American Indian, Seneca, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Nide, Dine, The People) versus others.

This theme of self-identity vs. others' imposed identity could be an indication of a power issue. "Identity and labeling have long been of concern to marginalized groups...those wielding

power have no need to define themselves as they already occupy a naturalized position” (Martin, et al., 1996, p. 128).

An interesting theme that emerged in the discourse of (*AI, M) during the second interview was a strong disagreement with the way the U.S. government identifies American Indians. This is a power issue relating to allocation of resources. Additionally, the government’s recognition of some Indians and not others creates a dissention among group members. For example, the U.S. government releases certain valuable sacred items for performing religious rituals (like eagle feathers) but only to a registered American Indian.

My brother works in D.C. in the Administration on Native Affairs...[he] sent me these applications and he said, ‘you know, you can ask for eagle parts for ceremony...All you need is to fill out this government form and to write a letter saying that you are enrolled and that you use these parts for religious purposes. (AI, F1, p. 31)

what makes you think you’re full-blooded, because you have it on paper?...That don’t mean nothing...the government their security says, ‘oh, you can’t have this feather cuz’ you’ve got to be registered to have this feather it’s an endangered species,’...every time we wanna go get our eagle feathers we have to go fill out a paper work for that. THAT AIN’T RIGHT! (*AI, M, p. 14)

I mean they are just going by the blood quantum I mean the leader of AIM you know who I know personally takes heat for not being a full blood. I

don't know if you know AIM, it's the American Indian Movement and he's here in Denver...his mom is white so even he the leader of AIM and a political leader he gets crap too. (*AI, F2, p. 8).

The U.S. government is in a powerful position deciding who gets to be considered an "official" Indian with all rights, privileges and benefits thereof. This identification and resource allocation by the U.S. government may cause a dialectical tension between the full-blooded, registered Indians, and those Indians who are not. Although Carbaugh (1996) mentions how the government decides (quantum blood level) on who is identified as Indian, neither his research nor other literature reviewed, examined how this can cause inter-group tension among Native American Indians. This is an important area for future research.

Another emergent theme we found was the use of rituals and practices. Pow wows were mentioned by each of the recipients, some of whom participated more often than others. "I did partake in a couple of Pow Wows where I was asked to be a head dancer. Again, still maintaining that culture, a traditional part of my dancing that I was taught as a little girl" (AI, F1, p. 6). Participation in rituals like Pow Wows can be a powerful way for American Indians to connect and communicate with one another,

particularly for those group members living in an urban setting, “modern Pow Wows now are for everybody to meet each other to show that we’re still alive, ya know, that we still know our culture” (AI, M, p. 17).

There were numerous other rituals and practices that communicated cultural identity for our respondents. Although there is not enough space to list them all, here is a small sample.

I am a pipe carrier, and once a month, you purify your pipe and I do offer special prayers to my pipe (AI, F1, p. 25)

It’s like they were praying, cuz’ they would dance from that night ‘til the morning praying and sweating, and sweating, cuz’ one you sweat you’re purifying your insides...so it was kind of like a healing dance. See all of our dances are kind of like either body healing or mind healing or for giving thanks to something. (AI, M, p. 16)

I was looking for some healing myself and so I decided that I would start Sun Dancing and so I just finished my fourth year this past summer. (AI, F1, p.7)

Peyote, it’s like a part of the cactus, cacti. It’s used to like open your mind to teach you what you’re supposed to do. Like ah, it’s like ah, visionary. I don’t do that often, but I’ve done it before...on the Rez. (AI, M, p. 4)

Cutting our hair in mourning...it’s a sign of grief. And then, we go through a year of abstinence from dancing. It’s a year of mourning. (AI, F1, p. 29)

It appeared that (AI, M) and (AI, F1) practiced more traditional Indian rituals than did (AI, F2). However, “giving” was mentioned by (AI, F2) and the other respondents as an Indian way of being.

See in Indian culture giving is almost a competitive sport. (*AI, F2, p. 5)

My grandmother was really admiring my jacket so...I gave her my jacket and she looked at me and she just practically started crying...that's how I respect my elders. (AI, F1, p. 21)

That's the way we do – we give. We always give to each other...Even when we have a blanket dance or a Give-Away, or give things to other people that are being recognized it's something like gratitude or appreciating. (*AI, M, p. 3)

Another theme we found was the prevalent role of storytelling in the discourse of our respondents. Additionally, stories emerged that included multiple themes. For example, stories could simultaneously display respect for animals, harmony with nature, mysticism/spiritualism, and the importance of teaching and learning in the American Indian culture:

We believe that a long time ago animals and people could talk to each other and that as man got farther away from nature he lost the ability to understand the animals but animals are very important and we respect every animal as being equally important to every person...I mean animals give up their lives to sustain us then you ought to be grateful for that so

ah then I try to teach my kids like its wrong to kill animals and then waste parts. (AI, F2, p. 19-20)

We don't hunt the antelope, because the antelope showed our ancestors a long, long, time ago where the water was at, just showed them a lot of different things to do, to learn from. Plus, there's a story that comes from that is because there was a person in the tribe, a lady, she was chasing after an antelope, and when she seen that antelope, she ran towards the antelope, and it jumped in four rings, it jumped in four rings and turned into a man, and she took that man to come live with her. (AI, M, p. 20).

I was supposed to tell a story to my class and I don't really know what to tell them. And so my mother told me the story of Devil's Tower...And how the beautiful girl was taken by the bear and her brothers went after her and, so in order for them to escape the bear, one of the brothers started praying and the ground rose up and so the claw marks that are all along the side are from the bear that was trying to get to them at the top of the mountain...then they didn't know how to come down off of this mountain that is 300 feet up in the air so they ended up going up into the heavens and coming out as the Big Dipper. (AI, F1, p. 34)

In the discourse of the American Indians there appeared to be a dialectical tension for practicing traditional ways of being Indian, while balancing life in modern day society. We termed this dialectical tension the "two worlds" theme.

It's just as difficult for me to go back into my community. People look at me and say, "Well, who do you think that you are? You're not in the community and you're doing this and you're not living here and you don't know what it's like..." (AI, F1, p. 13)

I'd rather not live in the white world which I define as US consumerism, and individualistic ah culture...and just be in our own indigenous culture I would prefer that, but as you know with our global economy...that's becoming everyday a more and more remote possibility even in our own country. (*AI, F2, pp. 3-4)

(In reference to Indians living on "The Rez) They even live it everyday. We live it every day too. We live two ways. I live two ways. I have an Indian way I live, that I believe, and then I live like going to work everyday like every modern person. (AI, M, p.23)

The American Indians displayed through talk that they live in two worlds simultaneously, the traditional Indian world, and the modern American world. We see the "Two Worlds" theme illustrated by Lame Deer as well, "I have to be two persons living in two worlds. I don't like it but I can't help it" (p. 42). This balancing act is easier for some group members than others. Whether it is easy or difficult, it is apparent that this two world way of living permeates our respondents' daily lives.

Greeting the dawn. Dawn prayers are very powerful. I pray daily and as far as purification, when I feel like I feel the need, I'll smoke sweetgrass. Then, again, once a month, I am a pipe carrier, and once a month, you purify your pipe and I do offer special prayers to my pipe (AI, F1, p. 25)

Every morning I smudge myself and pray every morning. (AI, M, p.23)

That's [spiritualism and mysticism] something I try to carry on all the time, it's not something I have to go to church to do. (AI, F2, p. 19)

What I do everyday and it's become a really big habit and I don't even notice it but other people do is that, I offer my food, before, when I'm cooking something, or if I'm out eating, before I jump into my hamburger or whatever, and I'll take a little piece of it and I make an offer to the spirits (AI, F1, p. 30)

Regarding Indian Culture, I always talk about it every day even. (AI, M, p. 31)

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was each respondents' reference to the forceful loss of ancestral language. The issue of language is one of power and history that affected and still affects American Indians today. The shared history of the people was communicated through themes of persecution of the American Indian people depicted by lost language.

...it's like persecuted because back then if you were to speak that language that my great grand father and grandmother told their kids and told us that would pass on to they used to like hit them – like the churches – and not to talk like that and to talk Spanish or English. (AI, M, pp. 3-4)

There's been very few Indians who were able to pass on their language because of the boarding schools and so forth and the attempts to acculturate Indians and the language was made illegal and forbidden and many people abandoned the language and most Indian people don't speak their native language and there's many attempts to preserve the language. (AI, F2, p.2)

My father was of the generation where he went to boarding school and his language was forced out of him. (AI, F1, p. 2)

I got from dad one word and I used to think everybody knew this word...since we know that culture's carried in language and we know that...all that was (pause) systematically through government policy taken away from people. (AI, F2, p. 25-6)

The shared history of the Native Americans interviewed displayed not only the loss of language and persecution of a cultural group, but also how that shared history stemmed from reinforcement from elders for two out of three respondents to always identify themselves as Indians.

My grandpa would get all us kids together, and say, "Come here, you little Indians." And show us how to dance, things like that, give us money, tell us, "Don't ever let anyone tell you you're not an Indian." Even though your last name, you have a Hispanic last name, that name was given to us because what happened in our past. (AI, M, p. 40)

...my parents, always I remember being raised and being told, "You are an American Indian. You are a person." and that was here when colonization occurred. And you are native to this land. (AI, F1, p. 3)

One area where there was much multivocality between respondents was the issue of silence as a way of communicating. Both of the women respondents mentioned that it was an Indian way of communicating. The male respondent mentioned silence as

a way of communicating with nature. He described his interpersonal way of communicating as strongly verbal, however, “Well I fitted in with everybody because I was a talkative person I always liked everybody” (AI, M, p. 5). He was quite eloquent and talked at length on a number of issues often telling interesting stories in the process of trying to explain concepts. The literature also repeatedly mentions silence as an Indian way of communicating.

Another theme that speaks to the question of how American Indians perpetuate their culture was found in how they teach their children.

I don't force my kids into it, but I'll show 'em every day about Indian ways of being. So, that's what'll keep them, oh yeah, I remember when my dad used to do that – and this is how you do it. (AI, M, p. 10)

...so spirituality and Indian people especially traditional Indian people is extremely important ...every person is responsible for their own relationship to the well, the great spirit or the great mystery or the great creator and that every person's responsible for that relationship themselves and ah that um you know—so I try to teach that to my kids too. (AI, F2, p. 18)

teaching the kids about the wilderness, teaching them ya know all the stuff how to make things with your hands by scratch, using your mind, ah, another thing I believe in to, is just trying to teaching my kids too, I have a hard with that, is teaching them Self-Healing. (AI, M, p. 8)

I think what I would reinforce in my children is that I would try to teach them the language. To me that would be most important. (AI, F1, p. 11)

I'm here to teach the kids and teach other people too, about who I am or what we believe in, so that's what I'm here for. (AI, M, p. 28)

Given the above emergent themes and discourse of American Indians, we found a multitude of ways these individuals learn, construct, communicate and perpetuate their cultural identities. This is seen in such practices as: attending and participating in Pow Wows; learning from elders what it means to be a group member: teaching about their culture; silence as a means of communicating, enacting spiritual and religious beliefs in their everyday lives; using storytelling to explain and perpetuate cultural beliefs, attitudes and values; practicing traditions such as sweats, dancing, and ceremonies; strong self-avowal of identity vs. others ascription/imposing of identity; and respecting nature, animals, and fellow human beings as an aspect of cultural values.

The American Indians interviewed were found to have strong traditional beliefs such as spiritualism, which influenced many themes that emerged in the discourse. It was difficult to group the quotes into themes since so much of the discourse could fall under the heading of a multitude of themes. However, given

the recurrent themes across all six interviews, we are confident that our research question was answered in how our respondents' learn, construct, maintain and perpetuate their cultural identities as American Indians.

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