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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study drew on the stories and reflections of six Appalachian women of Native American descent to explore their experiences of reconnecting with their lost Native identity. This paper visualizes those experiences in light of the relationships between personal realities and structural influences. Historically, Native identities have been fragmented and cultural heritage has been lost through several avenues: (1) systematic cultural genocide, primarily carried out in government boarding schools; (2) denial of identity as a means of survival; (3) emotional impact of negative stereotypes and stigmatization; (4) high incidence of Native Americans marrying out of their ethnic group; (5) removal of Native children from their families to be adopted by non-Native parents; and (6) loss of federal recognition of tribal status. In the past 30 years, there has been a great increase in the number of people identifying as Native American, reclaiming lost heritage and reconstructing Native identities. Interviews with the six research participants revealed common themes among their experiences. These themes included family secrecy about the Native blood in the family, personal discovery of Native identity by "piecing together" bits of family history, feelings of loss and sadness, anger and frustration, alienation from both White and Native communities, and moving from shame to ethnic pride. Reestablishing Native identity was not related to federal recognition, but rather to a commitment to Native ways and beliefs. (Contains 30 references.) (SV)

Fragmenting and Reconstructing Identity: Struggles of Appalachian Women Attempting To Reconnect to Their Native American Heritage

Linda Burcham Trollinger

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FRAGMENTING AND RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY: STRUGGLES OF APPALACHIAN WOMEN ATTEMPTING TO RECONNECT TO THEIR NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE[1]

Linda Burcham Trollinger

INTRODUCTION

The person we become or evolve into is deeply defined by external forces that surround us, as well as our ethnic group of origin; our very identity is a social construction from the [1]messages we receive from family, peers, institutions and society, in general. We are molded and confined within certain boundaries, according to social indicators that we possess, such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and so on; these restrictions of society directly impact the individual's self concept both on a person level, as well as a group level. This socially imposed construction of identity can wreak havoc on self-esteem, opportunity, and equality for certain groups of people; it has also become a basis for stereotypes, discrimination, injustice and even physical harm for many. What of people who grew up with a Native American identity in past generations, but because of government policies or other circumstances, have either lost or been denied that identity? What of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren now, who may want to reconnect to their People and culture? What would prompt Appalachian women to want to identify as "Indian" and step into a minority status? How does one reconstruct a lost identity or does it remain lost to them, except through family stories? This exploratory research looks at some of these questions by allowing the experiences of Appalachian women of Native American descent to be visualized in relationships between personal realities and structural influences.

The loss and/or denial of one's ethnic identity, in particular Native American identity, has resulted from multiple factors, yet has had a lasting impact on descendants as they struggle to find their own place. Important factors that have contributed to identity fragmentization are reflected in the struggles to reclaim that identity and, as well, the political and socioeconomic implications that could affect Native nations.

It is relatively easy to conceive how one's identity could be significantly affected by family, peers and group associations; it is somewhat more difficult to conceptualize the extent

[1] This research was funded in part by the Lois Bennett Shin research Grant and the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia as part of my Master's thesis at Marshall University.

that strangers and institutions affect individuals. For Native Americans, the last five hundred years have been a time of struggle, which intensified dramatically in the 1700's and 1800's; government policies have fueled both institutional and individual discrimination, not to mention hatred and violence against Native peoples. Social determinants are the "invisible hands" that allow fluidity across nature, time, region, familial upbringing and culture, yet at the same time, they create restrictive parameters for behavior and interaction. Harsh conditions imposed on Native people have caused me to question some of the factors that have contributed to the clash of these two worlds and how social issues have combined to haunt Native peoples for generations.

RESEARCH METHODS

The importance and impact of ethnic identity in the lives of these women can be most accurately explored in a qualitative research design, through their own personal stories and experiences. A qualitative method provides an ontological framework for understanding the perceptions that these respondents have encountered, that otherwise, might have been missed with other methodological approaches (Babbie, 1995, 283). Because of concerns of process and how people understand or conceptionalize their lives and experiences, a qualitative design offers each participant the opportunity to examine and tell her story as she perceives it.

The participants represent a diverse group of six Appalachian women, varying in age from 36 to 59 that come from a variety of professions and family settings; the one commonality is that they all share a family history of Native descent. None of these women are federally recognized. This study utilizes a phenomenological research tradition, the intent of which is to construct a holistic understanding while giving "voice to lived experiences." The limitations of this type of research are the accessibility and availability of participants, as well as the tremendous time element that is required to conduct interviews and comprehensive analysis, thereby limiting the number of interviews that can be conducted or for making generalizations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Key to understanding these women's current situation lies in a historical context of how and why an identity could be lost. What was the reason behind this cultural clash? How could social forces contribute to the loss of ethnic identity? What motivates one to feel that he or she has to deny who he or she is? How does a person deconstruct one identity and create another one? What are the psychological and personal consequences that result from such? What if their

descendants want to reclaim that identity? What struggles must be overcome to regain their ethnic heritage?

Because of dominant-subordinate nature of Anglo-Native relationships, Native people have been place in a minority status, both in number and social definition by the dominant society which controls the power, resources, and standards of a society (Hess, Stein & Farrell, 2001). A common theme is the analysis of power: the dominant group over the minority group which often results in alienation for those who confront barriers to resources, education, jobs and other opportunities. Interaction between Native and non-Native peoples has been deeply rooted in an ethnocentric view; Native culture, practices and beliefs were not understood and were compared to the European or Euro-American standards.

It is doubtful that any group in this country's history has undergone such dramatic changes in everyday life as the Native American. From the time of Anglo contact, the historic way of life was turned upside down—every aspect changed. As a result, social forces have had a direct and dramatic impact on not only Native life but also on Native identity, via the impact of diseases, bounties, policies of both physical and cultural genocide, and brutal population transfers/removals (Jackson, 1994). Life as they knew it was forever changed; policies and laws were put into place to civilize, Christianize and educate the Indian. Native Americans were subjected to a process of fragmentization.

NATIVE IDENTITY AND FRAGMENTIZATION

Whereas most ethnic identity is based on shared cultural markers, Native Americans are different; there is also a blood component that has been mandated (by the federal government and implemented in varying degrees by tribal nations) in order to be "recognized" as Native American and to share in certain federal economic disbursements. Native peoples are the only people of this country who have to prove their identity, based on biological determinism. This is one reason many people are deeply involved with genealogical research to find legal documentation to address the question of Native identity. This definitive policy has resulted in friction between people of Native ancestry who have differing blood quantum percentages, and also affects one's economic situation, such as eligibility for certain tribal services, selling art/craft work as Native American, etc. Again, this comes back to the obsession that this country seems to have with the issue of race, which is socially constructed. Ethnicity is present, whether one chooses to, is conscious, of or is able to embrace it.

Self-identity cannot be easily separated from ethnic identity for many people, especially Native Americans, who struggle daily to preserve their language and traditions. For Native peoples, ethnic identity is a way of life and the connection to that identity is so strong that for many the loss of that identity or ability to practice that way of life carries serious emotional, spiritual, and physical consequences (Worchel, et al. 1999). Thus, identity becomes very important to Native people for emotional well-being, and is significantly impacted by social forces in the messages that are projected by dominant society (Feldman, 1995).

Native American identity development begins with the core of beliefs and values held by that particular nation; on that is added the dramatic changes that resulted from Anglo contact, plus the images that society holds regarding Native peoples. Native identity formation is tied to both psychological, as well as sociological, factors that combine to produce an individual's personality and self-schema, encompassing an individual's attitudes, motives, outlooks, behaviors and emotions"(Morris, 1993, 472). It is a way of life that permeates every aspect of existence (Weigert, 1986). It is all encompassing; it places the People in the larger context with the Creator and creation and recognizes the human connection to all things in creation. The belief of interconnectedness and interdependence is central in a "sense of personhood that includes the ancestors, those yet unborn, nature and community" and provides a "holistic understanding and appreciation of their culture and their history, unifying with all humankind and with all life." (Myers, et al, 1991, 54-63; Dunn, 1998)).

Several avenues have contributed to Native identity fragmentation and loss of connection to their ethnic heritage: (1) systematic cultural genocide, (2) denial of ethnicity (3) stigma attached to being Indian, (4) marrying out (5) adopting-out or stolen children, and the (6) loss of federal recognition of tribal nation. While there are undoubtedly other considerations, focus of this paper will be restricted to the discussion of these six elements.

Cultural Genocide. Every facet of the culture came under attack. Although most profound events occurred around the time of colonial settlement and following the Removal period of the 1830s to the 1860s, similar attitudes and actions have continued. Wall (1993) conducted numerous interviews with Native people who recounted personal experiences, such as jail time or denied rations as a result of continued observance of traditional spiritual practices that had been outlawed, punishment (sometime violent) for speaking their language at school, and often told that they were no good. Many Native children were taken from their homes and

placed in boarding schools, resocialized into the acceptable white society; as a result, self-esteem and identity were stripped away, often leaving them alienated in white society and insecure in Native society (Billam, 1995). The changes in daily life that resulted from removal and containment affected family roles and caused dramatic changes in the husband-wife interaction. "The negative impact of contact with whites did not become manifest until the 1950's when especially high rates of social pathology emerged in the form of suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse, fatal accidents, divorce, domestic violence and murder" (Billam, , 65). It was not until this time that the consequences of this cultural genocide became recognized by the larger society. "Modernization has taken its toll on the identity of men, who discovered the equally important and meaningful work outside the home did not replace their traditional role." (Billam, 1995, 67). Besides the Removals and cultural assault upon Indian ways, the Relocation program in the 1940's and 50s, scattered many families from their reservation homes into urban areas, uprooting them even further (Russell, 1997).

Denial of Identity. Tribal identity often creates barriers to opportunity and acts as a catalyst for prejudice and discrimination; the extent of sanctions imposed by society often determines one's ability or willingness to embrace one's ethnic identity or to deny or conceal that identity as much as possible. This is done for a variety of reasons—to access certain privileges or opportunities, to escape discrimination, and for the protection of life, family and home. For those facing the Removal in the 1800s, survival was a key consideration; those who could, hid or tried to escape. If they were successful, it often became a necessity to keep that identity secret; that meant they had to deny who they were and to construct a new identity by passing for something other than Indian. This "deconstructing," a process of undoing a tradition or way of life and replacing it with another, results in a "splintering of self" to achieve one's purpose (Shotter & Gergen, 1989, 10). The possibility of a new beginning brought an end to a way of life and traditions; the values and traditions that did survive did so in the confines of secrecy. For many who were Indian that identity became something that was no longer talked about openly.

Stigma of Being Indian. Because of the negative connotation often associated with Native identity, it is important to examine how external factors, such as stereotypes, often contribute to the formation of an unhealthy self-concept and how one's self-esteem can be impacted. Self concept is a "personal sense" of identity and impacts one's self-esteem.

Textbooks and media have done much to further damage the self-esteem of Native people through the negative stereotypes and misinformation that has been printed and portrayed in movies. Hollywood movies, especially in the past, often portrayed Indian people as drunk, speaking only in monosyllable language, being violent and unintelligent (Billam, 1995). "Indianness has been defined by whites for many years. Always, they have been outside observers looking into Indian society from a self-made pedestal of preconceived ideas, coupled with an innate superior attitude toward those different from themselves" (Deloria, 1969, 259).

The effects of such external influences can be far-reaching. It is difficult for someone to have a positive opinion of himself/herself if he/she are constantly receiving criticism and ridicule and being the target of psychological abuse. "The impact of one's self esteem on one's general adjustment and overall quality of life cannot be minimized....low self-esteem may also impact negatively on the values one holds and on one's ability to genuinely love, like, or accept other people" (Cohen, 1994, 267 The interrelatedness of self-concept, self-esteem and identity form a progressional effect: a poor self-concept can lead to low self-esteem, which in turn negatively affects the construction of one's identity. Juanita Centeno (Chumash) shares the following, " Only when you are in our shoes can you know how hard it is to walk out that door. When we go to the store, to the drug store, to the grocery store, people around here say. I wish those damn Indians would get out of that reservation. It looks awful. I feel the pain, I pretend that I'm even, not even Indian. I buy things quick and get out of there" (Wall, 1993, 32). She also talks about when she was in school, "The white kids would beat us up because they thought we didn't have a feeling; we were animals from the hills. They put an outside toilet for us. They didn't let us use the white kids' bathroom. They put a trough for us to wash our hands. They put a faucet outside for us" (Wall, 1993, 44).

Emotional well-being for Native peoples is often related to the closeness they have with their heritage. Those who identify more strongly with their ethnicity may have higher self-esteem in one respect, but may experience increased prejudice and discrimination because of it (Howard, 2000; Schaefer, 1995). Those who experience cultural confusion often encounter feelings of "alienation, uprootedness, and depression" and which contributes to "sharp rises in drug and alcohol abuse, even suicide rates" (Cohen, 1994, 163).

Marrying Out. Native Americans have a very high incidence rate of marrying someone from outside their ethnic category; it is estimated by some to be as high as seventy percent

(Wright, 1993, 46-47). Two points of consideration surface. Why do such a high number of Native people marry outside their group? What of the children of those marriages? There is concern that this enormity of exogamy will result in a further loss of culture and traditions among the nations. From the non-Native mate selection, there is the whole issue of mixed-blood children and if they should also marry-out, the blood quantum is quickly reduced. That, coupled with the degree of assimilation, is behind Hawk Littlejohn's phrase, "brown-skinned whites" (Littlejohn, 1975, 277).

Adopting Out or Stolen Children. Up until the late 1970's, it was a common practice for Indian children to be "adopted out" to non-Native families. There were also many Indian children who were stolen from cars or hospitals and placed into adoption agencies or private adoptions. This brings to the forefront the many people who are struggling to make a connection to their ethnic heritage or those Native children who were adopted out to non-Native families that want to reconnect with their people, sometimes referred to as Split Feathers. In a paper on violence and vulnerability, Goldstein and Goldstein cited that 25-35% of all Indian children experienced separation from their families as a result of adoption or placement; most were placed in non-Native homes. "In the state of Minnesota, for example...during the year 1971-1972, nearly one in every four [Indian] infants under one year of age was placed for adoption—an adoption rate eight times that of non-Indian children" (Goldstein & Goldstein, 1994). For those struggling to reconnect to their heritage, there are many losses: loss of Indian identity; loss of family, culture, heritage, language, spiritual beliefs, tribal affiliation and the loss of tribal ceremonial experience and the anguish of growing up knowing they are different. In a 1986 report from the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) American Indian adults trying to discover their tribal roots; every member of the participant group reported psychological problems that often negatively impacted their lives. They used words like depressed, hurt, confused, angry, frustrated, alienated, etc., and several admitted the abuse of alcohol and/or drugs to help deal with their feelings.

Any form of tribal identity of these children was removed from their records; they were only identified as "Indian." To meet the tribal affiliation or federal recognition requirements today, you must know the tribal nation. Many nations require the tribal entity to be listed on the birth certificate; this closes the door for many Indian children to ever be able to make a legal connection to his/her tribal nation. For those children who were obtained illegally, additional

care was taken to prevent the possible tracing. Many Native children who have grown into adulthood know they are Indian, but they have no idea of their tribal nation or their ancestors' names. This practice of adopting out Native children to non-Native families ended with the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978; that legislation gives first consideration to the extended family, then to other Native families and then, only as a last resort, to a non-Native family. While this will prevent future problems, there are thousands from before 1978 that are still looking to reconnect to their true identity.

Loss of Federal Tribal Recognition. This phenomenon is often overlooked and misunderstood by people outside the Native community. The loss of federal recognition for a tribal nation or group of people, is dictated by the federal government; therefore, the ability to legally identify as a particular group may not be possible because the government ceases to recognize their existence. At the time of Removal, some Indian people were given the option of remaining in their homeland if they met certain criteria. Often, as it was the Ottawa remaining in Michigan, federal recognition was extended only to those who were removed to Indian Country. It has only been in the 1990s that they have regained federal recognition. Other tribal entities, such as the Delaware and the Loyal Shawnee lost their federal recognition by being placed under the auspices of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

For those who have experienced fragmentization, some degree of reforming must take place: it is indeed complex with a multiplicity of influencing factors that converge upon an individual and significantly influences who they becomes, how they fees about themselves and others, and how they interact with others (Worchel, 1999). This is particularly pertinent because Native peoples' holistic worldview often collides with the values of mainstream society. For Native Americans, identity is connected by both cultural and blood quantum, yet social forces, such as events, perceptions, acceptance, sanctions, etc., may strongly influence our willingness or ability to embrace that identity. The roots of our social identity origins reach deep into our past and are a focus of our present and our future.

The United States has often been referred to as a "melting pot" of many different cultural backgrounds blending into a new category, American. Great effort is made to achieve assimilation, either by force or permission. Assimilation is seen as beneficial to mainstream

society, but in what ways is it beneficial to those being assimilated? Again, this idea is Eurocentric in nature (Schaefer, 1995).

Many believe Native identity to be merely biologically based, depending upon blood quantum and genetic makeup of the individual only; for ones with distinct physical characteristics (skin type, hair type, structural features, etc.), little question is raised as to heritage. Others, who have failed to acquire these physical characteristics are often looked upon with non-acceptance by some or at the very least with suspicion. Physical characteristics are used by to place us in neat ethnic boxes so it is difficult to deny the influence others have on our self concept and identity (Worchel, 1999).

Society also directly impacted one's embracement of ethnic identity. Because of extensive assimilation and intermarrying, many Americans no longer know their country of origin or may not discover their ethnic background until later in life; ethnicity is generally perceived of as permanent and based on `facts of birth' so often the person who discovers later in life the ethnic or cultural background of their ancestors are not accepted or looked upon with suspicionKavanagh, 1996). In addition, many who do not have the physical characteristics associated with Indianness (e.g., dark hair, skin and eyes, high cheekbones, etc) also meet with doubt and unacceptance. Simply put, one may have the physical characteristics of the ethnic group, yet not embrace that identity; others may not "look the part," yet that ethnicity may be at their very core of belief.

Assimilation is ethnocentric, assuming that all people will want to discard their ethnic identities in favor of becoming "American," and while many may not be able to retain that identity with the same degree of intensity as before, they are not willing to abandon it (Schaefer, 1995; Marger, 1994). This ethnocentric perspective assumes that the United States "American" dominant mainstream is superior and that all members of ethnic groups will want to abandon their beliefs and practices to embrace those of mainstream society. Native peoples are not willing to relinquish their cultural identity in favor of the "melting pot" theory of becoming a homogenous society and let us not forget who the original people of this country were.

How much blood does it take to be considered a part of an ethnic group? Since most of us today have a have mixed ancestry of many ethnicities, how would you identify who you are? Do you identify more with one than the rest? If so, how do you choose that identity? Do you perhaps choose on the basis of physical characteristics, traditions taught in the home, or the one

who has better acceptance in society—there are a number of considerations. Today, many people of Native ancestry want to remember those things that our parents and grandparents wanted to forget or hide; this has caused many to be cut off from ethnic heritage and as a result, experience rejection and frustration (Worchel, 1999; Schaefer, 1995). The sum of these social actions and policies significantly affected the lives of individuals. Many Indian people were prevented from embracing their identity, while others chose to "pass" for another identity. In either case, the traumatic turmoil exists as one has to let go of who one has been and create a new identity, devoid of one's previous understanding and being. Anglo ways of seeing and being are dramatically different from Indian ways of seeing and being. For those making the transition from Native to white or white (or some other ethnic group) to Native carries major adjustments and considerations.

LITERATURE & MEDIA REVIEW

Native American identity has also produced a variety of opinions and perspectives surrounding the definition of Native identity, as well as reasons for the surge in the number of people identifying as Native American. In the past thirty years there has been a tremendous increase in these figures, more than can be attributed to the natural birth rate or a decrease in the death rate. What would explain this increase?

Joane Nagel (1995), a sociologist at the University of Kansas, proposes that this tripling of Native identity is a result of ethnic switching as a form of ethnic renewal and identity reconstruction. "by reclaiming a discarded identity, replacing or amending an identity in an existing ethnic identity repertoire, or by filling a personal ethnic void" (pg. 947). This can be done in numerous ways: reclaiming an identity by resuming observance, acknowledgement or practice of traditions; discovery of new information or side of one's family tree; or reconnecting to one's ethnic roots. Nagel points to three political forces that have brought about this increased "ethnic consciousness, ethnic pride, and ethnic mobilization": the "federal Indian policy, American ethnic politics and the American Indian political activism" (1995, 948). Two other influencing factors were the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty, which focused on poor urban and reservation populations. Another consideration is that as the stigma attached to being Indian decreased and the amount of government funding and land increased, more and more people were willing to identify themselves as Native American.

Lawrence Wright (1993) in his article "Rethinking the Color Line," specifically discusses the dramatic increase of people who now identify themselves as Native American; this increase is too great to be explained by biological reproduction and, therefore, becomes a matter of changing a previous identity. He notes that this same phenomenon is also present among Cajuns, which have increased 2000%, according to census records. In addition, he says there is a significant increase in the marrying-out by Native Americans -- as much as 70% marry someone from outside their ethnic group -- and that in earlier marriages between Natives and Blacks, the offspring were considered Black according to earlier census classifications (Gallagher, 1999, 58-59).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that reality is socially constructed by way of knowledge and social location and how that is internalized and becomes one's everyday reality. This is, of course, very subjective; the standpoint of social location "filters" their perspective. As one identifies with a group, the roles and attitudes are internalized as her/his own through the process of primary socialization, but can be changed by external factors (e.g., power) and is dependent upon specific social bases and processes. Identity is a key element of subjective reality and tends to be both implicit and intense; alteration to that demands a re-socialization, by which new values and norms replace those previously held thereby, providing a continuous relationship with the past.

Judith Howard focuses on both ethnic identities and deconstructing of identities and how the use of power and social processes impact those identities, whereby creating crises in the question of authenticity and self-value. She provides a comprehensive examination of theories of identity, both constructionist and deconstuctionist, and the need for analyses of the structures of everyday lives, along with both sociocultural and sociopolitical realities that directly impact individual lives. This would eliminate "a false coherence" of trying to fit ethnic realities into one neat homogenous category. (Howard, 2000, 367-93). This thought is reinforced by Sandra Harding in Whose Science, Whose Knowledge (1991, 111-113). She addresses the demands of hard data before something can be considered legitimate truth; family stories or oral histories would not be considered hard data and therefore not as reliable or important.

DATA ANALYSIS

Having listened to and re-read the transcripts of these women, certain themes have emerged; some have been consistent throughout all, some had very similar experiences with but

slight variations, while others varied according to the length they have known or begun to acknowledge that heritage. In that respect there seems to be a two-tiered development.

There were some clear patterns that emerged after extensive review of the interviews. These were themes of secrecy, discovery, loss, anger and frustration, alienation, and shame. It also became quite clear that the presence of Native American ancestry had impacted each of their lives in some way. These emerging themes sometimes differed in intensity, being either weaker or stronger depending on the length of time they had been aware of the ancestry and also if they had made a connection to and active involvement in a Native community

Secrecy. Nearly all the women shared stories of secrecy when it came to discussing the presence of Native blood in their family; similar comments emerged, which clearly said it was something that was not to be discussed. This reflected the reality for those ancestors who were able to escape the removal process by hiding and "passing" for some other identity. Because of severe consequences if that identity was revealed, it became a necessity to deconstruct their Native identity and to keep it cloaked in secrecy. The women's words revealed how well the secret was maintained. At the same time, it provided a catalyst for their research into their identity in their adulthood. Phrases like *"it was not discussed," "she did not talk about her heritage,"* and *"we don't talk about it"* were common, while others were specifically admonished to leave it alone. In contrast, the one woman whose family grew up on an Indian reserve did not report such secrecy; she has many family stories, family records and letters. For her, genealogical research had only confirmed what she had already known.

Discovery. Because the presence of Native ancestry was always discussed in a passing context and with a high degree of secrecy, it was not until they were much older that these women made a cognitive connection of that aspect of their identity. For some it emerged from those family stories, for others it was triggered by questions prompted by others, which brought them back to the stories they had heard as a child. It was at that point of cognition that their realization of Native identity moved into an active mode. Many of these women referred to this period of discovery as trying to "piece together" bits and pieces of their family history to obtain a more complete, holistic picture of their ancestors and experiences that have combined to make them who they are today.

Loss. There are many references that connected to a feeling of loss for their families, which has progressed into a multigenerational loss of family stories, traditions, as well as family

members. They expressed a sadness of this loss and how most of their family members have lost the connection to that heritage. Such feelings of loss manifest in a disconnectedness, which has caused a great many mixed blood people of today to be without a sense of belonging and not understanding why. Most of these women were raised "white" because their ancestry had been kept from them.

Anger and Frustration. A great deal of anger and frustration was expressed throughout the interviews over the difficulty of finding family records, of having been denied information and identity, and of constantly running up against stereotypes and having to defend themselves. Several of the women commented about how much emphasis is put on the stereotypical "Indian look," inferring that because they did not look Indian, then they certainly could not be. Another point of frustration is that the historical documents, if they can be located, do not have the information, necessary for tribal affiliation. This caused a lot of frustration for those who are trying "to prove" who they are through legal documentation. This was a very strong thread that was interwoven in every woman's interview. Such anger and frustration often generated a sense of insecurity, as reflected in the above quotes. Despite having oral stories and photographs of relatives, they were often excluded (at least initially) for not having documentation or not having the phenotypical characteristics associated with being Indian.

Alienation. Paralleled the anger and frustration, alienation was also a common reference. Some spoke of alienation in terms of the difficulty in making entry into the Native community or with difficulties experienced by their children in trying to fit in with schoolmates. It was also discussed in terms of psychological trauma of being separated from other Native people and that interaction. Other feelings of alienation centered around the issue of physical looks and being traditional. There appeared to be several layers of alienation that they encountered and had to deal with on a regular basis, which mirrored the difficulty of walking in two worlds, and often not totally accepted in one or the other, or in both. Some of the women talked about how difficult it was to make that connection to the Native community and to become accepted, yet there was the element of alienation from the dominant Anglo community if you have a strong Native identity. Alienation often generated an emotional turmoil, which becomes exacerbated by trying to walk in two very different cultural worlds.

Shame and Stigma. This was discussed in two different contexts: the degree of shame which reference the need for secrecy within their families and the degree of stigma that has been

perpetuated by textbooks and media that promote negative stereotypes and prejudice. These have combined to have a significant impact on self-esteem and self-concept. The shame and stigma that was present in many of their childhood homes was a strong thread throughout the interviews, although most of these women have been able to dramatically move away from it and to find a fairly high degree of pride related to their Native ancestry. As the level of stigma has declined, there has been a resurgence in people wanting to reclaim their Native heritage, as well as prompting many of these women to want to ask questions that they were previously denied.

None of these women placed any great importance on obtaining federal recognition, although they indicated it would provide a formal link. Half of these women have made a connection to Native communities. They have become accepted and very active in the community without having federal recognition or tribal affiliation. They have visibility in that community on a regular basis, work on projects, and promote Native culture and awareness. All of the women made references that this knowledge of Native identity, in terms of knowing their ancestors, their stories and to give voice and respect to them and their experiences, has influenced their personal perspective or professional activities.

DISCUSSION

The knowledge of Native ancestry in these family histories has been passed down through oral tradition, one generation to another. While oral tradition has always been at the very core of Native life, many people perceive it to be less accurate; it is rather believed that something has to be written down or recorded in some way to be true or validated. Recently, there has been a focus on oral history collections to present a more inclusive record of experiences, particularly of members of oppressed groups whose realities lie outside mainstream considerations. Much of what these women, and many others experience, is a direct result of decisions that were made generations ago by their ancestors or policies that impacted Native life, reflective of what Karen Warren refers to as emotional intelligence (2000,111)

Contemporary nations face concerns of a surge of people who identify as Native because of a need to preserve traditions and ceremonies, as well as concern over the small amount of financial resources available to them. There are the descendents of today, many who want to reclaim that Native connection, yet face a combination of obstacles that make it next to impossible to obtain tribal affiliation. These descendents now try to contend with a void in many

of their lives and struggle with the issue of identity and a sense of belonging as a result of the decisions made generations ago.

The experiences of these women are reflective of many who are trying to come to terms with a myriad of past decisions. They have the stories that have been passed down through their generations, along with stigma attached to that identity which, to their ancestors, necessitated a painful secrecy, and the ruralness of Appalachia provided some an opportunity for escape.

For some of these women, that identity is at the core of their existence; it defines who they are, how they think and interact and direction for their lives. As they pointed out, it goes much beyond going to a pow-wow or similar event, but rather it is a way of life that is lived everyday; it has become their worldview. However, all of them and their families have, and still are, trying to deal with their feelings of shame, alienation, loss and anger and frustration.

CONCLUSION

If one examines the number of Native people that Russell cites from the Census, of that 1.9 million people who identified as Native American, 800,000 thousand are self-identified (non-enrolled). There remains also the "estimated 10 to 15 million people who have a discernable degree of Indian blood, but have lost their tribal connection. A conservative estimate would be that 98% of the Indian population is tribally hyphenated (Ottawa-Chippewa) and that 75% are also racially hyphenated (Ottawa-Chippewa-Irish-English" (1997: 23, 27). This amounts to a large number of people with Native American ancestry.

I began this study with a hypothesis that the ability to obtain federal recognition was important to the identity and psychological well-being of Native Americans. However, these interviews indicated the complete opposite. While it may make acceptance a little easier, none of these women placed importance upon achieving federal recognition, nor planned to pursue that option at this point. From this small study, it is clear that involvement in Native communities is not dependent upon formal recognition, but rather upon a commitment to Native ways and beliefs and a respectful interaction. That is not to say they do not encounter difficulties by those who question that identity. There are many who look to physical features and "paper proof" to define one's identity.

Should one be denied identification as Native simply because they have no "proof of authenticity" or because the information now required does not exist on birth certificates from earlier decades? This exploratory research has prompted considerations that might be utilized in

a variety of ways. First of all, it can aid educators and the public, in general, to better understand the complexity of a culturally diverse population and the importance that ethnic identity holds for individuals as a representation of "wholeness." Secondly, for government and private agencies, it identifies discrepancies between what exists in historic documents and the current requirements for documentation. Because of changes in the information recorded on government documents, such as census birth and death certificates, many people are unable to substantiate that connection, not because they are not of Native descent, but because of inconsistent, inaccurate or missing information. Past records do not supply current required information. A third consideration is important for Native nations and policymakers. The impact in the rise in numbers of individuals claiming to be Native can be problematic. The massive increase can lead to political, economic and cultural problems, such as more people vying for already scarce funds and a further depletion of tradition by assimilated "white Indians." Yet, as more and more people are born of mixed-blood, it is imperative that tribal leaders look at this rising number and see that it can also strengthen their nations, not only in terms of sheer numbers, but also in awareness and cultural preservation. While some might point out that it could dilute the traditions, there are many who are enrolled, yet do not embrace traditional ways. However, for Native Americans, there is the issue of a certain percentage blood quantum necessary for the government to recognize someone as Native American and to achieve tribal affiliation. Although this does not prohibit one from participating in a Native community, it does make it easier to become accepted. As it stands today, "official" Indian identity does not fit neatly into the definition of ethnicity, and therein lies the difficulty.

Before the written word, there were oral stories that told of one's history and that of one's relatives. It has been the Indian way and now there comes many with the stories of their ancestors, many of whom want to return to or find that connection. Many families have stories that for decades have been kept silenced for different reasons. For this group of women, their words are the stories of their families; for them, they are important, real and have impacted their lives significantly. For some, they hope to find lost cousins; for others, they want to return to the traditions of their ancestors and to join their lost relatives on that journey. For all, it is a journey to find herself. While this study has included only women, it would provide valuable information to extend future research to include the voices and experiences of Native men in similar circumstances and also to gather data on the positions and concerns of tribal leaders and elders.

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