

Definition Begets Deficiency: A Critical Analysis of the
Creation of a Contested Indigenous Identity

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Introduction

Bordered Realities

I screamed, “Just because you’re Chicano, that you have connected with some forgotten ancestral tie, doesn’t mean you can stick a feather in your hair and call yourself an Indian. You can’t sing our songs, know our words and believe you know what it is we dream of. Your nightmares are different than our own!” Boundaries that I yearned to fall, in this instant, became both my shield and weapon. We were each told in our own experiences that our identities were illegitimate. There we stood together, but were nowhere, cut into pieces and histories scattered across bordered realities.

Just as lights swirl and blend together formed by the chaotic rhythms of a spinning carousel, the multiple stories of fractured identities flash around and before me. The stories are diverse in their expressions, but similar in their creation. He was a Chicano. I was a halfbreed. We were, are, both considered symptoms of a colonial history. In this story, we became oppositional as we both fought over the right to define Indigenous¹. Within the Native community our voices are more often silenced.

For myself, I had learned at an early age what it meant to be Native American. For the most part, and though I opposed it with every ounce of my quantified self, Indians became Indians through a system of legitimization introduced by the federal government known as an enrollment. The idea of enrollment (a system built upon blood quantum) was first introduced to Indigenous peoples of what is now known as the United States in the early 1700’s. Currently

¹ I should note here that I have chosen the identity Indigenous because of its relation to the continent, cutting across constructed colonial boundaries. Here, within the paper, the term will also be used interchangeably with Native, Native American, American Indian, and Indian.

many Native American peoples live by and uphold the idea and validate its use. However, it has been argued that the idea of blood quantum is part of euro-racist ideologies and was put into legislation to eliminate Native peoples (Forbes, 2000).

I realize now, that although I have fought against the use of blood quantum as a system of legitimization, I was still attempting to define a term that has not been historically our own but applied by outside forces. Growing up a halfbreed on the reservation and my companion growing up calling himself Chicano in the city, I was victorious in our intimate battle – defending the boundaries of what we were told it was to be Native American. In paradox, this meant that I was also accepting and perpetuating a reality that did not allow my *self* to exist in whole. Most fearfully, I realize that though I was taught by my community to see myself in all of existence (in this way acknowledging our connections), I learned somehow along my life *to define others by my own*.

The relations between our personal dialogues of struggle, the destructive dialogues within our communities, and the hegemonic ideologies of capitalistic systems become evident in the following example. A newspaper in central Washington State reports there are several tribal members who are currently supporting a guest worker program in hopes of ridding the Yakama Reservation of the Mexican community. Their justification is the belief that the Mexican community is to blame for an increase in drug trafficking and violence within the reservation boundaries. The area's local paper, the Yakima Herald, ambiguously arranges a political synthesis of agriculture, gangs, marijuana, and Mexican immigrants as it reports (both supporting and perpetuating) what people are considering “ethnic tensions”.²

²The article includes: “More than 150,000 acres of [fruits and vegetables] draw thousands of **migrant workers** to the reservation each year. In recent years, **gangs and marijuana**-growing operations have **plagued the reservation**.”

The same local paper follows later in the year, “Though Latinos have been part of the Lower Valley community for decades, there's been some uneasiness among some Native Americans about the impact immigrants are having on local schools, available jobs and their **cultural identity**” (Ferolito P. , 2008, bold added).

These types of pressures, or ethnic tensions, have been described by mainstream journalism as: an underlying ethnic or religious hatred towards another group of people. Others have described the ethnic tension as an essential tribalism. An alternative naming of these struggles contends that colonialism and the culture of capitalism are the defining sources of ethnic conflict (Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism, 2002).

Furthermore, the fact that these “groups” in pre-colonial times shared languages, spirituality, medicines, and more but are now at odds over “cultural identity” is not questioned by many in the communities and country, but seen as inevitable. In addition, the use of blood-quantum for tribal enrollment and its following rationalization of the identity crisis and financial strains that befall the halfbreed children (mostly in this instance those considered bi-racial i.e. half Mexican and half Native American) are deemed as necessary protections of tribal resources and Native American cultural identity.

“As Fanon and others such as Nandy have claimed, imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systematic fragmentation...” (Smith, 2005, p. 28).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that the terms associated with the experiences of Native people

This summer alone, police uprooted more than \$140 million worth of marijuana plants on the reservation, surpassing the value of the state's entire grape crop this year. Also, as in other parts of the country, **tensions have been growing over undocumented workers**” (Ferolito P. , 2008, bold added).

need to be brought to the forefront. As in the above examples, our identities, communities, and the world are intertwined to those things that often go unnamed in our day to day experiences. Explicitly, when in conflict we do not name those things such as colonialism, neo-liberalism, and capitalism as pressures – we tend to name each other.

This paper will address the formation of the contested Indigenous halfbreed identity and its association with the macro and historical structures of society by reviewing the relations between colonialism, community conflict, and contemporary theory. This analysis will specifically review: 1) The Strategies of the Research 2) The formation of Culture and 3) Symbolic Interactionism.

Strategies of the Researcher

An Objective Lens

Within the social sciences there have been a number of disputes over method, meanings and what constitutes ‘good’ research. Method is important because it is regarded as the way in which knowledge is acquired or discovered and as a way in which we can ‘know’ what is real (Smith; pg 164). We are told by positivist oriented scientists (whom believe the objectivist science is truly the best and only real science) that the truth is out waiting to be seized. The objectivist stand point asks us, in mysterious ways, to consider ourselves explorers out in the dangerous and perverted world searching for detached truths that will lead us to greater human existence. In contrast, there are also those that believe truths and power are interconnected; therefore, not objective in form. The truth is not severed from ourselves and our contextual worlds. The truth and knowledge, as it is realized through power, creates, supports, and maintains ideas and structures (our present world). These structures are not considered “natural” in form, but as social creations.

Then diverse ways of approaching the researched (Indigenous and other marginalized communities), defined here as a research strategy, are considered to be situated in historical relations to power. “A research strategy is best understood as the pairing of a primary **objective** and a specific research **method**” (my own emphasis) (Charles, 1994, p. 33). Understanding the connection between a researcher’s strategy and their subjective power can serve as foundations to understand research and its outcomes on the researched.

If research is approached from an objectivist perspective, compared to a critical perspective for instance, the two researchers in this way are said to be choosing differing

approaches. The topics of both researchers may be the same, but the strategy (methods and objective) and hence outcomes will ultimately vary. This understanding illuminates the importance of acknowledging the historical positionality of the researcher, their strategy or process, and what those objectives and methods may lead to. To understand the implication of research to Indigenous people then demands we analyze the theoretical assumptions and historical positionalities of the researcher as they approach the researched, including those who assert their approach is objective and scientific.

In my own experience, as I begun the research process, believed I could scan the data with learned theories and methods, put the “lenses” on and connect the dots to understand the phenomenon I was attempting to deconstruct. The unspoken assumption is then that lenses are easily exchanged, worn, and discarded when the researcher sees fit. However, for myself I could not escape the detached feeling these impressions held between body and mind. I’ve learned that where one is historically situated is as important as what they are attempting to historicize. As Menchaca posits, “To historicize is to interpret events; when scholars interpret, their voice is situated, because their analysis cannot be separated from their positions in society as members of a racial group, a social class, and a gender” (2001, p. 11).

Following, it is important to identify the pressures of colonial and imperial texts upon the researcher and the researched. Historically, where researchers searched adamantly for the truth, abuse and death ensued.³ For example, Marcus Griaule happily recounts acts of research and aboriginal people stating, “...We would play with the victim; we would rub his nose in his words. We’d make him smile, spit up the truth, and we’d turn out of his pockets the last secret polished by the centuries, a secret to make him who has spoken it blanch with fear” (as cited by

³ As seen in the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiments were unethical treatment of research subjects lead to the death of men, women, and children.

Clifford, 1988, p. 77). The words, written with such pride and authority from a researcher situated in imperial and colonial histories are sadly not anomalous – scarier is the exploitation of the researched still happens today.⁴

Some would criticize such a statement as oppositional and not fully telling. For example, after presenting on the importance of becoming both familiar with and acknowledging our positionalities as researchers, I was approached by a fellow undergrad student who stated, “Science of the past was acted out in ways that seem terrible today but were performed by researchers who truly believed they were doing what was best.” However, to rationalize such horrific acts of invasion, exploitation, and dehumanization only denies researchers the ability to identify “research” cloaked under the bias of what is good for the majority – regardless if it takes place in colonial times or colonial times.⁵ We must think critically of our own subjective positions.

Critical Theory

“Critical perspective challenges us to make connections between the ritual construction of our everyday lives and the historical organization of power” (Pfohl, 1994, p. 469). The critical perspective urges the researcher to acknowledge their own relation to power structures as it informs their interpretations of what is researched, and hence what is advanced as truths. The important point is to assert one’s position as a “counter hegemonic way of knowing”, which is oppositional to a proposed objectivist standpoint (Pfohl, 1994). Pfohl, in *Images of Deviance and Social Control*, states that “...positivism’s supposedly neutral promise of rational control over nature has been instrumental in the historical development of white western imperialism,

⁴ As seen in the Human Genome Project.

⁵ “colonial times or colonial time” - In this way I am refusing to state that we are in a post-colonial world – which increases the importance of not writing off such abuses as things of the past.

patriarchal capitalism, and totalitarian state-socialism” (1994, p. 470). As critical researchers we must most importantly “recognize that each of our thoughts and actions is laden with power”.

In sum, to engage in critical perspective is to combat the hegemonic process that defines society, culture, identity through a “mode of domination”. To combat those modes of domination that seek to “favor the control of some classes of people by others” a power-reflexive methodology is necessary; a method where we continually question both our positions and our additions to the creations of knowledge. Here, in the analysis of identity formation, it is important because they (positionality and the advancement of knowledge) synchronically affect the creation and control of ethnic conflict and our illegitimate identities.

Indigenous Methodology

Though as Indigenous scholars we too must not deny how our positionalities inform our interpretations, Indigenous methodologies advances critical methodology in important ways. Before reviewing the methodological advances by such scholars as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, it is important to state that Indigenous research does not necessarily identify all or only Indigenous peoples as Indigenous scholars. For example, Kathy Irwin, when discussing what she and Smith refer to as Kaupapa Maori research, characterizes Kaupapa Maori as research which is ‘culturally safe’, which involves the ‘mentorship’ of elder, which is culturally relevant and appropriate while satisfying the rigor of research, and which is undertaken by a Maori researcher, not a researcher who happens to be Maori” (184). These important steps of Kaupapa Maori research, or what some refer to as Indigenous Methodology, reveal a research strategy which centers the community in the process of research, not the researcher.

The centering of community and the validation of an Indigenous scholars ways of knowing are powerful affirmations in the process of research; yet they continue to be troublesome to the halfbreed identity. To explain in short, those Indigenous identities who have suffered the silencing affects of a halfbreed status are continuously displaced by the acts of centering. Though Indigenous methodology asks the researcher to both center the community as well as our Indigenous ways of knowing, halfbreed identities are often not trusted to do so.

To elaborate, the process of centering creates a static state of knowing, usually positioned by the elite of the referred to circle. For those of us who seek to speak for our Indigenous communities, but are regulated to the margins by texts that are situated both outside as well as within our boundaries, the act itself is seen as a force of unwarranted entry. The centering of knowledge and way of being are exclusive to those who behold the quantum of affiliation necessary to oppose oppression; not those who are considered shameful outcomes of its insertion. Therefore, re-centering of research also then depends on re-centering of our ways of knowing each other, and self – as those depend on the former.

Formation of Culture

Culture Creations

If you ask most people about culture they will respond with definitions that illuminate their understandings of group difference and specific histories. Most people will state that culture is characterized by the way one dresses, speaks, eats, sleeps, it is their heritage, and a relation to their ancestors. Culture is also said to be what makes people unique and special, what makes one different. Or simply put, “Culture is the way one lives their life.” Others differentiate between high and low culture or between high culture and folk culture. In sum, observing culture is a process of defining a group of people.

Yet our understandings of culture are rarely lucid of the creation of such ability to discern what “cultural” differences are. Is it that differences are so easily distinguishable or can we also consider culture, or more specifically the ability to discern what is culture, a concept created out of social historical processes? Naming is a powerful force. However, naming, as do all things, become influenced by power. When the powerless have less ability to name, and those with power more, who decides what to call themselves and others?

I argue that out of a bounded dialogue produced by the naming of culture we are limited to few questions. Though recognition of diverse cultures is needed and utilized in attempts to push back against suppressive scripts, the current concept of culture also restricts our imaginations from seeking more complex questions outside of our bounded cultural selves. “What is culture”, “How is it expressed”, and “How is it transferred,” are the current questions asked by social scientists. Though such questions are important and have assisted oppressed

groups in multiple ways, the limits of referring to groups as specific cultures should also be critiqued by scholars. We must also remember to ask why and where was the capacity to recognize culture socially imagined.

In analyzing the creation of the concept culture is not to say that the concept of culture is invalid, useless, or ill-advised. It would be inappropriate given the opportunities that culture understanding has promoted to take such a stance. However the social creation of such a concept as culture, the historical processes and its current implications on the formulation of self and identity is also a necessary condition to understanding the bounded self.

I believe it is also appropriate here to note societies tendency of now embracing the term culture (seen in the use of culture competency programs) compared to dialogues focused around terms of race or ethnicity. The equivocation of such a move from terms of race and ethnicity to one of culture is further complicated by Merriam-Webster's online definition that states culture is: "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a **racial**, religious, or social group" (bold added). I am impelled to ask, has culture analysis become considered or utilized as a less objected parody of race or ethnic inquiries?

In a critical analysis of culture we are asking for a search beyond the paradigms of essential or authentic differences articulated in the cultural theories and not the arrival of the typical response of meeting in a dialectic middle ground. I am asking for researchers to question the concept of culture, for us to truly understand why this concept is nurtured and sustained, and to be aware of the ability for our current dialogues to influence its ever present formation.

I will first lay a foundation for the points of discussion by sharing a story that was intentionally centered about culture. I first started the discussion by asking a friend, who was at

the time teaching an introductory course in American Indian Studies, to explain to me what culture was. After he related the text book definition of what culture is, we began to enter into a realm the two of us believed to be more grounded and familiar, something closer to home for the both of us. He started by sharing his ideas of the differences between traditional culture and modern culture of Native peoples.

“Traditional [Native] culture is when people practice their traditional [that is pre-colonial] ways of life. You know, this is like when they speak their traditional language, eat their traditional foods, and sleep in their traditional homes,” he said. I asked him to confirm his statement by repeating his words to him, “It is language, food, and ways of sleeping?” After he agreed, I repeated again by verbally operationalizing his statement, “So, if someone speaks their language *that’s* what makes them traditional.” He replied, “No.” “So, if someone eats their traditional food *that’s* what makes them traditional?” Again, he stated, “Well, no”. “So, if someone sleeps in their traditional housing *that* makes them traditional?” Once again he stated, “No.” and added, “It just isn’t that simple I guess.”

Sincerely wanting to engage more in the complexity of the topic we were attempting to deconstruct we moved to Language and its importance in cultural identity. We both agreed on the importance of language and its ability to pass on varying and complex ways of perceiving the world. My friend went on to say, as a speaker of his people’s Indigenous language, that he perceived the world different than those who only spoke English. Language was what influenced his relations to the Earth, the Creator, and other people. However, I asked him if he really believed there were things his soon to be daughter would not understand because of her most likely inability to speak any language other than English. I asked him about the experiential power of life that influenced our perspectives. “Could her experiences guided by your parenting

teach her just as language has taught you?” I asked. We looked at each other, reverting back to what we have learned in academia, and said in near unison “we experience life through language.”

As we spoke of the power of language I understood our dialogue as attempting to rationalize what people perceive as an Indigenous relation to the Earth. Understanding that this and ideas of connectedness and cycles I wondered about other cultures who also revealed these same relations. Those who we know today as Pagans were and are very connected to the earth and experiences of cycles, so I asked him of this and added, “We as Indigenous peoples recognize that cycles are powerful things; this group of people also live in this way, and live in this way speaking English. Is language truly the defining marker?”

I offered what I learned, from an anthropological friend, of Nahua people’s language and its similarities to the Hopi language. He concurred and added that he knows there also to be similarities between the Inuit and Dine’ peoples. The images of the Pagan and Indigenous peoples led us in ambiguous ways to discussing creation stories and their connection to diverse cultures. My friend, the teacher, explained that a people’s creation stories are authentic to a group of people and that its creation stories are a group’s unique way of seeing themselves and the world.

I returned to the sharing of languages, stories, traditions, food, and medicines that took place between so-called different groups or cultures and asked if he believed it took place from what we consider the beginning, or what we know as time immemorial. He agreed that it had. I wondered to myself, “What then makes a group authentic if we’ve always learned and shared our ways with one another, constantly changing and fluid from the beginning of time?”

“What is your word,” I asked aloud to my friend, “in your people’s language for authentic?” He responded, “There is no such thing.”

Sharing this particular conversation helps to illuminate the commonly held perspectives of cultures, how the ideologies of authentic culture has become embedded deep into our multiple ways of understanding ourselves, and how ideas of both cultural essentialism and universalism can be complicated by critical dialogues. I first discussed prior to, as well as within, the short narrative the commonly held perspectives of culture. In the following I would like to move into a discussion of how these ideologies of culture have entrenched themselves in our understanding of self and later how research, science, and more specifically concepts of culture are being deconstructed both within and outside of academia. To discuss the issues of authenticity and its relationship with research and culture, it is first important to historicize these relations.

Ethnographers in the Making

“We have often allowed our ‘histories’ to be told and have then become outsider as we heard them being retold” (Smith; pg 33).

When my friend and I first began our attempt to understand culture we left the voices of our own ways of knowing aside as we endeavored to take on the ethnographer’s narrative tone. My friend, though unknowingly, defined and operationalized something he considered multi-faceted and complex to simply defined characteristics. It would seem that to describe culture operationalization is unavoidable. I would argue that both the idea of culture authenticity and its following operationalization are actually learned phenomenon out of the processes of science, ethnography, and colonization.

To explain, James Clifford discusses the scientific objectivity ethnographers claimed to possess as they described culture with “sufficient neutrality,” not as “the earlier ‘men on the spot’ – the missionary, the administrator, the trader, and the traveler” (27). In this regards the “new ethnographers” distinguished themselves in six defined ways. Here is will focus on the first and the third. “First, the persona of the fieldworker was validated, both publically and professionally...[Thirdly] the new ethnographer was marked by an increased emphasis on the power of observation. Culture was construed as an ensemble of characteristic behaviors, ceremonies, and gestures susceptible to recording and explanation by a trained onlooker. Interpretation was tied to description...” (34).

For example, many Indigenous communities were researched and catalogued ‘for their own good’ (Smith, 2005). For many Indigenous peoples being cataloged and spoke of as if they have ceased to exist, or exist only in ‘traditional’ forms, can be very frustrating if not angering. “Collecting cultures,” as Clifford refers to it as, is the best represented in a passage written by Margaret Mead while in New Guinea. She states, “We are just completing a culture of a mountain group here in the lower Torees Chelles. **They have no name and we haven’t decide what to call them yet**” (as cited, Clifford; pg 230; bold added).

These ways of seeing so-called others was produced and sustained in the methods of research and the authoritative positionality of the researcher, which were both in correlation with the supported beliefs and acts of invasion and conquest. The researcher and her methods were products of social historical contexts, that of imperialism and colonialism, but so to were the researched.

Then, how do these histories influence the researched perception of what culture is? More importantly how do these hegemonic texts influence Indigenous peoples to view their own so-

called cultures? As seen in the included narrative, as Indigenous peoples these dialogues of culture and authenticity have embedded themselves into our own ways of seeing each other and self. At times we put aside our own language, or own experiences, our own ways of seeing the world to engage in a validated objectivist position. In this way, my friend and I were attempting to be those “trained onlookers” and the “participant observers”. We were in a sense ethnographers in the making.

There are those of us who become trained to operationalize our experiences and define ourselves and each other through a language once used to name and categorize us in oppressive and exploitive ways – regardless of our own ways of knowing, including that of language. As Gloria Bird states, “Five hundred years after the colonization of this continent, promoting the ideas of native people as Other, perpetuating as we parrot Othering language when we speak of ourselves, are instances of the internalization of oppression – it is, in fact, to speak the language of the oppressed” (Toward a Decolonization of the Mind and Text: Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, 2005). This operationalization not only takes place within academia and research; but, maybe more dangerously, it is so often seen in our daily expressions of each other and self.

We refer to each other as separate and unique peoples, as authentic or inauthentic individuals, as traditional and contemporary, as level of being “Indian”. We have swallowed the colonizers language and spew it out onto each other in destructive ways. We have moved away from feeling and experiencing ourselves and the Earth to now viewing and describing ourselves through an ethnographer’s perspective. The ethnographer’s language has taught us to describe that she is only half Indian, he is full blood, and we are traditional while they are contemporary. In sum, the language of science has taught us what to see and not to see. Levels of Indianess,

once something introduced through colonial texts, are now hegemonic in form as we disconnect and operationalize our own cultures – but also our relation to the Earth, each other, and self.

Returning to the narrative between my friend, the teacher, and I the dialogue does not meet an abrupt end, but leaves us only questioning more. Though we have learned the colonizers language, and it is embedded deeply into our ways of understanding both self and other, there are alternative dialogues that can inform our ways of imagining. If we can enter into safe and supported discourse that both challenges self and other, our acts are themselves entering into oppositional consciousness.

Symbolic Interactionism

Dreaming in Symbols: Why understanding theory is important

Those of us, whom are day dreamers, artists, and theorists alike, may be told that we are in ways retreating into the folds of their minds when deep in thought. However, our visions are never our own, nor our worries, nor our ideas. Symbolisms, because they are our form of communication and way of making sense of the world, surround our daily selves, enter into our minds, and structure our identities.

That is, “Thought, like meaning, is not idiosyncratic or private but public or universal activity...” (Hoover, 1986). Our thoughts are social phenomenon and it is critical to understand the disseminated texts and theories of social scientists, philosophers, and academics. In their attempts to decipher the self – they also create it. It is also important to acknowledge that “language can be thought of as a system of social control with vocabularies directing thought into socially desirable channels” (Bart & Frankel, 1986). As well, C. Wright Mills explains, “What is reason for one man is rationalization for another. The variable is the accepted vocabulary of motives, the ultimate of discourse, of each man’s dominant group about whose opinion he cares...” (Situating Actions and Vocabularies of Motive, 1940).

Following the idea that thought is social and influential, I will review the leading theory of identity formation, Symbolic Interactionism, and how it can be used to inform our understandings of the contested halfbreed Indigenous identity. In this section I will discuss the theories main assertions and provide brief descriptions of how the contested halfbreed Indigenous identity is organized within the framework of the theory. In my final analysis I will attempt to situate and validate my own understanding of the world (as I become through my

mother's eyes) by presenting my concerns with the situated *otherness* rationalized within symbolic interactionism.

We are social creations, not essential selves. Mead and other symbolic interactionists posit that, through the processes of social interactions, identity continuously *becomes*. "As Mead has stated, the self is an ongoing conversation" (O'Brien, *From Masks to Selves*, 2006, p. 246). The conversations that Mead refers to are the daily interactions that one shares with both the community and self. Because our interactions are in relation to multiple individuals and multiple institutions we are in a sense multiple selves. A typical undergraduate exercise of identity formation is said to illuminate the presence of multiple selves. It follows, when someone is asked to make a list of her identities she may state: I am a mother, daughter, auntie, scholar, American Indian, and bi-racial or a halfbreed person. Each person's multiple identities may only become present in certain interactions, several at once, or contradict each other in certain contexts.

In addition, Symbolic interactionism posits that our reactions are not to the objects themselves but to the meaning we associate with the objects. For example, it is often taught in many Indigenous communities that when asked to present yourself one is to begin by an elaborate introduction through sharing the geographical location of your people's creation, or more often your reservation, and family tree. However, if I'm entering into a friend's home and I am introduced to a grandmother, I know she is expecting to learn informally where I came from – who my family is and my mother's name. My reaction to her is not to her as an object – bus as grandmother – what I understand that to be and what I have learned her words are asking of me. In comparison, when strangers ask, as they often do, "what are you?" I interpret their question as an inquiry into my racial background. With this in mind, I most often will *not* say, "I'm a woman". That is of course, unless I am attempting to disrupt the power dynamics revealed in

such a question. As the “psychological theorist William James once remarked that our selves are as numerous as the number of people we interact with” (O’Brien, *From Masks to Selves*, 2006) and I would add, as numerous as the historical and political reasons we find ourselves in those conversations.

To state that we are “multiple selves” is not to say that the self is not unitary in form (as obvious as that may sound) or idea. Mead puts forward that, “There is usually an organization of the whole self with reference to the community to which we belong, and the situation in which we find ourselves. What the society is, whether we are living with people of the present, people of our own imagination, people of the past, varies of course, with different individuals” (1934, p. 253) as seen in my different reactions to similar questions that carried different symbolisms.

The multiple histories of a halfbreed person then affect the formation of self in peculiar ways. That is, we are reacted upon as the symbolisms of two divergent communities, not unitary – for there is not one “community to which we belong”. The halfbreed self must continuously navigate the multiple worlds she walks through carrying the weight of at least one of her historical identities at all times, for it is always pointed out to her that she does entirely belong. Here, I am reminded of W.E.B. Du Bois as he poignantly asks, “Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? (*Double-Consciousness and the Veil*, 1903).

To develop a better sense of how these interactions and struggles occur between the self, other, and community, I will now review the specific processes of symbolic interactionism and formation of the *self* as outlined by Mead. To begin, we identify or name our behaviors through the means of reflection with one’s self – we are realized through internal conversation. Here Mead states that, “...the individual is not a self in the reflexive sense unless he is an object to himself” (1934, p. 252). The ability to reflect, as Mead argues, is a human ability alone. “The

self is then entirely distinguishable from an organism that is surrounded by things and acts with reference to things, including parts of its own body. These later may be objects like other objects, but they are just objects out there in the field, and they do not involve a self that is an object to the organism” (Mead, p. 251). The humane phenomenon that creates self-consciousness directly follows the ability to *objectify* the self by taking a position of the *other* towards self. “*In this way, the self is a social construction that takes shape through interaction – interaction outwardly with others and, especially, internal interactions or conversations we have with our images of significant others and reference groups*” (O'Brien, From Masks to Selves, 2006, p. 240).

That is to say, that the conversations that are the foundations of self, the dialectic interaction between “me” and “I”, are imagined conversation with already familiar voices. To elaborate, the voice of the community is considered as the “me”. The “me” learns from daily interactions as it interprets symbols and witnesses the actions and interactions of others to each other and to the self. The “I,” that which reacts upon the “me,” is said to be “the response of the individual to the attitude of the community as this appears in his [sic] own experience” (1934, p. 254). The I, the subject, is the “unsocialized self, an assortment of personal desires, needs and dispositions” (Elliot, pg. 33) In other words the “I” is those ideas or consciousness that are raw and untouched by society; the me – those ideas that are formed through social interaction.

Secondly, Mead states that there can be no “...clear dividing line...between our own sense of self and the selves of others” (Elliot, pg. 31). The self, or identity, is contextualized by Mead as interacting energies, the social and the personal. The self cannot and does not exist without the other. The interaction between the two is the *creation* of the self – and agent is both influenced by and influences the context within which it is situated. And though societal interaction is influential, the self is not strictly determined by society. That is, “one who reacts to

this community and in [her] reaction to it... changes it” (Mead, 1934, p. 254). In addition, Elliot in *Concepts of the Self*, states that Mead’s ability to include the I as a vital process of the emergence of the self allows him to “avoid the charge that his theory is deterministic – that is, that the self is a mere reflection of the attitudes of general society, or an internalization of social structure” (Elliott, 2008, p. 34).

However, Anthony Elliot states as well that the the give and take between Mead’s “I” and “me” lacks tension and complexity seen in Freud’s analysis of the self (Concepts of the Self, 2008). He also states that the theory fails to acknowledge the structures that exist within society that limits the agentic expressions of the self (Elliott, 2008). Prompting us to examine the theory from a critical perspective we must ask about the intersectionalities of race, class, and gender and how they inform identity formation. “Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius (1986) are known for their studies on how people develop ideas about who and what they think they can be” (O’Brien, From Masks to Selves, 2006). They believe that the self is composed of at any one time possible now selves (what they presently consider the self to be) and possible selves (Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005). The authors, Markus and Nurius, have found that “your economic class background, your racial or ethnic background, and your gender are some of the significant differences that shape your ideas” about what you believe you can and can’t be. Their analysis than may posit, that the contested halfbreed’s “racial or ethnic background” informs her perception of “what [she] thinks [she] can be”. That is if the racial or ethnic communities to which she belongs have definitions, as all currently do, of what it means to belong to those communities, then she at the periphery of those definitions finds it difficult to assert her position as a speaker for those who are its core.

Otherness

Through my own position as an outsider/within my communities, and its following symptom of silencing by the ascribed identity of otherness, I must question the use of otherness. The endeavor – to create our own identities by the use of other ironically disturbs my own sense of self. To explain, Mead’s conceptualization of the self posits that the self is not determined nor static. However, Mead states that the emergence of the self comes into being between two things that are articulated and conceptualized as two separate, static texts – the “I” and the “me”. The self originating from the interactions between the unsocialized and the socialized reduces two complex paradigms into static, essential categories. The use of the I and me, is in itself, a binary opposition and is reduces what is complex to simplistic relation between *others*. Patricia Hill Collins warns that:

Additive models of oppression are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought. One must be either Black or white in such thought systems – persons of ambiguous racial and ethnic identity constantly battle with questions such as “what are you, anyway?” This emphasis on quantification and categorization occurs in conjunction with the belief either/or categories must be ranked. The search for certainty of this sort requires that one side of a dichotomy be privileged while its other is denigrated. Privilege becomes defined in its other.

I would add that what is problematic in the conceptualization of the self, by Mead and others, is the *other*. It is the ease that this perspective assigns the positionality of the *other*, the interaction with the *other*, the labeling of the *other* within and about the self, that creates for me an internal contradiction. To elaborate, the self in symbolic interactionist’s terms is said to be an

interaction between “I” and “me” or *other*. If the *other* is said to be a production of the self, as well as the self a production of the *other*, how is it that the two can be divided? Is it that the *other* that exists is the same as the *other* within? Symbolic interactionism has ascribed labels to self and other but has failed to identify the creation of the *other*. How is it that the *other*, different than self, is also said to be self.

When the other is theoretically positioned to exist within the self beliefs may ensue that leads *self* to believe it can reach inside the fissures of the *self*, take hold of this *other*, and remove it at will. For example, the idea that places patriarchy as essentially situated within a man and demands its removal for a just society leads one to believe it can be done by detaching oneself from the “male ego”. The proceeding statement and its implications can best be understood as I had a fellow colleague confide that his machismo, though figuratively speaking, had to be removed from the fissures of his soul. The self is split and reacted to as if the bounds that separated the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ were enough to understand them as two separate entities, enough to grasp and remove the flawed piece. The self is seen with fissures that cut across the self. I would extend this assertion to the creation of boundaries, at some level also a theoretical construction, which demarcate land from land, land from person, and person from person. The symptom of such demarcation also produces identity conflict for those that have been cut across and bordered from realities once set upon land and cultural continuums and renamed by dominate texts.

“People come into creation when words are created” (Fay, 1996, p. 52). If we examine ourselves and others as pieced together, a self that contains the I and the hundreds of social others, we fail to see the fluid and contextual identities that we possess, the ability for the self to change and move between, to exist between, and also for it to rest. I am hesitant to agree that the

self is essentially pieced and to synchronically rationalize the process of identity formation through the exploitation of other. If we can imagine that we are whole, maybe it is society that has become pulled off center. We do emerge as contextual beings, as Mead has cogently argued; but we must also acknowledge the aporia we have arrived at through the rationalization of *other* in the creation of self.

Those who reject the othering process of colonization call to each other to once again name ourselves. For example the power of naming is evoked by Rachel J. Nez titled in the documentary titled *The Border Crossed Us*. In the documentary the Indigenous peoples of Tohono O'odham are asked to supplant colonial labels of Native American and Mexican with Indigenous ways of knowing. In this film, Jose Cazares speaks to the Tohono O'odham people that have become separated by the creation of a US/Mexico border. The film reveals the policing of the communities and the severing of a people's relation to one another, to the land, and spiritual ways of life. In opposition to the fractured community, Jose asks the people:

“Are you going to allow two European entities, one the English that became American and one Spain that became Mexico, to dictate what we are, what we call ourselves, or how we identify...?” (Nez, 2005).

This interaction becomes an important process of resistance to “negative possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and for the continuation of our ways of knowing each other, our communities, and our selves. Settling into the confusion I would encourage scholars to ask further questions such as: What makes the halfbreed person experience silencing, marginalization within community, or disassociation from community if the phenomenon of self, in and of itself, is composed of multiple selves? Does the halfbreed identity, extending from

multiple histories, then create a subaltern oppositional reality? Are these the only realities we are capable of creating – subaltern? What can we learn from the experience of a person who extends from *both* a white imperial history and a ‘her’ story filled with exclusion, rape, and death? What of a person who extends from *both* a ‘her’ story of matrilineal community structures and a history of colonialism and slavery? If the process of naming is as powerful as philosophers such as Mead, Collins, and Smith state it is, shouldn’t we examine what scripts have been handed to us from colonial powers that identify us as separate nations and no longer human beings?

Closing

Or Continuing Thoughts

Patricia Hills Collins, while speaking of the intersectionalities that exist to produce the matrix of oppression, stated “that self-evaluation and self-definition are two ways of resisting oppression” (Collins, 1991). Research analyzing the formation of an Indigenous halfbreed identity then directly serves as a form of resistance to oppression. It does so as it illuminates the historical positionalities of Indigenous peoples as defined through processes of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

In addition, the dialogues that manifest out of research, as well as within and between communities, can serve as oppositional critiques of dominate forms of evaluation and definition. And as oppression exists within many forms and within many places, I believe that the alternative perspectives shown through the understanding of an Indigenous halfbreed identity can assist others in subversive ways to oppose the *othering* affects of “mythological norms”.

Positive dialogues should not exclusively lay between the binds of books in academia, but also so in our daily reflections within one another. Bird refers to the positive implications of dialogue as she reminds us that:

“Native peoples stories, histories, very beings are inheritors all of a legacy of pain and disinheritance, but to speak of colonization only in those terms is to say within the realm of creating boundaries between *us* and *them*, to stay locked into a static system with no resolution...In order to move out of the colonizing instances of interiorized oppression, we first must identify those moments in which we reinforce those useless paradigms and search for new approaches to the way we speak of ourselves in relation to our histories and stories” (Bird, 2005).

We must struggle to tell our stories to one another, across all constructed borders and boundaries, continuously decentering the dialogues that place us as outsiders. Through our stories as Tiin-Ma (the people) Indigenous peoples must “re-imagine” our creations by “remembering” our names – always continuing, just as we have, our stories as human beings.

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