The Ethnographically Contextualized Case Study Method: Exploring Ambitious Achievement in an American Indian Community

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This article demonstrates the empirical viability of the Ethnographically Contextualized Case Study Method (ECCSM) for investigating interrelationships between cultural and psychological processes. By juxtaposing two relevant forms of data—original interview material from a single respondent and existing ethnographic evidence—the inherent idiographic limitations of the case study approach for pursuing the psychological study of culture might be transcended. Adoption of the ECCSM for the exploration of cultural ideals among an elderly Native American respondent revealed both the personal and cultural significance of ambitious achievement within this tribal community, calling into question the conventional wisdom within multicultural psychology that Native Americans are culturally disposed to passive, submissive and noncompetitive psychological orientations. This application of the proposed methodology demonstrates how important empirical insights may be obtained in unusually efficient and nuanced ways at the confluence of culture and psychology.

Keywords: case study, cultural psychology, methodology, qualitative research, American Indians

As one approach to psychological inquiry, the case study method has historically enjoyed revered status in personology and clinical research, but has long remained more tangential to the nomothetic pursuits of the discipline owing to the restricted generalizability of its conclusions. The relatively recent disciplinary turn toward the substantive investigation of cultural influences on psychological phenomena may paradoxically renew interest in the case study method once more. On its face, the application of this method for the psychological study of culture would seem counterintuitive, given that cultural processes and practices are by definition *shared* by affiliated human communities and thus presumably remain inaccessible through "mere" idiographic inquiry. That is, lacking clear and cogent delineations of cultural practices with relevance to the respondent in question, the cultural psychologist would be hard-pressed to distinguish idiosyncratic dispositions, orientations, and habits of the individual from the shared patterns of activity, interpretation, and interaction within a given cultural community.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the empirical viability of the Ethnographically Contextualized Case Study Method (ECCSM) for the psychological investigation of the individual experience and expression of shared cultural orientations.

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As a specialized form of case study inquiry, the ECCSM is introduced here in response to the questions and concerns of disciplinary colleagues who have wondered (and worried) just how prior investigations of individual case material undertaken by the first author might be said to validly addressed matters of cultural psychology proper (Gone, 1999, 2007, 2008, in press; Gone, Miller, & Rappaport, 1999). As a result, this article aspires to formalize, illustrate, and legitimize a specific approach to case study inquiry that, while not strictly "new" in the canons of social science methodology, nevertheless remains unfamiliar (and perplexing) to many psychologists.

As codified in this article, the ECCSM represents one additional methodological tool for the study of "ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion" arising from the *coconstitution* of "psyche and culture, person and context, figure and ground" (Shweder, 1991, p. 73). It depends on systematic juxtaposition of at least two relevant forms of data: (a) original interview material from single respondents concerning some facet of psychological experience that affords careful and substantive interpretive analysis, and (b) an existing ethnographic record that furnishes details of the historical and cultural context from which interview responses are expressed. Again, psychological expressions of culture would be impossible to identify through the study of individual cases *in and of themselves* (i.e., in the absence of otherwise relevant and reliable cultural knowledge). Thus, *both* kinds of data or sources of information are necessary if the case study method is to illuminate the cultural foundations of psychological phenomena.

Using the ECCSM, this article presents results from an empirical study of cultural values within a northern Plains American Indian community. Subsequent sections of the article will: describe the research project and set forth the research question guiding the study; review scholarly attitudes toward case study methods within psychology proper; describe the ECCSM as employed in this study; summarize results emerging from original interview mate-

rial as contextualized by the existing ethnographic record for this community; highlight conclusions and insights obtained from the study that were not otherwise easily amenable to more familiar survey-based designs; and discuss limitations of and future directions for the application of the ECCSM relative to the psychological study of culture. In the process, this effort hopes to extend the arsenal of qualitative approaches within the field by equipping investigators with an additional methodological tool for exploring how culturally diverse respondents creatively utilize, adapt, and transform preexisting cultural resources toward individual psychological expressions.

Investigating Gros Ventre Cultural Ideals

The study to be described shortly comprises one component of a broader investigation undertaken by the first author during the mid-1990s concerning the cultural identity of the Gros Ventre Indians of the Fort Belknap reservation in Montana. Briefly, the Gros Ventres are an indigenous northern Plains Algonquian people who enjoyed the celebrated equestrian life of intertribal raiding and bison hunting until the late 19th century. Since then, forces of Euro American colonization have transformed Gros Ventre life dramatically, resulting in the quick demise of ancestral ritual tradition and language fluency and more than a century of federal government intrusion and dependency amid unrelenting poverty. Today, Gros Ventres at Fort Belknap—numbering some 3,800 tribal members, only half of whom reside on the reservation—are rural monolingual English-speakers who live in federally subsidized housing and pursue scarce wage labor in a perennially depressed local economy.

In light of such radical cultural discontinuity, the overarching research project was interested in characterizing Gros Ventre cultural identity in uniquely Gros Ventre terms. This interpretive approach required systematic analysis of Gros Ventre cultural ideals, the values and desirable behaviors embraced and expressed by tribal members. The specific population of interest was the cohort of Gros Ventre elders born before 1930. Of the 65 members of this cohort who were resident on the reservation and eligible for participation during the summer of 1994, 33 were approached and personally invited to participate in an interview that was strategically designed to elicit the attributes and significance of enduring and cherished tribal affiliation. Interview responses of 13 of these individuals were subsequently transcribed. The research reported here consists of a previously unpublished analysis of just one of these participant's interview responses (see also Gone, 1999, 2006; Gone, Miller, & Rappaport, 1999).

The motivation for this study stems from the now prolific psychological literature dedicated to the promotion of "culturally competent" clinical practice with ethnoracial minority clients requiring ethnically tailored mental health services (Pope-Davis, Coleman, Ming Liu, & Toporek, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2003). One of the dilemmas confronting this field, however, is how to cultivate the requisite knowledge base concerning the "culturally different" toward professional training in cultural competency that practitioners might efficiently access. The usual means to promoting culturally sensitive clinical practice has been the exposure of mental health professionals to summary characterizations of the psychological profiles of specific ethnoracial groups. And yet, as Lakes, Lopez, and Garro (2006) have cautioned, such ethnoracial proto-

types typically depend on relatively superficial "group-specific" notions of difference "that may inadvertently promote group stereotypes in the guise of cultural sensitivity" (p. 381).

The possibilities for simplistic overgeneralization in this regard are nowhere more fraught than when addressed to Native American communities in the contemporary United States. Today's 3.3 million American Indians and Alaska Natives comprise over 560 Tribal Nations descending from hundreds of peoples speaking scores of languages and practicing dozens of religious traditions (for summary overviews, see Gone, 2003, 2004). Despite such overwhelming diversity, psychologists and other multicultural mental health researchers have endeavored over the years to characterize the distinctive (usually *singular*) cultural profile of Native Americans relative to psychotherapeutic practice (e.g., LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990). These authors typically acknowledge the diversity of Tribal America and the resultant limitations for characterizing Native people in such broad brush strokes before offering their generalizations.

In a recent critical summary of this extensive literature, Waldram (2004) traced the historical formulation and subsequent recapitulation of the generalized Native American ethos as it appears in this scholarly corpus. This generic ethos is often delineated in terms of value differentials or "cultural contrasts" between Natives and Euro Americans. For example, in his recent guide to counseling Native Americans, Herring (1999) has written: "Generally, Native values consist of sharing, cooperation, noninterference, being, the tribe and extended family . . . . By contrast, mainstream values emphasize saving, domination, competition, aggression, doing, individualism and the nuclear family . . . ." (p. 72). Similar oppositions are prevalent in this literature. For example, Waldram observed that Trimble—one of the only investigators in this field to embark on systematic data-based investigation into Native value differentials—routinely references the classic contrasts delineated by Bryde (1972) among the Lakota and Zintz (1963) among the Pueblo (e.g., Trimble & Medicine, 1993). Both sets of Native/non-Native contrasts include, for example, generosity versus acquisition and cooperation versus competition.

As one means to focus the illustrative analysis presented in this article, it is significant to note that several decades of comparative evaluation by psychologists have yielded a virtual consensus that American Indians are *passive*, *submissive*, and *noncompetitive* in their psychological outlook and demeanor (e.g., Brandt, 1990; French, 2000; Johnson, 2006). Such assertions would appear at first glance to stand in stark contrast to the enduring cultural ethos of the Gros Ventres of Montana. As a result, the modest objective of this illustrative study is to interrogate this disciplinary consensus surrounding these supposed facets of Native American psychology. More specifically, this study asks: In what ways might "traditional" Gros Ventre cultural ideals shape individual psychological experience relative to widespread professional attributions of passivity, submissiveness, and noncompetitiveness to American Indians receiving psychological services? Inasmuch as the ECCSM is introduced as an empirical means to explore this question, a brief review of the role of the case study in psychological inquiry follows.

The Status of the Case Study in Psychological Inquiry

The case study approach to psychological inquiry has long provoked contention within the discipline, with the degree of

skepticism toward its validity keyed to the specific subfield of psychology as well as the researcher's guiding epistemological framework (Kazdin, 1981; Runyan, 1982; Yin, 2003). In fact, psychologists have not infrequently assumed polarized positions regarding the methodological merits of case study research, with some promoting and valorizing its adoption and others dismissing and proscribing its use. Debates concerning how best to define the case study method—and whether it truly qualifies as a distinctive research methodology—persist today (Kyburz-Graber, 2004; Verschuren, 2003). As a result, relatively little has been written by psychologists about the actual practice of case study research.

The extant literature suggests that the case study is regarded in some disciplinary quarters as a viable research tool for exploring, describing, or even explaining contextually embedded psychological phenomena, either at the individual or group levels of analysis (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006).[1] Moreover, the case study is said to increase scientific understanding of an individual or group because it affords opportunities for "triangulation" (or the integration of multiple strands of evidence) in drawing psychological inferences (Stake, 2005). Even so, the results of case study research have usually been accorded preliminary or complementary standing in the context of discovery rather than the full or final word on a subject in the context of justification (Symonds & Ellis, 1945). Certainly, in the disciplinary pursuit of reliable causal attribution, case study approaches cannot meaningfully control for most of the classic threats to internal validity. Moreover, in the absence of the ability to directly manipulate most variables of interest, the process of ruling out competing hypotheses is rendered exceptionally difficult (Kazdin, 1981). A final set of concerns pertains to the problem of generalization for case-based inferences.

In response to these major limitations, advocates of case study research in psychology have developed strategies to improve the validity of inferences drawn from these approaches. Davidson and Lazarus (2007) elaborated on six strategies by which case studies might contribute to psychological knowledge by: (a) casting doubt on general theories, (b) providing valuable heuristics for subsequent research, (c) demonstrating novel applications of established principles, (d) affording (in limited instances) scientifically valid inferences from single-participant experiments, (e) exploring rare but important phenomena, and (f) contextualizing, illustrating, or applying nomothetic knowledge in particular instances and contexts. With regard to the study of culture and psychology, *none* of the literature identified in this review of the case study method addressed the tantalizing intersection of culture and mind. The present study thus endeavors to contribute to psychological knowledge in this domain by exploring the significance of Gros Ventre cultural ideals relative to the professional consensus described above using four of the strategies just enumerated (specifically, strategies a–c and f).

Method

The stated purpose of this article is to empirically demonstrate the viability of the ECCSM for the psychological study of culture. The ECCSM achieves this by merging one source of data (single-participant responses to open-ended interviews) with another source of data (the extant ethnographic record) in the effort to facilitate more efficient and contextually grounded inquiry on the interrelationships between cultural and psychological pro-

cesses. More specifically, in addressing the question of how traditional Gros Ventre cultural ideals continue to constitute contemporary psychological experience relative to professionally established ethnoracial prototypes, this study triangulates between original and existing empirical evidence. One consequence of this synthesis will be a mitigation of the usual limitations on generalizability in service to inferences about *shared* cultural practices. As a contribution to the methodological literature, this article will necessarily foreground various elements of methodological justification relative to more familiar conventions governing the report of empirical findings.

Participant

It has already been noted that the ECCSM depends on substantive interpretive analysis of in-depth interview responses from a single participant. In this instance, the responses were obtained from two separate interviews administered to the same individual across nine months' time. The participant in this case study was Mrs. Bertha Snow.[2] A Gros Ventre elder in her late-70s at the time of the interviews, Snow was the firstborn of her parents, themselves "full blood" bilingual Gros Ventres who went on to raise 10 other children. Snow was born in 1918 at a time of considerable cultural flux. For example, Snow's parents preferred that she and her siblings speak English exclusively—thus, she does not speak the Gros Ventre language. Moreover, her parents' generation strongly impressed upon their children the necessity for a "civilized" education and, to some extent, the irrelevance of the old Gros Ventre way of life.

During her youth, Snow attended Catholic parochial school, only later to enroll in the nearby off-reservation public school for the bulk of her secondary education (she quit school to get married before graduation). Snow has lived on the reservation for the vast majority of her life, relocating for 5 years during the 1950s under Bureau of Indian Affairs sponsorship to San Jose, California, where she supported herself and her children as a domestic worker. She then returned to Fort Belknap and worked at the reservation hospital as a nurse's aid until retirement over a decade later. She has been married twice, rearing three children from her first marriage. From her earliest years, Snow has maintained strong ties to Roman Catholic belief and ritual. She has many relatives and descendents at Fort Belknap and is clearly recognized as the matriarch of the Gone family.

Owing to a combination of circumspect character qualities and some knowledge of traditional matters, Snow commands a modicum of respect in the reservation community. As one of 13 elderly Gros Ventre respondents to be interviewed in the summer of 1994,

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[1] For this article, a search of the PsycINFO bibliographic database was conducted in November 2007. Queried terms included "case study and methodology" (126 results), "case study and qualitative research" (13 results), and "case study and method" (142 results). Approximately 200 abstracts were initially perused, ultimately leading to the identification of seventeen articles for careful review based on the kind and quality of information provided.

[2] The research reported in this article was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Moreover, Mrs. Snow reviewed a draft of this article and was comfortable being identified as the respondent in this study.

Snow's selection for the purposes of this study merits brief justification. First, recall that only 13 out of an eligible pool of 65 Gros Ventre elders were inclined to be interviewed for the project—the relatively limited incidence of research participation attests to the logistical difficulties of undertaking psychological research in "Indian country," as well as the resultant limitations in generalizability absent noninterview sources of evidence. Second, even in deflecting requests to participate in the project (which was almost always communicated indirectly), most elders offered referrals to contemporaries who they believed were more knowledgeable and thus better suited for participation—Snow received a higher-than-average number of such recommendations.

Third, among the elders actually interviewed, Snow was one of four participants who were especially gifted, reflective, and responsive concerning the meaning of shared Gros Ventre experience in response to interview questions. Thus, alongside three other respondents, Snow was unusually insightful, evocative, and forthright in discussing these matters. Finally, Snow is the first author's maternal grandfather's oldest sister, and her responses to interview questions—in which she explained the meaning of Gros Ventre culture, identity and history to a grandson reared away from the reservation—were an important expression of kinship obligations.[3] Owing to significant commonalities across the four respondents' interviews, however, careful analysis of *any* of these would likely have yielded similar findings relative to the exploration of cultural ideals vis-à-vis presumed prototypical values such as passivity, submissiveness, and noncompetitiveness.

Measures

Two measures were developed specifically for this project, an Initial Interview and a Follow-Up Interview.[4] The Initial Interview consisted of some 25 clusters of open-ended, semistructured questions designed to facilitate respondent discussion of relevant features of Gros Ventre cultural identity. In the traditions of interpretive research, administration of this three-page, single-spaced protocol was organized around the kinds of information sought, but remained accommodating enough to incorporate a wide variety of emergent content. The first portion of the Initial Interview (comprised of 16 query clusters) was designed to obtain information concerning individual perspectives on various matters pertaining broadly to cultural identity. These broad questions solicited information about problems confronting the reservation, community role models, cultural ideals, generational differences, intertribal and interracial distinctions, and indigenous cultural categories at Fort Belknap. Examples of questions from this section include: "What kinds of people commanded the most respect from other Gros Ventres?" and "What are the most important Gros Ventre ways that need to be preserved for future generations?" The second portion of the Initial Interview (eight query clusters) attempted to solicit specific cultural narratives concerning the creation of the world, origins of the Gros Ventre Flat Pipe (the community's most sacred ritual object), ritual knowledge of the Flat Pipe ceremony, and especially ideas and opinions concerning public controversy over the place of the Flat Pipe in modern community life. Examples of questions from this section include: "Are there any stories which best capture what it means to be Gros Ventre?" and "How did the Old Timers think the world was created?"

A second interview was designed specifically for Snow based on preliminary analyses of her responses to the Initial interview. This Follow-Up Interview—consisting of six single-spaced pages—included many detailed questions organized under the following topical headings: Values (10 query clusters), Identity Categories (three query clusters), Communicative Norms (11 query clusters), Spiritual Beliefs (seven query clusters), and Knowledge (two query clusters). These questions were created specifically to verify, clarify, contextualize, or obtain new information about topics discussed in the Initial Interview. For example, under the Values heading—in which several cultural ideals tentatively inferred from the Initial Interview were systematically presented to Snow for her consideration and reaction—the ideals were introduced as follows:

> I've noticed a number of values or ideals that seem important to you from our interview this past summer. I want to go through each one of them briefly just to make sure that I really understand how you feel about these values. [List and describe each ideal, then ask:] Do I seem to have the gist of it? Is there anything you want to add to or clarify about my description? Do you think this value is unique (idiosyncratic) to you as an individual or one that is/was shared by other Gros Ventres in the past or present?

Successive passes through these questions for each of the posited cultural ideals served the crucial function of confirming key interpretations of earlier interview material. This process of verification, clarification, contextualization, and revision of tentative initial interpretations was repeated across other sections of the Follow-Up Interview as well.

Finally, the extant ethnographic evidence brought to bear in this study was retrieved from a search of the anthropological literature pertaining to the Gros Ventre people. Four works proved most useful. Flannery (1953) and Cooper (1957) were cultural anthropologists invited to the reservation by elderly Gros Ventres in the late 1930s to document what remained of ancestral knowledge and tradition. Their works stand out for their routine presentation of innumerable vignettes from many aged informants that still lend themselves to interpretation beyond the modest conclusions of these scholars. More recently, Fowler (1987) completed her sweeping ethnohistory of Gros Ventre society across more than two centuries. Fowler's attention to stability and change over time, as well as her analysis of contemporary generational dynamics among the Gros Ventre, remain invaluable. Finally, Taylor (in press) has nearly completed his comprehensive grammar and dic-

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[3] Ideally, for this type of approach, inclusion of additional contextual information concerning the researcher's position and standing is desirable. This was precluded here owing to considerations of manuscript length, but appears in much more detail elsewhere (Gone, 1996).

[4] All measures developed for this study are available on request from the first author. In addition, a third measure developed for this project was a composite Assessment of Culture Scale comprised of 39 items, the majority of which required Likert-like response ratings. The items were inspired by contemporary survey assessments of acculturation and cultural identification, and were included to explore the meaningfulness of relatively limited survey items in widespread use by social scientists in light of more deeply contextualized interview responses. Snow completed this survey, but her results are not reported here owing in part to the fact that, as an idiographic measure, the Scale remained relatively un-illuminating.

tionary of the Gros Ventre language. With the dearth of fluent speakers of the language at Fort Belknap, Taylor's work affords insights into cross-cultural meanings at the level of basic semantics and grammatical structure. Each of these extant studies was crucial at key junctures in the study, especially during (a) the development phase of the Initial Interview, (b) the tentative interpretation of Initial Interview responses, (c) the design of the Follow-Up Interview, and (d) the finalization of inferences following both interviews regarding the individual expression of shared cultural ideals by this respondent.

It remains here to justify the adoption of open-ended interviews for the assessment of Gros Ventre cultural affiliation and associated ideals, for quite clearly data obtained in this manner require interpretive analysis as opposed to the statistical analysis of variables so familiar to the discipline. Indeed, psychological science typically privileges methods that allow for the observer-independent measurement of phenomena that are quantified as variables and statistically related to one another to evaluate a priori theoretical constructs. In the wake of the "interpretive turn" in the social sciences (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987), the limitations of this approach have become salient, however, as investigators increasingly express interest in the nuanced complexities of *situated* and *meaningful* psychological experience. Such experience is less amenable to variable analysis precisely because it not infrequently defies both intuitive investigator preconceptions and the artificiality of measurement conditions. In the present study, we would have been hard-pressed to specify in a priori terms the complete corpus of Gros Ventre cultural ideals embraced by elders of the generational cohort born before 1930. Moreover, the understanding afforded by responses to survey items can be extremely "thin" with regard to nuanced cultural analysis (Geertz, 1973) and would likely have remained inadequate. In essence, this study was principally situated in the context of discovery rather than the context of justification (Symonds & Ellis, 1945), and so merited adoption of an interpretive methodology.

Procedure

Snow was contacted and recruited for the project in early June of 1994. Informed verbal consent to participate in the study was obtained by the first author on June 17, and the Initial Interview was conducted in Snow's living room. The 3-hr interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed in its entirety (and checked for accuracy). The resultant transcript comprised 2,010 lines of text across 55 pages. Multiple kinds of analysis addressed to different aspects of the overarching research project were undertaken by the first author. With regard to the empirical derivation of expressed cultural ideals, conventional qualitative content analysis was employed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). More specifically, multiple passes through a hard copy of the transcript by the first author using colored markers afforded the inductive identification and classification of cultural ideals. Interpretive consideration of the corpus of identified segments led to the tentative specification of cultural ideals espoused by Snow in the Initial Interview.

Whereas the Initial Interview served as the basis for generating tentative interpretations (exploratory), the Follow-Up Interview was designed to examine the adequacy of such interpretations (confirmatory). Thus, based on the cultural ideals tentatively inferred from the first interview, the Follow-Up Interview was designed specifically to elicit Snow's frank evaluation of the first author's provisional empirical inferences. Nine months later, Snow again provided verbal informed consent and interacted with the first author for nearly 6 hours over 2 days (March 22–23, 1995) to complete the Follow-Up Interview. These sessions were also audio-recorded. Owing to its function and length, however, the Follow-Up Interview was only partially transcribed for the tailored purposes of verification, clarification, or rejection of these initial interpretations.[5] As a result, the Initial Interview was examined in much more detail than the Follow-Up Interview and became the nucleus for the most systematic analyses reported here. The results presented below are thus principally illustrated with quotations from the Initial Interview, augmented occasionally with material from the Follow-Up Interview.

Results

In response to interview queries, Snow identified eight cultural ideals—expressions of normative behavioral expectation and evaluation explicitly attributed to the wider Gros Ventre community—that consistently ordered her assessment of appropriate and admirable behavior. Owing to considerations of article length, most of these ideals—*self-sufficiency*, *personal honesty*, *extended kinship obligations*, *respect for elders*, *community mindedness* (including generosity), and proscriptions against *self-promotion* and *interpersonal presumption*—will not be reviewed in any detail. Instead, for the purposes of illustrating the viability of the ECCSM, empirical engagement with longstanding professional assumptions regarding American Indian passivity, submissiveness, and noncompetitiveness will be undertaken here with concerted attention to only the most relevant of cultural ideals expressed by Snow, namely her esteem for *ambitious achievement*. On its face, this ideal seemed the most likely of the eight to diverge from the reigning professional consensus regarding the alleged psychological orientations of American Indians.

At the outset, however, the substantive relationships among these ideals are crucial to convey. For example, one of the more prominent ideals discussed by Snow was that of individual and familial self-sufficiency. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Snow's ideal of self-sufficiency merely simulates the Horatio Alger ethos of mainstream America. In fact, the remaining ideals identified by Snow shaped this self-sufficiency ethic in a markedly distinct manner. More specifically, her identification of the lack of employment opportunities at Fort Belknap as the reservation's most pressing social problem (closely followed by welfare and substance abuse) emerged from her conviction that access to resources is a necessary prerequisite for exercising kinship obligations and community-mindedness. Moreover, the preservation of autonomy through the avoidance of dependence was seen to fuel her regard for ambitious achievement as well. In the sections that follow, an evolving understanding of the cultural significance of this ideal as espoused by Bertha Snow will be presented, with specific attention to the manner in which ethno-

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[5] More specifically, a detailed outline of the interview was created, organized by interview section and topic of conversation, yielding systematic Notes from the Follow-Up Interview comprised of 296 topical entries across 35 single-spaced pp.

graphic contextualization helped transcend the idiographic limitations of single-participant inquiry.

An Interpretive Challenge

Based on Snow's interview responses, it seems clear that her veneration for ambitious achievement of various kinds characterized one of the more prominent cultural ideals among the Gros Ventre. For example, on a personal level, she recounted how a nun at the local Catholic Mission—one representative of a seemingly unattainable moral standard—complimented her as having the cleanest, best-dressed, and most well-mannered children at the Mission school. A related example concerned her parental responsibilities to her daughters while living in California. She reported an ability to properly feed and clothe her children despite very limited income:

> And [my White employers] would give me their outmoded clothes, you know . . . . And I'd rip them up and make skirts for [my daughters]. Make tops for them, and stuff like that. And at school, they'd say, "Oh, where'd you get that skirt? I never saw that anywhere." You know, [friends would] borrow them! And they were homemade out of somebody else's clothes.

Thus, Snow's provision of clothing for her daughters required initiative and creative talent, which resulted in their more privileged white friends admiring and borrowing their refurbished clothes.

In further discussion of life in California, Snow observed, "I lived right in the heart of the Whiteman's world and I didn't feel any different than they did. I could communicate with them, talk to them on a one-to-one basis. I didn't feel inferior to them." Curiously, this affirmation of adaptability to the White world stood in contrast to her portrayal of herself as an "outsider" during a brief visit among other Indians in a nearby state. Farther into the interview, she remarked that during her transition to life in California: "I didn't have no problem. Coming home, I had no problem." This apparent ease with which she adapted to the Whiteman's world, however, was directly contradicted a few sentences later:

> That first year I was down there I was so darned lonesome. I hated it so much. I wanted to come home. But like I said, I'd made a commitment and I wasn't about to come dragging myself back here with my tail between my legs . . . . Oh, I was so homesick!

This clarification is illuminating owing to her overt casting of a premature return home as a defeat ("dragging myself back here with my tail between my legs"). Less than a minute later, she explained: "[My husband] worked everyday. I got tired of his [behavior]. I used that as an excuse to come home." For this latter statement to make sense, it must be clarified why returning home to the reservation required an "excuse" (as opposed to being a desirable undertaking), which in turn requires an explanation for why leaving "the Whiteman's world" would have been a defeat.

An Ethnographic Insight

The extant ethnographic record would appear to afford insight into this important question. More specifically, in her efforts to document the resilience of Gros Ventre cultural ideals in the face of historical and cultural transition across more than two centuries, Fowler (1987) observed:

> Other behavioral ideals that have persisted for two centuries and that, to Gros Ventres, define group identity are unyielding tenacity in defense of group or sometimes personal interests (described as *"iní-itaatéhk"i*, "he is fierce") and the fulfillment of a commitment to the Great Mystery, or Supreme Being, to take proper care of certain ritual objects. (p. 22)

The ideal that Fowler describes as "unyielding tenacity" in defense of group interests (expressed colloquially in the adage *he is fierce*) seems especially relevant here. More specifically, Fowler observed a historic evolution in which Gros Ventre ferocity was rearticulated in the face of the pressures of Euro American pacification and colonization:

> Intertribal wars ended, but the Gros Ventres continued to feel threatened by the tribes around them . . . . A quest for primacy on the reservation began to preoccupy Gros Ventre leaders to the same extent that ambition for success in battle had once done. "Fierceness" came to describe not military vigilance, but tenacious, adversarial behavior toward other groups perceived as threatening. (p. 54)

To better appreciate the concept of "ferocity" as highlighted by Fowler, the dictionary of the Gros Ventre language was consulted. As an important cultural resource, Taylor's (in press) dictionary affords a suggestive glimpse into the web of interrelated meanings expressed through the Gros Ventre language. *He is fierce*, transliterated by Taylor as *?iniitcctehk?i*, is the linguistic kin of several related words, sharing a common root that clarifies the nuances in this phrase's meaning:

> *-iitoot-* (root): difficult, hard; fierce; capable, talented, ambitious, energetic (This word is often translated by English-speaking Gros Ventre as "moose." This is an idiom in the English of the Fort Belknap Reservation). (p. 215)

Of greatest interest in Taylor's entry is the evident conceptual link between ferocity, talent, energy, and ambition (with explicit reference to a local English idiom that preserves this notion).

Elsewhere, the first author has further explicated this concept among the Gros Ventre:

> This [concept] denotes that quality of experience in which difficulty, hardship, and overwhelming odds are met head-on with gusto, talent, energy, and ambition, such that individual agency ultimately prevails. Not surprisingly, the metaphor for such triumphant agency is drawn from the battlefield and exemplified by a "fierce" warrior charging into the enemy despite being outnumbered; it was this ascribed ferocity that the word "moose" was intended to preserve once the Gros Ventre language began to slip away. I choose here to tentatively translate this notion as "vitality" rather than "ferocity" because the former connotes less in terms of violence than it does in terms of *animus*. (Gone, in press, p. 8)

In summary, the anthropological evidence would appear to suggest that the longstanding Gros Ventre ideal concerning expressions of vitality, energy, agency, ambition, ferocity, and the pursuit of primacy still persists in Gros Ventre society. Additional discussion of the significance of this ideal in the words of Bertha Snow will be addressed in the context of relevant interview material.

An Enduring Ideal

In light of the ethnographic evidence, an obvious interpretation of Snow's earlier statements is that her premature return home would have been a compromise of ferocity or tenacity and a loss of primacy in terms of her interactions with White people, who (she was mindful to assert) are not superior to her. This compromise of ferocity was rooted in her observations that to be at Fort Belknap is to be without a job. And it is important to recognize that holding a job provides much more than just access to resources, but that, in addition to resources, jobs provide a forum in which to demonstrate personal "ferocity," that is, one's capabilities, talents, ambition, and energy. Thus, for Snow, employment was seen to be a prerequisite for establishing oneself as a respectable Gros Ventre person. That is why, according to her account, she and her husband went to such great lengths to find work upon their return to Fort Belknap, traveling around the state as necessary. That is also, why she eventually applied for a position as a nurse's aid despite the odds against her:

> I put in for a job at the hospital, not figuring that I was competing . . . . I had never graduated from high school, and I was just a tenth grader . . . . A lot of [the other applicants] were high school graduates, and I was competing against them. And I thought, "Oh, shoot. I'll never have a chance." Doggone it, I made it!

Many other of Snow's comments support this interpretation as well. In describing how Gros Ventres arriving in the big city might better cope with the transition, she stated:

> Go after a job. Present yourself and your credentials and keep on looking. And if they say, "Well, we don't have nothing today," be there at 7:30 the next morning. Just keep on trying. They're going to get tired of you one of these days and then they'll hire you. You can't just say, "Oh, I can't find a job." You ain't gonna find a job sitting in some bar.

Thus, Snow invoked the powerful agentic value of tenacity in her recommendations to newcomers. Jobs are not easily found. One must "go after" them, just as the tribal council must "go after" federal funds (as she elsewhere prescribed) if they are to create additional jobs at Fort Belknap.

In this regard, several exemplary individuals figured in Snow's account. She applauded two women of her generation who were "getting out and doing something" by virtue of joining the armed forces. One demonstrated further ambition by completing nursing school first. Snow immediately clarified that this particular woman was a Gros Ventre. She further described how these women returned to Fort Belknap on leave where their enlisted peers were forced to salute them. She concluded by adding, "Yeah, there wasn't that many of us in my generation," clearly classifying herself as one who had demonstrated remarkable ambition not through obtaining higher education but by raising so many children, "her contribution to humanity."

Snow's most telling statement about these concerns appeared in her response to judging how well most Gros Ventres cope in modern living: "I think if they'd really exert themselves and really put themselves out, I think the Gros Ventre, myself, are more sophisticated than other tribes and can cope very well on the outside world." Her logic was apparent: if tenacious, then Gros Ventre primacy (in competition with other tribes, Whites, or some-times other Gros Ventres) will be won. That is, ambition, resourcefulness, and tenacity were particularly noteworthy for Snow when they resulted in demonstrated primacy over others, especially members of other cultural groups. She recounted her father's favorable description of the Gros Ventres in comparison to the Lakota: Gros Ventres were said to be less cruel, vicious, and greedy.

And most telling of all, she approvingly commented on Gros Ventre agency—"They got gumption"—in direct comparison to the neighboring Assiniboine people.

> The Gros Ventres are more ambitious—I wouldn't know if "ambition" is the right word to use—than the Assiniboines . . . . Not afraid to get out there and go after it, whereas the Assiniboine are a little bit more timid . . . . The Gros Ventre is a little bit more sure of himself in that respect, toward dealing with the outside world.

It seems clear from this quote that Snow viewed the Gros Ventres as more agentic than the Assiniboines, and yet had an uncommonly difficult time describing exactly what she meant. If "ambition" was not quite right, what English alternative might be? Or was it that English simply cannot capture the concept at its essence without seeming unfair to the Assiniboine. In the end, it is possible that the old Gros Ventre concept embodied in the phrase *he is fierce* epitomizes a cultural ideal with enough nuance that English simply cannot capture it.

The competition for cultural primacy was also quite evident with regard to Gros Ventre dealings with Whites. For example, in her discussion of the White Catholic proselytization of the Gros Ventre people, Snow conveyed how the priests recruited Stiffarm, a prominent medicine man, to be their catechist: "They kept after this medicine man to get rid of his medicine because it was the work of the devil." However, despite the apparently widespread Gros Ventre conversion to Catholicism, "it looks like they just kind of secretly hung onto some of their beliefs." This very same convert, Stiffarm, was later described as demonstrating proven effectiveness as a medicine man despite his widely heralded conversion to Catholicism. In the context of the controversial history of White missionary efforts on the reservation, Snow also described her father's tenacious resistance to placing his children in Catholic boarding school:

> We was the only kids that never went to boarding school . . . . The Gones. He just flat out refused to put us in boarding school. They didn't have no day schools, but they had to make day schools and let us go to day school because my dad wouldn't put us there.

Snow's identification of tenacious resistance to powerful assimilative institutions in Gros Ventre life even extended to the formidable Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) that administered the urban relocation program starting in the 1950s to further dissolve reservation social ties:

> They had designated this Relocation Act . . . to get people off the reservation. And they would not give us names of other Indians in the cities. They tried to keep us apart so that we would turn into White people . . . . But they failed to take into consideration the moccasin grapevine. That's why we were having powwows all over the city.

Given the apparent centrality of "ferocity" or "unyielding tenacity" in the words of Bertha Snow, it should come as no surprise

that instances of surrendered Gros Ventre primacy evoked passionate censure and condemnation. For example, it is within this durable cultural framework that Snow expressed utter disdain for docility, defeat and dependency among the Gros Ventre people. Her attitude toward dependency has already been reviewed in passing, so it should suffice to observe here that her words mark dependency as the principal threat to ferocity and tenacity by virtue of its capacity to render ambition, talent, and energy impotent. In this regard, she discussed the threat of docility in the context of historic BIA control of Gros Ventre affairs, Roman Catholic proselytization of Gros Ventre religious sensibilities, and the general "defeat" of the Gros Ventre people wrought by Euro American colonization. Together, the narrative thrust of these accounts was how Gros Ventre agency was historically crippled almost beyond repair.

Finally, the question of primacy conceded or won in Gros Ventre life nowhere obtained greater ambiguity than in the explication of disrupted ancestral ceremonial practice. In acknowledging the passing of Gros Ventre ritual knowledge, Snow offered an interpretation that preserved tribal agency by describing this loss as an agentic "sacrifice" of such traditions. In fact, this interpretation is entirely consistent with Fowler's (1987) characterization of Gros Ventres as selectively choosing progressive adaptation to White ways in the early days of the reservation to attain primacy over neighboring Assiniboines and Whites. But the attribution of ritual loss as a deliberate "sacrifice" in the pursuit of tribal primacy carries disturbing implications:

> Our people are so bereft . . . of our own traditions that we have to go outside of our tribe to get people to come in here and show us how to do [ritual] things. They are not our things. Our things are already gone. And I don't think we should go out there and get these things from other people . . . . Because we did have those, and there must be a reason why we don't have them today. The Gros Ventre people are so much more modern than other tribes. And, to me, that's a plan of the Great Spirit . . . . If we were supposed to have these things, . . . our ancestors would have . . . passed on those things that are so dear to them.

In regard to ancestral ritual practice, then, it is this comparative awareness that affords an additional reason for Snow's insistence that Gros Ventre ways may have ended by supernatural design: any other explanation would risk portraying Gros Ventres as needlessly forsaking tradition in a misdirected effort to hastily adapt to the White world. Such an interpretation would conclusively concede Gros Ventre primacy in the contemporary era to a host of other Native peoples that have retained their traditions in the face of overwhelming adversity. Thus, the loss of language and especially sacred ceremony among the Gros Ventres, while still an extremely bitter pill to swallow, was attenuated and contained by Snow's belief that the Supreme Being fashioned history in this way. The alternative interpretation—that Gros Ventres willfully but pointlessly sacrificed their own traditions—would threaten to shatter the very foundations of Gros Ventre cultural identity through a paramount and irreversible concession of primacy (see also Gone, 1999).

A Fading Legacy?

Upon presentation of the tentative, ethnographically grounded interpretation of this cultural ideal to Snow during the Follow-Up

Interview, she acknowledged that such *tenacity* and *ferocity* had characterized Gros Ventres before their confinement to the reservation, but that these terms were of questionable descriptive validity in more recent times (owing to the crippling consequences of unemployment, poverty, dependency, and docility for the Gros Ventre community). With regard to the specific, evaluative behavioral adjectives identified among Gros Ventres by Fowler (1987) and Taylor (in press)—*fierce* and *moose*, respectively—Snow acknowledged their use among her parents' generation, but insisted that these expressions are idioms of the past. For example, among her father's generation, Snow explained that the term *fierce* meant "fearless at going after something, like fearlessly charging into the center of a battle." She added that the term likewise applied to someone who undertakes something with gusto, with a lot of will, energy, or ambition. Contemporary equivalents of the term, according to Snow, would be phrases such as "He's a go-getter," or "He means business." Regardless of how one chooses to denote this important cultural ideal, Snow's admiration for the energetic exercise of talent and vitality toward ambitious achievement in life was positively prolific throughout her interviews.

Discussion

In response to two open-ended interviews concerning cultural identity, Gros Ventre elder Bertha Snow consistently subscribed to eight behavioral ideals, the most salient of which was the energetic and talented pursuit of *ambitious achievement* (the English word *ambition* cannot adequately circumscribe this concept, but with proper qualification it seems an acceptable gloss). Such achievement was particularly celebrated when it resulted in primacy over others—including other Native peoples as well as Euro Americans—through unyielding tenacity. This reverence for effectual ambition strongly colored Snow's interpretation of her own life narrative and defined for her the essence of a prosperous and successful Gros Ventre life.

It is interesting to note that the cultural ideals as expressed by Snow were inflected by significant *social* or *interpersonal* commitments and orientations. For example, as was previously implied, Gros Ventre notions of self-sufficiency actually stand in marked contrast to mainstream Euro American practices promoting the accumulation of wealth by virtue of the manner in which extended kinship obligations, community-mindedness, and reciprocal generosity encourage the redistribution of resources as one means to reinforce and preserve social ties. Similarly, contemporary Gros Ventre "ferocity" as expressed through energetic exercises of talent and ambition are channeled toward the pursuit of primacy over others, rendering the quest for ambitious achievement *an intrinsically competitive endeavor*.

Once again, brief consultation of the ethnographic record reveals that Gros Ventre society was historically rife with competition as evidenced by numerous cultural institutions. Even casual perusal of Flannery (1953), Cooper (1957), and Fowler (1987) reveals a host of such institutions. For example, the mocking or disparaging names of several historical Gros Ventre bands (decentralized hunting groups) suggests that these may have been taunts by rivals designed to urge band members to greater achievements. The celebrated institution of the *enemy-friend* pitted two individuals comparable in skill and talent against one another in closely followed rivalries for community honors and validation. The male

age-graded cohorts each successively joined one of two competing men's societies, the Stars or the Wolves, for life—the members of these societies would challenge each other to extravagant deeds of bravery and generosity. Moreover, of course, it would be difficult to overemphasize the significance of raiding and warfare as competitive expressions.

It is now appropriate to return to the question that originally motivated this study: In what ways might "traditional" Gros Ventre cultural ideals shape individual psychological experience relative to widespread attributions by multicultural psychologists of behavioral passivity, submissiveness, and noncompetitiveness among American Indian people served by mental health professionals? Although Bertha Snow did not remotely suggest that she had ever obtained or desired professional counseling of any kind, it seems clear from her example that any contemporary Gros Ventres subscribing to the shared and enduring ideals of the community would likely clash with well-meaning, culturally sensitive Euro American clinicians who may have taken the stock, prototype-based multicultural message to heart. Instead, as the first author has elsewhere observed, any modern therapeutic project undertaken among the Gros Ventre must acknowledge that contemporary community "problems are primarily existential and spiritual in origin, not biological or behavioral—they result from over a century of thwarted ambition and depleted vitality" (Gone, in press, p. 20). As a result, truly therapeutic efforts at Fort Belknap must recognize that personal well-being may depend quite robustly on the realization of competitive personal ambitions, inflected, of course, by additional longstanding community values surrounding local reputation, familial honor, and extravagant generosity. In sum, a therapeutic orchestration of ambitious achievement through a harnessing of the spirit of competition—ideally channeled toward prosocial outcomes—may be just what the healers have ordered.

It remains to evaluate the empirical viability of the methodological approach proposed in this article. By now it should be apparent that the ECCSM is a methodological synthesis of: (a) a case study approach to psychological inquiry, and (b) an extant analysis of cultural practices and processes for a given community as documented within the existing anthropological record. The purpose of this operational merger is to transcend an intrinsic limitation of case studies, namely their relentlessly idiographic character that, no matter how insightful or textured the resultant analysis, affords little insight beyond the case at hand (but see Danziger [1990] for a critique of the conventional nomothetic-idiographic opposition). Subsequent to the suffusion of culture within disciplinary psychology, research investigators increasingly desire novel methods that might illuminate the fascinating interrelationships between cultural and psychological processes. In this regard, the case study approach would seem utterly impotent insofar as it provides no intrinsic means to differentiate the idiosyncratic dispositions, habits, and orientations of the individual from the shared patterns of activity, interaction, and interpretation within affiliated human communities. Yet, by availing themselves of the existing anthropological evidence, psychologists might in certain key instances effectively augment their case studies with extant empirical data to contextualize their inferences in service to the bona fide psychological study of cultural influences.

In this article, the ECCSM has been formalized, illustrated, and promoted as a useful addition to the methodological toolkit of the cultural psychologist. With regard to the extant ethnoracial prototype for Native Americans within multicultural mental health, the Gros Ventre cultural ideal of ambitious achievement—given its interpersonal expression toward the competitive pursuit of primacy over others—can be seen as a clear challenge to this pervasive notion of difference that inadvertently promotes "group stereotypes in the guise of cultural sensitivity" (Lakes, Lopez, & Garro, 2006, p. 381). In the absence of appropriate ethnographic contextualization, however, the cultural significance of Bertha Snow's routine commendations of ambitious achievement among the Gros Ventre may have been easily overlooked or even misconstrued as perhaps the result of a lifelong assimilation to Euro American cultural mores. Instead, application of the ECCSM in this instance has called into question longstanding disciplinary assumptions about the purportedly passive and noncompetitive psychological orientations of Native American people. Moreover, the adoption of the ECCSM in this instance has afforded unique and nuanced appreciation for the distinctively local contours of Gros Ventre ambition and its expression—which depart in quite significant ways from Euro American ambition and its exercise—in the lives of at least some contemporary tribal members. Finally, employment of the ECCSM facilitated insight into the ways in which shared cultural processes constitute individual psychological orientations in concrete and illuminating detail. Mere perusal of the anthropological evidence alone would not have identified the distinctive psychological contours of shared action and ideal. In these instances, the ECCSM has afforded cultural insights into psychological processes in efficient fashion, requiring analysis of only a single research interview.

Despite these evident advantages, the ECCSM—like all methodological tools—has its limitations. The kind and quality of the case study will naturally constrain the inferences drawn from its cultural contextualization. Furthermore, in the absence of relevant or reliable ethnographic evidence, the idiographic limitations of the case study approach may not be effectively transcended. Moreover, if the inferences drawn from the case study diverge substantially from the existing anthropological findings, then interpretive difficulties surrounding the meaning of such discrepancies may be difficult to resolve (including whether to conclude that the respondent is culturally detached from the community, or whether the anthropological interpretations of community life were simplistic or erroneous to begin with, or whether the cultural norms and practices of the community have shifted significantly over time, and so on). Finally, for many important cultural questions taken up by research psychologists, the ECCSM—like most case study approaches—will continue to represent a mere point of departure for much more extensive and rigorous inquiry into the complex and nuanced ways that psyche and culture "live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up" (Shweder, 1991, p. 73). Future use of this methodological technique should help to clarify the kinds of case studies that are most suited to cultural contextualization through the ECCSM, as well as the kinds of ethnographic evidence that most effectively lend themselves to the contextualization of psychological inquiry proper.

Conclusion

This article endeavored to demonstrate the empirical viability of the ECCSM for investigating interrelationships between cultural and psychological processes. By juxtaposing at least two relevant forms of data—original interview material from a single respondent concerning some facet of psychological experience, and existing ethnographic

evidence by which interview material might be culturally contextualized—the inherent idiographic limitations of the case study approach for pursuing the psychological study of culture may be transcended in key instances. Adoption of the ECCSM for the exploration of cultural ideals among a single elderly Native American respondent revealed both the personal and cultural significance of ambitious achievement within this tribal community, effectively challenging the widespread consensus within multicultural psychology that Native Americans are culturally disposed to passive, submissive, and noncompetitive psychological orientations. Application of the proposed methodology demonstrates that important empirical insights may be obtained with nuance and efficiency at the confluence of culture and psychology.

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