

# **“We Were Through as Keepers of It”: The “Missing Pipe Narrative” and Gros Ventre Cultural Identity**

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**ABSTRACT** *A detailed narrative performed by a Gros Ventre elder is analyzed for its significance in the construction of cultural identity. In the context of these analyses, it is argued that narrative performance can be central to the active construction of cultural identity for individuals engaged in social interaction. In the present instance, certain performative features of the narrative involve a discursive identification by the narrator with the narrative protagonist that affords a personal resolution of a cultural crisis-in-meaning. Finally, this discursive identification by the narrator results in the re-creation of narrative events that involve the audience as participants in ways that powerfully impact the cultural identities they too will construct.*

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**I**n the summer of 1994, I inaugurated a journey that took me into the homes of many of my tribal elders on the Fort Belknap Indian reservation. What I sought was a better understanding of how contemporary Gros Ventres of my grandparents' generation make sense of being Gros Ventre, and detailed conversations with my tribal elders promised rich insight into modern Gros Ventre cultural identity. In one particular July conversation with a respected elder I was told that “being Indian” is “nothing but a story.” Here, in the very words, of this venerated elder I heard a conviction shared by many proponents of narrative analysis (Mishler 1986; Schiffrin 1996; Somers 1994): identity and narrative are inextricably intertwined.

The narrative performance analyzed here is principally concerned with an account elicited from Mrs. Bertha Snow, my grandmother, in the

spring of 1995. I have designated this narrative the “Missing Pipe Narrative” because the historical events with which it is concerned involve the traumatic discovery by an elderly Gros Ventre man that one of the sacred Pipes entrusted to his care by the Gros Ventre people was missing from its ceremonial bundle.

The significance of the Missing Pipe Narrative for the elucidation of my grandmother’s cultural identity is evident on several counts. First, the substance of the Missing Pipe Narrative concerns a distressing event involving one of the sacred Pipes upon which Gros Ventre culture is founded. These sacred Pipes include the Flat Pipe, which is believed to have been given to the Gros Ventres by the One Above at their inception as a people, and the Feathered Pipe, which was given to the Gros Ventres by the Thunder Being as an additional resource for meeting sacred responsibilities and obtaining supernatural assistance in time of need. Together these Pipes represent the Gros Ventres’ unique link to the Creator and afforded us sacred opportunities through a variety of rituals to fulfill our spiritual responsibilities to the Creator and obtain supernatural favor (evoked through “pity”) during the exigencies of life.

Prior to the disappearance of the buffalo, the Keepers (priests) of these Pipes (which were considered spiritual entities in themselves), led arduous lives with many ritual constraints on their behavior and relationships with others. Violation of these constraints was believed to lead to supernatural retribution for the neglect of one’s sacred duties. The Pipes also provided their Keepers with supernatural abilities necessary to fulfill their role as intermediaries with the One Above (and the Thunder Being, who was also accountable to the One Above). Since the onset of a sweeping cultural transformation following the demise of the buffalo, Gros Ventres have continued to revere these Pipes largely in the absence of formal ritual—there are no longer ritual Keepers, merely “caretakers” (like the old man who appears in the Missing Pipe Narrative) who “watch over them.” As a result, the Pipes retain their immensely powerful symbolic nature while simultaneously fostering sharply contested meanings within the Gros Ventre community (see Fowler 1987). As the sacred Pipes generally played an important role in the experience and expression of my grandmother’s cultural identity (Gone 1996), it seems fitting to illustrate the pragmatic construction of cultural identity vis-à-vis narrative performance with this Gros Ventre “Pipe story.”

A second indication of the significance of the Missing Pipe Narrative inheres in the familial context of its tellings. The momentous events portrayed in the narrative were experienced firsthand by Grandma Bertha’s father, which he reportedly recounted to her on only one occasion (she asserted that her father “never talked about it again” at one point during the interviews). Despite her singular hearing of this incident from her

father, the personal impact of the recounted events was such that Grandma subsequently narrated these events for me on multiple occasions. In addition, my grandmother asserts immediately following her detailed narration that she may be the only person in the community to have heard this account from her father. Thus, the fact that the protagonist of the Missing Pipe Narrative is the father of the narrator, who then proceeds to communicate the account to her grandson, further attests to the potential significance of the narrative because of its role in establishing and reinforcing kinship ties in connection to pivotal sacred events of no small import in the Gros Ventre cultural landscape.

A final indication of the significance of this narrative for the study of my grandmother's cultural identity relates to its sophisticated dramatic character. In some sense, most of the stories that Grandma tells are "performed." In these "events of narration" (Bauman 1986), Grandma routinely adopts a specialized rhythm, employs quoted speech, alters her voice quality in complex ways, and involves her entire body (through facial expression, posture, and movements of her torso) in bringing the action of the story to life in the space created by her hands immediately in front of her. She is really quite adept at this "breakthrough into performance" (see Bauman 1986; Bauman and Briggs 1990), and the Missing Pipe Narrative seems significant in part for its exemplary quality in this regard. Systematic scrutiny of this telling in particular, therefore, holds promise for a deeper understanding of the constitutive powers of such performative qualities for cultural identity.

## **PRESENTATION OF THE MISSING PIPE NARRATIVE**

The Missing Pipe Narrative is embedded within a 15-minute flow of discourse that is clearly bounded on both sides. That is, the strip of discourse that contains this narrative commences with my asking Grandma specifically prepared questions during a loosely structured interview and ends with the ringing of a telephone, which interrupts our conversation. The narrative proper may be demarcated from its surrounding discourse by several emergent qualities of the text itself (which are not especially relevant here). Based on these textual features, the entire strip of discourse may be partitioned into five contiguous sections: prenarrative commentary (section 1: about 40 lines of transcript), narrative beginning (section 2: about 10 lines), nonnarrative intrusion (section 3: about 25 lines), narrative proper (section 4: 210 lines), and postnarrative commentary (section 5: about 50 lines).

The prenarrative commentary (section 1) commences with my asking when Grandma Bertha originally heard her father recount the events involving the missing Pipe. Grandma's response indicates that she was not

precisely sure when her father had told her about the incident. Most of my grandmother's subsequent prenarrative commentary as well as the non-narrative intrusion (section 3) are expressive of her concern to identify for me when she originally heard this account. In fact, she speaks at some length about how she could go about determining the year that these events occurred. I will return to discuss this matter in greater detail later.

While sections 2 and 4 are both narrative in form, the narrative beginning (section 2) is relatively short and abruptly cut off by the non-narrative intrusion (section 3), which continues the somewhat anxious deliberations of the prenarrative commentary (section 1). Because section 4 essentially restarts the narrative, the narrative beginning (section 2), which briefly situates her father by the window inside his small log cabin, will not be exhibited here.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the text of the Missing Pipe Narrative presented here corresponds to section 4 in the partition strategy described above and comprises roughly two-thirds of the bounded strip of discourse. Finally, portions of the postnarrative commentary (section 5) will be presented later, because the significance of these events for my grandmother are most explicitly discussed there.

The Missing Pipe Narrative involves several characters who are brought together following the discovery by an elderly Gros Ventre man that the sacred Pipe, which the people have entrusted to his care, has mysteriously disappeared from its bundle. These characters include Grandma Bertha's father as the protagonist, the "old man" who acts as caretaker of the Pipe, the old man's young son, the old man's wife, and the Feathered Pipe itself. The events described occurred in the southwestern area of the Fort Belknap Reservation near the Catholic mission within a decade of the close of World War II.

The narrative commences with Grandma situating her father at home in his cabin. (see Appendix 1 for a key to the transcription symbols):<sup>2</sup>

001 He said(2.0) "(I) was *sitting* here *reading*"  
 002 he said "and (.8) happened to *glance up*" he  
 003 said "In *fact*" he said "I got up to get myself  
 004 a cup of *?coff?ee*" he said. (.6) And he drank  
 005 *coffee* a:l:l day long a *great* big *po:t*.  
 006 (3.4)

This brief orientation segment essentially replicates information offered originally in the narrative beginning (section 2), but this time Grandma employs quoted speech, punctuated rhythmically with five instances of "he said."

The narrative continues with the introduction of complicating action:

007 He said "here this *kid* was running towards the  
 008 *hou:se* and gee (.) ih didn't know who he *was*  
 009 really (.) until he got *clo:se* and I  
 010 recognized him" he said. (.8) And *he* just (.)

011 *come up on the porch?* and- (.) *door* was loc-  
 012 |open all the *time* you know | (.) || in the  
 013 summer time. || (1.0) He was *a:ll* out of *breath*  
 014 and he said uh "*Fred*" he said "my *dad* *wants*  
 015 you" he said. *Turned* and |walked- (.8)  
 016 ((clap)) run and then he *ran* all the way back  
 017 home. | (.8) He'd *run* and then he'd *walk* and  
 018 he'd *run*. (.) "And boy I grabbed my (.) *ha:t*"  
 019 he said "and (.) *checked* my pockets for my ci-  
 020 (.) *Durham*" he said. "see if I had mat- enough  
 021 matches and *Durham*. (.) And I took *O:FF?*" he  
 022 said "and I walked real *fast?* (.8) o:ver  
 023 there" he said. (1.2) "And I got there and I  
 024 went *?in?* (.) cuz u:sually" he said "when I'd  
 025 go to *visit* that old man-"

In this segment, Grandma quotes her father's words to her as well as the "kid's" words to her father. The significance of her father checking his pockets for Durham tobacco and matches prior to leaving for the old man's house lies in the audience's awareness of the traditional Gros Ventre practice of offering tobacco to respected old people when visiting them. The fact that she portrays her father as careful to observe this practice even under somewhat ominous circumstances reflects her esteem for the cultural ideal of *respect for one's elders* (Gone 1996).

The series of actions in the above segment is literally interrupted (marked by a cessation of quoted speech and a change in pronouns in lines 025–026) by Grandma's comments to me that her father habitually visited old people:

026 He'd go *visiting* and *talk* about things and-  
 027 (.) and- and uh- (.) | You know *listen* to  
 028 (them). (.8) Talk about *serious* things that-  
 029 (.) how long ago:. | (.) He made it his  
 030 *bus?iness* to go talk to these *old* people.  
 031 (1.2)

This entire segment may be classified as intranarrative commentary. This type of commentary appears periodically throughout the account and may be distinguished from extranarrative commentary by the fact that it directly addresses issues relevant to the comprehension of narrative characters or events. In contrast, extranarrative commentary, while potentially useful for understanding the larger significance of narrative events, is not essential for the immediate intelligibility of unfolding action in the tale world. This intranarrative commentary, then, is necessary to the audience's full appreciation of the unusual nature of subsequent events.

Following a return to quoted speech Grandma offers a description of the old man's cabin in her father's voice:

032 || And uh || (.) he said (.8) “when I went *?in?*”  
 033 he said (.8) “his *wife* was in the *kitchen*  
 034 there that little *glee- leanto shed* on a  
 035 little uh (1.6) *lo:g* cabin. (.) And that  
 036 little *shed* there they used that for kitchen  
 037 and *?din?ing* area (.) and they *slept* in this  
 038 (.) the *log* cabin.” (1.2) And he *come?* in  
 039 *the:re* (.) and (.) come *this* way to the *door*  
 040 to the (.) *lo:g* cabin (1.2) “Usually” he said  
 041 “when I come to *visit* him he’s sitting on his  
 042 *bed* which is *right* in front of the *?door?* (.8)  
 043 His *daughters* has a bed over *there* His *sons*  
 044 have a *bed*. (.) Two daughters and two sons.”  
 045 (2.6)

This segment involves additional intranarrative commentary, but most of this is offered as quoted speech attributed to her father. In addition, Grandma offers brief comments to me in her own voice (lines 038–040).

Grandma Bertha proceeds by quoting her father’s description of the unusual sight that met his eyes as he entered the cabin:

046 hh | “Here when I come *?in?*” he said “that old  
 047 man was sitting on the *?floo:r?* (.) and he had  
 048 a plate of uh (1.2) *um coals?* (.) in front of  
 049 him (.) and he was *smudging*” (1.2) (You know)  
 050 doing this to himself? | (.) || ( and then  
 051 he’d go this way.) || (1.4) “And he was  
 052 *?cry?ing*” he said “*Tears* were coming down his  
 053 *face?*” (1.0)

Then, continuing in the very quiet voice of her father, the narrative action is suspended in order to evaluate the seriousness of the situation:

054 || “Gee:ze you know (.) scared me. || (.) | For  
 055 a while I thought maybe he had a *heart* attack  
 056 or he got real sick and that’s what I- (.)  
 057 what *I?* thought was *wrong* (.) you know | (.)  
 058 || (That) [his son] said ‘my dad wants you.’ ”  
 059 hhh. (1.2) (And so-) But he said “after I saw  
 060 him sitting like that” he said (.8) “I just  
 061 (.) figured it was something (.) *else* that was  
 062 wrong (with him).” || (1.2)

Thus, Grandma quotes the private thoughts of her father, originally addressed to her, as further evidence of something amiss in the development of narrative suspense. In addition, Grandma displays remarkable complexity in her use of quoted speech: she quotes her father quoting the words of the old man’s son (line 058) in her father’s subsequent report of these events to her.

The narrative returns to a very subdued action, softly recounted, in which her father sits and waits while the old man finishes his prayer:

063 || “So I *sat* down” he said “on a chair They had  
 064 a *chair* sitting right there waiting for me.  
 065 (.) I *sat* down and (.) I didn’t say a *woʔ:rd* ||  
 066 (.) | I figure in his o:wn good time he’s gonna  
 067 tell me what he *wantsʔ*” (1.8) So he: (.) got  
 068 through (.6) with his smudge. (.6) He *sat*  
 069 *back* | (.) || I guess. || (1.2) | They sit like  
 070 *this* you know ( ). (1.2) flat on the (.)  
 071 *floo:r.* | (2.2)

This lull in the narrative action is accomplished in two voices: her father’s quoted words to her (lines 063–067) and Grandma’s words to me (067–071).

Finally, the old man speaks:

072 | Then he took a deep *breath* I guess and he  
 073 said um. (2.8) “Something ah (1.2) unusual  
 074 happened with that *bundle* this morning” he  
 075 said. (.8) “When my wife got up (.) to make  
 076 *fire*” he said uh. (1.0) “She happened to  
 077 glance up there” he said. “and here she seen  
 078 (.) *something* laying on top of this *bunʔdle*  
 079 (1.2) So she goes closer and she chec- looks  
 080 at it (.) and here it’s a *ʔpeltʔ* (.8) It’s one  
 081 of those *ʔpeltsʔ* that belong inside this  
 082 *bunʔdle*” | (1.6)

Grandma here employs for the first time quoted speech attributed to the old man in his conversation with her father. Thus, this particular communicative event—and the events it portrays—is several times removed from my receiving it from Grandma. In fact, it is interesting to note that the old man’s explanation, initiated here and concluding much later (line 130), is itself an embedded narrative. It should also be noted that the Pipe is typically enclosed with a large number of related ceremonial items—including animal pelts—in a blimp-shaped bundle that is not supposed to be opened or disturbed except on the most sacred occasions by a Keeper skilled in the appropriate rituals. In this segment, then, the old man explains that his wife discovered a pelt from inside the bundle “laying on top” of it (line 078), a potentially threatening noncanonical event, given the supernatural retribution that typically accompanies negligence with regard to the Pipes.

An assessment of the situation is offered next in the old man’s voice:

083 | He said “I’m *scared*” he said “I don-no what  
 084 *happened.* (.8) I don’t know what to *ʔthinkʔ*”  
 085 he said. (1.4) “What’s going *ʔo:nʔ*” he said.  
 086 “I don- I don’t know- I- (1.2) I don- I don’t  
 087 know how to *exʔplainʔ* it” he said. | (.)

The old man conveys to Grandma’s father the agonizing existential crisis that confronts him and confesses to having no explanation that can render these events intelligible.

Grandma Bertha continues her account in the old man's voice:

088 "So I *made* her take it *down*" he said "and  
 089 bring it over to me" he said "and sure  
 090 e?*nough*?" he said- (.) "She took the *whole*  
 091 bundle down she didn't touch that pelt. (.)  
 092 She took the whole bundle off of the nail  
 093 and-" (.)

Grandma then abruptly switches to her own voice (indicated by the cessation in quoted speech and the change in pronouns) and offers a significant bit of intranarrative commentary addressed to me:

094 And *SEE THEY'D TIE IT LIKE THIS* (.) with *part*  
 095 of the string over this way and then they'd  
 096 tie it around *here* (.) so that it's got a  
 097 *?hand*?le (.8) And that's hanging on a *?nail*?  
 098 hhh (1.8)

Grandma Bertha returns to the unfolding narrative events with the elderly couple's inspection of the bundle:

099 So she *brought* it to him (.) and he:- they  
 100 *BO:TH* looked at it *really good* to see (.) if  
 101 it had been *TAM*pered with (1.0)

This segment is followed by the most extensive intranarrative commentary addressed by Grandma to me in the entire account:

102 because (.) *RIGHT AWAY* I guess they- (.) they  
 103 thought maybe their *?kids*? got into it. (.8)  
 104 Or- (.) But you? know (.) in a *?WAY*? (.) they  
 105 thought that- that people might *?think*? (.)  
 106 their kids got into it. (1.2) But he *?knew*?  
 107 his kids wouldn't get into it. (.) because (.)  
 108 he was an old *tim*?er and he- (.) he- (.) he  
 109 knew he had his kids *trained*? (.) not to (.)  
 110 *?E*:?ven *conSIDer* touching that *bundle* || you  
 111 know. || (1.2)  
 112 And uh (.) when his *daughters* got to that  
 113 *?a:ge*? (.6) that bundle wasn't supposed to be  
 114 in the *house* (.) when they have their *men*?ses  
 115 (.8) So (.) *they* had to *know* (.) the *mother*  
 116 told them to *tell* them (.) when they did  
 117 they'd take it *bun*?dle (.) and put it outside  
 118 in the back of the house. (.8) So those four  
 119 days- four five days (.8) that bundle would be  
 120 outside (1.2)

The bulk of this extensive intranarrative commentary is "evidentiary" (Hill and Irvine 1992) in nature and serves to assure me that the old couple had sufficiently "trained" (line 109) their children such that the children's behavior could not account for the events in question. This contention that



the children were appropriately “trained” is reinforced by an example involving the ceremonial obligation to remove the bundle from the presence of menstruating women (lines 112–120). Altogether, then, this commentary has served as important evidence in support of the truly mysterious nature of these events by staving off one obvious conclusion regarding the displaced pelt, namely, that the bundle was disturbed by someone else in the household.

This possibility is further contradicted in the subsequent segment, offered in Grandma’s own voice, in which the couple closely inspects the bundle and determines that it is intact:

121 Anyway he said uh (.) after they looked at it  
 122 real good (.) and they said (.) the *kno:ts* and  
 123 everything looked like they had *never* been  
 124 tampered with. (.) It was just the way it was-  
 125 (.8) lord knows when was the last time they  
 126 opened it you know. (1.0) | And (.) ((coughs))  
 127 so- (.) so *they*- he opened it I guess. (1.2)  
 128 to put this thing back *?in?* there. (.) He said  
 129 when he *o:pened* it | (.) || the Feathered Pipe  
 130 itself was gone. || (1.2)

The entirety of the preceding narrative action consummates here in the final revelation of this segment: “|| the Feathered Pipe itself was gone. ||” (lines 129–130). Several things bear mentioning here. First, this narrative consummation involves one of the most extreme noncanonical events imaginable in the Gros Ventre world: the disappearance of one of the community’s most sacred ritual objects. Second, the consummation concludes the old man’s embedded narrative (beginning in line 073), which may serve to structurally reinforce the catastrophic nature of the event because it completes the complicating action for both the embedded narrative and the larger narrative. Third, the revelation follows 37 consecutive lines of transcript in which Grandma’s use of quoted speech is completely absent. This attenuation of dramatic form may serve structurally as the “calm before the storm,” immediately preceding the climactic completion of complicating action. Finally, this completion is underscored performatively by a much quieter than usual voice quality—in fact, the final declaration that “|| the Feathered Pipe itself was gone. ||” (lines 129–130) is barely audible.

Immediately following the narrative culmination, a brief segment, marked by soft tones and the return of quoted speech attributed to the old man, provides an evaluation of his predicament:

131 | He said “and *I?’m* responsible for this  
 132 *bundle*” | || he said. || (.) | “What are the  
 133 people gonna say about *me?* (.) What are they  
 134 gonna- (.8) what- *How* am I going to *explain*  
 135 that pipe is *go?:ne* (1.0) It’s *go?:ne* | What am  
 136 I gonna *?do?* you know.” (1.4)

The significance of this cataclysmic event is narrated in terms of the social consequences surrounding a pivotal existential crisis. More specifically, the disappearance of the sacred Pipe that has been entrusted by the community to his care threatens not only to throw Gros Ventre belief and tradition in complete disarray but also to disrupt the old man's relationships with community members. According to his own words, the old man can find no "explanation" (lines 087 and 134) that might restore order to his shattered local moral world and bring comfort in the face of disaster.

Grandma Bertha quotes an aside by her father wherein he assesses the dire situation:

137 || "Oh gee" he said "I didn't know (.8) *what* to  
 138 say I really *pitied* this poor old man  
 139 because || (.) | I *kno:w* he's *innocent*. I know  
 140 (.) he would *NO?:T* (.) *ever* (.) *even consider*  
 141 (.) letting anybody or- you know- (.) or his  
 142 *?fam?ily* wouldn't- (.) I *kno:w* his family  
 143 wouldn't *touch* it." | (1.2)

This response to the old man's predicament is marked paralinguistically by a shift to her father's voice (indicated solely by a pause and a quieter tone, for the pronouns used in the two segments are exactly the same), which extends the narrative problem while re-engaging the protagonist prior to the resolution of the narrative. The reference to pity (line 138) is laden with cultural significance inasmuch as pity is understood by Gros Ventres (and most Plains Indian peoples) to be decisive in moving the Supreme Being to action on behalf of human beings.

It is not surprising, then, that in the following segment Grandma quotes in complex fashion her father's prayer:

144 "So I said *I* just said a prayer in the way I  
 145 know how to the Blessed Virgin Mary. (.)  
 146 'Please help me.' (.) *MENTally* I prayed. (1.0)  
 147 'Give me the right *words* (.) to put this poor  
 148 old man's mind at ea:se. (2.4) | so that he  
 149 won't be blaming *himself* (.) for something  
 150 that he's not responsible for. | (1.2) *If* it  
 151 *be: God's wi:ll* (1.2) let me (.) say the right  
 152 words.'" (1.2)

This segment is marked by Grandma's sophisticated use of quoted speech, in which she employs her father's voice to quote his own prayer (note the shift in tense indicating the quotation of a quote in lines 146–152).

The result of this prayer is a lengthy monologue. By way of introduction, I will note that this is one of the longest continuous segments of the narrative. In fact, the need to change cassettes during this part of the interview (line 169) resulted in part of this section being omitted from the recording. In addition, this segment consists almost entirely of quoted

speech (lines 153–155 are the exception) attributed to her father and directed to the old man. In any case, this portion of the narrative is unique insofar as her father offers a lengthy interpretation of the meaning of the disappearance of the Pipe. I have partitioned the monologue into three segments to facilitate my comments. The first follows:

153 So I guess he started to talk He said “you  
 154 know” (1.2) he said uh- (.6) I don’t know what  
 155 *a:ll* but this is just what he *to:ld* me. (.) “I  
 156 told him ‘This is uh- (.) you know (.8) we  
 157 were all- we were all *taught* (.8) to *respect*  
 158 (.) and love this *pipe* (.) because *a:ll* these  
 159 years (.) far back as we could remember (.6)  
 160 our folks- our people have *to:ld* us what this  
 161 pipe has *done* for us. (.) *Down* the years.  
 162 (1.0) it’s been ou:r (.) father our  
 163 grandfather our leader (.) our protector. (.)  
 164 It’s *told* us when to ?move? It’s *told* us what-  
 165 (.) where to find buffalo to *fee:d* our  
 166 *families*. (.) It’s *to:ld* us *everything*. It’s-  
 167 (.) It has- (.) It has *guided* our lives *a:ll*  
 168 of our lives. (.6) ?*BUT*? (.) *toDA:Y*  
 169 ((break))  
 170 and they’re *teaching* (.) our *children* a  
 171 *different religion*. (1.8) Our *children* are  
 172 *learning* (.) things that *we* never did *learn*.’ ”  
 173 (1.2) He said “ ‘*we*’ (.) | because (.) I was  
 174 talking about him.” (1.2) And he said | “and uh  
 175 (.8) *being* as the- (.8) the Supreme *Be:ing*  
 176 (.8) *gave* (.) us this *pipe* (.) in a  
 177 supernatural *way* (.8) to (.) *protect guide* and  
 178 *take care* of us (.) *a:ll* of these *years* since  
 179 we *got* it (1.2) *why?*: *should?*n’t (.) he *take*  
 180 it *back* (.) when he thinks (.) we don’t *need?*  
 181 it *anymore*.” (.8)

This portion of the interpretation Grandma’s father offers the old man is an exemplary illustration of that aspect of my grandmother’s worldview that I have designated as *historical discontinuity* (Gone 1996). For Grandma, Gros Ventre spirituality is characterized by a radical discontinuity whereby ancestral Gros Ventre ceremonial tradition has been decisively and irreversibly superseded by Catholicism, as a result of white domination and supernatural design. In the present narrative, the significance of the disappearance of the sacred Pipe is interpreted by her father in just this way. He offers two lines of argument in support of this interpretation, the first of which appears in this segment. Here, he notes that the Gros Ventre world has changed dramatically in the course of a generation or two. Whereas the members of his generation “were all *taught* (.8) to *respect* (.) and love this *pipe*” (lines 157–158), Euro-American Catholics

were “teaching (.) our children a *different religion*” (lines 170–171). Thus, in the face of such remarkable cultural change, “*why?: should?n’t* (.) [the Supreme Being] *take* [the Pipe] *back* (.) when he thinks (.) we don’t *need?* it *anymore*” (lines 179–181).

An additional line of argument follows immediately, also emphasizing the decision by the Supreme Being to summon the Pipe elsewhere:

182 “It’s a- you know yourself it’s an orphan. (.)  
 183 It didn’t *?leave?*- (.8) it didn’t *leave* (.) a  
 184 successor (.) to Bull Lodge (.8) Ever since  
 185 Bull Lodge *die?:d* (.) this pipe’s been an  
 186 orphan. (1.2) His- (.) his *brothers* took care  
 187 of it. (2.2) You know that yourself you *li:ved*  
 188 with it (.) you’ve been taking care of it (.8)  
 189 and you *know* your *daughter* isn’t gonna be able  
 190 to take care of it. (1.0) *So?:* (.6) it *stands*  
 191 to *reason* that (.) the Great Spirit came and  
 192 |*got* (.8) his *chi?:ld* (1.2) That’s all I could  
 193 tell you That’s the way it looks to *?me?* (1.4)  
 194 But the- I think that’s what *happ?ened*” | || he  
 195 said. || (.)

This second line of argument employed by Bertha’s father pertains to the Pipe’s status as an “orphan,” given the drastic decline in ceremonial knowledge since the death of its greatest Keeper, Bull Lodge. The significance of orphan status in Gros Ventre life would be difficult to overemphasize, given the emphasis placed on *kinship obligations*. For example, my grandmother’s esteem for this cultural ideal (Gone 1996) involves the expectation that Gros Ventres will provide materially for both their immediate and extended families (raising their sibling’s children, if necessary) and generally support their “relations” in any significant family matter. In this context, then, “orphan” status is seen to involve alienation from familial comfort and guidance as well as from shared material resources. As such, orphans are truly “pitiful” in Gros Ventre society, and Grandma quotes her father as portraying the Pipe as horribly alienated from the kinship relationships that it formerly enjoyed with its ceremonial Keepers. He concludes, “*So?:* (.6) it *stands* to *reason* that (.) the Great Spirit came and |*got* (.8) his *chi?:ld*. . . |” (lines 190–192).

Recall that previously the old man cast his dilemma in terms of the potential for disrupted social relationships that might attend the inexplicable disappearance of the Pipe for which he cared. Grandma quotes her father as concluding his monologue in response to this concern:

196 “Because you *looked?* at that bundle (.) *YOU*:  
 197 *SAY* (.) it hasn’t been tampered with. (.) *I*  
 198 believe you. (.8) And I think everybody *else*  
 199 would believe you *too*. (.8) because that’s  
 200 what people *think* of you. (.6) They think very

201 *hi:ghly* of you. (.) They would *NEV?ER* accuse  
 202 you (.) of mishandling this pipe.” (2.4)

The old man’s anxiety regarding the social consequences of his predicament emerges from the significance of social relationships for Gros Ventre personhood. That is, for Gros Ventre people, personal status depends to a large degree on the relationships one maintains in the community. This intricate connection between individual status and social ties motivates my grandmother’s esteem for the cultural ideal of *community-mindedness* (Gone 1996). Thus, to be severed from one’s relationships in the community is a fate almost too horrible to contemplate. Grandma’s father speaks to this angst by closing his monologue with comforting words designed to assuage the old man’s fears: “[The people] think very *hi:ghly* of you. (.) They would *NEV?ER* accuse you (.) of mishandling this pipe” (lines 200–202).

Ultimately, however, the mere offering of an interpretation cannot ensure resolution. The conclusion of the Missing Pipe Narrative centers on the old man’s response to this explanation for the Pipe’s disappearance:

203 | This old man listened and listened I guess  
 204 and didn’t *say?* a word | (2.0) || He says “yeah”  
 205 he says (.) “maybe you’re right” he says. (.8)  
 206 “Maybe you’re right.” (3.2) He said “it  
 207 re:ally *shook* me up?” || (1.6) | And dad says |  
 208 (.) “you know ?what? (.) maybe I ?*a:m?* right”  
 209 he said. (1.6) “Where did I? get those *words*  
 210 from. (.8) I got *help* from the Supreme Being”  
 211 (3.4)

Thus, the interpretation of Bertha’s father regarding the disappearance of the Pipe is hesitantly accepted by the old man (line 205: “Maybe you’re right”), and her father stands amazed at the words he has spoken (lines 208–210). This resolution is especially interesting for two reasons. First, Grandma uses the present tense three times (“says”: lines 204, 205, and 207) in quoting the words of first the old man and then her father. This switch to present tense may function to mark the interpretation ratified in the resolution as significant for Gros Ventre understanding today. Second, it is interesting to note here that neither the old man nor Grandma’s father are portrayed as dogmatically asserting the truth of these interpretations—both use the qualifier *maybe* in this segment of dialogue (lines 205, 206, and 208).

This caution in accepting interpretations of spiritual matters is reminiscent of two other features of my grandmother’s worldview. First, a moral universe saturated with spirituality raises the issue of *authority* for Grandma (Gone 1996), for the meanings of spiritual phenomena require considerable expertise and experience if they are to be discerned. The absence of such expertise in modern Gros Ventre life—given the abrupt

discontinuation of Gros Ventre tradition—confronts my grandmother with the same crisis of authority that probably confronted (to a lesser degree) the narrative characters as well, given the significant decline of ceremonial tradition even at that time. Second, even if seasoned spiritual leaders existed then or today, there would be no guarantee that an authoritative interpretation of spiritual occurrences was always possible. For it is the nature of the numinous, according to Grandma (Gone 1996), to resist conclusive rational analysis—spiritual phenomena tend to retain their *mystery*.

In summary, then, I have provided the text of the Missing Pipe Narrative with appropriate commentary prior to exploring the significance of this narrative for the pragmatic construction of cultural identity.

## THE MISSING PIPE NARRATIVE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Analysis of the Missing Pipe Narrative might explore a virtually unlimited number of discursive purposes served by the narrative (for example, interesting conversation, entertaining recreation, historical enlightenment, intergenerational socialization, and so on). My purpose in analyzing this narrative is to facilitate insight regarding the discursive construction of Gros Ventre cultural identity (Gone et al. 1999). As a result, I will focus analytic attention here on the Missing Pipe Narrative as an *epistemological resource* serving an important pragmatic function for both narrator and audience.

There is good reason for regarding the Missing Pipe Narrative as an epistemological resource: the narrative's subject matter, one of the sacred Pipes of the Gros Ventre, is central to the worldview constructed by my grandmother (Gone 1996). This "intentional world" (Shweder 1990) is primarily a spiritual one, characterized in part by the historical discontinuity, crisis of authority, and prevalence of mystery alluded to previously. Thus, the obvious epistemological function served by the Missing Pipe Narrative centers on the *meaning* of the disappearance of the Pipe, which ultimately defines the kinds of cultural identities that are available to modern Gros Ventre people.

There are several other aspects of the Missing Pipe Narrative that suggest its significance to my grandmother as an important resource for meaning making. First, the narrative casts her father as a protagonist. While the centrality of kinship relations to Gros Ventre life may account for part of the narrative's significance in this respect, it is no doubt augmented by the esteem in which Grandma holds her father with regard to knowledge of cultural matters. Thus, in the crisis of authority that characterizes her world, Grandma has repeatedly invoked her father (Gone

1996) as a cultural expert with legitimately authoritative information concerning Gros Ventre life. Furthermore, her father obtained this authoritative information by respecting his elders and seriously attending to what they had to tell him (see lines 26–31). Second, although her father related the narrative to Grandma Bertha only one time, she clearly remembers it in great detail. Moreover, in addition to the mere recollection of these many details, Grandma has demonstrated such great facility with them so as to stage an expert performance in vivid fashion. Her familiarity with the narrative details and polished performance of the account reveal an importance more powerful than mere declaration could accomplish. Finally, Grandma suggests in the postnarrative commentary that she may be the only person to have heard this account firsthand from her father. The possibility of unique access to an authoritative interpretation of potentially cataclysmic cultural events must certainly offer my grandmother powerful material for the construction of meaning.

My interest in the epistemological potential of the Missing Pipe Narrative approximates the scholarly concern with “evidentiality” in oral discourse (Bendix 1992; Hill and Irvine 1992; Philips 1992). More specifically, I am interested in exploring the potential of this narrative to support, validate, or establish certain claims about the Gros Ventre social world, claims that specify a kind of moral universe invoked by a cultural identity. Thus, the narrative’s epistemological functions are clearly rhetorical and pragmatic in nature.

One important feature of the Missing Pipe Narrative that indexes this epistemological potential becomes evident immediately in the pre-narrative commentary (section 1). Recall that my initial interview question concerned the historical timing of the original “event of narration” by Grandma’s father. This question prompted a detailed response throughout the remainder of the nonnarrative discourse in which Grandma repeatedly expresses the necessity (e.g., “I *need* to find out”; “See I *hafta* find out”; “See I need to know this-”; “See I *need* the- I *need* the *years* of that” [not presented here]) of determining when her father actually told her the account regarding the missing Pipe. While these words reflect a certain tension surrounding her concern with the timing of the incident, the transcript fails to convey the sense of anxiety that pervades Grandma’s speech in these sections of the discourse (although the prevalence of false starts and dysfluencies in these portions relative to the remainder of the transcript is indicative of this anxiety). Furthermore, the importance of this forgotten information is so central that it motivates the nonnarrative intrusion (section 3), which actually suspends the event of narration for a short time. This nearly obsessive attention to determining when she heard the narrative is interesting in its own right—an alternative possibility, for

example, was for Grandma to simply explain that she did not remember when this happened.

There are several possibilities that might account for my grandmother's concern about identifying the precise historical moment when she heard her father's narrative. First, she may have been concerned merely with answering my question. This possibility is unlikely because Grandma has routinely informed me on other occasions (and without noticeable anxiety) that she does not know some answers to my questions. In fact, she did so in response to the question that immediately preceded this one in the interview. Second, Grandma may have been especially distressed at not remembering this kind of information because it involves a significant event in her own experience. Again, however, Grandma has been unable on past occasions to "pinpoint" when certain personal experiences occurred (a fact that I attribute to the relative de-emphasis of historical time in contrast to the importance of spatial relationships among many native peoples [see Deloria 1992]), and these episodes were typically insignificant. Third, some aspect of the events described in this particular narrative may portend a significance for my grandmother that hinges on identifying the correct location in historical time of these narrative events. It is this latter possibility that I will explore in more detail.

I will assert that my grandmother is especially concerned with the historical positioning of these particular narrative events because these events hold the key to deciphering a pressing epistemological dilemma. While I have discussed this epistemological dilemma elsewhere (Gone 1996; Gone et al. 1999), I have not before analyzed this dilemma in connection to the detailed version of the Missing Pipe Narrative. The dilemma itself is contained within the discourse surrounding and including the Missing Pipe Narrative. It is revealed by the inclusion of two competing explanations for the disappearance of the Pipe.

The first explanation is offered by my grandmother's divinely inspired father to the old man within his lengthy monologue in the narrative proper:

175 "being as the- (.8) the Supreme Being  
 176 (.8) gave (.) us this pipe (.) in a  
 177 supernatural way (.8) to (.) protect guide and  
 178 take care of us (.) all of these years since  
 179 we got it (1.2) why?: should?n't (.) he take  
 180 it back (.) when he thinks (.) we don't need?  
 181 it anymore." (.8)

Thus, the unfolding of a *divine plan* in which sacred Pipe ceremonies are meant to be replaced with Catholic ritual represents one potential explanation for the radical historical discontinuity that Grandma has observed in Gros Ventre life.

A second competing explanation is provided by Grandma herself in a portion of the postnarrative commentary (section 5), in which she evaluates



the fact that photographs were taken of the sacred Pipe at a public opening of the bundle long after the precise details of the ritual had been forgotten:

235 Well *MA:Y?be* (1.2) *MAY?be* they shouldn't have  
 236 *done* that. (1.6) Because (.) *taking pictures*  
 237 of things like that is a- (.) is *taboo?* (.8)  
 238 And *they* took a *lo?:t* of *photographs* that  
 239 time. (1.2) *THAT'S?* when that pipe had his  
 240 *nose?* twisted out of (.) *SIIAPE?* and so he  
 241 *pulled out?* (.6)

In these words, then, Grandma Bertha recognizes the alternative explanation to the “divine plan” scenario, namely, that Gros Ventres themselves are responsible for the disappearance of the Pipe owing to *ritual malfeasance*.

Each of these competing explanations has serious implications for the kind of cultural identity available to modern Gros Ventre people. For example, if the Pipe is understood to have disappeared as a result of ritual negligence on the part of the Gros Ventres, the kinds of cultural identity available to modern tribal members emerge from the failure of *tenacity* (or effectual ambition) and the subsequent loss of *primacy* (cultural ideals important to my grandmother [Gone 1996]) to Catholicism and its Caucasian advocates. In contrast, if one understands that the Pipe was taken away by the Supreme Being because a Gros Ventre conversion to Catholicism was in the divine plan, then modern Gros Ventre identity may proceed with its cultural ideals intact and even reinforced (Fowler 1987). In my grandmother's case (Gone 1996; Gone et al. 1999), she has expressed a marked ambivalence about which of these interpretations to favor, primarily because of her inconsolable feelings of cultural loss which emotionally betray the adequacy of the otherwise palatable “divine plan” resolution.

This ambivalence is likewise present in the postnarrative commentary in which she acknowledges that either explanation may account for the Pipe's disappearance:

238 And *they* took a *lo?:t* of *photographs* that  
 239 time. (1.2) *THAT'S?* when that pipe had his  
 240 *nose?* twisted out of (.) *SIIAPE?* and so he  
 241 *pulled out?* (.6) Either that or (1.4) | we were  
 242 (.) through? hol- | (.) We were through as  
 243 *keepers* of it. (.8) It was taken *away?* (2.0)

Recognition of this epistemological dilemma renders intelligible my grandmother's anxious concern about the timing of her father's original recounting of the Missing Pipe Narrative. More specifically, identification of the correct historical sequence of events promises to substantiate one of the competing explanations. If her father's consolation of the distressed old

man occurred prior to the public opening of the bundle at which photographs were taken, then her father's explanation is supported. In contrast, if the photographs were taken prior to the events recalled by her father in the Missing Pipe Narrative, then ritual malfeasance may account for the disappearance of the Pipe.

Grandma explicitly recognizes the importance of identifying the correct sequence of events in her postnarrative commentary:

241                    Either that or (1.4) | we were  
 242 (.) through? hol- | (.) We were through as  
 243 *keepers* of it. (.8) It was taken *away*? (2.0)  
 244 See I *need* the- I *need* the *years* of that- of  
 245 that (.) *la:st* opening of the pipe *whether* it  
 246 was THERE (.) *THEN* or NOT (.8) and when [the  
 247 old man's son] (.8) | went and got my dad. (.)  
 248 Those two I need to find out. (1.2) And I  
 249 could just about | (1.0) *tell* you whether- (.)  
 250 If I *find* out those two dates (.) of [the old  
 251 man's son's] *age* (.8) and this- this *opening*  
 252 of the pipe- that feed- that *last* feed that  
 253 (.) they had.

Given the central importance of a correct ordering of events within this strip of discourse, then, how might my grandmother's previous indifference toward deciphering this epistemological dilemma be accounted for? That is, in the several decades since she originally heard the Missing Pipe Narrative from her father, why has she not actually taken the time for a brief historical analysis of her own (which she acknowledges would be an effortless process in the prenarrative commentary)?

There are, no doubt, several ways to account for this indifference. She may not have previously connected the events described here with regard to the epistemological dilemma. She may not routinely dwell on past events with regard to cultural analysis. She may never before have been given the task of explaining these events to a grandson who was raised away from the reservation. She may not think, ultimately, that an accurate temporal identification would truly substantiate one interpretation more than the other. Or she may find the possibility of the substantiation of one interpretation over the other too painful to explore. All of these and other reasons may account for her indifference toward a correct temporal identification. I will explore one alternative that is especially pertinent to viewing the Missing Pipe Narrative as a pragmatic resource serving important epistemological functions.

An alternative that might account for my grandmother's indifference toward the key temporal identification noted above emerges from the significance of her father vis-à-vis the Missing Pipe Narrative. I have already emphasized the epistemological importance of his role as the narrative protagonist, given the significant role he played in Grandma's life as one

of the community's last remaining cultural authorities. The great respect that my grandmother accords her father regarding cultural matters almost guarantees that she will adopt his interpretation of significant cultural events (Gone 1996). Thus, I would argue that she is already epistemologically predisposed toward the explanation of the Pipe's disappearance that her father offers to the old man in this narrative. Perhaps more importantly, however, Grandma cements her epistemological stance by virtue of her participation in the Missing Pipe Narrative through certain discursive features of her account. Two discursive features are most relevant here: her complex usage of quoted speech and first-person pronouns.

My grandmother's use of quoted speech throughout the account is indeed remarkable. Within the narrative proper about 60 percent of the words (930 of 1,540 total words) represent quoted speech. This speech is attributed to three characters: her father, the old man, and the old man's son (the latter is attributed five words only, which are repeated twice in the narrative [lines 014–015 and 058]). Furthermore, this quoted speech becomes extremely complex as Grandma manipulates tenses (for example, compare across lines 083–087 and 088–093; note also within lines 144–152), shifts voices without explicitly identifying the switch (for example, compare across lines 131–136 and 137–143), and quotes characters quoting other characters (as in line 058) or themselves (as in lines 144–152). These complex patterns of quotation afford a kind of participation not otherwise possible within the Missing Pipe Narrative: Grandma takes part in the narrative events through a discursive identification with the narrative protagonist via her father's quoted speech. This discursive identification is most salient in her usage of quoted personal pronouns.

My focus on Grandma Bertha's employment of personal pronouns will be primarily concerned with her usage of the first-person singular *I*. This pronoun has been tied to the expression of the self at least since William James's sophisticated taxonomy of the self appeared prior to the turn of the century (for an excellent review, see Damon and Hart 1988). When employed specifically in quoted speech, use of this "anaphoric 'I'" (Urban 1989) affords the narrator the opportunity to invoke "an identity the speaker assumes through the text" instead of the speaker's "everyday identity or self" (Urban 1989:27). For the purposes of this article, I will refer to the assumption of a textual identity via the anaphoric *I* as a discursive identification with the narrative character in question.

Grandma uses the word *I* (or its contraction) a total of 126 times in the strip of discourse that includes the Missing Pipe Narrative. Fifty-nine of these usages occur within the narrative proper, while the remainder occurs in the nonnarrative sections of the discourse (section 1 has 26 usages, section 2 has 0 usages, section 3 has 20 usages, and section 5 has 21 usages). The main opportunity for her to identify with the narrative

protagonist occurs within the narrative itself (section 4). Thus, I will examine in some detail her use of the anaphoric *I* in the narrative proper.

Grandma's use of *I* within the Missing Pipe Narrative is attributed either to her father (40 usages), the old man (12 usages), or herself (7 usages). So, the vast majority of the *Is* utilized by my grandmother within the narrative involve its anaphoric use in the discursive identification with her father. And, given the complexity of the quoted speech within the narrative, it is surprising that Grandma rarely makes a mistake in attribution. Thus, Grandma's heavy usage of quoted speech attributed to her father requires the anaphoric *I* and affords the discursive identification in the narrative which opens up all manner of epistemological (as well as ontological) possibilities.

In one very important sense, my grandmother's use of quoted speech and first-person pronouns imparts a sense of irony to the entire question of "when [the old man's son] (.8) | went and got my dad" (lines 246–247). Although this question elicited some anxiety in her discussion of the Missing Pipe Narrative, the fact was that, in some very real sense, the events described in her narration of the discovery of the missing Pipe were occurring as she related them. It is debatable, perhaps, whether this is the case for all narrative (although, insofar as they may be considered texts, they certainly seem to open up possibilities in front of themselves [Ricoeur 1991]), but it certainly would seem less controversial with regard to my grandmother's usage of the unique discursive features (quoted speech and personal pronouns) that permit the narrative to transcend its historical location. Stromberg (1993) alludes to this narrative re-experience in his study of language use and self-transformation in the conversion accounts of evangelical Christians. It is in this re-creation of narrative action, especially when the narrator identifies as strongly with the protagonist as my grandmother does, that the artificial separation between ontology and epistemology dissolves, and being and knowing become a unified mode of experience (see Heidegger 1962; Somers 1994).

In any case, while these many instances of discursive identification via personal pronouns involve all manner of activity, the particular activity of interest here is the epistemological act of knowing. More specifically, I assert that my grandmother's discursive identification with her father through her usage of quoted speech and first-person pronouns affords a unique epistemological opportunity: she might obtain an authoritative understanding of significant cultural events by vicariously participating in his experience. This access to authoritative understanding, however, merits an important qualification, mentioned earlier: with regard to things spiritual, it is my grandmother's belief that the very nature of the numinous resists conclusive rational analysis (Gone 1996). This sense of mystery that permeates her local moral world ensures that even her father's

authoritative understanding (which in the case of the missing Pipe is quite tentative: “you know ?what? (.) maybe I ?*a:m*? right” he said. (1.6) “Where did *I*? get those *words* from. (.8) I got *help* from the Supreme Being” [lines 208–211]) is not the final word. Nevertheless, to the degree that such things can be known at all, Grandma enters such knowledge through a *narrative* identification with her father via her frequent and complex use of the anaphoric *I* (where *narrative* is understood to be a type of discourse).

The specific pragmatic function of this narrative identification can be observed by attending to my grandmother’s explicit construction of “knowing” within the strip of discourse discussed in this article. For example, when speaking in her own voice, Grandma typically indicates that either she does not know important information (“I don’t know” appears at least nine times in her extranarrative commentary; “I would never know” appears twice) or that she needs to know it (three times in the extranarrative commentary). Furthermore, within the narrative boundaries themselves, *every single instance* in which Grandma utilizes “I” while speaking in her own voice (only seven times) involves an explicit or implied disavowal of knowledge (“I guess” appears six times [lines 069, 072, 102, 127, 153, and 203], while “I don’t know” appears once [line 154]). In fact, Grandma asserts knowledge (and this assertion is tentative) only one time in the entire strip of discourse: “*Maybe I’?m* the only one (.) that knows the story.” And even this one tentative assertion, found in the post-narrative commentary almost immediately upon the conclusion of the narrative, implies a “knowing” obtained from her father. In contrast, while narratively identifying with her father via quoted speech, my grandmother attains an epistemological certainty observed nowhere else in the discourse: she takes on the quality of knowing through her father (“| *I know:w* he’s *innocent*. I know (.) he would *NO?:T* (.) ever (.) even consider (.) letting anybody or- you know- (.) or his ?*fam*?ily wouldn’t- (.) I *know* his family wouldn’t *touch* it.” [lines 139–143]) and attributes knowledge through her father to the old man (“You know *yourself* it’s an orphan” [line 182, see also lines 187 and 189]).

Thus, in the discourse discussed here, my grandmother is able to access knowledge itself only through the narrative identification with her father while using first-person pronouns in quoted speech (the anaphoric *I*). As I have mentioned previously, however, this knowledge is also tentative, insofar as the narrative depends on the tension between knowing and not knowing. For example, the old man repeatedly states that he does not know how to account for the displaced pelt (lines 083–087). Furthermore, upon learning that the Pipe had disappeared, Grandma’s father links what he does know with what he does not know in order to obtain the insight necessary to comfort the old man:

137 || “Oh gee” he said “I didn’t know (.8) *what* to  
 138 say I really *pitied* this poor old man  
 139 because || (.) | I *know*:*w* he’s *innocent*. I know  
 140 (.) he would *NO?*:*T* (.) *ever* (.) *even consider*  
 141 (.) letting anybody or- you know- (.) or his  
 142 *?fam?*ily wouldn’t- (.) I *know* his family  
 143 wouldn’t *touch* it. | (1.2)  
 144 So I said I just said a prayer in the way I  
 145 know how to the Blessed Virgin Mary.” (.)

Thus, her father did not know what to say to the old man, even though he did know that the old man was “innocent.” The remedy for this pitiful situation, then, was to pray “in the way I *know* how,” which ultimately results in resolution: “Where did I? get those *words* from. (.8) I got *help* from the Supreme Being” (lines 209–210).

It is my contention, therefore, that my grandmother’s decision to narrate this account in the way she did affords her the unique opportunity to participate in this divinely inspired utterance. In the end, then, I may have discovered an answer to one of my grandmother’s nagging conundrums, evident in her prenarrative commentary:

I don’t know what we were- (.) *why* (.) *WHY* we were  
 talking about *dem*. (.) It must- (1.0) THERE *MUST BE A*  
 REASON *WHY* (1.2) [my father] went *in* to this (.6) | deal  
 (.6) *about* (.) the *pipe*. |

In summary, I have argued that the Missing Pipe Narrative serves an important pragmatic function for my grandmother by (1) confronting her with competing interpretations concerning the missing Pipe that contain significant implications for a modern Gros Ventre cultural identity and (2) providing her in particular with an ontological forum in which to access an authoritative understanding of the cultural dilemma posed by the missing Pipe. More specifically, I have suggested that Grandma obtains an important resolution to this dilemma by vicariously participating in her father’s divinely inspired utterance via narrative identification with him. It must be noted, however, that this resolution (that is, the divine plan) can only be as authoritative as any conclusion regarding the supernatural—spiritual mystery will always ensure that alternative possibilities (that is, ritual malfeasance) might be considered.

So it is that my grandmother is able to paradoxically assert that “Gros Ventre ways are gone” as a result of divine plan (Gone 1996) while simultaneously evaluating her world in uniquely Gros Ventre terms. This particular resolution to the thorny problem of cultural persistence and loss affords an account of a Gros Ventre cultural identity that retains intact a host of related cultural ideals, including unyielding tenacity and primacy in competition with other cultural groups (Fowler 1987; Gone 1996). Such

a resolution occurs for my grandmother at that complex intersection of narrative performance and cultural identity.

And yet, the pragmatic functions of this particular event of narration go beyond the cultural identity of Bertha Snow. Her re-creations of these events (on many occasions, with perhaps many family members) ensure that the personally meaningful resolution obtained by my grandmother in the act of telling will live on in our family in the act of hearing (and in future acts of retelling). Other researchers have argued persuasively in their examination of American Indian discourse (for example, Basso 1984; Farnell 1995) that an additional pragmatic function of narrative in native cultures is the reinforcing of social ties in the community. Thus, a communicative act (such as the recounting of the Missing Pipe Narrative), which often depends in Indian discourse on a rich base of shared contextual information for its meaning, signifies to narrators and their audiences the collective nature of their participation in a cultural community. This reinforcement of social ties, then, would seem especially relevant in both narrative events and events of narration (Bauman 1986) involving members of extended families within tribal communities: where my grandmother once listened to her father recount these narrative events of no small import, I (and perhaps other members of our family) have now vicariously heard my great-grandfather speak of these occurrences.

It remains simply to observe that, given the specific context of this telling in particular, my dialogic participation in these events as an audience for Grandma Bertha shapes the kinds of cultural identity available to me as well. For to reject the authoritative interpretation of these cataclysmic events vocalized by my great-grandfather through my grandmother is to disavow a host of Gros Ventre cultural ideals pertaining to respect for one's elders and kinship obligation. Whereas Grandma Bertha's gift to me is the authoritative words of her father, my reciprocal gift to her is to heed such words and treasure them for future generations of our family. Thus, my own cultural identity is both facilitated and constrained by the pragmatic force of her narrative, the reverberations of which will remain powerful in the future, as I also identify discursively with both Grandma and her father in the act of narrating these events to my own children.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this analysis is to explicate the pragmatic functions of the Missing Pipe Narrative in the construction of Gros Ventre cultural identity. Certain discursive features of the narrative, namely, the employment of the anaphoric *I* in quoted speech, afford the narrator an opportunity for discursive identification with the narrative protagonist. This identification proves significant in the epistemological and rhetorical

ratification of a particular worldview or moral universe within a contested social space. Insofar as this moral universe is invoked in the construction of the narrator's cultural identity, the Missing Pipe Narrative can be seen to dialogically create an intentional world that preserves intact a host of related Gros Ventre cultural ideals. The construction of cultural identity through narrative is significant not only for the narrator's own cultural identity but also for the cultural identities of her family members as actual and potential interlocutors. Thus, the "pragmatic grounds of cultural experience and human psychological functioning" (Desjarlais and O'Neill this issue:407) are seen to be subtle, complex, and fertile with regard to narrative performance and cultural identity among the Gros Ventre.

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## NOTES

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1. The complete transcript of the entire strip of discourse (sections 1–5), which utilizes several conventional transcription symbols to denote rising and falling inflections of tone, pauses, emphasis, and so on, is available upon request.

2. Much effort was expended on my part to represent the narrative in written form while retaining at least some features of its spoken quality. As a result, the text of the Missing Pipe Narrative has been transcribed according to several standard conventions employed by narrative analysts. The key to the symbols used is provided in Appendix 1.

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## Appendix: Key to Transcription Symbols

. = stopping fall in tone

? = rising inflection

: = elongation of vowel

?word? = entire word at higher tone

word- = abrupt cut off

(.) = short pause (less than .6 of second)

(#) = pause (tenths of second)

(word) = possible translation of unclear word(s)

((words)) = commentary

*word* = emphasis

WORD = louder than typical speech

| words| = quieter than typical speech

|| words|| = much quieter than typical speech

[words] = paraphrase of identifying information