

Trials of Navajo Youth: Identity, Healing, and the Struggle for Maturity

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ABSTRACT *In this article, we examine the experiences of Navajo youth living on the contemporary Navajo reservation with the aim of conceptualizing how they position themselves between overarching discursive tensions of what it means to be Navajo and the everyday constraints of existence on the Navajo reservation. We take up three topics in particular: the categorical problems and processes of Navajo youth specifically in terms of their use of such organizing terms as tradition, the multifaceted reservation and off-reservation worlds that Navajo youth move through, and the mediating role of Navajo ritual healing in cultivating a sense of connectedness for adolescents, which in turn feeds into the broader task of negotiating a uniquely Navajo identity. This article is based on interviews with 11 adolescents and postadolescents who took part in the larger Navajo Healing Project.*

Navajo youth today, as they move through the multiple social worlds that constitute both on- and off-reservation life, find themselves continually confronting shifting and deeply problematic notions of what it means to be Navajo. In a space where the salience of a distinct and unified Navajo identity is rapidly eroding, yet with equal swiftness intensifying and solidifying, what exactly does it mean to be “authentically” Navajo? For youth, answering this question is not simply opting between a traditional Navajo way of life and a modern “Anglo” life. Simply being able to pose this question, as young persons do, implicates a radically complex and indeterminate world that does not lend itself to such dichotomous options. Within this world, Navajo youth

must negotiate competing loyalties and fashion meaningful personal universes. It is here, as well, where they must become adults.

Although the vast majority of Navajos on the reservation clearly define themselves as Navajo, the criteria for inclusiveness into this category are remarkably multifaceted and often contradictory. In this regard, the trials of Navajo youth that we will speak of constitute an ongoing process in which young persons position and reposition themselves between overarching discursive tensions of what it means to be Navajo and the everyday constraints of existence on the Navajo reservation. Navajo youth thereby undertake the challenging task of fashioning identities amidst a transfiguring social order that is simultaneously divided by newly emerging gang loyalties, infused by a flood of media images targeting a constituent youth culture, and idealized through the image of a traditional Navajo lifestyle grounded in a mode of subsistence inconsistent with the world (and economic reality) Navajo youth currently inhabit. Following LaFromboise's general characterization of American Indian youth, the aim of this article, consequently, is to make sense of how Navajo youth "live in a complex world of multiple loyalties—a world that challenges, sustains, and sometimes destroys them but seldom removes their Indianness" (LaFromboise et al. 1990:637).

Rather than conceptualizing adolescence as a liminal stage within which identities solidify and crystallize, our discussion of Navajo youth is grounded in an understanding of adolescence as a period in which youth acquire the tools for a lifetime of ever-solidifying, but never crystallized, identity negotiation. As Navajo youth move out of adolescence, they do not emerge with a necessarily stable, unproblematic identity. Adolescence is not an end but a beginning. That is to say, it is here where they gain competence in navigating the intricately variable "complex world of multiple loyalties," a world that does not become any less complex as they age. By taking this position, we are likewise highlighting the role of youth as active cultural agents within their multiple social milieus.

In doing so, we are particularly interested in the mundane, everyday—at times even banal—ways Navajo youth carve out their unique positions in the world and, in the process, define themselves both personally and collectively as Navajo. While this seems to be principally a matter of cultural (or ethnic) identity, this discussion builds on a distinction between a personal politics of collective identity and a collective politics of personal identity (Csordas 1999). Thus, on the one hand, we will consider how youth position themselves not only vis-à-vis a dominant Euro-American society (captured in the statement "I am Navajo") but also in relation to a series of religious and social differences constituting reservation life (e.g., "I am Christian"). Although in the broad sense our use of identity relates to modes of self-presentation and representation, we are emphasizing the

divergent ways in which such collective positionality plays out within young Navajos' struggle to find a relevant place and meaningful personal identity in their movement through differing spheres of collective life. We are thus concerned with the processes by which young Navajo situate and position themselves within multiple fields of social and cultural signification, and in the process articulate a world, one's place within it, and one's proper (and at times problematic) relation to others.

After briefly introducing the ethnographic context, we will take up three interrelated topics. First, we will address the categorical problems and processes of Navajo youth specifically in terms of their use of such organizing terms as *tradition*, and the implications of this for establishing one's identity as a Navajo. Second, turning to the particular kinds of worlds Navajo youth traverse, we will consider both the multifaceted nature of reservation life and the specific off-reservation, non-Navajo worlds that make up significant dimensions of their social networks. Lastly, we will examine the mediating role of ritual healing in addressing prevalent experiences of isolation and loss among young Navajo—both personal and cultural—and the capacity of such healing to cultivate a sense of connectedness for young Navajo, which in turn feeds into the larger project of negotiating a uniquely Navajo identity.

NAVAJOLAND

The Navajo (Diné) are an Athabaskan people who, along with the kindred Apache peoples, migrated south from Alaska and Canada to what is now the U.S. Southwest approximately five hundred years ago, roughly the same time as Spaniards were migrating north from Mexico into the same region. The contemporary Navajo Nation comprises more than 17.5 million acres (roughly the size of West Virginia) in the “four corners region” where New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado meet. It lies immediately to the east of Grand Canyon National Park and completely surrounds the Hopi Indian reservation. The reservation and its boundaries are an institution of the U.S. federal government, established by an imposed treaty in 1868 as the condition for the Navajos' release from captivity at Bosque Redondo near Fort Sumner in eastern New Mexico. The collective trauma of the Long Walk—their forced march into collective exile from their homeland, following military defeat by U.S. government troops using a scorched-earth policy at the command of the infamous Colonel Kit Carson—is critical to contemporary Navajos' sense of who they are as a people. Today, the Navajo reservation is divided into five federal administrative districts or agencies as well as into 110 indigenously recognized localities or chapters.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of the Navajo Nation is 180,102, of whom 96 percent are American Indian. Of this, approximately eighteen percent of the Navajo Nation, or 26,300 persons, are between the ages of 15 and 24. Although precise figures are not available, as many as 50,000 Navajos may live in other regions of the United States, many maintaining close ties to their homeland. These figures make the Navajo, along with the Cherokee and Sioux, among the largest American Indian tribes in the United States. Given the size and geographical expanse of Navajoland, it is not surprising that there is some regional cultural variation among Navajos. This variation corresponds to differences in micro-ecological zones within Navajoland and, more recently, to the development of semi-urban administrative and commercial centers. Doubtlessly, regional variations are becoming less salient as more paved roads have decreased isolation over the past 20 years. There are, nevertheless, slight dialectical differences in lexicon, accents, and the construction of certain expressions, and there also appears to be some variation in the distribution of ceremonial knowledge.

Navajo society is traditionally organized around a system of exogamous matrilineal clans. There is common agreement on the identity of the four original clans said to have been created by the deity Changing Woman, but the system is quite complex, and several versions of clan classification are extant. Traditional subsistence is based on a combination of farming (primarily corn) and raising livestock (primarily sheep). The Navajo undertake farming and livestock production in varying combinations depending on their ecological zones within Navajoland. In the 20th century, these have been supplemented by wage labor, first in railroad construction and the mining of coal and uranium, and more recently in service occupations in the vast bureaucracies of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, the federal Indian Health Service, and the Navajo tribal government. In general, although Navajos remain an economically poor people, their land, natural resources, population, and cultural and linguistic base place them as relatively well-off in comparison to many other American Indian tribes in the United States.

This article was specifically born out of a larger project examining the experiences of Navajos participating in one of the three modes of Navajo healing on the reservation—Traditional Navajo healing, Native American Church (NAC) healing, and Navajo Christian faith healing (Csordas 2000). Briefly, Traditional Navajo healing is that of the *hataaht'i* who performs intricate chants and sand-paintings, and of the diagnostician who works by methods such as hand-trembling, crystal-gazing, or coal-gazing. Traditional Navajo religion, with deep roots in Navajo history, is grounded in reference to the four sacred mountains surrounding Navajoland and the Holy People who continue to inhabit this land in their nonhuman form.

NAC healing is that of the Roadman, who prays at his earthen altar or fireplace and administers sacramental peyote. The NAC, an intertribal religious movement found throughout Southwestern American Indian tribes, came to the Navajo primarily in the 1930s and, ceremonially, contrasts sharply with the more structured ceremonies of Traditional Navajo religion. Christian faith healing is that of the independent Navajo Pentecostal preacher, with his or her revival meetings and laying on of hands, and of the Catholic Charismatic prayer group, with its communal integration of Navajo and Roman Catholic practices. Although Christian missions have a long history on the reservation, Pentecostal Christianity arrived much later, and, in contrast to Traditional and NAC, is organized around a transcendent Christian God that represents the ultimate source of healing. All of these forms of healing are available on the Navajo reservation, and it is worth emphasizing that Navajos typically distinguish among them as representing three identifiably distinct religious traditions. For this reason, when we speak of a specific mode of healing—such as NAC—we are also referring to a particular religious tradition or orientation.

METHODOLOGY

For the larger Navajo Healing Project, ethnographic work with healers ($N = 95$) and patients ($N = 84$) was carried out by four teams, each consisting of an ethnographer and an interpreter assigned to a particular region of the Navajo reservation. In addition to the ethnographic work, a formal psychiatric diagnostic interview was conducted with each patient by a team composed of a clinician experienced in treating Navajos and an interpreter trained in social work or mental health services. The patient group, from which the cases considered here were drawn, took part in a series of interviews that included the Description of Illness in Navajo Experience (DINE), an interview in Navajo and English developed by Thomas J. Csordas and Martha Austin for use in a study of the experience of Navajo cancer patients (Csordas 1989, 1994; Csordas and Garrity 1994), and elements of the Context of Illness Experience Interview (CIEI) developed by Janis Jenkins for the cross-cultural study of psychiatric illness (1997).

The patient group was recruited either through referral from identified healers or through contacts made by Navajo members of the research teams. Interviews occurred in a variety of settings across the reservation, typically within the homes of participants, and addressed the following topics: demographics, family history and interpersonal environment, typical daily activity, acculturation, work history, medical history, attitudes toward illness and health, explanatory model of the current illness, religious background, and experience with religious healing. By the end of the study, research participants had completed from three to seven interviews.

In addition to ethnographic and diagnostic interviews, the patient group completed follow-up interviews at three to six months, and a selected group participated in further follow-up interviews several years later.

Although the larger project from which this article emerges was not specifically focused on Navajo adolescence, 11 adolescents and postadolescents had nonetheless participated in the project by the end of the data-gathering stage of the study. The following discussion thus represents a series of case studies with 11 young Navajo individuals ranging in age from 15 to 24. Together, this group is distributed equally between men (45%) and women (55%) and includes the three distinct modalities of Navajo religious healing—Traditional healing (36%), NAC healing (36%), and Christian faith healing (27%). The discussion presented here is based on material drawn principally from the series of core ethnographic interviews conducted by the four research teams.

NAVAJO ADOLESCENCE

Although the traditional rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood among Navajo females (*kinaalda*) has received considerable attention (Begay 1983; Frisbee 1993; Leighton and Kluckhohn 1948; Reichard 1928; Roessel 1981; Schwartz 1997; Wyman and Bailey 1943), the study of the contemporary lives and lived experiences of Navajo youth is remarkably limited.¹ Of the scholarly literature that does address American Indian adolescence, there is an overwhelming focus on the various risk and protective factors associated with rates of suicide (Grossman et al. 1991), incidents of depression (Barney 2001), adolescent pregnancy (Berry et al. 2000), conduct disorder (Kunitz et al. 1998), problem behavior (Fisher et al. 1999; Mitchell and O'Neill 1998), emotional health (Cummins et al. 1999) and overall health status (Blum et al. 1992). After reviewing this literature, one is left with a troubling image of adolescent lives dominated by problems of substance abuse and alcoholism (Kunitz and Levy 2000; Quintero 2000), depression (Barney 2001; Dinges and Duong-Tran 1993; LaFromboise and Bigfoot 1988; Manson et al. 1985; Sheeber et al. 1998), suicide (Berlin 1987; Berman and Jobes 1991; Grossman et al. 1991; Pharris et al. 1997; Strickland 1997), adolescent pregnancy (Berry et al. 2000), and feelings of hopelessness (Chester et al. 1999; Fisher et al. 1999; Kunitz et al. 1998; LaFromboise and Bigfoot 1988; LaFromboise and Howard-Pitney 1995; Lester 1997). In many regards, this literature serves to pathologize American Indian adolescents, and Navajo youth in particular. Although these factors undeniably constitute important dimensions of adolescent experience, a narrow focus on them paints a problematic picture of what it means to be young today on the Navajo reservation.

We will consider a similar set of social factors—considering contemporary Navajo adolescent experience, how can one not?—but we will take a markedly different tack, posing different questions of similar phenomena. For instance, while religiosity can be considered a protective factor (although Kunitz et al. [1998] finds it to not be a significant one), exactly what kind of religiosity is being talked about—Christian, NAC, or Traditional? While community participation can likewise be regarded as a protective factor, what types of communities are youth exactly participating in? Although gang membership can be considered a risk factor, can it not also constitute a significant network of social support that buffers potentially deleterious outcomes, such as depression? Although the data presented here do not allow us to address these questions directly, they nevertheless press us to think through the variable implications of risk/protective factors and, simultaneously, question the assumptions of cultural homogeneity in reservation life from which such analyses issue. In this ethnographic study, we thus examine not only the specificity and multiplicity of what constitute risk/protective factors but we also seek to ground them within broader networks of meaning and social significance. This is particularly important when one considers, as Van Hasselt and Hersen noted, “that only one tribal group—the Navaho—is large enough and residentially concentrated enough to provide a clear-cut cultural base for an adolescent subculture” (1986:407). In this regard, we focus not only on isolated factors contributing to deviant behavior but also the ways in which Navajo youth negotiate the complex social and symbolic terrain of contemporary Navajo reservation life.

Significantly, these topics were not the explicit focus of the Navajo Healing Project. Rather, concerns over the meaning of Navajo tradition, experiences of living within multiple social worlds, and the ways in which healing informed these processes repeatedly emerged in the context of other discussions. There are thus no narratives here that were presented in response to such questions as, “What does it mean to be a Navajo (youth)?” Yet it is the prominence of these concerns that has pushed us to raise the questions we do in the present text. At the same time, that the discussion is grounded within a larger study of religious healing is neither incidental nor inconsequential. In fact, this provides a unique position from which to understand the experience of Navajo youth, and it directly relates us to questions of cultural identity formation and reproduction. As has been noted elsewhere, ritual healing on the reservation is a contentious ground where Navajo identity is played out along multiple axes of social significance (Csordas 1999; Lewton and Bydone 2000). In this regard, it offers not just a window onto larger processes—such as the reproduction of Navajo culture—but is quite central to these processes.

It is also important to note that although the age range pushes our group toward the upper limits of adolescence, interview narratives repeatedly addressed experiences and sentiments of not yet being fully integrated into an adult Navajo life. While marriage and having children commonly represent significant criteria for being recognized as adults, these case studies in particular show that this is not sufficient. Many in fact had children as teenagers and were married as a result. Thus, these experiences did not mark their entrance into adulthood but, rather, problematized such a transition. Moreover, that the individuals considered here are patients of Navajo healers should not be read as suggesting that their cases are exceptional. On the one hand, the centrality of healing in Navajo religions means that seeking the assistance of a healer is not an exceptional experience. On the other hand, the extensive ethnographic engagement of the Navajo Healing Project on the Navajo reservation in a variety of settings has helped us understand these experiences as being widespread concerns. What is unique, however, is the narrative space that interviews opened for such discussions.

NAVAJO TRADITION AND “STUFF LIKE THAT . . .”

I know some Navajo people who, who aren't Navajo and who have these ceremonies around them who, they have relatives who do these ceremonies but they still don't believe in it themselves.

—Nancy, 20 years old

In the relatively short history of Navajo subjugation, the terms *Navajo* and *traditional* have emerged as conceptually conjoined. In popular idiom, among non-Navajo, to speak of anything Navajo is to speak of a romanticized traditional way of life. In scholarly literature as well, a focus on “traditional philosophy” is notably overrepresented, given its limited salience for Navajo youth growing up on and off the reservation today. This emphasis on Navajo tradition, by extension, has fed a widespread scholarly consideration of Navajo people as alternatively stuck, caught, or trapped “between two worlds”—the traditionality of Navajo reservation life versus the impending modernity of the outside Anglo world. In turn, this positioning of Navajos between two worlds serves as an attractive motif for explaining Navajo youth's difficult transition into adulthood.

Yet, for Navajos, and for young Navajo in particular, the boundaries of the two worlds between which they are purportedly stuck are far from stable. While recognized, they are continually problematized. At the same time, however, this is not to suggest the elimination of the concept of “tradition,” and its relation to notions of “Navajo-ness,” as an object of analysis. While of limited analytic value, the concept has gained a social life of its own and figures prominently into the sorts of processes considered

here. In order to return it to the center of analysis, albeit at a different analytic register, this section considers how young Navajo persons understand and use such terms as *tradition* and *Navajo* rhetorically in the negotiation and production of their identities as Navajos. It is in this—in the rhetorical pragmatics of traditionality and Navajoness—that we begin to grasp the complicated, uneven, and varied understandings of what it means to be and act like a “real” Navajo.

The ways in which Navajo youth conceptualized and employed notions of traditionality are multifaceted—at once hauntingly similar to essentializing non-Navajo conceptualizations of the Navajo (found everywhere from mainstream media to New Age revivalisms) and nonremarkably grounded within a specifically Navajo system of distinct religious and philosophical orientations. In addressing these apparently inconsistent usages, two movements that, at face value, appear contradictory will be examined. On the one hand, *tradition*—as discussed by young people—emerged as a markedly unelaborated and nonspecific term to describe a wide range of social phenomena. On the other hand, and seemingly contrary to the first movement, tradition—in this unelaborated form—served as a central ascriptive category for defining oneself as Navajo. Despite its limited salience as a category, it nonetheless posed itself as vital to Navajo youths’ definition of themselves as Navajo.

Navajo elders continually bemoan young people’s lack of knowledge about Navajo culture. In everything from familiarity with clan lineage to proficiency in Navajo to rudimentary knowledge about Navajo ceremonial life, young people are criticized for lacking what elders commonly view as intrinsic dimensions of being Navajo. Based on the case studies examined here, their concerns are not unfounded. For instance, young Navajo interviewed for this study repeatedly struggled to define basic concepts such as “five-fingered being” (*bilaa ashdla’i*), the Navajo term for person. Conjectures ranged from expressed ignorance (having never heard of the term), to descriptions of five-fingered beings as “upright beings . . . [that] use tools,” to considerations of the effect of losing a finger on being able to write or get married (if one were to lose one’s ring finger). Although not all respondents had such difficulty, instances such as this nonetheless confirm elders’ evaluation of young persons’ cultural competence.

Youths’ steady disengagement from a way of life that historically defined Navajo subsistence, such as sheep herding, and the associated deterioration of firsthand knowledge about what constitutes Navajo tradition were common threads that ran throughout our interviews. Nancy, the 20-year-old woman whose comment opened this section, for example, captures this process when describing her childhood visits to her grandparents’ home:

Where they lived . . . they, they lived on, they lived on, we had our garden and my grandpa was there. He stayed there all day and worked on the garden and my mom and my grandma and . . . they, all they did was weave all day and it was very traditional, everything they did was traditional and we didn't . . . we didn't go anywhere, we stayed in that area.

Since her childhood, however, Nancy has moved several times, completed a two-year degree, and has succeeded, during periods of unemployment, in finding various temporary jobs. Although she is deeply committed to what she describes as a traditional way of life and regularly attends Traditional ceremonies, the image of tradition that Nancy provides is notably general and non-elaborated, particularly in her characterization of traditional practices as “things.” In a context where the reproduction of Navajo culture is no longer grounded in a common mode of subsistence, it is not surprising that many young Navajo do not know a great deal about Navajo culture, or at least their grandparents' Navajo culture. For many, it is less a matter of speaking Navajo and herding sheep than joining their high school Indian club.

This does not mean, however, that tradition is any less relevant to their lives. Quite the contrary; if anything, it is more relevant. Nancy's understanding of her grandparents' traditionality stood as a model for her self-evaluation. This was precisely the reason she initiated this topic in her interview, to make clear the importance of tradition in her life: “I participate in a lot of traditional things and I believe in that . . . as far as that goes.” *Tradition*—as problematic a term as it is—has deep resonance in defining Navajo identity for young people. What we thus find occurring today, as we can see occurring throughout the history of Navajo–Anglo relations, is not the term's obsolescence but rather a refashioning of its content and associations, making it a meaningful and useful term in the negotiation of specifically Navajo identities.

That tradition can be spoken about as a “something” (e.g., a way of life, a model, a goal) should give one pause, a pause at which this section's second theme enters—the persistence of tradition as an organizing principal in the lives of young Navajo. For tradition to be discussed in this way, as a unified entity, a certain degree of distancing and objectivizing is necessary. That is to say, to speak about tradition in such terms requires a particular relationship to one's cultural milieu. In other words, one must be able to imagine a position outside. Among other things, the possibility of such an objectivizing position reflects the intertwining of the problematic reproduction of Navajo culture (as seen in the waning of a “Navajo way of life”) and the construction of Navajo culture within the social imagination of non-Navajos. It is at this site of intertwining where Navajo youth fashion a coherent and guiding idea of tradition.

This dynamic is captured in Nancy's later discussion of the traditional wedding she had insisted upon, a wedding that had taken place less than a year before her interview:

Well, when we were [at the wedding] they told us [things] they never told us about . . . how you . . . I mean, just things that are expected of you like, where the female you have to know how to do cooking and making bread and all the stuff that like Navajo people are known for. And then the groom, they explained the same thing to him. And . . . they just explain things to you.

Accompanying her nonspecific rendering of Navajo tradition as "stuff," and paralleling her description earlier of it as "things," is an intriguing positioning of herself *outside* of Navajo society. That is, in referring to traditional practices as "stuff . . . Navajo people are known for," she encapsulates Navajo experience from the perspective of an outsider, implicating objectified criteria of authenticity understood from a standpoint that knows, but is not entirely of, Navajo culture—a standpoint that perhaps straddles the boundary between reflexivity and alienation. Yet it is these criteria she seeks to fulfill in her own life.

Rather than tradition being an unobjectified set of experiences and practices that are taken for granted, and difficult to articulate in its ubiquity, tradition is discussed here as an abstracted notion that emerges as a salient means of conceptualizing and categorizing the worlds within which Nancy, and other young Navajo, live. Furthermore, in its self-conscious recognition as a specific set of practices and modes of understanding the world, it stands as distinct from alternative modes of comprehending the world. This is precisely what Nancy is getting at when she says that she believes in Navajo tradition "as far as that goes." Although we will come back to this comment later, it is worth noting that she recognizes tradition as only going so far. She acknowledges, then, that it has boundaries.

The shifting positionality articulated by Nancy also emerged through linguistic idioms of translation. The case of Vicky, an 18-year-old patient of an NAC Roadman, illustrates this point well. When asked about the cause of her infant child's illness, she responded:

Is that in Navajo, traditional? Or, just, uh . . . Both? Yeah. Probably, just the doctors looking at it would probably just be that, she was around someone who must have had it. Must have had it, and gave it to her. They coughed on her, or sneezed on her, or something. . . . And that's how she could have caught it. And, in traditional, I would just say the same thing I said with my dad, witchcrafting.

Although we will consider Vicky's case in more depth later, it is noteworthy that Vicky had recently returned to the reservation in order to move in with her parents and give birth to a child. Before returning, however, she had led a remarkably different life as a member of a gang in which she had gotten heavily involved with drugs and spent time in jail. Paralleling her movement between dramatically different worlds, the above passage

highlights Vicky's awareness of being situated among competing belief systems and ethnomedicines. And when she asks the interviewer whether she wants a response "in traditional," the question appears as a seemingly linguistic one, and her role in the matter is one of translator.

Vicky's query, importantly, was not an isolated one. Again and again, similar questions were encountered: Shall I explain this in Navajo traditional terms or in terms of biomedical medicine? What is particularly striking about such conversations is the respondent's frank awareness of being positioned and situated among multiple social worlds, as well as the ease with which speakers are able to move among them. And as they move from one to the other, they thus highlight their roles as translators. Correspondingly, as they move through cultural and linguistic worlds, they position themselves and reconfirm their identities as Navajo.

The ways in which notions of tradition served to organize young peoples' lives were plainly evident in the case of Henry, a 24-year-old patient of an NAC Roadman and a student at the time of his interview who spent a great deal of his interview addressing specifically this topic. Although he articulated a noteworthy degree of inclusiveness when talking about religion—"there's good and bad in every religion, it's just the basic teachings like righteousness I guess, and how to carry yourselves and that's it"—it was nonetheless a fractured inclusiveness. That is, his interview was organized around a series of oppositions between a Navajo worldview and that of the "Anglo" world.

At the time of the interview, Henry was living with his girlfriend outside of one of the reservation's border towns. In a setting that reflected the cultural and religious complexity of reservation life—an apartment bristling with electronic equipment where framed biblical passages, dream catchers, and a poster describing what it means to "Walk in Beauty" were displayed—Henry turned to what he saw as the deep conflict between the "two ways." On the one hand, there is the Navajo way grounded in the way of the elders and marked by simplicity, balance, and cohesion. On the other hand, there's the shallow, materialistic Anglo way:

There's the whole society like in magazines and everything. I don't know. I read a lot so, that, it's just everyday issues, I think society is going to take us all down. I for myself, I try to keep happy for myself. Really no one will bring me down, but it just seems like sometimes it does and I just motivate myself some other ways. I just look away from the problem or do what needs to be done.

For Henry, this latter way is corrupting the Navajo way and creating "new Navajos" who "keep themselves blind." These new Navajos, as Henry described, do not want their peers to know if they can speak Navajo or that they participate in ceremonies; they are "trendy" and interested only in the material world. Henry, on the other hand, seeks escape from this corruption so as to "deal with the facts of life instead of winning the lottery."

With this escape, however, he contemplates his impact on the world and his service to his people. In the end, he wants to join the Peace Corps so that he can help others and then return to the reservation to bring balance to the two ways.

The fact that Navajo youth utilize such dichotomous distinctions—the Navajo way versus the Anglo way—should not be taken as evidence for its analytic validity. Henry’s apartment, with its startling mix of cultural and religious symbols, clearly problematized his oversimplified opposition between “two ways.” Yet, while life on the reservation today profoundly undermines any facile distinctions between tradition and modernity (or postmodernity), such distinctions nonetheless carry considerable social weight. As with Henry, and many others, these distinctions serve to organize lives and situate speakers within particular notions of what it means to be Navajo. In other words, they represent but one rhetorical strategy for positioning speakers within complex social and discursive fields, the negotiation of reservation life, and the formation of coherent subjectivities. While young Navajo may have limited knowledge of their parents’ and grandparents’ lifeworlds, their utilization of what they imagine their parents’ and grandparents’ lifeworlds to have been like—traditional—highlights their persisting relevance. Thus, on the one hand, some Navajo youth will insist on having traditional wedding ceremonies despite their parents’ indifference and their own limited knowledge of Navajo, and, on the other hand, young Christian Navajos will insist on ridding themselves of any traditional religious practices or ceremonial paraphernalia.

Navajo youth are certainly not alone in this strategy of objectivizing tradition. In fact, and following our argument that this is a period when young Navajo acquire the tools for negotiating a complex world of multiple loyalties, one would not expect this strategy to end as they become adults. Yet its urgency in interviews with young Navajo as compared to their elders highlights the prominent role that tradition plays in their lives. In this respect, despite its paucity as a category, tradition represents a cogent category through which youth navigate the worlds within which they live, stake claim to a uniquely Navajo identity, and separate those who are truly Navajo from those “Navajos . . . who aren’t Navajo.” It is in this context, then, that we can speak of the simultaneously eroding and solidifying significance of what it means to be “authentically” Navajo.

MULTIPLE LOYALTIES AND PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

Nancy’s statement concerning the salience of Navajo tradition “as far as that goes” is worthy of reconsideration. When Nancy recognizes the “stuff . . . Navajo people are known for” and states that she believes in “traditional things . . . as far as that goes,” she is more than reproducing

the coterminous relationship between the terms *Navajo* and *tradition*. She is, in fact, recognizing that tradition only goes so far. That is, *tradition* has limits, beyond or between which it is not, at most, believable, and, at least, not useful. In usage, *tradition* has inconsistent linguistic value depending on where the speaker is located, and thereby is not consistently translatable within alternative social worlds. The astuteness of the young Navajo that we mentioned earlier—in their ability to move between different social worlds—is reflected in their knowledge of where “traditional” can be spoken, as opposed to, say, “biomedical.”

Taking up themes of translation and movement, the aim of this section is to provide an introduction to the multifaceted nature of reservation life and the various ways in which young Navajo engage specific off-reservation, non-Navajo worlds that make up a significant dimension of the social networks they inhabit. As such, we are not only emphasizing the complexity of reservation life but also problematizing a tendency to treat the “Anglo world” (against which Navajo are positioned) as a coherent whole. In introducing the heterogeneity of cultural worlds Navajo youth exist in, our analysis can be characterized as a concern with the various sorts of worlds young Navajo move through. This discussion will prepare us for the following section’s turn toward understanding how young Navajo seek to cultivate a sense of belonging and connection within particular communities.

Although one can identify many lines of difference on the reservation (in terms of gender, age, and class, for instance), the most significant divisions for the present discussion are among the three religious systems existing on the reservation—Traditional, NAC, and Christian. Before continuing, we should emphasize that the connotations of *traditional* in this section are distinct from those of the previous section. Whereas in the previous section it referred to a particular way of life (a rural, pastoralist mode of subsistence), in this section it denotes a specific religious and spiritual orientation (that is itself grounded in a particular way of life). Although the term may be employed to establish one’s allegiances, in either context, it nonetheless works along different axes of meaning. That is to say, tradition (as a way of life) commonly serves to demarcate a distinction *between* Navajo and non-Navajo; Tradition (as a religion), however, functions to situate the speaker *within* Navajo society, as a part of a specific religious community that is distinct from NAC and Christianity. For the present discussion, this second axis is of particular concern.

Csordas (1999) and Lewton and Bydone (2000) have considered this topic in some depth and addressed the particular ways in which different modalities of Navajo religious healing intersect with processes of personal and collective identity production. For instance, Csordas argues that Navajo ritual healing articulates a series of identity politics in regards to both a personal politics of collective identity and a collective politics of

personal identity (1999). Lewton and Bydone (2000) suggest that the elaboration of key synthetic principles in each healing tradition is integral to participants' self-orientations, their identities as Navajos, and the therapeutic process. All note that despite the eclecticism of healing traditions and the degree to which people in practice use multiple traditions, the different traditions of ritual healing nonetheless represent salient categories for the articulation of social and religious difference. Not surprisingly, a similar dynamic was encountered among the young Navajo considered here.

It was common, for instance, to find Navajo youth aligned with multiple religious orientations simultaneously. For example, Vicky, the 18 year old mentioned above, affiliates herself with both the Native American Church and the Catholic Church. Alternatively, John, a 22 year old who identifies with Christianity and NAC but also attends Traditional ceremonies, describes the impact of a Traditional ceremony he received through specifically Christian themes of forgiveness and confession. Laura, a 24-year-old patient of a NAC healer, on the other hand, explains that she is "very traditional and also part of the Christian-Episcopal Church." Again, the juxtaposition of symbolic objects in Henry's apartment can be understood as a material crystallization of the eclectic ways in which multiple healing traditions constitute everyday life. To these, we can add many more examples of young Navajos being variably affiliated with a number of religious traditions simultaneously.

While people may draw on different traditions at different times depending on the nature of their problem, each modality of healing—as a religious orientation—works in particular ways in defining social allegiances. That there is a great deal of overlap in everyday life, in other words, does not lessen the significance of these categories in the structuring of individual and collective identities among young Navajo. Nancy, the 19-year-old woman discussed at some length already, for instance, clearly affirmed their viability as she recognized and moved between alternative modes of explaining her child's illness etiology. More generally, each religious orientation incurs certain social obligations, definitions of appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and prescribed ways of leading one's life. Furthermore, each orientation engages participants within particular social communities that are, in turn, defined in distinction from other communities.

In this respect, Nancy's emphasis on translation highlights a particular problem recurrently encountered by young Navajo. For example, Mary, a 19 year old who was tragically killed in an auto accident not long after her interview, depicted a far less fluid and unproblematic division of loyalties. At the time of the interview, Mary already had three children. She lived with them and her parents not far from the church she regularly attended. Mary had dropped out of school and was unemployed at the time of the

interview. In the following passage, she discusses her experiences in a ceremony with her boyfriend, the father of her youngest child:

I mean, I didn't know nothing about it and he, after it was done, he kind of got mad at me because he said, "You didn't have no faith" in his church. And I was like, "What do you mean?" And he goes, "You're Christian, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes, I'm . . . could be upset with me," and I said, "Well, my God was upset with you." . . . I thought there was only one God [laughs]. I really don't really understand Navajo, and they were saying something in Navajo, and that's, they told me to just forget it, don't worry about it, and I'm, "I want to know what you said." But he was pretty upset with me because I was just sitting there. I shouldn't be saying that. "Some fire, I don't know, some fire almost took her." I was like "Umm . . . OK," cause I don't know nothing about it, what ceremonies we had that night. I was just sitting there.

As Mary's conversation instantiates, Navajo youth's movement through different social worlds may not only be problematic but may lead to conflict. Importantly, it is discussed as precisely a linguistic problem and a problem of translatability.

While one can thus argue that the significance of ritual healing for the articulation of identity is a social dynamic found throughout the reservation, young Navajos' movement between different religious traditions can nonetheless be problematic. This is particularly the case since most young Navajo can neither speak nor understand Navajo. We will return to this problem of language proficiency with respect to how it relates to achieving ideals of traditionality. For now our emphasis is on the heterogeneity of reservation life exemplified by the coexistence of the three distinct religious orientations and the ways in which young Navajos' multiple loyalties to them are at times a source of conflict.

Paralleling this introduction to the multiplicity of loyalties constituting reservation life, one that belies any simple conceptualization of a unified Navajo culture (however longed-after it may be), the lives of Navajo youth are intricately enmeshed within an "Anglo world" that is no less easy to frame in homogeneous terms. This is a significant point to make because it is crucial to recognize that young Navajo who move in social circles off the reservation—as most do—move within particular worlds of North American society. Vicky, for example, lived within two starkly contrasting worlds—the first a very traditional one on the reservation and the second a gang in East Los Angeles. For Vicky, they are both her family. Whereas her family on the reservation is traditional Navajo, her "family" in East Los Angeles is predominately female and Mexican. Thus, as with many other young Navajo, Vicky's connection with an "Anglo" world is a specific one.

Other young people, not surprisingly, inhabit different positions outside of the reservation. With Cindy, the 18-year-old daughter of an NAC healer who describes herself as a musician, we are again taken to Los Angeles, but a very different Los Angeles:

I started to write again and I'm getting involved with a friend in LA and I'm recording, he's recording me over the phone with a board track. And he's going to be using it in a club in LA. And I've been doing things like that. Just writing and hearing music and that's been good for me. Cause the way it makes me feel when I do that, so happy, so proud, so like, I just feel good.

Cindy, who had dropped out of high school two years earlier and who, at the time of the interview, lived with her parents and siblings in a modest house on the reservation, thus considered herself part of a community defined not in religious, ethnic, or territorial terms but in relation to a shared interest in producing music. This interest, in turn, took her off the reservation (via telephone) into specific non-Navajo communities.

Many more examples are available from the cases considered here, linking young Navajo with such sites as Mormon boarding schools, migrant construction outfits, and U.S. military bases. As Vicky, Cindy, and others show, the "outside" society with which they interact is not a unified, undifferentiated "Anglo" world. Furthermore, these specific communities (themselves not always localized) are far from representative of what one might characterize as "mainstream" American society. This Anglo society, no less than Navajo society, is crosscut by many alternative lines and communities within which young Navajo are variously linked and integrated.

While we cannot overlook the multiple and specific avenues along which social networks of Navajo youth extend off the reservation, neither can we ignore the reverse direction of this social and cultural flow. That is, just as the social connections linking young Navajo to particular communities outside of the reservation disrupt a strict separation between life on and off the reservation, so too does the mass media and entertainment industry that infuse the lives of young Navajo on the reservation. Recall, for instance, Henry's prediction of society's downfall—a prediction forged through his love for magazines. Not only is each purportedly monolithic world unique and multifaceted, but they also blend into one another in particular ways and along distinct paths. And when one considers the North American mass media and entertainment industries' contemporary fixation on youth culture, the unevenness of these cultural flows must also be recognized. In this regard, not only has the media dramatically influenced Navajo youth culture, but one can also argue that it has played a central role in producing it.

Although there are many ways to address the impact of mass media on Navajo youth culture (e.g., fashion, music, language, etc.), the ways in which young Navajo drew upon idioms and images from North American popular culture in conceptualizing and communicating experiences of illness and healing were particularly striking. For example, John, whom we introduced earlier, cast the impact of a Traditional ceremony within the frame of Hallmark Entertainment's recent remaking of *Alice in Wonderland* and, later, exemplified the clash between "tradition" and "Western"

views through the story of the O. J. Simpson trial. In describing specifically his illness experience, he alternatively explained:

I sort of think that it's like . . . it's like eating me up, I think of it like a Pac-Man, slowly taking parts away from me. Not only particularly the sores I feel damaging your skin, but spiritually, psychologically and thinking all the process of my body that makes me . . . I feel like it's being taken away day by day and that's it.

In each of these examples, in weaving together *Alice in Wonderland*, the O. J. Simpson trial, and the Pac-Man video game, John highlights the intriguing ways in which North American mass media and popular culture provide idioms through which Navajo adolescents organize, describe, and make sense of the intimate experiences of illness and healing.

In this discussion of the multiple lines of differentiation among Navajo and the varying and specific ways in which adolescents become enmeshed within non-Navajo worlds, we have emphasized that any one adolescent has a wide spectrum of social worlds to which he or she is attached, and through which he or she moves. This, in the broad sense, is what we mean by multiple loyalties. Instead of a Navajo youth trapped between a generalized Navajo world and a generalized Anglo world, we thus see that Navajo adolescents have alternating allegiances to Christian, NAC, and Traditional religious orientations on the reservation, to a series of family members themselves aligned in multiple ways to these same orientations, and to a specific set of non-Navajo communities off the reservation—all of whose boundaries are notably porous. While one can argue that youth throughout North America exist within social worlds divided by multiple loyalties, what is important here is the specific content of these allegiances. That is, we are emphasizing that in young Navajos' existence within and movement through these multiple loyalties, they are simultaneously establishing a collective identity as a people (*vis-à-vis* North American, Anglo society) and reproducing personal identities within a collective of divergent religious orientations, all of which take shape within a particular, collective history of suppression and structured economic disadvantage. In this regard, it is not merely an ethnic other that stands as a foil for defining one's identity as a Navajo but also a range of internal differentiations that social actors must navigate in cultivating a coherent personal universe and charting a future for themselves and their people.

HEALING LOYALTIES

The ways in which divisions of loyalty play out in daily lives are manifold and can be explored along a variety of avenues. For Mary, it was in her relationship with her boyfriend. It was their inability to understand one another and one another's religious orientations that sparked discord. More generally, conflicting alignments such as this have the potential of

creating deep divisions within families. At the extreme, this can lead to pronounced feelings of isolation. Throughout the course of interviews, the young Navajos considered here—particularly those having problems and yearning for stability—repeatedly touched upon precisely this topic. Isolation represented a central obstacle in their lives, and often the perceived cause of their problems. In this section, we will thus consider discussions of isolation, how different healing practices address it, and what this has to say about being or becoming Navajo. This turn toward healing is an important one, for with it one begins to understand how Navajo youth seek to ground themselves within the complicated, and at times divisive, social environments they inhabit.

Isolation and the Ideal of Clan Lineage

Being integrated into an expansive web of social relations is a pervasive ideal by which many Navajo live. These social webs include family members, clan members, fictive kin, friends, coworkers, and the generalized community of fellow Navajos. Whereas being enmeshed within a particular set of social relations is what largely constitutes a normal or healthy person, isolation, by extension, represents a sign of deviation or illness. In this regard, when asked what might help their problems improve, participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of social relations. As Henry responded to this question: “Better relationships. I guess the whole, the Navajo thing is to have family relationships. Just to go in there in a gathering, just to be together, just to help each other, whether it’s a problem or just wanting a little company.” For Henry, doing “the whole Navajo thing” of having “family relationships” is vital to his own health.

On the reservation today, however, young Navajo are finding close social relations among extended familial networks an ideal increasingly difficult to achieve. Reflecting the problematic reproduction of Navajo cultural practices more generally, the centrality of kinship as an organizing principal of group identity is dramatically declining. This is something Micah Parzen also observed in his study of Navajo adolescents’ experiences with wilderness therapy (2001). Although in the past clan membership represented a significant means of social ordering, regulating such decisions as whom one could marry, today many adolescents struggle even to identify their clan lineage. The waning significance of clan membership, in turn, implicates a larger reordering of social relations being undertaken particularly by Navajo growing up today. However, with the primacy of family relations and clan lineage remaining as an ideal, many youth experience this process of reconfiguration as a profoundly disheartening isolation. Despite their ability to navigate multiple loyalties and move among disparate social worlds, many felt as if they did not really connect in any one place.

Our concern with Navajo youth identity is also implicated in this discussion, for expressing interest in one's clan was recognized as one step toward "getting in touch" with one's Navajo roots. Over the course of several interviews, for instance, Vicky went from feeling ashamed about her ignorance in clan matters to taking it upon herself to learn her clan lineage. Ultimately, with pride, she enumerated them to the interviewer. A point not to be overlooked here is that it took Vicky's desire and self-motivation to learn her clan lineage. It was not, in other words, a taken-for-granted principal through which her social relations were ordered.

Nonetheless, the sense of pride expressed by Vicky was something that other adolescents similarly discussed in relation to their healing ceremonies. Healing both addressed the sense of isolation and inspired the kind of pride experienced by Vicky. Before considering this point in more detail, however, let us first get a sense of the sorts of isolation young Navajo discuss.

Cindy, the 18-year-old musician introduced earlier, renders vivid the feelings of isolation and the desire for acceptance encountered among young Navajo:

Growing up, I was really insecure about that, the way I looked because I had bad allergies. I was really young and I think at that age people care so much about how they look and their appearances and I was going through that stage. It was really hard for me, and I couldn't really ever look anybody in the eye and speak to them and I had a real problem with that. And I didn't associate with anybody and I didn't have any friends. I was just so alone because of that, just afraid of what other people might think of me . . .

My stepfather is an alcoholic and that's been really hard on me because I'm the oldest of my sisters and I feel I have to look out for them, everybody, even my mother, and I feel I have to help her out and everybody I can . . . I know my real father is an alcoholic. . . . Growing up I felt really left out. When I lived with my grandparents, it was really comfortable. . . . On the other hand I also felt lonely and some abandonment, I really don't know, it's just the way it was. My mother had me when she was 18 years old and it was probably my choice to stay with my grandmother because I didn't feel right staying with my mom and her husband, cause they didn't feel a part of the family.

Although her experiences may not seem particularly surprising or unexpected for adolescents—both Navajo and non-Navajo—the ideal of strong, extended family cohesion among Navajo nonetheless compounds her feelings of isolation.

Reconnecting, as a Navajo

The work of Lewton and Bydone (2000) on Navajo ritual healing has shown the ways in which different modalities of Navajo healing invoke notions of harmony within and connection to the physical/spiritual world. As they describe, harmony and connection have implications for encouraging proper family relations and an understanding of one's cultural and

spiritual history. Together, these point toward some of the most pernicious problems young Navajo refer to as they experience a dramatic reordering of social relations, the increasing rarity of contact with people who live traditional Navajo lives, a heightened sense of longing for an authentic life, and the bleak economic future they see reservation life preparing them for. In this section, we thus consider the particular role that ritual healing plays for young Navajo in addressing the intersecting sentiments of personal isolation and cultural disconnect.

For Cindy, as with other young Navajo, participation in healing ceremonies was a prominent cultural space for addressing sentiments of isolation and loss—both personal and cultural. After a diagnostician identified the source of Cindy's problem as "a dead people spirit that was bothering the patient," she underwent a series of ceremonies involving crystal-gazing, the recitation of neutralization and protection prayers, the Basket Turning and Tobacco Way ceremonies, and a Corn Pollen offering. For Cindy, her participation in the ceremonies was an attempt to reconnect with her family and her Navajo heritage:

I want to get in touch with where I come from and who my people are. I want to get in touch with that once again . . . I'm learning how to sing [perform ceremonial chants] now and I'm asking a lot of questions. And my mother tells me stories like about my great-grandfather, or people who lived back then. And I read a lot of books about things like that, the Navajo folk tales, I read and I just try to get back to where I come from. And I feel comfortable with that, very comfortable. It's in my family and that makes me even more comfortable and safe.

In turn, she expressed the success of her ceremonies through sentiments of being loved, noticed, protected, heard, and no longer feeling alone. Moreover, the ceremonies had brought together significant dimensions of her family—her grandparents, mother, siblings, and aunts and uncles—whose participation contributed in various ways to its successful completion. Cindy's healing experience was thus largely a matter of social support and the role support played in her quest for self-identity; she sought not only a closer relationship to her parents but also an intimacy with her Navajo cultural heritage. Her healer, as well, expressed hope for her recovery precisely because of her "interest in Diné [Navajo] ways."

Cindy's experiences were far from exceptional. Helen, a 15-year-old woman suffering from a series of skin ailments and what she described as a general bad attitude, traces a strikingly similar movement between isolation and connection, as well as their relationship to her feelings of being Navajo. At the time of her interview, Helen was living with her parents in one of the larger towns on the reservation and attending junior high school. Although her contact with the study initially revolved around her physical ailments, it quickly became apparent that these symptoms were minor in comparison to a profound sense of isolation she was experiencing. Her problems, as she explains, "make me feel that I don't want to go

anywhere with my family. It just makes me feel like I want to stay home and be by myself.” Later, highlighting the problems she had sleeping, her lack of friends, and distant relationship with her parents, Helen indicated that she spent a lot of time alone, not out of an appreciation of solitude but because of the combined effects of her suffering and her difficulty in reaching out to her parents for help.

After visiting a diagnostician, in this case a Hand Trembler, and being told that the source of her skin problem was a childhood incident involving ants (one that she did not recall), she sought the assistance of a medicine man who could administer the Red Antway ceremony for her—a three-hour ceremony involving a series of prescribed chants, the ingestion of specially prepared herbs, and the application of a “blackening” balm over her body. It is in her description of the ceremony that we again encounter the relevance of healing for both her feelings of connectedness with her family and her sense of cultural identity:

I was itching and I had a lot of red bumps, I wasn't feeling good and I had tonsillitis. Some of that was the problem, so my mom took me to a medicine man and they did a ceremony on me. And I was proud that I had that ceremony done on me so I don't have anymore of those red bumps.

Here, as with Cindy, she draws a direct connection between a sense of pride and the efficacy of her treatment. “I was proud that I had that ceremony . . . so I don't have anymore of those red bumps.” Helen noted several times that her participation in the ceremony, and her more general aim of learning more about Navajo culture, were part of her attempt to be more accepted by her parents—more integrated, in other words, within a familial network of social support. What she wanted more than anything, she explained, was to have a close family.

Although many of the Navajo youths in this study appreciated the ability of healing to mend, or at least substantiate, one's Navajo identity, the broader social world they inhabited frequently undermined the ceremonies' desired effects. On the one hand, values of independence and self-reliance cultivated in such institutional structures as the educational system often worked against ideals of social integration and fed into adolescents' feelings of isolation. The ideal of self-reliance is captured well in the case of Laura, the 24-year-old patient of an NAC Roadman mentioned above who characterized herself as “very traditional and also part of the Christian-Episcopal Church.” At the time of the interview, Laura was still struggling with the aftermath of her parents' death, which had occurred when she was 15. She was living alone in the trailer they had left her. As she explained, “When I actually started maturing a little bit, and when I started realizing responsibility, I started realizing that I was on my own, and that I have to do something with the trailer that my mom and my dad had left us.” In this sense, becoming independent and “on your own” are

considered part of being an adult. At the same time, being “on your own”—as in the case of Helen and Cindy—held debilitating implications in the sense of being isolated from social and kin networks.

A more pronounced obstacle for cultivating connectedness and a salient cultural identity, on the other hand, was the linguistic barriers adolescents encountered in attempting to communicate with their elders. Cindy’s desire to become closer to her grandparents, for example, was repeatedly challenged by her inability to speak Navajo.

I’m trying to get close, closer than where I’m at right now to my grandparents. My grandfather understands just a little English and it’s really hard for me to communicate with him cause I could barely speak our language. So much I want to have a really good relationship with him, where I could ask him a lot of questions about what he does. Right now I’m just getting through books and things like that. But so much I want to have a close relationship with my grandfather. Because I would really like to know how he feels beyond a certain point. Sometimes, I want to ask him, like during a NAC meeting, I watch him and he’s just so amazing and he’s singing, and it’s like he’s somewhere else or in a different world and I feel that and I can see it. And sometimes after the meeting I want to discuss with him what he felt that night and tell him what I felt that night, but it’s so hard because I can barely speak my own language. But definitely I want to get closer to him.

In Cindy’s case, as in others, the ability of healing to foster social connectedness is constrained by differences in language. This is particularly the case in the context of NAC and Traditional ceremonies. With Navajo as the predominant language spoken in both contexts, most youth have a difficult time understanding what is being said and the meaning of particular practices. Although taking the initiative to attend ceremonies is important in addressing feelings of isolation, an inability to participate fully problematized their desire to connect with their relatives and their culture.

Moreover, the tension between closeness and distance found in Cindy’s narrative represents a more pervasive struggle that seemingly feeds off itself. Just as participation in NAC ceremonies solidified Cindy’s social connectedness and sense of cultural identity, it also revealed her distance from both. As in other cases, the closer she gets, the more clearly she can see how far away she is. Although her ceremonies mitigated this feeling to a large extent, it seemed in the end that she still did not know exactly where she fit. Although of questionable success—in the absolute sense—her participation in ceremonies nonetheless reflects a larger process whereby healing stands as an important means of both mediating young Navajos’ desire for connectedness with family members and cultivating their identities as Navajo. In terms of our discussion of multiple loyalties, this suggests that healing practices represent one avenue through which these loyalties are solidified and grounded within a specific social community. If translation among different social worlds often evokes themes of isolation and disconnectedness, healing just as commonly evokes themes of grounding and connection.

THRESHOLD OF MATURITY

We have discussed the multiplicity of social experiences among which Navajo youth divide their loyalties, the ways in which they act as translators between various overlapping social environments, and the mediating potential of healing to move from the horizontal translation across social worlds to the vertical integration of Navajo youth into specific familial networks of social support. The trajectory of our discussion, toward increasing specificity of the lived experiences of Navajo youth, has ultimately led us back to where we began, with youth yearning for a sense of connectedness with their elders and their cultural heritage.

Connectedness with elders and with cultural heritage in turn pointed toward the looming presence of an imagined past—a past of an authentic Navajo way, a past when life was simple, a past when people were close—that is continuously being reinterpreted, reconfigured, and reinvented as Navajo youth carve out their specific position within contemporary Navajo society. While this highlights the significance of the past for the present, what of the future? That is to say, what sort of pasts will be drawn and drawn upon by future generations of Navajo adolescents? How will the youth of this study raise their children, what kind of social worlds will they inhabit, and how will they evaluate their child's authenticity as Navajo?

Several of the young people we have talked about, as they begin raising children of their own, are already confronting these questions. Particularly when we consider the follow-up interviews, some of which occurred over five years after the initial interview, we gain an insight into what these young people—as they became adults—imagined as a future for their children and the younger generation more generally. Examining as a whole the multiple interviews that occurred over this long period, we are left with intriguing images of youth as they stood at the threshold of adulthood, and passed through it—at least those who, unlike Mary, did not die at a distressingly young age. It is with this tentative step toward the future, and its past, that we shall bring our discussion to a conclusion.

In a five-year follow-up interview with Allen, who is by this point approaching 30, we catch a glimpse of the future importance of Navajo tradition. Allen, at the time of his initial interview, was a 24-year-old high school graduate seeking help from an NAC Roadman for chronic back pain caused by injuries he received doing construction work. At the time of his follow-up interview, he was working as a counselor at a community school and living nearby:

I work at a school . . . and my main focus is working with the children and their problems. I work with them, like they bring them over, like those who don't listen in class or the ones that are just goofing off or those who you try to talk to they bring them to me sometimes and I talk to them and whatever that's bothering them and just being with them and try to relieve their pain anyway I can . . . I talk to them everyday about tradition, the old ways, the Long Walk, I tell them that most of my life I grew up in Rough Rock and my

paternal grandfather, my father was from there, and my paternal grandfather were with the tradition. They taught me every day about tradition and the old ways, they talked about that and it was interesting. I used to be very enthused about that, before that I was very grouchy, even just to say something to me I didn't want to hear it. But they toughened me up with that. And my paternal grandparents used to talk to me about that every day.

In a curious way, we find Allen confronting himself. As a counselor at a school, he repeatedly encounters Navajo children dealing with the same problems he had. They reacted, as well, much as the youth of Allen's generation had reacted.

Allen is being of service to his people in attempting to help these troubled youth. He, after all, was in their position not many years earlier. Who could better understand their problems? It is precisely Allen's ability to identify with his students that is pivotal to his role as a counselor and his identification with Navajo tradition, in particular, that is central to what he does as a counselor.

I went into the sweat lodge with the children, they were saying that they weren't listening; they were running over the teachers, talking back to them, the sixth grade boys. I went to the sweat lodge with them, saying that maybe it would be good for them. And I went in there with them and this coming Friday their teachers asked me "What did you do to them?" Or, "What did you say to them in the sweat lodge?" I just told them, "I talked to them, I talked to them. How you respect people?" And I asked them, "Is that how you respect your parents?" I was talking to them like that and I asked them, "Do you want your parents to come in and see how you act in school?" And the little boys were crawling around in the sweat lodge, they were moaning and I told them, "You can't resist from misbehaving, this will help you really good," and, "Hang in there." I told them that even though they didn't want to do it. And the teacher said, "They've been doing pretty good after you went into the sweat lodge with them, I think we'll keep doing that every other two weeks." And the teachers, they want to start something like that again at the schools, doing sweat sessions with the students and it's true that they kind of rehabilitate them.

We quote Allen at length because, beyond further substantiating our earlier observations, he also opens a window onto the future. That is to say, Allen's work with children is very suggestive of the type of labor that will be required, and most likely undertaken, in the reproduction of a uniquely Navajo world. In this regard, the importance of Navajo tradition as a self-conscious identity will most likely continue, if not become more intense.

Notions of tradition, in this respect, will not only serve to draw youth together as *Navajo* youth but connect them with their parents and their elders. At the same time, learning more about tradition will reveal the distance that stands between them. As with today's Navajo youth, this will have positive implications for some and dire consequences for others. In either case, and alongside an economic reality marked by deep poverty, it is doubtful that life will become any easier for young people growing up on the reservation today. Nonetheless, as we have emphasized, Navajo youth continually refashion the multiple worlds they move through as creative cultural agents. In the process,

they negotiate their distinctive identities as Navajos in a way unique to their generation, recreating tradition through the trials they face on the road to maturity.

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NOTES

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1. See, for example, Henderson et al. (1999) and Hailer and Hart (1999) for ethnographic research on Navajo youth gangs. Dehyle, alternatively, has published work considering Navajo adolescents' resistance toward Anglo racism and discrimination (1995, 1998). Lastly, Micah Parzen's study of a wilderness therapy program on the Navajo reservation provides intriguing insight into the lived experiences of Navajo youth (2001).

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