

**CONTEMPORARY COWBOY CULTURE AND THE RISE OF AMERICAN
POSTMODERN SOLIDARITY**

A Dissertation

by

RONNIE DEAN HOMANN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2006

Major Subject: Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Cowboy Culture and the Rise of
American Postmodern Solidarity. (May 2006)

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In this dissertation, I build on contemporary theoretical perspectives to interpret characteristics of contemporary cowboy culture. Specifically, I target the image of the cowboy in relation to solidarity. I assume that contemporary cowboy culture is an illusion or simulacra of something, something maybe once authentic. Now, it is built around language games, illusion, image and many other postmodern phenomena. Even so, in this work I explore how postmodernism is useful, which many are hesitant to do. This is a new twist or at least an interesting study in contrast to the enlightenment project. I rely heavily on theoretical discussion, qualitative analysis, participant observation and interpretive interactionism to accomplish this study and engage this culture. I integrate this approach into the continuing question about progress and the relationship between postmodernism and modernism, which is characterized here by McDonaldization. I find contemporary society provides opportunities to celebrate the benefits and development of postmodern social bonding. As a result, postmodernism, characterized by chaos, contradiction, and especially illusion is found to actually create solidarity and allow for Jungian rebirth of something authentic.

DEDICATION

To My Beautiful Wife Jennifer,
Rachel My Princess,
And Luke My Precious Son

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my best friend Jesus, who called me to accomplish this work. He believed in me from the beginning and supported me every step of the way. I also want to give special thanks to my wife who has always inspired me to be the best I can be. Her love and support is never ending.

I also give my gratitude to Henry and Sally Carwile for their care and provision. Not only did they give me their daughter in marriage, Henry and Sally provided the financial backing I needed to go to school. Henry has been a visible role model for my life. His own success, the value he places on education, and his expectations for Jen and I to accomplish our dreams have been a consistent source of motivation.

I want to thank my Aunt Janet and Aunt Patti for taking me into their homes and giving me love and a future during rough times. I also am grateful for my entire family and my church the Touch Family Church for all their support, prayers and encouragement. I am especially grateful for my friends Eric and Chris who make me laugh and sharpen me when needed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following work is a theoretical production supported by ethnographic, qualitative research: theory not posturing as fact, but interpretation. As I began this endeavor I shared Adrian Holliday's (2002) confidence that what is significant to find will emerge during the journey. Holliday claims, "Reality contains mysteries to which the researcher must submit, and can do no more than interpret" (p. 6). This work then is an interpretation. Specifically this is an interpretive interactionist account of contemporary American culture with an emphasis on theory and contemporary cowboy culture.

As a distinctly qualitative approach to social research, interpretive interactionism attempts to make the world of lived experience visible to the reader. ...The focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects. This existential thrust sets this research apart from other interpretive approaches that examine the more mundane, taken-for-granted properties and features of everyday life. (Denzin, 2001, p. 34)

Similarly, I describe and interpret mundane features of society, but I do this to highlight the existential and more profound such as the rebirth of the cowboy spirit. As a researcher, I observed and participated in various interactions of ranch hands and cowboys in a variety of settings. Specifically, I have studied and observed cowboys on a locally owned ranch in the Morgan County area. In addition, I had the privilege of monitoring and examining sociological phenomenon and interactions at steer shows and a newly formed cowboy church in the area. This particular church is actually called

This dissertation follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

Morgan Cowboy Fellowship Church and is possibly the fastest growing entity in Morgan. Participation at these events has led to numerous sociological findings and enriching interviews.

One of my chief objectives is to deconstruct the concept and image of the contemporary cowboy. First, I want to paint a comprehensive picture of American culture before targeting cowboy culture. I utilize extensive theoretical discussion during the first half of this work to frame my discussion of America. This theoretical approach eventually gives way to an ethnographical approach. Hopefully, the reader will find favor with this combination. Along with the change in approach, a significant change in writing style occurs. Hopefully, this provides the reader with a minute yet visible example of the symbiosis I see between modernism and postmodernism. At the same time, I hope sharing the discovery of this journey is enriching.

As I first began this interpretive work, I intended to maintain considerable social distance from the subjects. However, as the research progressed I was drawn into the matrix of interactions and I was impacted more than I ever anticipated. Something changed within me as I conducted interviews with ranch owners, contractors, fence builders, steer show participants and spectators, cowboy church members and ranch hands within the area of Morgan County, Texas. I have based significant amounts of sociological analysis in this work on these exploratory interviews. I have included many excerpts to give the reader a taste of the perceptions and explanations of contemporary cowboy culture offered by participants. My research will incorporate multiple perspectives and interpretations and not rely on only one single perspective taken from

one point of view: especially, not my own. Instead, I will offer multiple viewpoints, and some viewpoints that are seemingly contradictory.

Robert Emerson (2001) explains that qualitative “field workers began to understand reality as complex, allowing multiple interpretations, shifting in meaning, depending upon the researcher’s theoretical concerns and orienting questions”(p. 20). I too allow for this multiplicity. The research and interpretation presented in this work is just one piece of the puzzle. I agree with Emerson, who states,

Many ethnographers moved to the position that social reality is at least in part a product of an investigator’s efforts to apprehend and describe it. This view fundamentally reconceptualizes what had previously been seen as a one-way relation between reality and representation. Reality is not a pre-existing, objective entity, and representation a more or less accurate mirroring of that entity; rather, reality and representation are related reflexively, each shaping and hence constituting the other. Reflexive approaches thus view social reality as constructed or accomplished exactly by efforts to capture and represent it rather than as something that is simply “there.” (p. 20)

My work is part of this reflexive and introspective turn in qualitative ethnography. Emerson describes ethnography as “not simply a matter of ‘grasping what’s there through close participation,’ but of actively interpreting ongoing social life and transforming those experiences and interpretations into texts that could be made available to others as versions or representations of ‘what’s there’” (p. 23). In this vein, I offer this work on contemporary culture.

As a researcher, I have attended work sessions on the ranch, church meetings and steer shows and conducted follow-up taped interviews with various individuals mentioned above. Emerson claims,

Ethnographers increasingly rejected notions of fieldwork as detached observation in favor of the imagery of fieldwork as a profound, experiential encounter with

the lives, behaviors, and thoughts of those from different social worlds. Such appreciation of the worlds and concerns of others was characterized as a form of *verstehen*, or interpretive understanding, a mode of inquiry leading to the perception of action as meaningful. (p. 20)

Likewise, I have experienced meaningful interactions with my subjects that have significantly influenced my perceptions and interpretations of culture. Since my research has taken place at various rural areas in and around Morgan, Texas I have gotten dirty. Meaning, I have not only observed but have actually participated in a meaningful way in some events and helped in various tasks. Consequently, I have been effective in establishing rapport and investigating topics as thoroughly as possible while gaining a better grasp of the participant's perspectives. Like Emerson, I also

...Characterize fieldwork as a process of resocialization: Sharing the lives of others, the field researcher comes to enter into the matrix of meanings of the researched, to participate in their system of organized activities, and to feel subject to their code of moral regulation...Actively participating in another way of life, the ethnographer learns what is required to become a member of that world, to experience events and hence to understand what they mean and portend to others. (p. 21)

Just like Billy Crystal in *City Slickers*, I have actually had my arm completely inserted into a pregnant cow. This was a one-time experience that will not soon be forgotten.

These experiences persuaded me that a qualitative ethnographic study is an optimum method for keeping in step with the events of cowboy culture. As a qualitative researcher, I had the flexibility to change methods of inquiry and keep up with my subjects as they changed: changed locations, events, agendas, or opinions. As my findings will indicate, many contemporary cowboys operate in a transitory manner. For example, many cowboys can only find temporary employment working cows. Consequently, they travel from ranch to ranch or town to town often very quickly and

without much notice. Some contemporary cowboys manifest the cowboy spirit or life unexpectedly and sporadically. Other research techniques are not as accommodating to such fluctuations. Likewise I agree with Holliday, "Settings are not always ready-made or easy to find" (p. 45). Qualitative research is very open-ended and is designed to handle or adjust to difficult settings, sporadic sociological subjects or interaction patterns. I have realized researching contemporary cowboys entails being able to gather your research materials and travel to a destination quickly, or leave quickly, or even take lengthy trips. While observing or participating many unexpected turns have presented themselves and my qualitative research approach allowed me to be flexible and adapt in these situations.

I have relied on qualitative research as a superior method because it is participant/respondent centered. Many other techniques are not. I have engaged subjects who are very willing and cooperative because my observation and questioning have not been too imposing or restrictive. I have made significant findings because I have given ample freedom to respondents in interviews and because I have observed participants without significantly altering their common interaction patterns. This method has been extremely rewarding, not only for the results but the process as well. Consequently, I have discovered significant richness and depth in interaction patterns and underlying mechanisms influencing contemporary cowboys. Many of these discoveries are only accomplished in their natural environments. I agree with Rossman and Marshall, "Human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur; thus, one should study that behavior in real-life situations" (p. 57). Many research or lab settings are

counter in nature to those that are comfortable to the contemporary cowboy. Without question, many discoveries and much information would be lost forcing such a fit.

Participant observation or personal observation of society in general is a direct manner of examination rather than other methods, which rely on too many degrees of separation. Many quantitative research projects rely too heavily on experiments, secondary data or self-report mechanisms. By observing groups and individuals working cows on ranches, attending church services, or participating in steer shows personally, I have gathered data more directly and used interviews to complement or contradict my findings or theories. Seemingly, this has painted a more comprehensive picture.

Qualitative interviews are very unique and different than quantitative interviews. For example, they allow the respondent to disclose the information that he or she deems important. Respondents have the freedom to take the conversation in various directions. Partly because I started with only an elementary understanding of the cowboy culture, I merely facilitated the interview and directed the respondents to discuss the subject matter. Even though as the researcher I have specific questions I like answered, respondents are open to take a number of different routes in the conversation. Quantitative interviews are much more constrictive. Many ask specific questions in a specific manner and thus a significant amount of information the respondent offers is simply not considered if it does not fit a prearranged format.

Another reason for undertaking a qualitative approach to studying the modern cowboy is partly a response to recent postmodern critiques of research projects and

interpretations. Correctly, many postmodern arguments find fault with researchers and research projects that are aimed at finding one truth, one right answer, or one correct interpretation of particular sociological phenomenon.

In the past few decades, some qualitative researchers have espoused postmodern arguments that critique traditional social science. These researchers challenge historic assumptions of neutrality in inquiry and assert that all research is interpretive, “guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied.” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 3)

Qualitative research provides a framework that makes it possible to address such a critique. By undertaking an ethnographic qualitative project I can give allowance for multiple explanations and interpretations of interactions and perceptions of the contemporary cowboy. There are a wide range of viewpoints and opinions uncovered in this work. There is no one opinion or interpretation presented in this work that stands alone. In addition, contradictions and contrasting dimensions that may exist in this subculture are purposely represented. Since I am open to such dissimilarities I do not have to cut out valuable or contradictory information.

With this qualitative approach I am not tied to a particular hypothesis or thesis. Many researchers are over-committed to a particular paradigm and hypothesis and it colors their ability to receive contradictory information. They may be inclined to ignore information that does not validate their preconceived ideas. Even though I started gathering data with certain theoretical frameworks as a foundation, I have abandoned these when findings dictated I should. With a ground up approach, I have relied on the information and data collected from the field to influence and even change my

interpretations and theoretical analysis and assumptions. Not adopting this approach with a culture such as that of the contemporary cowboy, to borrow from their epigrams, would be putting the cart before the horse.

Early endeavors into the field reveal that the contemporary cowboy may be at a critical time of transition. If so, this has important implications for the future. This is especially noteworthy if this transition impacts local societal structure, cultural interactions, or individual's perceptions. Consequently, research that keeps pace at this juncture would be a valuable asset. Marshall and Rossman claim, "The first challenge (in qualitative research) is to build an argument both that the study will contribute to theory and research—the ongoing conversation in a particular social science discipline or applied field—and that it will be significant for policy and practice"(p.9). I must reject such an assumption. Why must work center on policy, money or widely accepted practices. Why? Who is to say an interpretation or specifically my interpretation and study of the contemporary cowboy is not significant! Is it only significant if it contributes to policy and practice? Is it only significant if it leads to funding? Is it significant only if it fits neatly into established methods or if it is polished and packaged just right for "people who matter." The production of a work and interpretation of culture and groups of people should and does carry innate significance, because people are significant. People are significant in and of themselves. I am significant and the people I study are significant regardless of what they do. Likewise, a contemporary theoretical work supported by qualitative ethnographic research, which serves to join people together is significant.

I believe the work I have put forth is significant because it is an expression of who I am and the academic training I have received. It is a representation, albeit only one representation of many, of people who live and love and fear and die. People I have gained access to. People who have on some level a shared existence. I have taken time to notice their existence and to interact with them and share my comments about that experience. Maybe my comments or conclusions are not significant to some, but the work and link that has produced those outcomes is. It is a link between culture, contemporary cowboys, my self and hopefully the reader. It is an impressionistic work of our culture aimed at displaying elements of its expression and influence.

CHAPTER II

INTERPRETING PROGRESS

Sociologists have conflicting interpretations of progress, defined here as the advancement of society toward a more developed, complex, and highly organized state. Contemporary theorists often take opposing stances on the causes and future of progress, and they incorporate contrasting ideas of evolution and modernity to define it. In fact, many would not agree on the definition given, but I choose to start the discussion with this definition. Undoubtedly, modernists and postmodernists assess the relationship between society and progress quite differently and reach different outcomes concerning their interpretation of progress. Many scientists, politicians, businessmen and countless others have promised “Progress” with the advent of modernity. In postmodern times, many feel this promise has been broken. In a wave of skepticism, contemporary culture has raised a backlash of dissatisfaction with modernity and its claims. I start this dissertation with a discussion of progress to set the stage for addressing the trends of modernism and postmodernism in present-day America to ultimately highlight postmodernism’s impact on solidarity. I will attempt to deconstruct the traditional notion of progress linked to modernity in order to show the beneficial, harmonizing elements of postmodernism in a new light. So, if there is a new form of progress in postmodern times it can be interpreted separately and hopefully distinctly from any interpretation of progress linked to modernity. Consequently, I will offer a new interpretation of progress associated with American postmodernism by examining current trends in America and highlighting postmodern cowboy culture.

For Charles Horton Cooley a prominent theorist associated with the American sociological tradition, progress is a subjective moral category that depends on human interpretations of changes occurring in society (Cooley, 1998, p. 242). These interpretations or judgments rest on the qualities or impulses of the human nature. Specifically, the causes of progress are dependent on the ideas of man and his ability to realize those ideas (p. 241). Although Cooley would not deny that development characterized by enlargement, diversification, and organization has occurred throughout history, he would hesitate automatically to label these advances as progress. His ideas of progress seem pessimistic and skeptical. He states, “The world does move, it moves slowly, and seldom in the direction we hope. There is something rank and groping about human life...” (p. 243). For him, “the reality of progress is a matter of faith, not of demonstration” (p. 243). Therefore, the causes of progress are subject to interpretation and progress is a tentative process rather than an attainable end.

George Herbert Mead echoes Cooley’s sentiments. For Mead, progress and future social reconstruction depend on the mind, defined as the constructive, reflective or problem-solving thinking of individuals and their adaptations to the environment (Mead, 1977, p. 268). So, progress is dependent on the mind and thoughts of individuals. It is variable and conditionally linked to individuals. Ultimately, societies progress by means of “greater degrees of functional, behavioristic differentiation among individuals” (p. 270). Seemingly, Mead argues that societies progress as individuals adapt to various problems presented by the environment, which confronts individuals with confusing and difficult situations. Therefore, progress is linked to the abilities and interpretations of

individuals. He also claims progress is achieved by communication and changing patterns in communication. Likewise Cooley claims progress is a product of the reason, social consciousness and rationality stemming from this communication (p. 109). Contemporary theorists such as Richard Rorty strongly rebuff this interpretation of communication. This type of communication is understood to be language games that avoid contradictory interpretations. For him and many postmodern theorists participation in language games claiming progress hide or ignore the costs or negative effects of progress.

Emile Durkheim (1984/1933), a dominant force in the French sociological tradition, states, "...Society is not a secondary condition of progress but it is the determining factor" (p. 282). The nature of society itself demands and directs progress not environmental conditions or distinct individual qualities. This process of progress is characterized by differentiation and specialization. This process "constitutes the principal element in social solidarity and which becomes the primary cause of the scale and growing complexity of the social organism" (1984/1933, p. 23). For Durkheim, social change must be attributed to social causes and actions that develop within societies as a whole not individuals. Social causes and actions such as social change cannot be developed or contained solely in individuals. They are too complex and independent for individuals to maintain (1984/1933, p. 284). Durkheim states, "Any personality, however powerful it might be, could do nothing alone against a whole society" (1984/1933, p.143). He explains that a force that is superior to individuals can only dominate members of a society, and groups alone possess this quality. Individuals such as chiefs or despots who do have power to bring social change derive that power from their

specialized positions. These positions arise as a manifestation of the group's power and division of labor rather than the distinct qualities of an individual (1984/1933, p.143). Durkheim claims, "No individual is sufficient unto himself, it is from society that he receives all that is needful" (1984/1933, p.173). Therefore, "Man is thus subjected to causes *sui generis*, whose relative share in the constitution of human nature becomes ever more important" (1984/1933, p. 283). In relation to social change, this transfer of dependence transforms the individual from an independent state to a more dependent state. This contrasts the dominant modernistic view that man is in control of his own progress and destiny. For Durkheim, progress is not the product of human handiwork, the environment, or subjective interpretation (1984/1933, p. 282). In fact, he directly states, "it is because society changes that we must change" (1984/1933, p. 282).

Durkheim's view seems positive in certain aspects but he is working with a very different definition of progress. His definition is linked to integration and solidarity, specifically organic solidarity, evident in societies not a grandiose belief in man and his destiny. His optimism about progress in modernity is curbed by his observations about the rising influence of egoism in modern societies. In the *Division of Labor*, he asserts, "There is no absolute happiness, objectively determinable, that men come nearer to as they progress (Durkheim, 1984/1933, p. 194)." According to Durkheim, an increase in the division of labor will strengthen integration, but at the cost of weakening the collective consciousness. Since the collective consciousness is an integral part of society, changes in the collective consciousness will manifest themselves in the form of social change throughout the society; changes such as increased suicide and declines in

happiness. He claims, "...The suicide of sadness is an endemic state among civilized peoples (Durkheim, 1984/1933, p. 191)."

The American sociological tradition views progress through a different evolutionary framework than the French sociological tradition. Many sociologists aligned with the American tradition favors an evolutionary model that is based on the ideas of Charles Darwin. Darwinian evolution of life is produced primarily by genetic variation and natural selection. Natural selection indirectly influences inherited variability. This variability is shaped and pruned through time. The primary assumption in Darwinian Theory is that a progressive line of change does not exist (Kuper, 1985, pp. 280-283). In fact, Darwin stated in *On the Origin of Species* that, 'I believe in no fixed law of development'" (Kuper, p. 283). Darwinian sentiments such as this are fused within the American tradition's view of evolution and ultimately of progress. For example, Mead states that life forms arise within the life process itself and, "the form is dependent upon the conditions under which the life-process goes on" (Mead, p. 15). Mead concludes that human progress is directly tied to the interdependence of human individuals forged within this life-process (Mead, p. 271).

Darwin's influence is further realized in the American tradition's Postulate of Evolving Natural Mental Selves. Undoubtedly, this postulate is built on a foundation laid by Darwinian principles. Charles Sanders Pierce, an American tradition pragmatist, viewed society as a community of experimental investigators engaged in a collective process of inquiry. For Pierce this process can only be properly understood in the larger context of Darwinian evolutionary development (Levine, 1995, p. 255). Similarly, Mead

believed mind, self, and society are “products of a long-term process of organismic adaptations to environment” (Levine, p. 262).

Durkheim would not agree. He argues that Darwinian hypotheses must be applied cautiously if at all to sociological matters (Durkheim, 1984/1933, p. 144). Undoubtedly, Durkheim would reject any interpretation of progress framed in a single evolutionary course for societies. He clearly supposes “an evolutionary model like a tree, with branches heading in divergent directions, each of which possesses its own characteristic standard of morality” (Levine, p. 170). The Lamarckian evolutionary model more closely influenced the French tradition than the Darwinian model. In the Lamarckian model, organisms are essentially bound to improve themselves because of their inherent nature. Significant changes occur progressively, suddenly and drastically, and acquired characteristics can be passed to offspring (Durkheim, 1984/1933, p. 283). These propositions are seen in Durkheim’s firm beliefs concerning the inevitability and multi-directional path for societal progress. Durkheim felt society could best be understood in the Lamarckian model because society’s progress is due to inherent qualities in the nature of society, not because of environmental or individual level qualities. Durkheim might agree with the pragmatists that an animal is in a state of dependence on the physical environment and its biological make-up; however, he would scoff at the idea of applying Darwinian notions to man. For him, man is reliant on social causes, causes *sui generis*; causes better understood using a Lamarckian model of evolution (Durkheim, 1984/1933, p. 283).

The various aspects of modernity expressed by the American tradition differ sharply with those found in the French tradition. American pragmatists find modern societies in an opportunistic condition for rationality, rational discourse, and public deliberation (Levine, p. 312). However, opportunity does not always lead to desired outcomes without passing through a time of transition. According to Cooley (1998), the opportune condition of the modern state should be a platform for individuals finally to accept that there are no absolutes, which he sees as the primary problem with modernity. Cooley describes four primary characteristics of the modernity that cause him reservation when evaluating the progress of modern societies. First, he believes they are unlikely to produce any reflexive works of art or literature possessing substantial quality. Second, the hastiness and speed of life in the modern societies are not conducive to reflexive thought. Third, widespread commercialism unduly rewards those in business and politics rather than those in literature and art. Fourth, the ability and zeal to diffuse work in modern societies do not promote detachment and isolation, which he asserts are key components in quality reflexive works. Cooley believes modern societies are in a time of transition, and these negative characteristics will likely pass away in the future but many contemporary theorists are not so optimistic.

For Durkheim, members of modern societies depend on each other more due to the functional interdependence created by organic solidarity and because of the connective links forged by the legal codes and norms regulating this interdependence (Levine, p. 309). This connection is built on necessity not similarities. “Durkheim proposed, that modern societies can achieve an unprecedented degree of solidarity

without requiring a substantial body of shared beliefs and values” (Levine, p. 309).

Durkheim might seem to evaluate modern societies favorably because of the progress made in the advancement of organic solidarity and integration. But Durkheim qualifies his statements with a sobering awareness of man’s egoism and decline in shared sentiments. He warns we must be careful to appreciate logic or the interpretation of the mind that lead to notions of progress, because “...reality has the grave disadvantage of being resistant to all explanation” (Durkheim, 1995/1912, p. 239).

The American tradition proposes that the subjective interpretations of individuals comprising the society are important to understand the relationship between the idea of progress and society. In addition, it relies on Darwinian evolution as a guide for capturing the essence of progress. The American tradition is skeptical of progress in the modern state but is still optimistic about the future because of the adaptive qualities of individuals. The French tradition attributes the causes of progress to societal level phenomenon such as the division of labor. The French tradition is compatible with the Lamarckian evolutionary model. Durkheim understands progress to be a quality of complex societies, but does not favor a single avenue or interpretation of progress. In addition, he is wary of other aspects of human society that neglect the “errors” in mans observation and interpretations. Durkheim clearly states, “From the standpoint of observation through the senses, everything is disparate and discontinuous ” (Durkheim, 1995/1912, p. 238). Likewise, many now hold a new interpretation of progress and do not accept the traditional definition associated with modernity.

CHAPTER III

PROGRESS DELAYED

Erik Erikson's famous stages of psychosocial development from trust/mistrust to integrity/despair are commonly applied to individual development. However, Erikson himself addressed sociological issues by exploring how society aids and/or hinders each stage of development. The most compelling intersect between the two domains is highlighted by Erikson's discussion of "moratorium" or a delay in development as applied to the identity stage. Continuing the discussion of progress in contemporary society I endeavor to draw an additional linkage between Erikson's concepts and progress in American culture, or rather a halt in the traditional notion of progress.

According to Erikson, individuals passing through stages of psychosocial development are significantly impacted by the cultural characteristics of society. Society can significantly support or hinder one's ability to advance through the eight stages detailed by Erikson. I suggest that America's advancement in other-directedness, as detailed by David Riesman, and augmented by Stjepan Mestrovic serves to delay development, which is especially evident in the fifth stage of identity formation. Seemingly, other-directed social character significantly hinders today's youth in their pursuit of the identity achievement status. James Marcia operationalized four identity statuses (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement) vis-à-vis Erikson's identity verses identity diffusion stage. I propose that youth of today will be more likely to spend additional time in moratorium, and have considerable difficulty reaching identity achievement because of the postmodern, postemotional, other-directed nature of society.

Erikson claims that development across the lifespan is an interconnected process whereby skills mastered in earlier stages have significant impacts on how individuals experience life in later stages. Each stage presents a unique problem, which demands that individual learn new tasks in order to transition to following stages. Earlier stages of development are the foundations for those that follow. Erikson adds, “These criteria, when developed in childhood and when integrated in adulthood, blend into the total personality” (Erikson, 1980/1959, pp. 57-58). At each stage there are distinctive challenges posed to individuals who are developing a sense of self. Erikson points out that these are critical times to master certain skills or form key components of the self. I will only briefly describe the first stages of development in order to provide a framework for my claims concerning the fifth stage.

The first stage of psychosocial development Erikson titles *Basic Trust Verses Basic Mistrust*. This is the first stage and logically the most important in Erikson’s taxonomy. This stage occurs from birth to approximately age one. During this stage of development children make assessments about the world and others. They undergo a process of determining if the world is a safe secure place and whether others can be trusted. Because children are so dependent on others the quality of nurturing from attachment figures is an essential influence on their conclusions. I am primarily focusing on the cultural influences of other-directedness in the adolescent identity stage. However, cultural influences and differences begin to impact children in the earliest stages and continue throughout the lifespan. Erikson clearly understood infant’s earliest encounters expose them to the basic modalities of culture.

The next two years of life are characterized by a child's increasing development of autonomy. Erikson refers to this stage of development as *Autonomy Verses Shame and Doubt*. Considerable cognitive and physical development occurs during this stage. The primary task for children to undertake is to develop a strong sense of control of their bodies. Arguably, the goal for children is to feel confident about the mastery of their body movements and voluntary functions without feeling ashamed or significantly doubting their capabilities.

Initiative Verses Guilt is the stage emerging around the ages of four to six. During this stage children become more focused on successfully applying the level of control they have developed. "Being firmly convinced that he is a person, the child must now find out what kind of a person he is going to be" (p. 78). Erikson explains that children have a tendency to want to be like their parents in order to demonstrate their own characteristic advancements and aspirations. They accomplish this primarily through initiating activities, perfecting language usage, and exercising imagination. The governor for this new found initiative is a firmly established conscience. This conscience is offered as strong evidence of the moral development also happening during this juncture in the child's life.

The fourth stage of psychosocial development extends from the approximate ages of six to twelve. During which, children are occupied with developing and maintaining friendships and learning cultural values. Erikson titles this stage, *Industry Versus Inferiority*, and places importance on education. During these ages children enter school

and are engaged in learning how to be busy and do a wide range of activities. The development of self-confidence is an important attribute associated with this stage.

During these first four stages parents or primary care givers tend to be the dominant agents of socialization. During adolescence significant changes begin to occur in this alignment. Adolescence in America is often signified by great turmoil and upheaval in terms of identity, physical, emotional and social changes. Adolescents are no longer children, but are not considered adults either. They must struggle to position themselves in the surrounding culture while developing a self-identity. Seemingly, these changes especially would make adolescents temporarily vulnerable to and more susceptible to the influences of the social character of other-directedness.

For Erikson, the fifth stage is unlike the others in one significant regard. It is not the culmination or sum of the skills and assets developed from the other stages. What is more decisive in aiding the adolescent's navigation through this stage is the benefit of going through the processes of child development itself. "It is the inner capital accrued from all those *experiences* of each successive stage..." (p. 94). Erikson titles this adolescent stage, *Identity Verses Identity Diffusion* which he claims accompanies the ages of twelve to eighteen. He defines the goal of this stage to be developing a strong sense of ego identity. Those who have been able to successfully navigate through the previous stages will have "accrued confidence...to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense)..." (p. 94).

James Marcia (1966) has elaborated on Erikson's work by further identifying four common statuses associated with identity development in adolescence. Individuals tend

to be associated with primarily one of the following statuses during identity formation: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Three main dimensions differentiate these four statuses. These dimensions include the presence of developmental crisis, exploration and commitment. Developmental crisis is the presence of an internal struggle or conflict in establishing one's identity. An adolescent who is actively wrestling with questions like, "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" or "Am I special?" is understood to be undergoing developmental crisis. Crisis is a weighty word, but Erikson points out that this is natural and quite healthy in the quest for identity formation. Exploration is a process of examining options and choices available in a wide range of domains. Adolescents involved in exploration are actively attempting to determine the values, norms, goals, peer groups, etc. to incorporate into a personalized sense of self. Exploration involves weighing options and considering alternatives available in one's culture. Commitment is accomplished by making firm allegiance to a specified path or identity.

Identity diffusion is a status composed of individuals who have no clear direction in life. They often do not lay claim to clearly defined or established sets of values and goals. Moreover, they are not actively seeking to form any, and do not sense a need to engage in such a task. Therefore, there is no developmental crisis in their life, no exploration and no commitments. These youth may seem to be "floating" through life or apathetic about life in general.

Foreclosure is described as a state of premature commitment. People in foreclosure have committed to specific values and goals and have settled on a specific

course to take in life. However, they have adopted this way of life without exploring alternatives. Often those identified with foreclosure are characterized as having a high regard for authority figures. In psychological terms they are steered by an external locus of control: often relying on influential others like parents to dictate the course of their life. Foreclosed individuals do not actively explore options. They are more likely to see the world in black and white terms, and even more likely to be dogmatic and inflexible. This premature commitment is not the result of development crisis. Foreclosed individuals avoid the discomfort of exploring before commitment and move directly to commitment.

The next status, moratorium, is defined a prolonged time of disequilibrium or dissonance. It is a temporary halt to the progress made in development. Individuals are actively pursuing answers to significant decisions or choices involved in identity formation. They are definitely in a state of developmental crisis; they are questioning the world, themselves and their futures. They are involved in the process of accumulating information and viable options. These individuals are searching for their own set of values and goals, but have not made firm commitments yet. Seemingly, other-directed social character increases the intensity of moratorium by offering more choices, and more confusing choices, and the illusion of better choices in the future. This significantly prolongs or hinders individual's ability to ultimately make the firm decisions and commitments necessary to reach identity achievement.

Identity achievement is the final status of identity development encompassing Erikson's adolescent stage. Individuals in identity achievement have maneuvered their

way through developmental crisis, explored options and have made solid commitments. They typically possess a high sense of self-efficacy and have been found to have higher self-esteem than individuals in the other three statuses. Of course, identity commitment for adolescents is a complex system of schema that may not be salient in all social contexts.

It is not my aim to discuss the strengths or weaknesses of Marcia's taxonomy or Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. Instead, I would like to draw attention to trends in society that may significantly impact individual's progress or placement in the adolescent stage. Applicable trends in society, I wish to discuss are captured in the book, *The Lonely Crowd*, by David Riesman.

Riesman proposes societies have social character or personality patterns, which are common to a majority of the members in the society. He differentiates three types of social character, which are common among societies presently and throughout history. He asserts that pre-industrial societies are often characterized by *tradition-directedness*. Individuals occupy tradition-directed societies with rigid orientations to conformity, group membership and long established ways of living. Riesman associates *inner-directed* social character with western cultures influenced strongly by changes brought about by the Renaissance and Reformation. Such societies are "characterized by increased personal mobility, by a rapid accumulation of capital (teamed with devastating technological shifts), and by an almost constant expansion: intensive expansion in the production of goods and people, and extensive expansion in exploration, colonization, and imperialism" (Riesman, 1980/1950, p. 14). Inner-directed people are very goal

oriented and can obey internal piloting, and they display considerable self-discipline even in the face of substantial obstacles. In *other-directed* societies “contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual-either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friend and through the mass media” (p. 21).

Other-directedness is seen in American adolescents by their receptiveness to the most up-to-date trends, fashions and activities. This receptiveness is often expressed by imitating others. The influence of the media is significant in this process. Pop music stars like Eminem, MTV hosts and celebrities, skateboard King Tony Hawk and the like, lead today’s youth. The omnipresence of media in America cultivates conformity not individual identity expression. Originality is forsaken for imitation. In the media, fashions and trends change at an incredible rate compared to the rate of change just forty or fifty years ago, when Erikson was writing. Today adolescents who want to keep up with these changes must constantly monitor the airwaves for the slightest shift in the winds of fashion. An inability to stay tuned to the latest fashions is what separates “popular” kids from the others.

This obsession would seem to be counterproductive to the forces Erikson describes aiding identity formation. He asserts that the process of being “self-made” and differentiating from others is fundamental to forming one’s own identity. Identity achievement is accomplished when an individual settles on one particular path or choice. So today’s social character opposes identity formation. Mestrovic points out the establishment of other-directedness, “...is a shift from a small set of basic emotions that are held passionately and rigidly in a group context, even if holding them meant

offending others, to a vast array of superficial emotions that are easy to slip on and off...” (Mestrovic, 1997, p. 49). Thus, today the commitment of individual identity achievement is more complex and carries more costs. The cost of staking a claim on a specific identity often means one must drop out of the race of simulating the latest trends. One’s commitment means he or she loses ground and may even offend others who do not want to be tied down, which of course is offensive.

Likewise, in an other-directed society commitment to an agenda is dangerous. In doing so one risks being identified as an outcast or “loser.” One is suppose to be against everything, and not for anything. Other-directed individuals should constantly be engaged in exploration, but commitment excludes. Excluding options or others is often counterintuitive. Somehow, this exploration should be accomplished by maintaining tolerance and an openness to all choices. The complexity of these nuances and their interplay is mind-boggling. If these principles apply to Erikson’s identity formation then it is easy to ascertain how such distinctions complicate choices individuals in moratorium are wrestling with.

Someone who makes a firm commitment to a specific identity risks not being liked, accepted, or even not fitting in with imaginary others. The instant one commits he or she risks being labeled as an outsider, a loser, a freak, etc. Exploration is valued, and commitment is not appreciated. More pointedly, the process of choosing becomes more valued than any particular choice. Individuals poised to make a decision, Riesman would add, might, “...systematically question themselves in anticipation of the questions of others” (p. 256). Riesman even goes as far as to state forming autonomy is the only

significant “problem” left in other-directed societies, which affords their members an easy and permissive life. Even the existence of easy permissive social character would seem to undermine any internal drive to form identity.

There may be a hesitation to make the decisions that lead to identity achievement on one hand and an uninhibited desire to solidify group identities on the other. As Mestrovic states, “The nice and happy consciousness (of other-directed individuals) ensures that one will obey without thinking, join without hesitation, and be a part of a society without opposition”(p. 51). The dissenting opinions or individual expressions of identity that would likely propel someone to stand out and make a claim or ultimately reach identity achievement are systematically extinguished. They are extinguished because group membership and group identity is at stake. One might even go as far as to say, postmodern youth strive to reach group identity achievement while trying to avoid individual identity achievement. Whether this is possible or not does not change the result. Moratorium is the result in either case.

In regards to Erikson’s operations these individuals would not be committed to a clear set of goals, values and a way of life. According to Riesman the other-directed person would not so conceptualize life in terms of any one single career or choice. More likely, one would only be committed to a life of dependency on others. They commit to always knowing what is popular. They commit to keeping up with the latest trends. They commit to always having a willingness to change. This leaves one at the mercy of the newest group and influential others. This is not commitment as Erikson envisioned. Other-directed groups are constantly changing and trying to keep pace with the latest

trends, which can change at any second. So committing to a postmodern group is actually a commitment to live in flux, not identity achievement. Riesman echoes this by proclaiming; “The uncertainty of life in our day is certainly a factor in the refusal of young people to commit themselves to long-term goals” (p. 138).

Riesman argues, “...the other-directed may find their paths to autonomy twisted by guilt for the excluded, by the limitation of their own choices that exclusion entails and by the over-all reduction of the potentialities...” (p. 279). The postmodern other-directed value of tolerance is also counterproductive to commitment to specific identity choices. Liking others and taking in other’s opinion becomes most important; which would seem to hinder someone making their own opinions. It is almost as if committing to a choice means one is not being tolerant of other choices. Other-directed individuals are often influenced to feel they must tolerate everything and everyone except the intolerant.

Discussing tolerance, Riesman’s utilizes the term autonomy, which is a very similar construct to Erikson’s and Marcia’s term identity achievement. He defines it in part by saying, “...Autonomy depends...upon the success of his effort to recognize and respect his own feelings, his own potentialities, and his own limitations” (p. 259). He acknowledges autonomy as a form of self-consciousness, an achievement in abstraction. In *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman outlines the path of tolerance and concludes the path leads to anomie or other-directedness. He links tolerance to high levels of self-consciousness, which is associated with autonomy. Autonomy leads to “achievement of a high order of abstraction” which often leads to anomie. In this discussion of tolerance, Riesman claims, “As we know all too well, such an achievement is a difficult thing;

many of those who attain it cannot manage to mold it into the structure of an autonomous life but succumb to anomie” (p. 259). Riesman seems to indicate there are two primary choices in other-directed or postmodern societies; people can adjust to other-directedness or risk “distorting themselves.” How does an inner-directed person “survive” in a world of other-direction? The tolerance of the other-directed should provide a base of support, but does not completely alleviate the tension.

Another postmodern trend that would seem to impede one’s identity development is the “Milky Way of Stars” phenomenon described by Riesman. The number of choices and forms of expression and identification are so numerous today, it often serves to overwhelm and immobilize rather than empower. There are too many variables, too many uncertainties to calculate for youth to feel confident about any one selection. There is always the possibility of a better choice just around the corner. If one commits then he might deny himself the opportunity to make better choices. This is demonstrated clearly at the university level. Students at large institutions have so many majors to choose from, they may take three or four years to decide. This is only after changing their decision several times. Often, instead of feeling liberated by the autonomy to choose and the diversity of options, people are captivated by fear. Mestrovic’s application of Emile Durkheim’s discussion of the infinity of desires supports this notion. Mestrovic claims, “...the over-stimulation of the mind because of the widening of one’s scope of consciousness is the root cause of the ‘infinity of desires’ that constitutes anomie” (p. 24). At this point, I would also note Durkheim’s discussion of anomie and Riesman’s use of the term seems to highlight this “negative” side of Erikson’s moratorium.

Another significant cultural factor influencing adolescents to vacillate in moratorium is other-directed anxiety. Riesman offers socialization by parents as one key contributor to the overall anxiety of children and adolescents. He claims, “The loss of old certainties in the spheres of work and social relations is accompanied by doubt as to how to bring up children” (p. 49). Parents are so consumed with what others think about their children and their own parenting style that children pick up on this anxiousness. Regardless of the specific style parents choose or adopt, it is layered in the metamessage of anxiety. In short, parents who are overly anxious, self-conscious and consumed with other’s opinions raise children who are the same. I would argue this exacerbates the effects of moratorium during adolescent identity formation.

Another factor contributing to this phenomenon is the postemotional expressions represented in the social character in American society. For youth today, the present is not emotionally satisfying. The future promises to be the epitome of one’s wants and desires. The young person believes only then will he or she achieve the fulfillment of their existence. “Who I am now” cannot be satisfying in comparison. For Mestrovic emotional ambivalence is the hallmark of postmodern society. He observes that the connections between emotion and intellect and action have been severed.

If this is true then the mechanism for change and the formation of identity achievement has been lost. Erikson felt the developmental crisis caused by moratorium would create a discomfort in the individual. Thus, he or she would be motivated to seek out solutions and commitments to solidify one’s identity and relieve the discomfort. But, in a postemotional society emotions do not often lead to action or desired outcomes.

Youth are saturated with distorted emotions associated with ever increasing choices. This saturation is tolerated as long as it does not lead to action.

Children of today are not asking the right questions (Erikson would likely agree) in order to reach identity achievement. They are not asking “Who am I?” or “Why am I here?” They are asking “Do others like me?” and “Do I fit in?” They have lost many of the tools to advance in individual identity achievement. The individual perceives the answer to questions with caution. He or she is extremely aware that the answer can change at any moment. Thus, the foundation for identity achievement is not fixed and stable. It is a free-floating platform that is prone to wobble unexpectedly.

I would like to draw attention back to the key dimension discussed by Marcia in determining one’s identity status: presence of developmental crisis, exploration of options, and commitment. Youth today have developmental crisis. The problem is that theirs is a unique beast. It does not play by the rules. I do not think even Erikson envisioned this twist of fate. To elaborate, youth today have involved in exploration. But in a sad change of events, postmodern society has turned exploration itself into the solution for developmental crisis. This creates a circular feedback loop.

Consequently, commitment is excluded from this process. When confused youth look to the culture around them for appropriate solutions to the turmoil they are experiencing, they do not see others who are established in commitment. They see others who are overly tolerant and who are either comfortable with the ambiguity of endless exploration or are anxious about it. To reiterate, Riesman asserts in other-directed societies “contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual...this source is of

course “internalized” in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early” (p. 21). Moreover, these goals “shift with guidance: it is the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life” (p. 21). To put this in Erikson’s terms youth make a commitment to exploration and to follow the signals of others, not to a specific choice or identity. Commitment to exploration and not individualism is a monumental difference in terms of one’s orientation to society. The few, who make a firm commitment and reach identity achievement, do so by exiting the system (not fulfilling it). They are forced to depart from the group identities and mainstream culture they have become dependent on and infatuated with at the same time.

Considering the factors I have outlined, other-directed society seemingly hinders one’s ability to advance through the fifth stage of psychosocial development detailed by Erikson. I have argued, America’s advancement in other-directedness, as detailed by David Riesman, delays development and may even lock adolescents in moratorium indefinitely. In America, the costs of identity achievement have become greater than those of moratorium. Moratorium today is characterized by anomie, tolerance, fear, lack of commitment, and anxiety. But ironically, in postmodernity identity achievement may be depicted by these qualities as well. No longer does the end justify the means but rather the means is the end. That is until new means come along. Consequently, progress has been delayed or must be reinterpreted.

CHAPTER IV

MCDONALDIZATION

George Ritzer has influenced various domains of academic inquiry through his contemporary sociological work entitled *The McDonaldization of Society*. Some of this success is attributed to the popularity of McDonalds itself and the entertaining style of the book. However, this does not diminish the serious academic accomplishments of his theory and insights. Ritzer has applied sociological analysis of this cultural icon in a direct and convincing theoretical framework that opens a clear window into the heart of contemporary industrial society itself. McDonaldization theory seems to capture key values operating in many modern societies, especially the United States. In his analysis, Ritzer targets four key principles powering the McDonald's juggernaut: Efficiency, Calculation, Control with Nonhuman Labor, and Predictability. In addition, Ritzer blurs the distinction between modernism and postmodernism, and his work lays a foundation for understanding how postmodernism coexists with such phenomena as Efficiency, Calculation, Control with Nonhuman Labor, and Predictability.

The importance attributed to these four principles is a product of the values linked to the industrial revolution. Especially in western culture, industrialization, capitalism, and modernization have been associated with progress and indirectly everything desirable. Modernization and industrialization promised to bring better working conditions, more leisure time, more time with family, better housing, and sanitation. It has delivered on some of the promises, but there have been undeniable dysfunctions associated with modernization: weapons of mass destruction, the

holocaust, global warming, etc. Efficiency, Calculation, Control with Nonhuman Labor, and Predictability eventually affect almost all domains of social life. These values and practices dominate not only in factories or food production, but all walks of life: home, religion, and recreation as well. Understanding these cultural values is key to comprehending modernism, its coexistence with postmodernism and the subsequent halt or modification in modernism.

Efficiency defined by Ritzer (2004) is, “the optimum method for getting from one point to another.” (p. 12) To elaborate, efficiency equates to the *quickest* way to get from one point to another. The quickest method with the fewest steps or procedures along the way is considered optimal. Hungry people have biological drives that appreciate efficiency. Understandably, when one is hungry one wants to eat as soon as possible. At that moment, one is not likely to be opposed to expending the least amount of effort to get his or her belly full: the fewer the obstacles the better! Right? Another goal of efficiency is to cut out the mistakes or variables that might lead to wastefulness or disorganization in this process. McDonalds has developed well-organized plans for creating efficiency not only with its employees, but also with its store layouts and with the consumers themselves. McDonalds has provided an efficient solution to hunger for millions and millions.

One of the primary methods for producing efficiency is streamlining the process of production and serving. Streamlining has its roots in Fordism and ultimately Taylorism. Frederick Taylor developed engineering techniques to provide manufacturing solutions to save time and money. These techniques were aimed at

decreasing the amount of movements and time workers spent assembling various parts. The goal was to create more order and routinization of activities. Taylor discovered that unnecessary steps and actions of people themselves create many variables and inefficiencies. Therefore, manufacturers began to streamline production processes and find ways to discipline workers. Getting workers to stay in one spot and simplifying the actions they have to perform primarily accomplish this. In the food industry this is carried even further by forcing the customer to do many of the tasks workers use to perform. Customers now go to the counter to order and pick up their food, instead of a waiter coming to the table. Customers pour their own drinks at stations in the dining area, and they buss their own tables. From the producers perspective this is extremely efficient. Unpaid labor performed by the consumer is most advantageous.

The implications of these processes in food production and consumption are quite interesting. People have become so inundated with modernization principles such as efficiency they begin to view food as lines in an equation. They must reduce the equation and cut all the variables that give food its authenticity and distinctiveness. Food is only a means to an end. It is not an end in itself. It is a means to money for producers and a means for energy for consumers. Ritzer states,

...People do not go to McDonald's for a delicious, pleasurable meal but, rather to 'refuel.' McDonald's is a place to fill their stomachs with lots of calories and carbohydrates so they can move on to the next rationally organized activity. Eating to refuel is far more efficient than eating to enjoy a culinary experience. (p. 69)

Modern people rationalize the entire process of food apprehension and consumption. Food is not something to be savored or enjoyed. That approach is rejected because it is variable and leads to inefficiency.

Calculability is the next important McDonaldization principle in this process. Calculability involves, “calculating, counting, (and) quantifying” (p. 66). The goal of calculating all aspects of production is “to produce and obtain large amounts of things very rapidly” (p. 66). Measuring and quantifying everything accomplishes this goal. Processes, goods, services, time, mistakes and anything else should all be thoroughly and accurately counted: the more precision the better. Owners, managers, workers, and consumers have been trained to transform numerical quantities into qualitative assessments. For example, close attention to calculations reveals whether workers are being as productive as they should, whether stores are good investments, whether a customer is getting a “good deal.”

Combined with the notion that bigger is better, quantification allows one to somehow reach these qualitative conclusions. This phenomenon is illustrated superbly in the arena of sports. Athletes and games are evaluated increasingly by statistical analysis. The all-important tale of the tape for any athlete is his or her “stat sheet.” Sport organizations have developed extensive reporting techniques to quantify specific details of player outputs. Gone are the days of just keeping score. In basketball for example, simply keeping track of points and fouls is a thing of the past. Now a player is evaluated on points, rebounds, steals, turnovers, assists, blocks, and fouls per game. In addition, players’ shooting percentage, three point shooting percentage and free throw percentage

are thrown into the evaluation. More recently even more elaborate stats have been developed such as assist to turnover ratio and *efficiency*. Efficiency is a statistic that is based on an elaborate formula to measure players per minute productivity. Production per game is no longer a satisfactory summation. This formula is equated by the following formula:

$$\text{Efficiency} = ((\text{PTS} + \text{REB} + \text{AST} + \text{STL} + \text{BLK}) - ((\text{FGA} - \text{FGM}) + (\text{FTA} - \text{FTM}) + \text{TO})) / \text{G}$$

The interesting social impacts seen in basketball may be a microcosm for changes seen in society at large as a result of McDonaldization principles. This is illustrated by the media obsession of individualism in what once was considered team sports. Players' weight, size, age and other personal information are constantly reported during broadcasts. Now a player's every move is scrutinized on and off the court. This leads to high player and coach turnover rates. People are intolerant of stats that "don't measure up." If a player's stats decline too much he may be quickly traded. The essence of team solidarity seems lost in the flood of stats. This has led to widespread lack of commitment and apathy to a particular team by players and coaches. Before long fans are no longer enjoying a game, they are consuming a soap opera supported by statistical expertise from every angle. This process of quantification has a similar effect on food; eventually people are not eating food, but consuming calories, carbs, or dietary points. Quantification and categorization saturates the entire process of eating. Food becomes raw data to be analyzed; the more efficiently the better. Food may even be viewed through the lens of cost/benefit analysis. Surprisingly, time for enjoying food or savoring its uniqueness becomes equated with costs not benefits.

Predictability is the next value of McDonaldization that is spread throughout modern society. Predictability is the assurance of what will come next. People in America have grown accustomed to knowing exactly “what to expect in most settings and at most times” (p. 86). Often they demand it. They are not comfortable with deviance from the normal routines or with unexpected surprises. Predictability provides producers and consumers comfort and a sense of safety and control. I have personally witnessed this extensively while teaching college courses at Texas A&M University. I was under the naïve assumption that college was the place for students to be challenged, to broaden their experiences and ideas. This is simply not the case for many students. Undergraduates in particular want class to be run in a predictable, consistent, routine manner. They become uncomfortable or confused with situations that do not adhere to normal interactive scripts. Students are tolerant of only moderate breaks from the norm, and are primarily concerned with knowing exactly what is going to be on tests. Professors increasingly must spell out every detail of course and suffer serious consequences if everything does not go exactly as planned.

The last key component Ritzer emphasizes as part of the McDonaldization of society is control through nonhuman labor. This replacement is accomplished through a variety of extensive new technologies. For Ritzer,

Technology includes not only machines and tools but also materials, skills, knowledge, rules, regulations, procedures, and techniques. Thus, technologies include not only the obvious, such as robots and computers, but also the less obvious, such as the assembly line, bureaucratic rules, and manuals prescribing accepted procedures and techniques. (p. 106)

Anything that controls people by dictating their actions, timing of actions or sequence of actions is considered nonhuman technology. These technologies are developed to make processes more predictable and efficient primarily by replacing people. Owners and managers constantly report that people are the chief source of variability, mistakes and inefficiency. Workers show up late, get sick or tired, take breaks and perform a host of other inconsistent behaviors. Machines and controlling technologies function as a middleman to help regulate, control or direct workers. Since technologies are unbiased and unemotional they are effective and “less likely to engender hostility towards supervisors or owners” (p. 107). The implementation of these technologies often leads to the deskilling of workers performing mundane repetitive tasks.

More control is being placed in the hands of consumers as well. McDonalds are now being equipped with computerized cash registers that are manned by the customer. The customer swipes a credit or debit card and places his or her order. No employee is necessary to take the order. The customer does the work and does not have to worry about the employee making mistakes. The Internet has also given more control to consumers by eliminating stores and employees in the process. Consumers can order directly from factories and stores and have products shipped directly to their homes. Control through nonhuman technologies is meshed completely in the fabric of modernization and the values of McDonaldization.

If Efficiency, Calculation, Control with Nonhuman Labor, and Predictability have pervaded almost all realms of thought and behavior in modern society, then McDonaldization theory provides valuable insights for framing social theory. But what

about societies, which have long passed through demographic transition and have developed extensive post-industrial economies? Seemingly, the application of Ritzer's theory is invaluable for understanding postmodern societies. McDonald's itself has demonstrated moderate success adapting to other cultures and changes in contemporary postmodern cultures. Evidence of this is found in the menu, which may offer vegetable McNuggets, mutton burgers, or Mcspaghetti depending on localized cultures. Likewise, McDonaldization theory also provides critical insight into understanding current trends.

Postmodern thought is beginning to flourish especially in societies characterized by late industrialism. This stage is established when societies become increasingly service and information oriented. Some dominant postmodern trends have been fueled by a disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the effects and unfulfilled promises of modernism. Modernism for many has been a process of depersonalization, deskilling and anxiety. Some try to recreate nostalgic sentiments to compensate with the cold, predictable routines of life. Others are beginning to withdraw from mainstream entities to form more localized personal establishments. This trend seems to be a significant factor in the growing establishment of cowboy churches and cowboy culture itself.

Now that a foundational understanding of McDonaldization has been built, I would like to return to the discussion of progress and postmodernism. McDonaldization and modernity are products of The Enlightenment, which promised progress and answers for mankind based on scientific reason. Modernity is commonly linked to social character associated with industrialism, capitalism and rationalism. In recent times much debate has surfaced about postmodernism and its societal effects compared to modernity.

Seemingly, many contemporary theorists are claiming that modernism's progress has been significantly impacted by postmodernism. Many theorists claim postmodernism is fundamentally different than modernism and is replacing modernism. Others claim postmodernism is an extension of modernism. Anthony Giddens claims: "Rather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalized and universalized than before" (Giddens, 1990, p. 3). This perspective views modernity as a juggernaut of efficiency and order that is continually advancing. Built into both perspectives is the idea that the progress proposed during modern times has been altered, delayed or even clogged. I will analyze, discuss, and illustrate this contemporary issue in American culture.

Postmodernism may be viewed as an academic challenge to modernism. Overman (1996) claims: "Progress through human intelligence and scientific rationalism energized Western civilization" (p. 156). But he asserts the tide has turned: "the optimism of modernity has turned into postmodern cynicism" (p. 156). Postmodernism challenges the capability of science to give the guiding light it promised. Postmodern thinkers challenge the notion of objective truth. Instead, Overman asserts in current times "culture and social perspectives are taken more seriously" (p. 156). This is evident in the value placed on celebrating diversity and multiculturalism. Postmodernism in this sense would be built on a pastiche of values such as tolerance, deconstruction, decentering, relativism, simulacra, chaos and contradiction.

Theorists have argued whether postmodernism is simply an extension of modernity or something entirely different. If it does exist, is it diametrically opposed to

modernism? Many theorists draw clear distinctions between the two, while others like Ritzer blur the line between them. I hesitate to analyze the relationship only on these terms. Instead, I tend to accept their coexistence as the beginning of observation or analysis.

Thirsty? There is a vending machine located on the bottom floor of the Academic Building just outside the elevator. Actually, there are four but the second one from the right closest to the elevator is quite peculiar. It is the newest of the bunch, and it draws my attention every time I wait to catch a lift on the elevator. Why? It is a vivid symbol of the symbiosis developing between modernism and postmodernism. Assessing modernization, all four machines are quite efficient at dispensing carbonated beverages or snacks within seconds. All are equipped to process coins, bills or even the aggie buck debit card. Select a method of payment and within seconds a cold drink or fresh snack is deposited in a slot for the customer to retrieve. However, the second vending machine is strides ahead of the other three: drinks are deposited in a slot positioned higher up on the front panel. The other machines deposit the merchandise so far down; customers are required to bend over to claim their purchases.

These four machines are all products of modernity and man's ingenuity. They harness electricity, refrigerate, and distribute mass produced goods at the touch of a button. But, the second vending machine is distinguished by its postmodern qualities. This particular vending machine is not simply a rectangular cube like the snack machine on its right and is not nearly as boring as the two coke machines on its left. Its outer

design is not symmetrical. On the right side, it protrudes forward at the top and bottom and has several unnecessary curves in its corners.

Like the other two coke machines, it is adorned with simulacra images; but its simulacra are more deceptive and advanced. It has an interesting picture of A&M students giving the Baudrillardian smile and holding coke products. The students are wearing clothing that displays computer generated coke symbols. More interesting is the way this machine incorporates more than elementary simulacra images. Like the other two it has the typical pictures of bubbles and liquid, but it has something quite unique. Its glass front is adorned with a different kind of simulacrum. There is a border around the glass that is approximately three inches wide. This border is not a sticker on the face of the glass. It is a technologically advanced etching that looks like frozen ice crystals. It simulates the way ice accumulates in a humid freezer or on car windows on a frosty night.

But the main attraction is the *spectacle* created after someone has made a beverage selection. The cokes do not simply drop into a retainer. First a mechanical platform adjusts to the appropriate row and the specific drink topples a couple of inches to the flat surface. Next, the platform's conveyer belt carries the drink swiftly to the right side of the window adjacent the plastic bottle shape opening. This is quite enjoyable to watch. I am left with the impression a highly sophisticated robot has just served me a bottle of joy. It almost makes one want to hang around the elevator just to watch people buy a drink.

The delightful example above highlights the symbiosis I see developing between modernism and postmodernism: a symbiosis that is becoming increasingly visible in a vast array of cultural phenomena. To answer how the two forces co-exist, I will venture to examine and illustrate the relationship that exists between the two by describing cultural phenomenon where both dimensions are operating. For me, one can distinguish clearly between modernism and postmodernism in certain instances and not at all in others. To engage this topic further, I will begin by discussing elements of modernity and postmodernity separately. This, however, is simply a preliminary exercise before delving into other matters and examples of the symbiosis between the two.

Modernity is commonly linked to social character associated with industrialism, capitalism and rationalism. These values have dominated society since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the 1800's. Modernity is a product of enlightenment, which promised progress and answers for mankind based on scientific reason. Industrialism promised to usher in order and progress. According to many theorists, America has been a world leader in this revolution. Contemporary theorists such as Ritzer have examined American society to ascertain the scope and depth of such values. To briefly recap, according to Ritzer, the main values associated with modernism are characterized by the following four principles:

Efficiency, Calculation, Control with Nonhuman Labor, and Predictability.

1) *Efficiency* defined by Ritzer is, "the optimum method for getting from one point to another" (p. 12).

2) *Calculability* involves, “calculating, counting, (and) quantifying” (p. 66). The goal of calculating all aspects of production is “to produce and obtain large amounts of things very rapidly” (p. 66). Measuring and quantifying everything accomplish this.

3) *Predictability* is the assurance of what will come next. People in America have grown accustomed to knowing exactly “what to expect in most settings and at most times” (p. 86).

4) *(Control through Nonhuman) Technology* includes not only machines and tools but also materials, skills, knowledge, rules, regulations, procedures, and techniques.

Anything that controls people by dictating their actions, timing of actions or sequence of actions is considered nonhuman technology.

Again, these are the four key aspects Ritzer claims capture the essence of modernity. All four are clearly operating in the before mentioned vending machines. All four of the machines are efficient and reliable. Like many others, I am confident enough to put money in the machines. For professors in the academic building, these machines are the quickest most efficient way to get a refreshing coke. These machines display all the quantification characteristics of modernism. For example, the prices for sixteen ounces of liquid per container are clearly marked. I have utmost confidence in the reliability of these machines, and as for predictability, I know when I enter E10 on the keypad; I am going to get a C2 (The New Coke).

I draw attention back to Giddens who like others believes “... the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalized and universalized than before” (p. 3). Once again, this perspective views modernity as a juggernaut of efficiency and order that is

continually advancing. I clearly understand how one can adopt this perspective. When I view the technological advancements represented in something as small and insignificant as a vending machine, I see Giddens' point clearly. These little machines are universal themselves. They are everywhere. They cover the college campus, and are miniature models of the juggernaut of modernism.

However, the principles of modernism do not paint the whole picture. Undoubtedly, modernism is on the rise. Technology, efficiency, and capitalism are spreading, but principles of postmodernism are simultaneously growing alongside them. The following definitions provide a sample of the new patterns of thinking and expression represented by postmodernism. These definitions are found in Pauline Rosenau's (1992) glossary of postmodern terms.

De-centering – absence of anything at the center or any overriding truth.

Deconstruction – a post-modern method of analysis. Its goal is to undo all constructions. Deconstruction...revels in contradictions and assumptions; its intent, however, is not to improve, revise, or offer a better version of the text.

Hyper-reality – reality has collapsed, and today it is exclusively image, illusion or simulation.

Hyper-space – modern concepts of space are meaningless. Space does not act according to modern assumptions. It has been annihilated, and spatial barriers have disappeared.

Pastiche – a free-floating, crazy-quilt, collage, hodgepodge patchwork of ideas or views. It includes elements of opposites such as old and new. It denies regularity, logic, or symmetry; it glories in contradiction and confusion.

Simulacrum (a term coined by Baudrillard when studying America) – a copy of a copy for which there is no original. No distinction can remain between what is real and the model.

I incorporate these terms to help gain an understanding of how some postmodernists view the world and how postmodernism and modernism are impacting society simultaneously. However, relying on these terms to define postmodernism would be counterintuitive to many postmodernists. Categorizing and defining are guiding principles of modernity. Postmodernism finds its existence in the joy of destruction and contradiction: in the ambiguity of contradiction. Postmodernism is a challenge to conventional authority and wisdom. Truth is considered myth. No one's voice should carry more weight or validity, not even the author with "expertise." One person's interpretation of a text or event is just as viable as the author's or anyone else's.

Postmodernism revels in spectacle rather than substance. It is cynical and resists placing trust or laying foundations. The line between authenticity and simulacra is blurred. There are not absolutes, and functionality is not favored over the conspicuous consumption of images and immediate gratification.

Ironically, many of the terms used to characterize postmodern thought are pessimistic nihilistic words. But, postmodernists themselves often feel liberated by their proliferation. There is joy in the process of destroying texts and highlighting contradiction. The goal is not to tear down in order to build something better, but to enjoy the process of deconstruction itself. These postmodern terms reflect a new paradigm or way of looking at people and society.

Thus, postmodernism and modernism seem to be two different creatures. How can these two distinct cultural patterns co-exist? I have offered a personal account with the vending machines that draws attention to how the symbiosis might influence people

on an individual level. To answer the question more thoroughly, I will offer a few more examples that are rooted more in group experiences: where in hopefully an answer lies. Of course, to answer is decidedly modern and to question is postmodern.

For an example that highlights the simultaneous impacts of modernism and postmodernism on small groups I will delve into a discussion of automobiles. The latest vehicles to come off the assembly lines are mobile islands of modernism and postmodernism. In them, the trends of both forces are clearly visible. New automobiles are microcosms, Petri dishes, for observing the effects of these two cultural strands. The achievements of modernity are undeniably present in the new Trail Blazer my wife and I recently purchased. It is an efficient “VORTEC” 4200 six-cylinder capable of reaching speeds of a 120mph. It will seat five people comfortably with plenty of room for luggage. It can hold 25.3 gallons of fuel, 7 quarts of oil, and 2.8 pounds of cooling system refrigerants. It has power steering, anti-lock brakes, cruise control, power doors, power windows, power seats, and remote keyless entry. New cars such as this are outfitted with elaborate computer systems that monitor engine performance and power dashboard displays. 55 fuses govern the Trail Blazer’s electrical components.

The list of technological advancements goes on and on. Expensive vehicles have Onstar systems that are linked to satellites. These systems provide access to complex navigational systems and phone services. In addition, it is possible to have satellite radio systems. This allows for clear uninterrupted access to national stations and programmed music sites without commercials. The choices are limitless.

In addition to these modern qualities, postmodern developments characterize new vehicles and more importantly the types of interactions they foster among occupants. Postmodern features may serve to socially distance the occupants from their surroundings or one another. They create hyper-space qualities, which supply the passengers with the illusion they are not confined into a small cubic of space closely connected. They can escape the confinement and conventional connections in a number of outlets. They themselves can de-center from their particular point of existence.

To elaborate, people in postmodern societies are rarely at any one place at one time. The way people utilize cell-phones or in this case car-phones illustrates this point quite vividly. People use such inventions to take away boredom or the reality of being confined to a particular location. This is accomplished by having a conversation with someone who is miles away. If someone is stuck in traffic or sitting at a red light, all he or she has to do is call someone and he or she can escape. They can focus their thoughts and imagination elsewhere. The actual conversation is meaningless; it is the experience or the exchange that is valuable. This way, one can avoid the discomfort caused by their physical location or experiences, or at least they can minimize its effects. I do not have to focus on my circumstances or even travel alone if I am having a conversation with someone else on the car-phone.

Children in the back seat can plug in headphones and view movies on miniature TV's that unfold from the roof of the car. This creates a sound barrier and a social barrier between those in front of the viewing screen and those in back. This creates more hyper-space for everyone's driving pleasure. The children can wisp away to a fantasy world

watching Disney movies, while parents are free to do otherwise. Parents no longer have to interact with the children or constantly correct their behavior, except between movies. The children sit in a hypnotic trance, oblivious to their surroundings, especially those outside of the vehicle.

More expensive vehicles are equipped with two screens: one in back and one in the front console. Arguably, this is a potential distraction to the driver, and hazard to everyone in the car and others on the road. Modern advancements have been invented to maximize efficiency and safety, but these screens are for fun and entertainment not safety. Modern automobiles are lined with air bags, security systems, seat belts and HUD's to maximize protection, but even safety must surrender its place to America's need to consume images.

Dual climate control systems also distance the driver from the passenger on the other side of the drink holders. Even though the two may only be a foot apart, they can position their own temperature settings for their own individual space. No one has to get in arguments or have interactions about the air conditioning any longer. These conflicts dissipate without the need for any verbal exchange. Passengers are not in the car together anymore; they occupy and control their own hyper-space.

Satellite radio has a similar effect. It erases connection into the neighboring community. It disengages listeners from the radio stations or talk shows that are locally based. Satellite radio allows one to listen to music without commercial interruption and without information about local news or events intruding on the experience. This is a

dominant trend in postmodernism: namely, the destruction of localized connections in favor of disconnected global associations.

The irony amid the disengaging and disconnecting occurring inside the vehicle is the postmodern expressions displayed on the outside of the vehicle. Driving in College Station, I have pulled up next to an SUV at a red light numerous times only to look over and witness its hubcaps still spinning. The hubcaps are designed to give the illusion that the wheels are still turning even though the vehicle has stopped. Some drivers place stickers on their side panels shaped like bullet holes; while others position stickers in their windows in the shape of a golf ball, baseball or tennis ball to give the impression the ball has broken the window and is lodged in the glass.

Overlooking that people are driving cars named “Escape” or “Mirage” as if hoping their car can be an oasis from reality. People make statements about their identity or beliefs by utilizing bumper and window stickers. Many are full of clever epigrams or contradictions to serve an array of purposes. People place political propaganda on stickers to say, “I am libertarian, I think”, or “Friends don’t let Friends vote Democratic!” They display the logos of their favorite musical groups or sarcastic sayings such as, “Mean People Suck!” They may place fish fixtures on their cars to indicate they are Christians or the colors of the rainbow to possibly indicate being gay or lesbian. The outside of the vehicle seems to say “I’m here, I am somebody, look at me!” and the inside is saying, “I am not here, I am not confined, I am not connected!”

This coexistence of modernism and postmodernism is also illustrated superbly in a large societal structure in America: the arena of sports. As I mentioned before

Athletes and games are evaluated increasingly by statistical analysis. This modernization principle is carried to the nth degree. Individualism is glorified, dissected with statistical analysis and quantified to points of absurdity. The effect often weakens team solidarity because of this excessive attention to individual performance. This example captures the ability for Ritzer's McDonaldization principles such as quantification to saturate every corner of the American social life. Professional sports have been increasingly compressed by this juggernaut of modern expression.

The postmodern influence in basketball is linked with the media's obsession of individualism in what once was considered a team sport. The media's portrayal of athletes is a composite of contradicting scripts. Announcers often talk about a team's "franchise player" compared to the "role players." Player's respond to questions about the team with "I" statements. Players' weight, size, age and other personal information are constantly reported during broadcasts but for ulterior reasons. I am aware these are modern quantifications and individualism is commonly linked with modernity, but the wiles of the postmodernism media utilize them to accomplish different ends.

Often the personal information has no connection to the events of the game. The information is not to inform but to entertain and fill dead space during time-outs, stoppage in play, and even while play continues. A player's every move is scrutinized on and off the court because the airtime must be full and entertaining. This must be accomplished even if the game is uneventful, boring and meaningless. Announcers and media personal will use the same scripts, words and fake emotions to describe the NBA Finals as a regular season game between two last place teams. They reach for any way to

make the game seem important, a must see event. The details of a player's personal life will be reported over and over in the same broadcast; especially, if he or she is a high profile player going through divorce, involved in criminal trials, or has missed practice during the week. The soap opera angle is carried through the telecast. Any "dirt" or gossip that is unearthed is sure to be discussed from a dozen perspectives throughout the game.

The media attempts to create an illusion to captivate the television audience and increase ratings. They accomplish this in a variety of ways, but I will only mention a couple. Networks position numerous cameras throughout the arena to catch the action from every angle. They continually break feed from one camera to go to another to give the impression of constant activity and excitement. During commercials viewers can see into huddles or the stands, but cameramen are trained not to focus on sections, which are not full. On a typical professional basketball game night large sections of seats have only a few spectators sparsely dispersed in them, but cameramen only shoot the densely populated sections. And this is only done when the crowds are being animated, which the majority of time they are not.

The announcers are often very animated, energetic or bubbly. They pretend they are at the greatest event ever and reporting on something quite significant, but often this is simply not the case. Including preseason, professional basketball players play approximately hundred games in a single season. Many of these games are quite meaningless. Unless it is a playoff game, the players themselves are often very apathetic. They travel to so many cities and play in so many games; it is emotionally impossible for

them to be “up” for every game. What the viewer at home may not see is that the instant the camera is off: player and reporter both have the “I am not here” glaze over their eyes.

The supreme influence of postmodernism in basketball is online, not at the arena. Basketball fans can form fantasy leagues and pick their favorite players to make up their own team. The fan becomes the coach and manager of his or her own team. They are connected to the real games in quite a circuitous fashion. Let’s imagine I have a fantasy league team and a real NBA game is scheduled between the Houston Rockets and the Dallas Mavericks in the new Toyota Center. In regards to fantasy league games, the actual teams that are competing do not matter. The fact the Rockets are playing the Mavericks is insignificant. The only thing that is important is if one of the individual players, for example Tracy McGrady, on my fantasy team is playing. Whether his team, the Rockets, win or lose has no bearing. McGrady’s stats are kept and applied to the fantasy team’s total. My fantasy team might even have a player from the Mavericks on it, like Dirk Nowitzske. So it is even possible to have a player on both teams who are starting for the same fantasy team. As the fantasy league fan at home, I will watch the game between Houston and Dallas and cheer for both T-Mac and Dirk, even though I am a Rocket fan. The connection between team and fan has been significantly altered by the schisms of postmodernism.

My final example regarding modernism and postmodernism is a particular account of a subculture that exists in various traditions across the state and nation. This subculture is tied to show steers and county fairs. Every year various counties have

competitions to determine which steer in the county is the greatest. Local youth participate by raising steers for months and then displaying them in the ring on the night of the contest.

At this point, I will endeavor to interject a viewpoint about this debate by relying on two localized cultural phenomenon, cowboys and steer showing. I will tie these together with a discussion of food culture targeting specifically beef consumption to make this unusual journey.

Cowboys at steer shows in Morgan only slightly resemble the traditional cowboys who participated in cattle drives and beef contests. Steer shows and the present cowboys seem to be more akin to postmodern simulacra of the authentic cowboys of the *old west*. In addition, postmodern steers are significantly dissimilar to other cows, which are raised solely for beef production. I would like to tie in the discussion of the delayed progress in modernity, the coexistence of postmodernity and glance at the outcomes for both steer and cowboy. If they have become postmodern representations of the past, what happens to these postmodern phenomena? The answer might give insight into the future of postmodernism itself, and a viable interpretation for the debate.

Cowboys of days gone by established a symbiotic relationship with cattle. All aspects of their lives revolved around these hardy animals as they herded them across the country. No doubt, the reader has seen images of tough, burly men with straw hats *hollering* and slapping their ropes at the cattle as dust flies and the heat scorches their necks. The wild longhorns bellow loudly in reply, just waiting for their chance to break from the herd. The cowboy is ready to rope the stray and wrestle it back at any moment.

Out of an inner-directed upbringing, these roughnecks worked from sunrise to sunset. They were rugged individuals who knew how to survive in the wild and take care of themselves. They behaved as if they could overcome any obstacle to accomplish their mission. They would deliver those cattle come hell or high water, at least according to the movies. These wranglers thoroughly identified with their work. Their sense of pride and attachment eventually led to the establishment of competitions to deliver the healthiest cows with the best tasting steaks to the stockyards. Upon arriving, the cowboys would select premier cows to have butchered for the contests. These rivalries were more a way of celebrating the weeks of hard work and accomplishment than anything else. For them, the cows were a means to an end. That end was *food* and a way of life. This traditional culture was not able to escape the advent of modernism. Even though many cowboys resisted, modernism has thoroughly altered the nature of cowboy work and cowboy culture.

At this point, I would like to jump past the changes brought by modernism and focus on the postmodern alterations. I have witnessed in the past years an interesting subculture, which has descended from this cowboy tradition. I have studied a subculture built on cow simulacrum comprised of steer showing and county fairs across the state of Texas. As mentioned, Baudrillard originally defined simulacrum, as “a copy of a copy for which there is no original” (Rosenau, 1992, p. xiv). Academics now define simulacra simply as anything that is a copy, fake, or imitation. I had no prior contact with the steer showing culture before moving to Morgan. As a sociologist this lack of familiarity has been beneficial. Being a marginalized observer of the culture has allowed me to analyze

underpinnings of certain mainstream behaviors with an acute awareness of sociological implications. Others who are entrenched in this subculture may hardly give such behaviors a thought. Forming a significant relationship with a former state fair champion, county fair queen, and occasional steer groomer has allotted me the opportunity to participate and observe people, practices and interactions in this subculture as an outsider with insider privileges.

My friend is a lifelong participant in this subculture in comparison to my late entry. Seemingly, people who enter a fully formed subculture are affected differently than those who enter in its initial stages. I have observed a tendency for long-term participants to be significantly more invested and immersed in the plot and theme of the simulacrum. The subculture becomes their reference point, their point of interaction with the subculture, themselves and others. They adopt the values and desired behaviors of the influential leaders for that particular society more thoroughly. In contrast, I have navigated through this subculture with a higher sense of awareness of the trends of inauthenticity present in cows and people. While doing so, I have relied on signals from others for proper socialization and cues to display and experience the appropriate emotions and behaviors for the simulacrum.

In postmodernity, the steer show subculture has transformed the authentic cowboy experience into something quite different in nature. The honored “cowboys” at the steer shows are clean-shaven and wear heavily starched long sleeve Polo shirts retrieved from the dry cleaners earlier in the week. They drive massive trucks with air conditioning and six CD changers. They wear designer cologne, 20X beaver hats, and elephant skin boots

that cost approximately \$450. They mysteriously develop more traditional southern accents equipped with readily accessible drawls, even though this strange anomaly does not occur with other siblings raised in the same household. They work typical nine to five jobs during the week and work the cows in the evenings and travel to steer shows on the weekends. This is far cry from cowboys on cattle drives who had a life dependency on cattle.

In this culture, the makeover of the cattle themselves eclipses the makeover of the cowboy. First, the cows participating in steer shows are not bulls; they are steers. Actually, they are simulated cows or simcows. These simcows are twice removed from the bulls they were originally designed to be. They have their testicles surgically removed a few weeks after birth. Their horns are soon discarded as well. Both alterations ensure that simcows will be easy to handle and that they have an opportunity to develop the desired body dimensions. The values of predictability and efficiency described by Ritzer influence many steer alterations. Unlike cowboys of old, the modern cowboys rely on incredibly high levels of predictability and control when dealing with cows. The McDonaldization process for the cow begins long before they are chopped up and consumed. The McDonaldization of the cow even impacts steers that are not raised primarily for food production.

The origin of countless simcows is pure simulacrum. Many are artificially inseminated with cords of semen from a genetically desirable bull (who may not be alive anymore). These cords are purchased for amounts ranging from ten to five hundred dollars and manually inserted into hand-selected cows. Successful implantation begins

the journey of a steer's alternative lifestyle. They are fed the best genetically engineered feeds and are groomed frequently. The simcow's hair is washed, rinsed, combed, and blown dry almost every other day. They have fans blowing on them constantly to keep them cool. Many are kept in large coolers during the months of summer. This practice ensures that their hair will grow long and they will reach the desired weight. These cows are more like pets than real cows.

Steer shows are bovine beauty pageants. Participants in these exhibitions work months preparing their simcows for the big show. They sweat, get dirty and invest credible amounts of physical and emotional energy along the way. This investment might make entertaining the connection between steer shows and beauty pageants threatening. I have witnessed people acknowledge the correlation but attempt to trivialize it with laughter. They are more apt to validate the process by claiming the steer show judge is evaluating the steers by "market readiness and desirability." The judge feels the steers to check for fat deposits in various places and to determine the steer's "finish" over its ribs. One participant informed me, "Honestly, this only plays a small part. A steer could have the best finish a judge has ever felt, but if he has crooked legs there will be no first place ribbon."

Even though I have characterized the steer show as a postmodern event, the contestants view it in more affirming positive terms. Their emotional, physical and financial investment drives the entire subculture. They are personally coupled to the subculture and monitor current trends with much enthusiasm. As Mestrovic would likely suggest the steer show culture is "not an abstract world...devoid of emotions; [it is] a

concrete world of rooted fictions saturated with emotions that are displaced, misplaced, and manipulated by the culture industry” (p. 39). Undoubtedly, incredible levels of emotions are experienced throughout the entire process of raising and showing a steer. This is obvious from personal testimonies and witnessing ecstatic fans at the arena. Participants convince themselves and others, “This is all for the kids.” “It builds character and promotes family unity,” but clearly there is more involved.

I interviewed a long time participant in steer shows who gave this account, “Now, I heard a judge the night Jessica won her second steer show in Capitol. He told a story about why we do all of this. He told a story of a man and woman who had just bought a house. They had just sodded the yard and all of sudden they look up and their kids are running and playing all in the new grass. They jump up and run to the door to jump on the kids. Then they stopped and looked at one another and said, “Wait a minute are we raising kids or grass.” The guts are: are we raisin’ kids or steers? We are raisin’ kids. And people who are not doing it for that reason have missed the picture. Our family benefited greatly by showing calves because it gave us a focal point. Every day right here at the table we were discussing it. Even at breakfast sometimes. You can’t do that with little league football or baseball because the whole family is not involved, but with showing livestock the family is involved.” This account is an excellent indicator of the level of attachment and involvement people ascribe to showing steers.

On the day of the steer show, with excitement all around, fitters and groomers style and prepare the simcows for the show ring. They wash, rinse, blow, comb and clip the hair. Next, they spray glue on the steer’s legs so its hair will stand up to make the

legs appear as straight and thick as possible. The tail is fashioned into a ball with bulky amounts of glue. If the steer's hair is not dark enough in areas it is spray painted the desired color. The activity builds with anticipation of the big event. Reflecting on this process and the changes incurred to nature, I would agree with Spinoza who stated "a thing engaged in a process of development is engaged in closing what it is now to become what it is not" (Collingwood, 1960/1945, p.16). It is difficult to imagine a cow as a beauty queen contestant.

What are the consequences of this particular hyperreality, in which simcows and people work together under the pressure of reaching "perfection" in image? In the quest for perfection, fitters will succumb to pressure to enhance the simcows features and subsequently engage in illegal activities. Sometime, they will inject cows with banned substances for various reasons. For example, if a steer is unruly before a show, the fitter might administer a sedative. If a steer has structural problems and walks stiffly, the fitter can inject steroids into the spine. If a steer does not display the right dimensions in specific regions of its body, fitters might separate the skin of the steer from the muscle and pump air into the space to create the appearance of a thicker, well-defined steer. Steer shows provide a practical model of a highly developed simulacrum, which demonstrates the social and ethical bi-products of turning something real and authentic into something shallow and fake. Even though I have focused primarily on aspects of simulacra and fakery in my interpretation of the social character associated with steer shows, modern and postmodern phenomena are both fused within the culture.

Is the realization that these cows are a source of food lost in this process? Steer show judges are often heard commenting on the ‘industry’, meaning the beef industry. They may state that the steers they have chosen as their champions will represent what the current industry is looking for. However, the beauty of the steer has nothing to do with how large or juicy a rib eye it will produce. The connection between steer shows and the beef industry is a peculiar one. People are no longer raising steers to be market ready. The amount of show steers consumed for beef compared to the total of number of cows that are slaughtered is miniscule. They are driven by other more personalized reasons.

Some participants admit trying to push the thought of their steers being slaughtered for beef out of their minds. One contestant named Jessica claimed, “It *seldom* bothered me.” She adds, “I even eaten some of the meat from a cow I raised and showed and it did not bother me.” She explained that the one time it did cause some difficulty was with her favorite steer. She formed a strong attachment to this particular steer because he was so gentle and playful. Americans are accustomed to having meat prepared by others. Often, little thought is given about the food in front of them once being alive. Would American eating habits change if this were not the case?

At the most recent county fair an interesting interplay was reported to me. A young eleven-year-old boy had finished showing his steer. His steer made the cut for the auction, “the sale” as participants call it. Once a steer goes to the sale, local businessmen and others bid on steers. The highest bidder then takes a few pictures and then schedules a barbecue. The steer may be kept sixty days before being butchered. Interesting to note, this time allows any harmful chemicals in the steer to pass through its system. This is

quite a contrast to the cattlemen of old, who could enjoy their steaks that night. Anyway, the young boy made the sale and his steer was being led to a holding pen. A woman in charge of registering the steers tried to make up a lie about what would happen to the steer in an attempt to comfort the boy. The boy who must have already known what happens to the steers replied, “I don’t care at all what they do with that steer. He was *mean*.” Both accounts of the boy and Jessica indicate attachment influences perspectives about meat. Possibly, the less connected emotionally and mentally the fewer objections there are to eating beef.

Beef producers are a powerful conglomerate in industry and politics in the United States. They have been forerunners in the process of industrialization and modernization. The meat industry has become a complicated science within its own rights. Literally, thousands of articles have been published about various aspects of meat production, classification and consumption. For example, Toraichi et al. (2002) published an extensive work presenting a “Fluency Image Coding System of beef rib-eye images for Beef Marbling Evaluation. Image encoding is by a novel automatic contour compression method based on function approximation via interpolation... (1277).” This intricate system, which attempts to grade and evaluate beef, has now been automated and put online. Beef can now be observed and evaluated by remote databases.

Elaborate systems have been established to move cows from farms and ranches through auction barns, feed lots, processing plants, the local grocery store and into homes. Every step of the process has been extensively mechanized and modernized: McDonaldized. For example, tending cows can be difficult but there are many

technological advances and modern techniques that help modern cowboys. A key advancement is the four-wheeler, which is considered cheaper and easier to maintain than horses. Modern cowboys also incorporate the use of trucks, trailers, cell-phones, computers and even helicopters on the large ranches located in the Midwest.

Not only has working cows been considerably impacted by these advancements, but the process of shipping cows from one location to another has been significantly improved. With the advent of railways, eighteen-wheelers and modern cattle trailers, a trip that would have taken weeks can be made in a single day. Mechanization has permeated the activity and handling of cows in feedlots and processing plants as well.

Mechanization has led to the deskilling of modern cowboys. In approximately ten interviews, modern cowboys voluntarily admitted that cowboys of older generations possessed more skillfulness and expertise when working cows. The technological and scientific knowledge of cows has eclipsed what was known a hundred years ago by astronomical amounts. However, these innovations tend to replace hands-on contact and creative management of cows. The process has become so predictable and efficient; relatively poorly skilled workers can accomplish numerous steps. Interestingly, local auction lots still employ workers *called* cowboys. These “cowboys” don’t ride horses, but they do administer antibiotic shots to cows when they are first delivered to the lot.

Show steers are sent to this highly mechanized, highly modernized industry following the sale. They do not return home to be pampered and treated as pets. Their postmodern existence is no more. Once the steer show is over the steers suffer the fate of other cows. They spend a short time in the crowded feedlots or they are shipped directly

to the slaughterhouse. They get chopped up and put on the assembly line. They are efficiently dissected and packaged into numerous steak and beef categories.

The point I would like to make from these anecdotes is that postmodernism may not simply be a competing force or antithesis of modernism. It may be packaged as such but postmodernism and modernism seem to form a well-integrated symbiosis.

Postmodernism is represented by the practice of creating beauty pageants with cows: simulacra cows. During the height of the steer show, one could easily argue that postmodernism is taking over the world. If rural communities are inundated with practices built around simulacra and contradiction, then surely postmodernism can spread anywhere. The values and practices of postmodernism are prevalent in institutes of higher learning and in localized rural settings alike. But that is not the end of the story. In particular, that is not the end of the story for the cowboys or the steers.

As mentioned, the steers are sent to the butchering shop and processed by machines and the agents of modernization. They are efficiently chopped up and barbecued like any other cow. In the end we eat the steers just like other cows. In the end postmodernism is swallowed up and digested by modernism. This is true for the steer show participants as well. After the big contest, they get back in their air-conditioned trucks; stop by McDonalds and head home to get some rest for their white-collar job the next day. They delve right back into the comforts and way of life afforded them by modernity.

We engage in postmodernism for a while but in the end we enjoy a good ole modern steak. Even the hardcore postmodernists who work hard to challenge everything,

and fight against modern philosophies enjoy the comfort of air conditioning at home and a big juicy steak once in a while. Postmodern writers still keep their day jobs. One of the benefits of modernism is it allows us to have time to think about and spread postmodern ideas. The idea I would like to spread is that postmodernism is dependent on modernism. Is modernism becoming dependent on postmodernism?

In this previous example, I have begun with a discussion of the characteristics of postmodernism. But, the menace of modernity is lurking in the background throughout the entire process of grooming and showing steers. Its presence is contrasted most sharply at the end of the process, when the show is over. What happens to the steers? From conception to contest steers are adorning images of postmodern simulacra. But, even they have to face the butcher. They cannot break totally free from modernism. They are destined for the slaughterhouse, and may even end up in McDonald's, which Ritzer proposes is the superlative icon of modern society.

The McDonaldization of the beef industry has become a complicated conglomerate of industrialization and modernization. Elaborate systems have been established to move cows from farms and ranches through auction barns, feed lots, processing plants, the local grocery store and into homes or fast food chains. Every step of the process has been extensively mechanized and modernized. Most steps in the process have amazingly predictable and efficient. Their postmodern existence is trampled by this elaborate modern system. Once the steer show is over the steers must

face the butcher not the crowds and cameras of the show ring. They are barbecued like any other cow, and sometimes even eaten by the people who afforded them their postmodern lifestyle.

This example of the show steer subculture along with the example about professional basketball provide evidence of the incredible ability of postmodernism to reach even the most diverse groups of people in society. Focusing on vending machines is an attempt to highlight individual exchanges with material culture characterized by the symbiosis of modernism and postmodernism. The discussion about new vehicles was offered to draw attention to the impact of the symbiosis on small group interactions and factors associated with identity expression.

Summarizing, I have highlighted characteristics of society's connections to the collective phenomena of modernism and postmodernism. In doing so, paradoxically, I have relied primarily on simple concrete examples such as vending machines, automobiles and show steers to illustrate how a complex symbiosis of modernism and postmodernism co-exist. All of these examples paint a recurring theme of Ritzer's modern principles of efficiency, quantification, predictability and control fused with postmodern illusion, simulacra and deception. If postmodernism is a cultural phenomena that does exist as I have assumed; then, I have offered a demonstration of its intermingling with modernism. Exposure to and analysis of this aspect of society is necessary for painting the picture of contemporary cowboys. Any discussion of progress

should incorporate vigorous detailing of these powerful forces and their association with contemporary sociological phenomenon. Consequently, it is also important to interpret progress in light of the symbiosis between modernism and postmodernism

CHAPTER V

COWBOY DEFINITIONS

Cowboy: How does one define cowboy? The term is so common and widespread; millions of people “know” what a cowboy is. However, it is hard to find two people who agree on one definition. I have met people all over the world who have various definitions and exposure to cowboys or at least the image of the cowboy. When I mention I am from Texas while traveling overseas, I often encounter people who have already formed their own opinions about cowboys and are eager to discuss the topic.

The American Heritage Dictionary (Pickett, 2001) defines a cowboy as, “A hired man, especially in the American West, who tends cattle, typically on horseback.” This is an “official” definition—a product of modernity. A few decades ago this definition would have been accepted at point blank. If it is in the dictionary then that’s the final word because the authority has spoken. However, this simple definition does not satisfy many people anymore. This definition is significantly different than most of the contemporary descriptions I have come across. In Morgan, there are a wide variety of cowboys who have a milky way of definitions for “real” cowboys.

In Morgan, a number of cowboy communities exist and I witness local cowboy related events throughout the year. First, there is a growing cowboy church (one of the biggest I visited) on the main road through town, trail rides continually pass by my house on the way to the national forest, there are local rodeo arenas, local cow ranches, restaurants and businesses with western themes, a county fair and countless ranches, farms, and residents who are related to cowboy culture in one fashion or another. I have

contacted various members of each of these groups in order to identify, define and understand trends with contemporary cowboys. I have realized during these interviews many respondents have contradicting definitions and competing categories for various types of cowboys. In the following interviews, I highlight many of these ironies. Despite the self-contradiction and ironies in these interviews several patterns do emerge, and even a hierarchical categorization is represented. For example, respondents distinguish among cowboys in several key domains such as clothing, function, equipment and consumer products.

The following paragraphs consist of a handful of definitions proposed by people in the local area. Clayton is one of the top ranch hands who many locals encouraged me to interview because they consider him a real cowboy. Clayton is in his sixties, but still looks amazingly strong and healthy. He works full time as a ranch hand and general contractor. He has a rugged leathery face with a distinct southern accent. I questioned Clayton about the status of cowboys. He answered,

Well, really and truly there's not many cowboys left--real cowboys. There are a few, but there's a lot of wannabes (slang for want to be). The wannabes are the one's that got hobbies and trail riders are wannabe cowboys (chuckles). I guess it goes back to the, well what do you call it, the romance of the cowboy, you know. Everybody wants to be a cowboy. I think it's just that Texas romance, you know. You want to be associated with cattle.

Clayton draws distinction between cowboys based on function as many do, but he believes the majority of cowboys are counterfeit. He seems aware that there is an attraction to the cowboy image-that many are drawn to the image or appearance of the cowboy. He calls them wannabes; Big Juicy the ranch foreman calls them drugstore cowboys.

I asked Clayton, "Should a cowboy wear certain things or talk a certain way?"

"Uh, I think there's cowboys that look just like you and I look. The clothes and the talk don't make you a cowboy."

"What does?"

"A person that's knowledgeable of cattle and knows what to do with cows. He might have on a pair of wing tip shoes and a pair of dress pants, but that don't mean he ain't a cowboy, he knows what to do. Then you see one with a big hat and boots, he may not be a cowboy, he's a wannabe. (Laughter)" Many people in the cowboy culture seem to be aware of this unique mixture. They believe a large component of contemporary cowboys are counterfeit in some form or another.

However, what surprises me is that later in the interview Clayton reveals that he does have perceptions that are linked to appearance and clothing. Clayton claimed in one response he could often tell a real cowboy from a wannabe just by seeing them. Intrigued, I asked, "So how can you tell the difference just by looking at somebody?"

Clayton responded, "Well, uh, if they're wearing a belt buckle as big as a pie plate, that's a dead give away (chuckle). A real cowboy would not wear that. They'll wear a buckle, but not a big one. Most of them you can look at their hat. It's the way a hat looks on a person. A lot of cowboys don't wear western clothes; you know what I'm saying. They wear sport shirts, blue jeans, a pair of old boots and they don't necessarily look like a drugstore cowboy."

At the local Abode Ranch, foreman Big Juicy (a nickname he is very proud of) claims, “Well these days yeah. You got to have a cowboy truck. If he’s a real cowboy, he’ll be driving an old scraggly looking truck.”

Knowing Big Juicy drives an old scraggly truck I asked, “Would you call yourself a cowboy?”

“No, I ride horses and all that, but I don’t get in rodeos. I don’t ride bulls and that no more.”

“Have you ever thought of yourself as a cowboy?”

“Yeah, one time when I rode horses alot. Went to rodeos and did some ropin’ and that.”

“So, how do you think of yourself now?”

“Just a redneck... (Laughter).”

“But you still work with cows?” I questioned to follow-up on the contradiction apparent in Big Juicy’s lifestyle and his own seemingly fluid definition of who a cowboy is.

“Yeah, we still work cows here.”

“So, what does it take to be a cowboy?”

“I guess, working on a ranch with cattle, going on trails. Cowboys in the ole days, you pushed the cows from one place to another to sell. These days you put em in the trailer and haul em in the trailer. In those days, you had your horses and you stayed camped out and all that. By now you just load up in your trailer and haul em to sale (*Not sell; sale is synonymous with auction*); too many highways.”

“How would you say someone is or isn’t a cowboy?”

“You can tell if they are a cowboy because they still got ranches, they ride the rodeos, still brands cows and all that. One that just thinks he is a cowboy don’t own no ranch, don’t do nothing maybe go to a few rodeos. I know a few of them. They think they are cowboys because they go to rodeos and ride trail rides. I think there is more to it.”

“Like what?”

“Working cows in the pasture.”

“What would you say the bottom line is then?”

“Work cows, ride rodeos, work your own horses, work your own cows. Let me see what else. (Long pause) I mean there are still some places where you can still go on long trail rides, pushing cows.”

“Does a cowboy have to look a certain way or do certain things?”

“Yeah, they should wear cowboy boots and a hat. A cowboy hat, a western looking shirt. Not some of these cowboys who wear some of these fancy duds.”

“What do you mean fancy duds?”

“Well stuff that don’t look...well I think cowboys should wear wranglers and western things. There are some that don’t. They wear some of these other different kinds of pants. I don’t know their names (Laughter). You can wear tennis shoes with a cowboy hat on. You can do that sometimes. We call em drugstore cowboys.”

“What is the difference between a drugstore cowboy and a real cowboy?”

“One that don’t wear uh..., one that’s got a cowboy hat but he don’t dress like a cowboy he don’t wear wranglers or a western shirt he wears like uh a t-shirt and pull over shirt like Ted.”

“Why do you call them a drugstore cowboy?”

“I don’t know that is just what I always heard. I don’t know why they call them that. They want to be a cowboy, but they just ain’t.”

Interesting, in these answers, Big Juicy gives a prime example of a subtle shift in the social character of postmodern times compared to modern or traditional times. Undoubtedly, different types of cowboys have coexisted for hundreds of years. The claim I am making is that contemporary cowboy culture is increasingly differentiated by appearance rather than function. There are still key differences in the cowboy culture tied to function. For example, many people draw clear distinctions between rodeo cowboys and ranch cowboys. In fact, interviewees tend to divide cowboys into three main categories: ranch cowboys, rodeo cowboys and fake cowboys. Many of the respondents do not use these titles but there is a tendency to draw these general distinctions. However, even though these three categories are more closely tied to function, many respondents incorporate appearance into their discussion to highlight further nuances among different brands of cowboys. Many respondents have no difficulty articulating who a real cowboy is and who he is not. But there is a tendency to contradict themselves and to focus on appearance or language. In addition, they often have strong opinions but frequently change their previous answers.

I will come back to this finding with more examples but first I want to contrast the change in contemporary culture based on appearance with the difference Karl May (1989/1892) draws between a “greenhorn” and a westerner in his book *Winnetou*.

A greenhorn is one who's still green, that is to say, newly arrived and inexperienced in the basic knowledge he needs to cope with the customs of the country." A greenhorn doesn't get up when a lady enters the room; he greets the master of the house without first bowing to the mistress and her daughters. Worse, he loads his weapon backwards, first the wadding, then the ball, and last the powder.

A greenhorn speaks either pure and affected English or else no English at all; if the former, it pains him to hear Yankee- or backwoods-English spoken. He mistakes a raccoon for a `possum, and a birch tree for a pine. He smokes cigarettes and despises tobacco-chewers. If a ruffian boxes his ears, he takes it to court instead of throwing a punch in return, or shooting the brawler down on the spot.

A greenhorn takes with him a bath sponge, a scrub brush, and a pound of soap for a day-trip out on the prairie. He writes down a hundred Indian words and expressions, and when he meets his first red man finds he's left the list at home. He buys gunpowder, and when he tries to use it, finds that he's been sold powdered charcoal instead. He sticks his Bowie knife in his belt so that when he bends over it stabs him in the thigh. (p. 5)

May's points of contention with greenhorns are centered on their lack of experience, or their inability to use a gun, a knife or to fight. Throughout the novel, May esteems being able to *function* efficiently in the wilderness, being able to ride a horse and shoot a gun, and being able to relate to Indians. One's utility not one's appearance or clothing is the line of demarcation. In today's cowboy culture appearance seemingly plays a much bigger role. Even those cowboys who place a bigger importance on function or utility make concessions to the presence or power of appearance and image in the cowboy culture.

Big Juicy calls certain cowboys drugstore cowboys because he sees them as fake. For him, one of the main reasons they are fake is because they don't dress the way a real cowboy dresses. They don't wear Wrangler Jeans.

Mr. Chevy, the Abode ranch owner, proclaims, “The cowboy thing for me personally today is more of a mental attitude rather than a job or profession or way of life.” He explains,

There is a definition that the old guy running the drive gave to one of the young men, that a cowboy is nothing more than somebody that tends cows. I think that’s the essence of what a cowboy is. I think that’s the essence of what a cowboy is. And all of my life I have tended cattle. So if you take that definition then I am a cowboy. Every cowboy throughout history that I know of is someone who takes care of cows, whether that is on a horse or in a truck, or whatever. In the old west they had trial rides and fought Indians and did whatever they had to do. But in today’s world, most people who consider themselves a cowboy; they dress like it, they talk like it, they drive the pickup, they have the horse; most of these people do not own a cow and most of them, more than once a month, would not even work with a cow. None of them tend cows!

Mr. Chevy is asserting that there has been a change from utility and value placed on tending cows to clothes, and language and the image that has saturated the culture. So there has been a value shift for many from function to appearance, but function is not totally extinct.

I interviewed Bud at an outdoor barbecue restaurant; he is a ranch hand who does cowboy work on a number of ranches in the area. He asserts that to be a real cowboy, “All you need is a four-wheel drive truck and an ice chest in the back full of beer.” After Bud offered this definition he paused for a second as if he was trying to recall if there was any key ingredient missing. Then he blurted out, “You have to talk a lot of bullshit.”

Bubba who is Bud’s sidekick added, “You need a deer rifle handy.”

“So that is all you need?” I asked them trying to clarify.

They both assured me that was it, but the main thing is beer. “You need a lot of beer.” Bud and his friend Bubba seemed confident the main ingredient for being a real cowboy is beer. “You need a lot of beer.”

Bud went on to state that real cowboys are a dying breed. He proceeded to tell me about someone named Bo, who he considered a real cowboy. “Bo builds his own wagons; real chuck wagons. He even *talks* like one, and he don’t have no teeth. When you go to his house it is like you go back in time.” The word “*talks*” seems to be another subtle slip that emphasizes outward appearance or perception rather than utility or function.

Bubba adds, “We are ranch hands and we do it for a living.” He then tried to draw a distinction between cowboys who are working cowboys and Bo who lives it all the time. The distinction did not seem clear even to him. He eventually concluded, “There is not much difference.”

Bud redirected the conversation and announced, “True cowboys eat the nuts off of castrated cows.” Bubba and I both laugh, but in such a way as to challenge Bud’s claim (I was thinking I have heard this one before). Bud replies, “I’m serious.” Bud begins to tell a story about some local guys who are real cowboys. He expounds on a recent time he spent time with these cowboys. They were castrating cows and they had a propane cooker fired-up. As soon as they would cut the “balls off they would toss em’ in the fryer. They did not consider you a real cowboy unless you ate them balls.” Providing more insight into this custom, which I would link to an initiation rite, Bud stated, “They considered it their reward.” Bud tried one, but said he would never do it again. Jokingly, he claimed that he must not be a real cowboy.

I rephrased my question and asked, “What does take to be a real cowboy.”

Bubba replied, “You have to be thrown off of a horse or kicked at least once, but you at least have to work cows.” Bud agreed that you have to at least work with cows and followed Bubba’s remark by questioning why they are called cowboys and not cowmen. Bubba reflected, “You know I never thought about that all of my friends are cowboys.”

Bud says, “You have to get cowshit on your boots.”

Bubba challenges Bud’s claim by saying he tries to avoid the cowshit and that some cowboys do not even wear *real* boots anymore. Bud agrees and explains that new cowboys can wear tennis shoes or even “fake” lace-ups. He explained that there are fake boots that barely go above the ankle and that have leather shoelaces. He defended the utility of the lace-ups by telling about his friend with a hurt ankle who needed to wear the lace-ups for more support. Now, his friend wears them all the time.

Bud began to elaborate on what it takes to be a real cowboy. He states, “You have to be hard core and do off the wall stuff.”

“What do you mean,” I inquired.

Bud claimed that he knows a group of cowboys who are the real McCoys. They are as real as it gets, and they are always doing crazy stuff for no reason. “They will always get drunk and do something stupid.” For instance, Bud stated that the cowboys drank a lot of beer once and put on dresses and went to the bar.

Slightly shocked and curious I asked, “Put on dresses?”

“Yep, they put on dresses just for the hell of it.”

As I begin to try to conclude the conversation and gradually exit the table, Bud and Bubba seemed to be fully engaged with the topic. I had the impression they were not quite ready to end the conversation and could sit and talk with me for hours. They began to tell me about places and opportunities where I could observe real cowboys in action. I let them know I was interested and we exchanged phone numbers. Actually, this exchange ended up being quite telling. Both guys realized at the time that it was ironic that they both had cell phones in their pockets. They felt the need to justify possessing such a modern instrument.

Bud assured me there was a time when he would think it was ridiculous for a real cowboy to carry a cell phone around. “They use to be just for city slickers, but now every cowboy should have one. They are just like a pocketknife. You never know when you are going to need one. You might be working fence on the back forty and need to get a hold of someone to get help for something.”

At times Bud and Bubba seemed to express a sufficient amount of vagueness and lack of surety about what it actually takes to be a cowboy, except that it takes a lot of beer. At various points, Bud and Bubba responded as if they themselves were real cowboys and at other times they questioned their identity as cowboys and even would claim the opposite. In some responses they viewed themselves as part of the real cowboys and at other times as if they were not.

This interview provides another example of the postmodern blend evident in the cowboy culture. It highlights the contradiction and emphasis placed on appearance blended with the waning importance of function. Bud’s and Bubba’s answers at first

seemed centered on having a good time and on portraying the right image. However during the interview there is a qualitative change in their answers and Bubba eventually concedes, “You have to be thrown off of a horse or kicked at least once, but you at least have to work cows.” Bud and Bubba seem confused, yet confidently sure. Funny, definitely.

Clayton says, “Well, some people look at things a little bit different. The clothes and the talk don’t make you a cowboy.” A cowboy for him is, “Somebody that had a job that that’s what he did for a lively hood. That was his everyday work. It would be a job to him, you know what I’m saying, a full time job.”

The Cowboy Pastor of Morgan declares, “The modern cowboy is a whole new deal. The older cowboy was a drinker, boozier and womanizer.” He would not like Bud and Bubba’s definition of a cowboy. For him, “The modern cowboy if they are serious about what they are doing, they are going to take care of their bodies. They are not going to go out there and abuse themselves, because they get enough abuse in the rodeo arena. They are going to keep their purpose in the front of their head.”

He also claims, “When you say cowboy, you can cover a big gambit. You can cover anyone that owns a cowboy hat that says they are a cowboy, which really in my opinion they are not, that is not a cowboy. You can go all the way from that to a ranch raised cowboy, children that were raised on a ranch and have been in ranching families all of their lives, those are real cowboys.” For the pastor there are primarily two types of cowboys: ranch cowboys/buckaroo cowboys, and rodeo cowboys. He himself professes

to be a rodeo cowboy. However, he is quick to point out he welcomes a variety of cowboys in his church that may not fit into either category.

The following are a few of his comments about rodeo cowboys.

It's more of an athletic event these days. Rodeo is a lot more disciplined. It is like any other sport. If they do things right and have the discipline then they win. If they don't do things right, they don't last. The modern cowboy is an athlete as near as much as most athletes, but there is more required from them physically than any other sport depending on what event they are working." Some of the ranching type cowboys don't believe that the rodeo cowboys are real cowboys. There is a bias in some regions and states where you have your buckaroo type cowboy, which is more of your ranch type cowboy. These are guys who live on a horse; they stay on a horse that is their life that is their work. They get up in the morning and saddle their horse and take off and come back at night like they have for centuries. But, our deal, the rodeo deal, it is more specialized. There are six main events in rodeo: calve roping, steer wrestling, team roping, bareback riding, saddleback riding, and bull riding. The women do the barrel racing. But those are the major events in the rodeo now.

The Pastor's comments caught me by surprise. The modern cowboy is like an athlete. So, a cowboy can be seen as a participant in sport. Seemingly for some, being a cowboy has been commercialized and transformed into sport. Sport requiring more and more specialization and "professional" athleticism. What an interesting blend of different cultural arenas. This is obviously a blend not all cowboys are comfortable with. The Cowboy Pastor even suggests that ranch cowboys would not consider rodeo cowboys to be real cowboys.

Following this interview, I met a rancher who runs a large cow operation. When I met this rancher, Krystal, for an interview she informed me,

I am the principle person in charge of running my family's land. We now hold about 2000 acres in the central Texas area around Waco. All the land up there is original Spanish deed and has been in the family forever, nine generations. Back before Texas was Texas the Spanish government would award Anglos land for helping them fight in the battle of Mexico, and so that was where my land came from. Our family was the original settlers of the hill country area. My family donated the land for Baylor.

Thinking of the Cowboy Pastor's comments, I was curious to ask Krystal, "What do you think about rodeo cowboys?"

(Chuckle) Rodeo cowboys, bless their little hearts. Um, rodeo cowboys are a totally different breed. Um, a lot of them started out in life as what I consider cowboys, and then somewhere along the way they become like caricatures of what society thinks a cowboy is. They all want the Marlboro Man image. For them it's real, but for me it's not. You know, I know a lot of them that own farms and ranches and I know a lot of them that have the trucks and their families have been doing it forever and things like that, and then they get sucked into the allure, for some reason or another. I think they're crazy half the time, but they start doing this and their focus of life shifts off of the land and the animals and things like that and shifts into this production, a stage production. Every time I see the rodeos and things like that there's always a little sadness to think that they've found a different view of themselves. But, yea, it's kind of selling out. The basis of the rodeos in years and years past was the competition between the different ranches and it was a form of socialization and the rights to say who was the better cowboy and things like that. Um, now it's just entertainment and I think that the actors who are doing this entertainment, some of them may have been cowboys, but to me if they're out there doing the rodeo circuit and all of this then they're not a cowboy anymore.

I asked this follow-up question, "What different types of cowboys do you think there are?"

For me, the true cowboys are the ones who work. I always divide them into horse people and not horse people. I hate horse people. I hate horses. They're something weird about people and horses. To me the horse is a tool and I'd so much rather use the 4-wheeler or the Gator cause it's so much easier. Really, truly in Texas you don't need horses to get places that you couldn't get some other way, a mechanized type of way. Those who insist on continuing with that whole tradition and things like that, I think that is part of a heritage issue.

Mr. Chevy echoed these sentiments when I asked him about cowboys. Except, I did not ask him about rodeo cowboys or solicit a response from him on the subject. The following is the question and answer that led him to a similar conclusion.

I asked, “So how would you draw the distinction between real cowboys and fake cowboys in your mind?”

Mr. Chevy states,

Well, tending cows is being there seven days a week taking care of them throughout the year by feeding, breeding, taking care of sick ones, delivering calves, marketing them, anything that has to be done for the daily care of that animal. Most of the daily care has nothing to do with horses, trucks and roping, and nothing has to do with tobacco chewing, drinking, honky tonking, artificial bull riding and all that crap. Rodeoing has nothing to do with tending cows; it’s absurd. You never have to go out and ride a Brahma bull to tend cows (Laughter).

So, these ranchers do in fact seem to have the view mentioned by the Cowboy Pastor. In addition to having a negative view of rodeo cowboys, they also question what they see is a dubious mixture of appearance and simulacra in the cowboy culture. Many other respondents mention this blend in one-way or another.

Krystal also provided her own definition of a cowboy,

Well, see, to me whenever we talk about cowboys the first image that pops into my mind is of a guy I used to work with all the time, his name’s Matthew. Matthew is truly a cowboy to me. Drives a truck, has the dogs, um, knows the animal business inside out, he looks the part, big handle bar mustache, has owned only one pair of tennis shoes in his life. He has only owned boots and Wranglers and works outdoors and says ‘yes mam’ and ‘no sir’ and when Matthew says ‘That’s the way it is’, then that’s the way it is. He lives by his word of honor and his handshake is a contract and to me that’s what a cowboy is. That is my vision of when somebody says that word, that’s what I get.

One particular theorist, David Riesman (1980/1950), author of *The Lonely Crowd* provides an excellent theoretical framework to interpret these findings and various cowboy definitions. In *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman provides detailed descriptions of the

social character emerging from contrasting societal types. His discussion of tradition-directedness, inner-directedness and other-directedness are applicable for a richer understanding of the nuances highlighted in the various definitions and interviews above. Riesman defines social character as personality patterns common to members of a society. Pre-industrial societies are characterized by tradition-directedness. Industrial societies are characterized by inner-directedness, while post-industrial or postmodern societies are characterized by other-directedness.

Tradition-directedness is social character evident in rigid personalities based on conformity to time-honored ways of living. Social changes occur very slowly and little energy is directed to finding new solutions to cultural tasks (p11). The horse people Krystal describes epitomize this type of social character, because they have a resistance to relying on anything besides a horse just because it is “the way it has always been done.” Once I participated in “bringing in” a herd on 1,000-acre ranch and we rode four-wheelers. We were successful, but one in the group assured me there are many times when a horse is needed. One could argue an inner-directed cowboy would choose the most efficient way to work cows regardless of any traditional heritage. If new technology provides better ways to work cows, then they would incorporate that technology into their work and life. However, the tradition-directed would cling to the old-ways at all costs. Bud and Bubba’s description of Bo also portrays someone who is likely motivated by tradition-directedness. “When you go to his house it is like you go back in time.” Bud and Bubba assured me that Bo was a real cowboy because he lives the way people lived in the

Old West all the time. Even though I doubt the totality of their claim, it still points to tradition-directed behavior.

I must interject a point about those I interviewed who did seem tradition-directed. There was a peculiar omission in all their responses and answers along with all the others I interviewed. They omitted linking their version of cowboy tradition to its origin. No one associated cowboys or cattle with Mexicans or Spanish-Mexicans. In their contemporary definitions like many others around the world there is a lack of connection to the Mexican origin of cowboys. Even Krystal whose land was donated by the Mexican government did not mention this origin. Image and illusion have seemingly replaced history. The cowboy image is often an Anglo image. In *Lone Star: A History of Texas and The Texans*, T.R. Feherenbach, describes the origin of cowboys and the cattle industry. He states,

Spanish-Mexican cattle were lean, rangy longhorned, ugly and incredibly tough. Like the Afro-Arabian horse, however, they were splendidly suited for the country. Left to roam wild, they flourished and increased. With such stock, and possessed of almost unlimited grazing land, the Mexican cattle industry became entirely different from animal husbandry in Europe. Cattle were branded for identification, turned loose on what was virtually open range (though it was owned by someone, usually a large *hacendado*), and they were protected from wild Indians, rounded up, and branded or slaughtered by a new breed of laborer, the *vaquero*, “cowman.” (Fehrenbach, 2000/ 1968, p.74)

Carey McWilliams (1968, 1949) claims, “The word “cowboy” was unknown prior to 1836. ‘Cowboy’ is the literal American equivalent of *vaquero* which is derived, of course, from *vaca* or “cow.” Everything that served to characterize the American cowboy as a type was taken over from the Mexican *vaquero*: utensils and language, methods and equipment” (p. 153). Furthermore, the saddle of the cowboy was a copy or

alteration of the horned Spanish saddle. So quite ironically, it is possible to be tradition-directed without an accurate or complete knowledge of tradition or origin.

Inner-directedness is characterized by increased personal mobility, rapid accumulation of capital, and significant technological shifts. Inner-directed society is involved in constant, intensive expansion in production of goods, people, exploration, colonization and imperialism (pp. 14-15). Riesman claims, “The source of direction for the individual is “inner” in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals” (p. 15). Accordingly, the inner-directed person is “guided by internal piloting” (p.16). He has an internal gyroscope that points him in the right direction and keeps him on track. “The inner-directed person becomes capable of maintaining focus despite the demands placed upon him by his occupation and the buffetings of his external environment” (p. 16). This makes me think of an old-timey locomotive equipped with a cowcatcher – the metal frame projecting from the front of a locomotive and serving to clear the track of obstructions. The locomotive just plows straight ahead no matter the debris or obstacles in its path.

Clayton and several others would easily fit into this category. “Well, some people look at things a little bit different. The clothes and the talk don’t make you a cowboy. Somebody that had a job that that’s what he did for a lively hood. That was his everyday work.” Clayton’s comments echo inner-directed sentiments. He ties identity to function and work. He seems like a very straightforward person who often displays a single-

mindedness concerning cowboys and work. The cowboys who place more importance on working cows than appearance, tradition, or what others think exhibit similar inner-directedness.

An inner-directed cowboy a hundred years ago likely would be more numerous and easier to identify. For example, on a cattle drive, the inner-directed cowboy works hard from sun up to sun down and occasionally through the night to bring in the herd. He is able to endure isolation, physical torment, natural disasters and much more for the sake of a job well done. He can go it alone, even when the reinforcement of social approval is not available. He is focused on the cattle and the goal of delivering the herd to their final destination, not on appearance or other people. As Riesman states, “The inner-directed man tends to think of work in terms of non-human objects...while the other-directed man tends to think of work in terms of people” (p.111).

The inner-directed cowboy’s chief source of conflict is with nature not himself or others. He must constantly strive to overcome the elements to survive and reach his goals. Other conflicts are minor comparatively. He will cooperate and work well with others regardless of personality differences if they are focused on the task. Delivering the cattle and protecting the herd is more important than the opinions of others or even his relationships with others. He is more concerned with doing a job well. Social relations are a trivial concern in light of his objectives.

Contrasting, other-directedness is characterized by receptiveness to the latest trends and fashions, often expressed in the practice of imitating others. Contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual either known, or indirectly (Riesman, p. 21).

One primary supply for this direction is the media. The other-directed person's goals continually shift: it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered through life. The other-directed person possesses an insatiable force driving the psychological need for approval. Bud, Bubba, Big Juicy, Rodeo Cowboys, and the even the Cowboy Pastor seemingly possess many other-directed qualities. In particular, Big Juicy illustrates this by his belief that real cowboys wear Wrangler Jeans. Other-directedness often centers on trends or fashion rather than function. Other-directed descriptions of cowboys are closely linked to entertainment, fun, sport, clothing, and language than cows. This is evidenced in the cowboy pastor's description of rodeo cowboys. According to those I have interviewed, they identify other-directedness with labels such as drugstore cowboy, wannabe, city slicker, or maybe even what they consider a real cowboy.

The contemporary other-directed cowboy may be clean-cut on the outside and disarrayed on the inside. Meaning, he wears Wranglers and a cowboy hat and looks the part, but on the inside he is not sure if he is a real cowboy or exactly who a real cowboy is. Turning back to the writings of Karl May mentioned earlier, "A greenhorn is one who's still green, that is to say, newly arrived and inexperienced in the basic knowledge he needs to cope with the customs of the country" (p. 5). A greenhorn today must adjust to a new postmodern cowboy culture. He no longer must adapt to the wilderness and the hazards of a rugged lifestyle. He no longer has to know how to shoot a rifle or hunt his own food. He must adjust to a culture that is increasingly characterized by an ever-changing image, appearance and a new form of solidarity. He is a greenhorn because he

does not wear Wranglers, or he drives a Toyota instead of Ford, Dodge or Chevy. He is likely to be identified more by his clothing and image rather than his inexperience. Interestingly, Karl May himself would likely not struggle to fit into contemporary cowboy culture. He would not be labeled a greenhorn. He was a master of deception and impersonation. He convinced hundreds of thousands that he was a westerner and wrote extensively about the Old West, but ironically never actually visited the United States until the last few years of his life. He was an imposter and his entire career was built on forgery. But he was good at it, so most did not care. His book *Winnetou*, according to the forward, is still one of the top five books preferred by Europeans.

CHAPTER VI

SIMULACRA

One of the leading postmodern theorists of our day is Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard (1988/1986) criticizes America clearly and sharply in a wide range of characteristics. The criticism is pointed and meaningful. At first, I balked at his claims that America is a world of simulacra and ultimately Americans are fake and shallow. My emotional response eventually led me to wrestle with the evidence supported in his claims. One tends to have strong reactions to criticism. At first I decided to challenge, deny or dismiss the criticism in order to alleviate the dissonance it created. I wanted to conclude that the criticism is not legitimate then the effect would be negligible. However, the more I wrestled with his theories the more I began to understand and even agree with many of his insights. The unshakable certainty of Baudrillard's claims led me to have a strong reaction, and to investigate the merits of his theories in light of the cowboy culture I have experienced.

Baudrillard (1988/1986) claims, "America is neither dream nor reality. It is a hyperreality" (p. 28). "(Americans) are themselves simulation in its most developed state...America is a giant hologram" (p. 29). "Americans may have no identity, but they do have wonderful teeth" (p. 34). These words are a strong rebuke and I have wrestled with them often. How did Baudrillard arrive at these conclusions? To develop his book *America*, Baudrillard states,

I went in search of astral America, not social and cultural America, but the America of the empty, absolute freedom on the freeways, not the deep America of mores and mentalities, but the America of desert speed, of motels and mineral

surfaces. I looked for it in the speed of the screenplay, in the indifferent reflex of television, in the film of days and nights projected across an empty space, in the marvelously affectless succession of signs, images, faces, and ritual acts on the road... (p 5)

This method of observation and analysis is the foundation for Baudrillard's interpretation of America. His historic race through the streets and his desire to see the emptiness of America was only a spark to a wave of postmodern criticism and analysis. His research and theories have ignited an academic forest fire among today's theorists. Contemporary theorists and readers seem to be divided into those who are fascinated with his interpretation versus those who discuss Baudrillard's version of postmodernism seriously. Especially in his book, *America*, Baudrillard's postmodern interpretation draws the line and seems to demand one of these responses.

At this point in my short research career, I wish to identify with those theorists who take Baudrillard's approach and theories seriously, but I do not accept his work as a complete interpretation but rather just one piece of the puzzle. There is a colloquial saying, "What you are looking for you will find!" It does not seem coincidental that Baudrillard (1988/1986) found what he was looking for in his observation of America. He went in search of shallow, empty Astral America and that is what he found. Likewise, if I am looking for the "bad" in something I can usually find it. If I am looking for the "good" I can usually find it.

I started my research with multiple objectives, but one primary objective was to deconstruct the contemporary cowboy culture and the image of the cowboy. I too was caught in the flames of Baudrillard's forest fire. So, naturally, I began to follow Baudrillard's footsteps and look for all the contradiction, simulacra, shallowness and

detrimental things associated with the cowboy culture. I soon realized these things are easy to find. I can find them almost anywhere. As months began to pass by I encountered other aspects of the cowboy culture seeping in through the cracks. There are positive, cohesive and even authentic aspects of the cowboy culture, which at first I wanted very much to neglect and avoid addressing in my research. Why? I began to ask myself why? Why did I want to neglect these “positive” elements?

I came up with two primary answers or reasons for this approach. First, this is what I have been trained to do during my graduate program. But why deconstruct cowboys? Surely this was not a totally random occurrence. Of course not, the source of my desire to deconstruct cowboys is clear to me. The second reason is tied to my own relationship with my dad who has always proudly claimed to be a cowboy. He listens to country music and often wears boots and a cowboy hat. However, he only owned a horse once and has never owned cows or did cowboy work, but he has always viewed himself as a real cowboy. He did frequent honky-tonks and drink lots of beer, so according to Bud and Bubba he is a cowboy. My initial desire to deconstruct contemporary cowboy culture was due to resentment by association. So I admit this preliminary “angle” or “bias” but I have changed my thinking as a result of my research.

Even though I initially embarked on my research in order to deconstruct and destroy the image of contemporary cowboy culture, I have grown to embrace, appreciate and respect many aspects this culture. At this key point, I have diverged from Baudrillard’s path and method of analysis. My primary intentions were to paint with the same colors and brush strokes that Baudrillard painted America. Somewhere in the

process, I could no longer avoid the contradictory information. I could no longer ignore the “positive”, beneficial and cohesive elements of cowboy culture. In a sense, I had a change of heart. As a researcher my new stance is probably more favorable. I am no longer diametrically opposed to cowboy culture or enamored with it either. Now I occupy a much more balanced position. However, I still do not want to disregard Baudrillard’s piece to the puzzle, but rather to contribute a piece of my own to link with his.

Baudrillard (1988/1986) claims that often in America a clear line is not visible between what is real and what is fakery; and, ultimately there is nothing underneath. He asserts that America is a pastiche of simulacra. He defines simulacra, as a copy of a copy for which there is no original. Whether there is an original, or ever was, is not the heart of the issue. The critical point is whether there is any authenticity or substance. Theorists often use the term simulacra in a derogatory sense to mean a mock appearance, a counterfeit or a sham. It is interesting how many synonyms there are for the word simulacra in English. For example, forgery, phony, imitation, artificial, replica, synthetic, façade, charade, and farce are only a few. There are so many ways to blur the distinction between reality and fake it is difficult to capture with words all the nuances represented in American culture.

Simulacra have become such a dominant fixture in the cultural landscape, hardly a day passes when I do not notice some new object or phrase, which illustrates Baudrillard’s findings. Consider the material aspects of culture, the tangible objects that make-up the fabric of American life. For examples, I draw the reader’s attention specifically to the diverse areas of sports, animals, and transportation. In the arena of

sports for example there is a proliferation of bogus phenomenon. The cowboy pastor and Krystal the ranch woman both compare cowboys to athletes. For them there is a similarity in the image, lifestyle and perception of rodeo cowboys and athletes. I received these comparisons as clues. Since I am a long time sports fan and I am familiar with the simulacra and postmodern characteristics of sports, I assumed there must be similar elements in cowboy culture.

But, first sports. Sports and athletes have been increasingly characterized by simulacra. Just to mention a few contemporary counterfeits: arena soccer, batting cages, pitching machines, miniature golf, air hockey, tee-ball, foosball, Astroturf, artificial putting greens, steroids, disc golf, paintball games, nerf balls, fantasy football leagues and the list goes on. These are all contemporary counterfeits that simulate or replace authentic aspects of athletics. The transformation to postmodern simulacra in sports is nicely traced and illustrated in the following history of miniature golf depicted by

Timothy Beal in *Roadside Religion*:

Miniature golf is America's quintessential *trivial* pursuit. Granted there was some utility in its early predecessors—private courses laid out in backyards and on city rooftops designed for putting practice. The earliest of these is commonly held to be the eighteen-hole, carefully landscaped “Thistle Dhu” course in North Carolina, built for James Barber in 1916 as a miniature *replica* of a full-size golf course. By the 1930's, however, miniature golf had exploded into a pastime of its own, *losing all connection* to the more serious sport of golf... We owe this *transformation* especially to Frieda and Garnet Carter, who in 1926 created their whimsical Tom Thumb course, complete with underground pipeways, gnomes, and Little Red Riding Hood, in the front yard... Soon the Carters were manufacturing and selling Tom Thumb golf courses throughout the United States. Other franchisers followed, as did many mom-and-pop entrepreneurs with their own peculiar visions of *artificial* turfsapes. (Today)...you need a coherent theme. Not just any coherent theme but one that transforms the course into a thematically coherent miniature world, *a fantasy world*. (p. 83)

This history spells out the process of transformation in sports cultures and society. First, something serious, beneficial or authentic exists in society. Second a replica is made. Third the replica is altered with whimsical fantasy elements and saturated with simulacra (artificial components). Fourth the mass-produced, “perfected”, thematic replica becomes the entry point for participants to escape reality and have fun. Many aspects of American culture pass through a similar transformation. Seemingly contemporary cowboy culture has also traveled this trail. One could argue that the first cowboys were something serious, beneficial or authentic that existed in society. They were invaluable to the development of the west and to ranching. Second replicas have been made. Respondents call these replicas rodeo cowboys, drugstore cowboys, wannabes etc. Third, these replicas have been altered and saturated with simulacra (many examples to follow). Next, they have been mass-produced. Almost all respondents agree on this. They claim “real” cowboys are few and far between, but replica cowboys are a dime a dozen. The image of the cowboy has certainly been mass-produced through movies. People are flocking to become cowboys according to the cowboy pastor, Krystal the ranch woman, and many other respondents. Cowboy culture has also been polished and saturated with simulacra and fun opportunities for all, and people are signing up to participate.

Sports serve valuable functions at all levels of stratification in the American class system, whether it is the scripted events of pro wrestling for the lower classes, or the golf swing simulators at the country club. Sports are increasingly comprised of fake or replica arenas, equipment, language, events, or actions. American athletes are equipped with simulacra such as throwback jerseys, play on simulacra like Astroturf, and can display

simulacra trophies with miniature people mounted on them as a symbol of their accomplishments. I doubt there is hardly a subculture anywhere in America that is open to the public that is not saturated with the same simulacra and symbolism.

One only has to take a trip to modern gyms to witness the ultimate in simulacra sporting advancement. Inside a sea of workout equipment and facilities exist to provide a safe, comfortable and predictable environment. Treadmills, stationary bikes, and stair steppers provide favorable advantages to their natural counterparts. Stationary bikes do not get flats and they allow the rider to simultaneously watch T.V. The pinnacle of simulacra achievement in the gym is the artificial climbing wall. Climbers can ascend predictable “rock patterns” with suspension straps for safety while enjoying crisp clean air conditioning. Since many respondents compare cowboys to athletes, I thought it would be interesting to compare the simulacra of the sports culture to the cowboy culture.

Mechanical bulls are a shining example of simulated cowboy culture. To ride a live bull is unquestionably a dangerous and unpredictable encounter. Forgetting the fact that the necessity of riding bulls is debated among various cowboys the event itself is quite spectacular. The animal weighs 2,000 pounds and can crush your chest with one stomp or gore you to death in a matter of seconds. It makes for thrilling entertainment, especially in person. Many bull riders have been severely injured or killed by riding bulls. Actually, many consider this part of the excitement. Many spectators secretly hope to see a rider launched ten feet by an angry bull. Mechanical bulls however are tame, predictable and thick wrestling mats cushion the fall of the rider. Mechanical bulls do not have horns or hooves for that matter, but they do have various speeds. Yeehaw! Like

miniature golf, mechanical bulls allow participants to enter a thematic fantasy world. Golf is expensive and the “masses” are excluded in many ways from playing. Riding Rodeo Bulls is also a very exclusive event due to its inherent danger and the insider culture that guards its gateway, but anyone in need of some entertainment can ride a mechanical bull. Yeehaw!

Pseudo-nature and simulacra mimic this odd relationship between man and beast throughout society. Stuffed animals, fake aquarium fish, chia pets, electric watch pets, ferbies, bobble head dogs, Digi pets, robot dogs, the large mechanical mice at Chucky Cheeses, Barney and cloned sheep are just a few examples. It is difficult to imagine a single material domain of American life that is not saturated with simulacra, including replicas of animals that blur the line between man and beast or cowboy and bull.

Simulacrum in transportation combines functionality and simulation in a spectrum of complexity. This spectrum includes the bizarre such as stickers designed to look like bullet holes that drivers arrange in a pattern on the side of their car. This gives the illusion that the car was involved in a shoot-out. At the other end of the spectrum are highly required or desirable accomplishments such as remote military planes, flight simulators, escalators, moving sidewalks and synthetic motor oil. It is likely that every aspect of travel has been simulated or infused with simulation. For example, Hot Wheels, Tonka trucks and Race Car beds aid early gender socialization. PT Cruisers offer consumers nostalgic connections to the past. Mopeds and motorized skateboards offer fun and functionality in delightful combinations. The permutations of transportation simulacra seem endless. Take four-wheelers for example.

Although tending cows can be difficult there are many technological advances and modern techniques that help modern cowboys. The primary advancement mentioned by Morgan residents is the four-wheeler, which is followed by trucks, and trailers. In the cowboy culture four-wheelers are actually simulacra. Many cowboys claim that the four-wheeler is a viable substitute for the horse. The four-wheeler is often mentioned as the preferred and most efficient way to work cows. Different types of cowboys debate which of the two is better. Bud and Bubba assure me the four-wheeler is much more practical when working fences. Some tradition-directed cowboys guarantee me they can do anything with a horse a four-wheeler can do, but there are many places a horse can go that a four-wheeler cannot. The debate is not that critical to the argument. The point is that the four-wheeler is seen as a substitute, hence a simulacra. Big Juicy sums up what most of the other respondents claim, "Most of them (cowboys), these modern days uses four-wheelers and stuff."

During one conversation I remember at the cowboy church, a greeter began to tell me about modern cowboy ranches in the north. Besides four-wheelers, he said they even use helicopters now.

"Helicopters," I questioned him?

"Yep, Helicopters." He explained that some of the ranches are so large and have so many cows that helicopters are the quickest and most efficient way to bring the cows in.

I said, "Wouldn't that be too expensive?"

He informed me that the ranchers simply rent the choppers for a day or so and that way it saves money because it is much quicker and more efficient than bringing in the cows with other methods. This is McDonaldization at its best. I wonder if the pilot is called a cowboy?

Baudrillard drove across the southwest amazed at the amount of simulacra he encountered at every turn. Likewise, I sit at my computer writing this dissertation surrounded by simulacra. In particular I am watching an image of a dancing paper clip in the bottom right corner of the screen. The clip has eyes and flashes messages to help me write more effectively. It is my personal simulacra office assistant. I realize this is one reason many do not take Baudrillard's depiction of America serious. This could be a key insight. Possibly, those who are only fascinated with Baudrillard and do not perceive the depth of his analysis focus primarily on the *tangible* aspects of culture. It is understandable how this might occur. It is quite fun and enjoyable to notice the objects in our surroundings and especially to view them in a new light. There is often joy and fascination in new discoveries.

I am regularly delighted to encounter some new invention or object that is so unique and characterized by simulacra I have to stop and pay homage to Baudrillard. On a trip to New Orleans to deliver a presentation, I pulled into a gas station to fill up. I was thoroughly delighted to see the pump had a video screen approximately five inches tall and seven inches wide. The video was playing a Reba McEntyre country music video. Although, country music is not my particular taste in music, the novelty of the experience was priceless. I was instantly aware of the power of simulacra to infiltrate all aspects of

American life. Cowboys don't have to travel miles in wagons to go to the county fair anymore to hear quality country music. Good ole country music is at home via radio or television, in the car and now at the pump. Now, the two minutes it takes to pump gas does not have to be an overbearing time of boredom. Americans can count on simulacra to be there to comfort and entertain almost anywhere. In this aspect, America is the crowning jewel of a postmodern culture built on simulacra.

Many only take a glancing look at Baudrillard. Maybe those who are only fascinated with him fixate on his claims about the material aspects of society. I suppose if the debate were only about the material world, the topics he raises would not be so controversial. Entertaining his ideas and discussion about material culture would only be a fun academic exercise. However, the depth of Baudrillard's analysis and the crux of the issues can be seen in his claims about the immaterial aspects of American culture. For example, one can easily argue that Baudrillard (1988/1986) is declaring that Americans themselves are fake and shallow. He claims, "Americans...are themselves simulation in its most developed state" (pp. 28-29). Likewise, "America is neither dream nor reality. It is hyperreality" (p. 28). Americans "continually have to prove that we exist" (p. 21).

Why does American advertising focus on claims of authenticity? Product after product lays claim to being real and authentic. Coke for example constantly advertises itself as the "Real Thing". The fear is that underneath all the simulacra, maybe there is nothing authentic anymore. If we say we are real often enough and loud enough people will believe it. Baudrillard is saying that this constant claim to authenticity and being the

real thing is an attempt to hide the emptiness and illusion. This advertising theme is echoed in the responses given by those I have interviewed in the cowboy culture. Many seem preoccupied with identifying and “proving” that there are “real” cowboys. But their answers display a hint of defensiveness, almost as if they are masking a realization or a fear that underneath all the cowboy hats there are no longer any real cowboys.

I will momentarily collaborate with Baudrillard to illustrate his argument. There is a colloquial saying, “You are what you eat!” Erik Erikson echoes this sentimentality when he claims, “One might say that personality at the first stage (of psycho-social development) crystallizes around the conviction ‘I am what I am given’” (p.87). If there is any truth in these statements then Baudrillard’s depiction of America is substantial. What do Americans eat? What are they given? In short, Americans eat simulacra: Spam, T.V. dinners, instant potatoes, powdered eggs, soy burgers, powdered milk, margarine, sweet-n-low, veggie burgers, non-alcoholic beer, frozen pizzas, miracle whip, processed foods and genetically enhanced foods. They are given simulacra as processed forms of physical, mental and emotional nourishment. Not only do Americans consume simulacra in the form of food, more notably they consume simulacra in images. Erikson viewed cultural phenomena such as these that produce “synthetic personalities” to be a danger. Is the contemporary cowboy just one of these “synthetic personalities”? If you eat castrated cow balls does that make you a cowboy? According to Bud it does. If you eat steak and beef jerky does that make you a cowboy? If you chew tobacco or smoke does that make you the Marlboro Man? Synthetic personalities claim, “...you are what you can appear to be, or as if you are what you can buy” (p. 100).

Baudrillard (1988/1986) asserts, “They (Americans) embody one single passion only: the passion for images...” (p. 56). Young Americans are obsessed with shows like M.T.V. where images flash on screen and change so quickly sometimes they do not even last a single second. Adults come home after a hard day at the office to stare at a television for hours while eating and relaxing. Billboards overwhelm drivers everywhere. One can sit at a computer screen and surf the Internet for hours viewing image after image. Rest assured there is always a better more surreal or shocking image awaiting the next click of the mouse. Baudrillard (1988/1986) would add that these images are not the product of imagination. Rather they rob imagination, “they have nothing to do with the world of imagination, but everything to do with the material fiction of the image” (p. 57). Images are photographed, scanned, copied, pasted, and put in clip art for the user’s disposal. One no longer has to rely on something as crude and unreliable as imagination. That is better left to the expert or a few really talented individuals. It is much more fun to digest and interact with the images themselves. They are not just a means but also an end in themselves. They are products to be consumed.

Moreover, images become highly desirable compared to reality. I am reminded of this during football season. In the comforts of my home, I can watch football game after football game, even flipping back and forth between games at the same time. Those with more expensive televisions can watch two games simultaneously with picture in picture features. Watching a football game at home has considerable advantages to watching in person. At home I can enjoy close-up camera angles, instant replays, access to in-depth player statistics, and funny beer commercials. At games, I have to deal with long hikes to

the stadium, crowds, climbing entrance ramps, obnoxious and often-intoxicated fans, cramped seats, overpriced food and awareness that the players are just normal people. At home they are giants with supernatural abilities to accomplish great feats. This mystique is only enhanced by slow-motion images I crave to see again and again. Americans are so good at producing high-quality simulacra and so accustomed to interacting with simulacra; they often prefer it to the real thing. This is another advantage of the mechanical bull. A mechanical bull at a bar comes with air-conditioning, waitresses, jukeboxes, and convenient restrooms and parking. At rodeos spectators get to sit on hard benches and eat dust in the hot sun.

If you are what you eat, then Baudrillard's theory should not be taken simply as a passing fascination. His claims strike at the core of what it means to be American. He is clearly offering a definition that one should not take lightly. At first glance maybe, but his findings call for deeper inspection. For him (1988/1986), "...There is no truth of America" (p. 27).

Trends in American consumerism are only one aspect that substantiates Baudrillard's claims. If you are not what you eat or take in then one could argue you are what you produce or what comes out of you. What are the current products of American society that distinguishes it from others? What is it that Americans produce that is distinctively American? What does America export that is not produced with more quality in other countries in the world? Answer: Movies. No one in the world consistently matches the cinematic quality and production of the United States. Movies are the epitome of the simulacra world. America until recently could claim superiority in

the production of things such as automobiles and other mechanical or digital machines. But now, this is highly debatable. Many consider Japanese and German cars superior to those in the U.S. Recently, I heard an Asian student remark about the poor quality of American cell phones and other electronics and I was quick to agree. America's superiority no longer lies in steel but in image.

What about cowboy image? During almost every interview, respondents make reference to some aspect of the image or mystique associated with being a cowboy. For many, this is directly linked to television actors, singers, movies or images more than face to face experiences. The number of respondents who connect with the positive images and *romance* of the Old West Cowboy through various media sources is quite significant!!! These connections seem to be salient across all types of cowboys. These secondary sources appear to greatly impact people's definitions and connection with cowboys and their own image of being a cowboy.

I received the following quotes when I asked respondents questions about how they define or categorized cowboys. I did not ask any of the following respondents about media in any form, neither television nor music. However, these connections continually surfaced in their answers.

Mr. Chevy articulates,

Well, I think it was Willie Nelson who said that all of his heroes were cowboys. And when I was a kid all of my heroes were cowboys, Tex Ritter, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Hop along Cassidy, Cisco Kid, right on down the line. And each year at the rodeo the big attraction was the cowboy, not the singer. It's true that Roy Rogers could sing, but first they were cowboys. When I was a kid in the 40's and 50's the symbol of a cowboy was a big hat and fancy clothes, a horse, and they could all play a guitar and sing. Now that was cowboy, not so much smoking and drinking and all that. In fact my cowboy heroes didn't drink, they would order

Sarsaparilla, whatever that was. As a kid that's all I ever wanted to be was a cowboy. In Michener's Centennial, there is a cattle drive where they bring the cattle up out of Texas and go into Colorado. There is a definition that the old guy running the drive gave to one of the young men, that a cowboy is nothing more than somebody that tends cows. I think that's the essence of what a cowboy is. And all of my life I have tended cattle. So if you take that definition then I am a cowboy.

This answer shows a clear connection between media image and identification. There seems to be two sides to this coin, however. On one side are the comments Mr. Chevy has given and the warmhearted connection and sentiments he has formed with media cowboys. On the other side of the coin are the connections and identification that Mr. Chevy seems to disdain.

Elaborating, Mr. Chevy would say some images of the cowboy are inaccurate and detrimental, yet they are very popular. "Yeah, I think the Urban Cowboy, that movie, which I enjoyed watching, but if you watch that movie, the Urban Cowboy, the bull riding, the dressing, the pickup driving, the basic mistreatment of women, I'm just going through it, in that whole movie, I defy you to show me one cow. Try to find a cow in that movie. It's not there," he states as he laughs.

Yes, yes, the biggest objection I have to the cowboy image that I see is the use of alcohol and if you ain't beer drinking and throwing the cans over in the back of the pickup then you ain't a cowboy. The honky-tonk atmosphere for some reason we have taken as being part of the cowboy image. I don't think it is at all a part of what a cowboy is to me, but that's the image now. I mean, the Gilley's nightclub of years ago was the cowboy thing. Maybe, I don't know, I think the cowboy image is too masculine. I think there's a feeling among these guys that women don't account for much. It's reflected in the music I hear. I know there's a song I've heard a number of times, 'don't call him a cowboy till you've seen him ride.' He won't be good at anything if he's not good in the saddle. It's always a man, and obviously there are some good cowboys that are women that have tended cows. I don't like what the modern cowboy is supposed to be. I don't like the people. I don't like their attitude. I don't like their philosophy. I don't like their lifestyle. I sit back and say; don't ever ask one of these cowboys "how many

cows do you own?” You can’t ask that question because you’re going to make them mad, because they don’t own any and they won’t own any. Most of the daily care of cows has nothing to do with horses, trucks and roping, and nothing has to do with tobacco chewing, drinking, honky tonking, artificial bull riding and all that crap.

Mr. Chevy highlights this opposing unconstructive side when he mentions Bob Sales. He believes Bob Sales has adopted identification with a different image of the cowboy, which Mr. Chevy considers detrimental and not congruent with Mr. Sale’s self or lifestyle. He claims,

Sara (Mr. Chevy’s wife) and I laugh about Bob Sales all of the time. Bob never drives a pickup unless a trailer is attached, a gooseneck stock trailer. And in that gooseneck trailer, invariably, there is a horse that is bridled and saddled, ready to go, and there are two or three dogs in there with that horse. Now, I have never seen Bob Sales ride that horse. (Laughter)

Admittedly, I too have seen Bob Sales dozens of time driving his horse trailer with horse and dogs into town, but I did see him ride the horse once a few months ago. Mr. Chevy continued, “It’s kind of part of his persona, or whatever the correct term is. No matter what these guys do to make a living, whether they work for the electric company or somewhere else, they have a pickup, a stock trailer and a horse. No matter what they ‘do’ they are cowboys. That’s just how they see themselves.”

The cowboy church pastor reveals his own connection to a media image in the following statements,

Will Rogers once said, ‘The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man.’ We (the church) believe the outside of a horse is good to *reach* the inside of a man. Hey, that is pretty good. I have never said that before, I should write that down (and he did write it down on his desk calendar). So you get out on a horse and start riding and it is good for you. It is an atmosphere. It is what Jesus would have done, because he reached people where they were at. He went fishing with the fisherman. He went to the wedding parties with the people who were getting married. He got among the people.

Just in these simple statements it is easy to see that the cowboy pastor identifies with Will Rogers and Jesus both in such a way that it guides his current behavior and relationships. Media images, actors and even his image of Jesus have played a significant function in influencing his definition and understanding of cowboys and their part in cowboy culture. A similar combination is evident in almost everyone I interview.

For Big Juicy it is about one guy, “John Wayne. John Wayne, a lot of his movies *is* western. I love all his movies. If you want to be a cowboy, be something like what John Wayne *is*.” Wow! What an amazing statement. If you want to be a cowboy, no problem, just be like a fictional character from movies in the mid to late 1900’s. I think this connection is lost with Big Juicy because he has such a strong identification with John Wayne western movies. Big Juicy concluded, “I would have loved to be back in the western days. I think it was neat with the horses and the cows.” This highlights an important connection to nostalgia, which is also characteristic of postmodern trends in contemporary society. The media purposefully capitalizes on nostalgic sentiments and images to hook viewers. Nostalgia is a significant variable in contemporary cowboy culture. Many observe or even participate in the current culture through this lens of nostalgia. Similar to the way one attends a high school reunion. Participants experience the current events in light of feelings and images attached to past events.

Clayton claims,

...It goes back to the, well what do you call it, the romance of the cowboy, you know. Everybody wants to be a cowboy. I think it’s just that Texas romance, you know. You want to be associated with cattle. Well, when I was young, teenager and early twenties, I worked a lot of cattle. There was a lot of cattle around. And, uh, now it’s seldom, I work my calves once a year. I’ve got about 60 grown

cows. Takes about an hour and a half to do it and you don't do anything until the fall. I try to keep around 60 mamma cows.

I responded, "That seems like a contradiction that you own 60 cows and you wouldn't call yourself a cowboy."

No, I don't think you're a cowboy just cause you own cows. Well, I guess once a cowboy; you're always a cowboy. I guess it just really depends on how you *feel* and maybe the romance has just gone out of it. You know what I'm saying? I guess you could call me a cowboy and it wouldn't hurt my feelings. It wouldn't be humble for me to say I'm a cowboy cause there's a *real positive image* attached to it and people that work on ranches I would consider to be a real cowboy. They don't have to tell anybody they are, people know they are. They know the way they act; they know the way they dress. People just know that you are. Like I said you see these wannabes and you know they're wannabes too.

Clayton is hesitant to adopt the name cowboy but also the personification of the cowboy, which he considers too lofty a position to occupy. I question whether this is modesty or false humility? According to many other respondents, Clayton *is* a cowboy and he closely resembles the highly esteemed notion they have of cowboys from the good old days.

Clayton projects for many in current cowboy culture an outward expression or manifestation of the character that they idealize or associate with "real" cowboys. Others consider him a vivid representation of a true cowboy, but he himself is not decided on the matter. Of course, I do not think he will lose any sleep over the matter, and I am sure he is content to just be himself regardless of any label he carries. This inner-directed quality is undoubtedly one that marks him as such a cowboy that stands out in comparison to many other contemporary other-directed cowboys.

Krystal states,

You know, I have a romantic notion of what a cowboy is... Society has decided that they have this moral structure and rules that they live by. It's kind of like athletes. You know, we expect athletes to have this different set of rules and structures than we all do, but you know what, they're normal people.

I think there's that romantic idea that a lot of them have that people that do this sort of work are better people than the ones that are in the city. That somehow they hold a better value structure, you know, God, country and apple pie. Since values hold more in country rural settings than they do in city settings. Whether that's true or not, I don't know... But I'm seeing that there are not that many guys who are saying, "Oh, I want to go and work in the city", it's "I want to go work in the country." Part of that, I think, they've never done it before and it's something that they'd like to experience. I also think that they are looking to become part of this... and it makes them feel good.

Krystal's claims ring loud and true for many in the cowboy culture. Many respondents claim there is an attraction to the cowboy culture. It is an attraction that draws people not only from the city, but all walks of life. Many people feel cowboys do carry an image or persona that is different than the contemporary other-directed society. I guess it is possible for the image of the cowboy to be inner-directed while the actual cowboys can be inner-directed, other-directed, or even tradition-directed. What an interesting association.

Maybe being human is not adequately defined in discussions about consumption and production and specifically image. Many would say this is not what sets the human species apart. Rather it is being able to feel, to experience and express emotions. This is an intangible aspect, which differentiates human society. What is it that moves American society to feel if it is not images and simulacra? For example, the recent film by Mel Gibson entitled, *The Passion of the Christ*, has made a significant impact on American society. Millions flocked to theatres in search of a deeper religious connection or

understanding of Christ. Millions have been heard crying or even sobbing as they leave the theatres. I have overheard many people making comments such as, “I am glad someone finally gave a *real* account of the suffering of Christ,” and “Now, Jesus dying on the cross is *real* to me.” Someone even commented, “This film is the greatest evangelical tool in a thousand years.” Does this mean it has replaced the Bible? Do people need images now to deeply connect with a story or event, for it to seem real? It is as if Americans are saying if something is not on screen it is difficult to accept its authenticity. Now simulacra images are often needed for deep emotional conviction. In fact, many people are disoriented by perceptions from a “real” event, because they are not experienced in same way as watching T.V.

American reactions to the events of 9/11 also demonstrate this vicarious connection between emotion and simulacra. I remember sitting in a graduate class preparing for a typical three-hour lecture period. A student arrived before the start of class and informed everyone seated about the event. The reaction of the class was surprisingly calm. It was as if the news did not really register. A few students asked some follow-up questions, but then we simply began lecture. During the break, I journeyed to the break room where a couple of people were huddled around a small white television. For the first time, I was able to witness the plane colliding into the side of the building and exploding. Like many, I remember exactly where I stood and how awkward and shocked I felt first viewing the images of the explosions. Like many, it did not seem real or significant until I was able to reach a television and see the images for myself.

Following the disastrous fall of both towers, Americans were glued to televisions watching over and over and over the destruction. Many tried desperately to watch numerous programs and catch a glimpse of any new footage of the event. I question if there is a point where people's connection to the simulacra and images takes precedent over the consequences of the actual event. I hesitate to begin to make such a suggestion; but this is what Baudrillard has done. In his book *America*, He does make such claims and he elaborates in convincing manner. *America* was written well before 9/11, but he addresses many key topics that also strike at the core of the American experience and culture. It does not seem appropriate to simply be fascinated with Baudrillard in light of such events. One would be inclined to have a strong reaction and accept or reject his claims.

If Americans truly are the product of what they consume then one can say Americans are simulacra. Cowboys are image. On the other hand, if what you do defines who you are, then Americans are what they produce: simulacra. If what motivates someone to feel is simulacra, then possibly a schism exists between authenticity and existence. If there is merit to this argument it will be evident in the people of America themselves. Americans can now be born and live in a simulacra existence at every stage of the lifespan. One can be born as a test-tube baby via artificial insemination, or start as embryo transplants or in-vitro fertilizations. Alternatives to natural fertilization and childbirth are becoming increasingly popular. Doctors increasingly chose to deliver babies by performing cesareans. Many babies are now raised on Similac Formula or powdered milk as opposed to breast milk. Americans are simulacra born.

Girls put on press-on nails and make-up while playing with Easy-Bake Ovens. They wear clip-on earrings and store bought jeans already faded and equipped with stylish holes. As they reach adolescence, push-up bras will provide ample simulated breasts. Boys can wear henna and replica jerseys and spend hours playing video games. Childhood is enjoyed via simulacra. Childhood is nurtured by simulacra.

American Adults adorn or alter themselves in every imaginable simulacra alteration. Hair is colored, permmed, or straightened. Hair extensions are another option. It is possible now to receive a face-lift or get permanent make-up tattooed on. One can wear colored contacts, fake eyelashes or get botox injections for fuller lips. One can order a tummy-tuck, liposuction or buy butt implants. People can pay for tattoos or spend time on tanning beds for simulated tans. Breasts implants are treated as just another trend. Everyone should get “them done” even men. Men can also pay for penis enlargements. Older adults can wear wigs, toupees and dentures. These are only few examples that highlight the pervasiveness of the American experience with simulacra across the lifespan. This is not to mention extreme examples of simulacra expression such as cross-dressing, Elvis impersonators and Michael Jackson.

Baudrillard’s (1988/1986) depiction of America rang loudest in my ears during the summer several years ago. I read an article in the university newspaper portraying lingering debates associated with the collapse of the Texas A&M University Bonfire in 1999. In this commentary, Kevin Espenlaub (2002) provides insight into the incoming president’s stance on the issue and a possible solution. The instant I read his comments I realized simulacrum not only permeates Americans’ actions, experiences and emotions,

but exists in the core of their logic and reason. It rushes through in crisis as well as the mundane. In August of 2002, this article entitled, *Gates Supports Bowen's Stance on Aggie Bonfire*, was published in the Battalion. Espenlaub details how President Gates gains insight and understanding into the magnitude of the problem after evaluating students' connection to the event. He states, "...Just in listening to the students it seems a big part of the Bonfire tradition was the engagement of the students in every aspect" (p. 2). Then the climatic moment comes when Gates understands the enormity of the situation and the student's connection and offers the following solution: "Gates encouraged the idea that students *create* a new tradition to *imitate* the complete student participation that made Bonfire *unique*..." (p. 2). There it is in black ink. The solution to the problem is to create a simulacrum. American creativity has been delegated to the fabrication of simulacra. Is this the bedrock for American hope and confidence? This is an echo of Baudrillard's claims. In *America* He states, "What is new in America is the clash of the first level (primitive and wild) and the 'third kind' (the absolute simulacrum). There is no second level" (p.104). Gate's solution is to jump to the absolute simulacrum mirrors Baudrillard's description of the third level. Gates assumes this will satisfy students, to move away from Bonfire, which has proven to be primitive, wild and unpredictable and move to a simulacrum that is contemporary, safe and highly predictable. Joy will come in its fabrication.

Baudrillard (1988/1986) is challenging and criticizing; how do we respond? I cannot simply be *fascinated* with Baudrillard. I have to grapple with the implications of

his claims and the possibility of their validity. I see evidence for his claims everywhere I focus my attention, not only in the material aspects of culture, but the immaterial as well.

Baudrillard's analysis and depiction of postmodern America is insightful and it is difficult for me to dismiss it as trivial. Of course, I cannot deny I am fascinated with the unconventionality of Baudrillard's claims. I admire the complexity and creativity he displays in his postmodern writing style. Specifically, his combination of theoretical analysis and creative writing style come together most vividly in *America*. This work has significantly impacted my interpretation of numerous cowboy cultural elements, but it has only functioned as a starting point. Even though his work is controversial, captivating or even alarming I have incorporated it into my theory and interpretation of culture. I capitalize on his ability to provide a theoretical framework for interpreting current trends in cowboy customs. Because Baudrillard's claims rings so loudly in my ears I am inclined to take this stance.

But Baudrillard should get the last word. In this academic exercise, I began to wonder how Americans might respond, and also how would Baudrillard? Unfortunately, I doubt Baudrillard would be as enthusiastic as I first anticipated. At first, I imagined Baudrillard agreeing and offering approval at my discussion of simulacra, especially to take his claims seriously. But, it is likely he would see through the veneer. At first glance, my response seems to mirror that of Baudrillard; but Baudrillard would scoff at such an appearance. I imagine his response would mimic the thoughts developed in the following quote:

When I see Americans, particularly American intellectuals, casting a nostalgic eye towards Europe, its history, its metaphysics, its cuisine, and its past, I tell myself that this is just a case of unhappy transference. History and Marxism are like fine wines and haute cuisine: they do not really cross the ocean in spite of many impressive attempts that have been made to adapt them to new surroundings. (Baudrillard, 1988/1986, p. 79)

I cannot help but realize I myself have engaged in an unhappy transference. I also have been casting an unfavorable eye on the inauthenticity of American culture. But I know that along with History and Marxism, Baudrillardian theory for me may only be a fine wine and haute cuisine. It influences me intellectually, but does not move me to considerable action. I am inclined to discuss or even debate his allegations, but what else? I espouse to take serious Baudrillard's claims and try to influence others to grasp the validity and depths of his claims; but underneath I question whether this endeavor is futile and will undoubtedly be abandoned. It is my experience that most will see Baudrillard's ideas as fascinating or ludicrous but not the grounds for serious, in-depth and prolonged action or discussion about the postmodernism of America.

Admittedly, when the novelty of his thoughts wane, it is likely that my strong reactions and opinions will also dissipate. Consequently, I desire to align myself with those who take a serious look at Baudrillard's theory, but in the end may simply be grouped with those who are fascinated. What an irony. I have given the appearance that I am something, when probably I am not. Why? I enjoy the simulacra myself. It is deeply engrained in my orientation to the world. I take too much pleasure in being able to watch football games on TV and movies on the big screen. So, in the end, my argument has

imploded, as Baudrillard probably would have suspected the outcome to be. I have given the appearance of wanting to discuss Baudrillard seriously, and this was not done deceptively or with false pretenses; but in discussing him seriously, I have realized I too cannot escape the gravity of his claims.

CHAPTER VII

SOLIDARITY

In contemporary society, to embrace the image of the cowboy, one may turn a blind eye to reality. But, what if such blindness or ignorance leads to solidarity? Is blindness in the name of solidarity unreasonable? Possibly, the solidarity afforded by embracing the cowboy image justifies ignoring certain details. For example, the image of the lone cowboy on the cattle drive is ironically misleading. Many different people working together in some form of solidarity and purpose must coordinate a cattle drive. Interestingly, not only the privileged, but marginalized groups of society seem capable of such blindness. There appears to be power in the cowboy image and lifestyle on certain levels to congeal groups and cut across ethnic, geographical and class lines. The cowboy image may be a cultural icon of rugged individualism but many diverse groups have arbitrarily adopted it as a unifying or redemptive force of solidarity.

Richard Rorty, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard offer postmodern perspectives about solidarity which differ significantly from commonly held views. By commonly held views, I mean those spawned by enlightenment thinking and modernity. These “rational” totalizing views frame solidarity in an affirmative light, choosing to focus on common interests, objectives, standards and norms between individuals. Often it is understood to be a pure or even faultless state of existence, which magically links individuals in mystical fidelity and piety. These viewpoints ignore harmful or contradictory impacts of solidarity in society. Arguably, according to enlightenment thinking, the Nazi’s regime during WWII possessed some of the strongest and purest

solidarity known to mankind. This is an extreme example but a rational end for functionalist modernist thinking would be to glorify Nazi solidarity and overlook the results for the Jews. Many postmodern theorists on the other hand, choose to tune into these other negative effects and the costs of solidarity. Postmodern theorists such as Rorty, Lyotard and Baudrillard would not be so blind, mindless or pitiless.

These theorists question if solidarity even exists in postmodernity! Rather, they question societies' definitions, understanding and use of the idea of solidarity. Not that there is no such thing as solidarity, but solidarity has been misinterpreted. Moreover, certain aspects of solidarity are neglected or denied. As Rorty (1989) points out a traditional notion of solidarity is as follows: 'human solidarity' is to say there is something within each of us-our essential humanity-which resonates to the presence of this same thing in other human beings" (189). Rorty soundly rejects this definition. For him, solidarity is not *simply* anything. It is much more complex and contradictory than is implied in this traditional notion. He does not assume solidarity is something that exists in all people, but it must be created. He is quick to point out though; any sense of similarity or solidarity in *us* is contingent on difference and exclusion of *they*. There is an ugly side to solidarity many people do not incorporate into their understanding. Rorty argues solidarity is contingent, inconsistent, unpredictable, and rooted in contradiction, and even cruelty (pp. 189-198).

Likewise, Lyotard (1984) challenges the grand narrative perception of solidarity and social bonds. He believes there are often details left out of the narrative. People agree to focus on certain story lines and overlook or deny the ugly side of solidarity and human

interaction. He asserts participation in language games holds individuals together; not something as noble as the enlightenment idea of a common bond or destiny. This enlightenment view is too positive and unrealistic in light of wars, ethnic cleansing, the Holocaust, etc.

In Lyotard's words, "language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist" (p. 15). Lyotard builds on Wittgenstein's term *language games* as a construct for understanding human conversation and interaction. He defines language games in the following statement: "What he (Wittgenstein) means by this term (language games) is that each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put- in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules..." (p. 10).

Lyotard adds three key components of language games in his discussion that is applicable to his understanding. First, the rules are not legitimizing in and of themselves, but people agree on the rules and interactions that they will legitimize and play by. This seems evident in the cowboy slang many participants of cowboy culture utilize regardless of their antiquity or incompatibility with contemporary times, or other aspects of their lives. There are individuals who actually change their accents and vocabulary when engaging in cowboy culture. Second, Lyotard claims, "...if there are no rules, there is no game..." (p. 10), and third, language and speaking is similar to sparring. He states, "To speak is to fight" (p. 10). Simply by engaging in conversation there is a subtle

antagonism built into the structure and rules of language. At first glance, cowboys and those participating in cowboy culture seem to be playing their own unique language games.

Baudrillard understands participation in language games to have a multifaceted effect in terms of solidarity. Participation in communication may solidify, but participation in communication, especially unified communication, may also kill freedom, free-will, imagination, etc. For Baudrillard (1996) solidarity is not necessarily linked directly to communication or language games but illusion itself. He states, “Hence the paradoxical fact of illusion as the only true democratic principle” (p. 93). Illusion allows individuals to coexist in the chaotic, unpredictability and chance of reality, by providing rules and a game to play. “(It) transforms that uncertainty into a set of rules, and thus stands outside the natural condition” (p. 93). Uncertainty would characterize this natural condition void of solidarity. According to Baudrillard, illusion is the solution, the necessary medium. Likewise Baudrillard (1994) makes the following claim based on something he sees in Ecclesiastes, “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacra is true” (p. 1).

Is contemporary cowboy culture a *Last Chance Arena* for those lost in the chaos of today? The *Last Chance Arena* is the name of a rodeo arena hidden in the backwoods of Morgan, Texas near my house. I question if it is an island of escape for those disoriented and unsatisfied with the modern world. Is it an illusion? Do many find solace from mainstream society and everyday life in this arena: more specifically in the illusion it provides? It offers a temporary reprieve from the chaotic fast paced life they encounter

during the week. Is it really the last chance? It fosters a different climate; different activities centered on horses and cows, with different norms and language for interacting. Those who participate in the activities of the arena can forget about the “real world” and pretend they are back in the good old days, when times were simpler and a man’s horse was his best friend; unless his dog had saved his life once.

The Morgan Cowboy Fellowship Church, which is not in the backwoods but in the center of town, seems to serve a similar purpose. It is an assembly for those who want to enjoy the cowboy culture created by the congregation. In addition, the Morgan County Fair and Livestock Show provide participants the opportunity to have fun, ride rides, and raise cows and other animals. Members of adjacent communities can partake in competitions while mingling with cowboys, farmers, and other rural folks. These various arenas provide the benefits of participation in a cowboy illusion as a medium for the creation of solidarity as well.

In agreement with Rorty, I am not describing solidarity in the traditional sense. I am not talking about solidarity as the recognition of a common ancestry (p. 189), but rather an *imaginative identification*. Many of the participants at rodeo arenas, cowboy churches and steershow have an imaginative collective identification with the image of being cowboys. Many of the participants adopt and remove the cowboy image depending on the day of the week or the social setting. For example, Jessica, one of the respondents at the county fair disclosed, “My Wrangler jeans and boots were reserved for weekend steer shows. I never dressed ‘western’ at school. No one would know I showed steers

unless they knew me.” Therefore for most respondents, it is identification with the cowboy image rather than a cowboy lifestyle that produces the label.

People form an imaginative identification with this image much the same way as groups who dress up in Civil War uniforms and reenact old battles on the weekends. These soldiers work typical nine to five jobs in an office on weekdays, but dress up and pretend to fight for the Union or Confederacy on the weekend. It is similar to the way people crowd Renaissance Festivals and make-believe they are still living in the Middle Ages.

There is one stark difference between these illusions or simulacra compared to that of the cowboy culture. Baudrillard (1996) recognized a similar difference when talking about the illusion of gaming. He states, “Unlike all the illusions which present themselves as truth (including that of reality), the illusion of gaming presents itself as just that. Gaming does not require us to believe in it, any more than we are called on to believe in appearances once they present themselves as such (in art, for example)” (p. 92). Likewise, participating in Renaissance Festivals, Civil War reenactments, and Star Wars conventions are akin to gaming and they do not require this belief Baudrillard speaks of. There is little tension between reality and simulacra in these illusions or subcultures. The participants know they are in a game, make-believe or illusion; therefore, they are free to engage in fakery and enjoy their peculiar connection with others in the illusion. They do not have to incorporate their location or role in the simulacra as a framework for identity or as a social compass for orienting themselves in the world (even though a few do such a thing).

Not so with being a cowboy. Adopting the cowboy culture or cowboy image often requires its participants to believe it is true at least to some degree. Many in fact cling to the belief that somewhere, someday or in someone the real cowboy still exists. Many believe being a cowboy and living in the cowboy world is a bona fide life choice. Rorty challenges this idea of essence many participants allude to when discussing cowboys. Extrapolating from his ideas, I would question whether anyone could essentially be a real cowboy all the time. Are there times when their behavior, language or beliefs change to fit different social contexts or language games?

Participating in the cowboy culture or adopting the cowboy image is different than gaming illusions because it does present itself as truth. Therefore many struggle with inconsistencies in the image or contingencies that accompany the incompatibility of the cowboy in today's world. For most, it is not possible to live on cattle drives and sleep under the stars next to the cows year round. Many of the people I have interviewed do struggle with the cowboy image in relation to their perception of reality or illusion. Many have developed extensive matrices for identifying "real" cowboys, and many feel the need to justify their connection to the image regardless of how minute the association. As shown in the definition chapter, these inconsistencies are well represented in the various definitions and explanations given in personal accounts I have collected. I have questioned numerous cowboys or people who participate significantly in cowboy cultural illusions in various settings.

I am highlighting these inconsistencies to report on two simple aspects of the cowboy phenomenon at this time. First, the postmodern occurrence (characterized by

simulacra, illusion, and contradiction) in the cowboy representation is not the totalizing image or experience many desire. Second, despite and/or because of these qualities the postmodern cowboy phenomenon creates and fosters solidarity. I do not wish to focus on cause and effect, but to simply claim both postmodernism and solidarity are key aspects of the cowboy image and culture.

I return to the following quote from the man named Clayton (who many other respondents believe to be a real cowboy) who commented on aspects illustrating these phenomena. This is his assessment concerning what he believes to be two different types of cowboys (wannabees and rodeo cowboys), which are different than himself and his notion of real cowboys.

There's nothing wrong with being a wannabe, but *a wannabe is not a real cowboy*, ya know. *I don't think they really realize that they're being fake*. They put on a hat and a western shirt, and a pair of boots and they're a cowboy, but they're really not. And I don't know that they really realize that they're not, most of them. They think, well that's all you gotta do is just get dressed up and that makes you one.

... (About rodeo cowboys) Well, yea, I would consider them cowboys. They're good at what they do and yea I would consider them to be rodeo cowboys: *Not real cowboys*, but rodeo cowboys.

Many other respondents also displayed numerous distinctions and taxonomies for identifying cowboys. But many contradicted themselves like Clayton in the previous quote and even changed their answers in the course of the same interview. To crudely sum up their comments, there seems to be a general hierarchy along the following lines:

- 1) Dead “Real” Cowboys
- 1A) Ranch Cowboys, Ranch Raised Cowboys, Buckaroos
- 2) Television Cowboys (John Wayne, Gene Autry, etc.)
- 3) Rodeo Cowboys
- 4) Specialized Cowboys
(Trainers, dairy farmers, groomers)
- 5) Cowpeople
(“Small time people”, own a few cows or horses or land, people intrigued with culture)
- 6) Fake Cowboys
(Wannabees, fakes, drugstore cowboys, trail riders, may be considered any category but 1 depending on interviewee)

Most if not all respondents would not agree on this hierarchy if asked, but most acknowledge in some way there is one. Almost all have a difficult time defining or justifying different kinds of cowboys. For most the distinctions are blurry and confusing because of the different contexts situating cowboys. Almost all struggle considerably when asked to define what a real cowboy is, but they are much more comfortable defining what a real cowboy is not. What is interesting is the weight many respondents give to actors on television shows-especially John Wayne.

The importance of solidarity created by participating in cowboy illusions is also evident in these interviews. I have included several of these comments in order to illustrate the postmodern aspects of the cowboy image and the priority given to solidarity in some fashion. I will examine some of their comments in light of the contemporary theorists I have already mentioned. The following quote is from the small ranch owner whose children participated heavily in showing steers at county fairs:

Well there is only one reason for any type of livestock show and that is *entertainment. It has nothing to do with the real world.* Now, I heard a judge the night Jessica won her second show in Capitol, she was a senior. He told a story about why we do all of this. He told a story of a man and woman who had just

bought a house. They had just sodded the yard and all of sudden they look up and their kids are running and playing all in the new grass. They jump up and run to the door to jump on the kids. Then they stopped and looked at one another and said “Wait a minute are we *raising kids* or grass.” The guts are: are we raising kids or steers? We are raising kids. And people who are not doing it for that reason have missed the picture. *My family benefited greatly* by showing calves because it gave us a focal point. Every day right here at the table we were discussing it. Even at breakfast sometimes. You can’t do that with little league football or baseball because the *whole family* is not involved, but with showing livestock the family is involved. And I am still in favor of it today, but I would like to get back to the point of why we are doing this ever so often. Jessica had a lot of friends that she met; it *gave her a lot of friends* year round. It wasn’t “well football season is over, what do I do now.

In this quote, I would draw the reader’s attention to the emphasis and importance put on solidarity and socializing children. Many of the people interviewed indicated they favored the cowboy culture because it is a better alternative for raising children. Many see the cowboy culture as an option or a choice, sort of like the choice between placing children in youth soccer or little league baseball. It is not a totalizing identity or family heritage. In addition, for most respondents, whether the culture is a simulated one or is authentic is not a central issue. For them, what is important is that it is a medium for camaraderie and raising children “right”.

In the above quote, two types of social bonds are directly mentioned as being strengthened or created by participation in the cowboy culture: solidarity with family and solidarity with friends. Mr. Chevy indicates that participation for Jessica insured her strong bonds with both year round. These comments tie directly into David Riesman’s theory of postmodern other-directed social character. In postmodern times benefits gained from others directs or motivates individuals’ behavior. Benefits such as fitting into

social groups, being liked and having friends are highly esteemed. Contemporary cowboy illusions seem to provide this valuable necessity.

Simultaneously, there are subtle clues Mr. Chevy is aware of the illusion. This is evidenced by his comments, “It has nothing to do with the real world.” Deep down he like many others may be aware of the illusion, but consider it a better alternative than other games or illusions offered by society. It may have nothing to do with the real world, and everything to do with illusion, but that is O.K. There is an awareness that the illusion’s purpose is to create entertainment, fun, and solidarity, which is more valuable than authenticity or realism.

The following quote by the pastor of the Cowboy Fellowship Church echoes the emphasis put on utilizing the cowboy image to create solidarity and to socialize children. It also reveals subtle incongruence in the language tagged to the cowboy illusion.

Really to me people are *intrigued*, intrigued with the life or the lifestyle but they weren’t born into a ranch type lifestyle. They had to put their stuff together for themselves, because that is what they really *wanted to do*. They didn’t have the means to do it. They just do the best they can with what they have to work with, you know... My deal is not really a ranch; it’s a facility that I use where I raise hay and stuff for my horse and my calves so I can do roping events. It’s a specialized deal. My little boy, the way I’m raising him, he’s had a rope in his hand ever since he could walk and he’s eleven years old now. He can rope off a horse and tie calves down. Eleven years old. You talk about what’s *carrying on the tradition*; it’s these guys that are bringing up their kids like I’m bringing my kid up. They’re being raised with a rope in their hand. Part of what we’re *trying to do* here, Ron, it’s *a family thing*. Very few things in our world today are designed for family activities. The mamma’s driving everybody around and no body has time to stay with the one (child) even if they’ve got a game or whatever. We live in a busy, busy society and, uh, our focus is through the medium of horse activities, to get the *family back together again*. That’s a challenge. These days, in the world we live in, that’s a real challenge. *The ranch deal is really a perfect setting*. They’re all there for one purpose, you know. It’s more of a family type setting and we’re trying to *recreate that*. Our society has, and I don’t think it’s an accident that it’s gotten to the place it’s at, but our society has built in programs to

break up families. It's a real strong statement, but I believe that in our society everybody's going off in different directions. It's a whole different deal. It's an attitude that you're *producing* here. It's an attitude of excitement first of all. If you can't get excited about what you're doing, *go find something else*.

Interestingly, after alluding to carrying on the tradition, the cowboy pastor makes many references to trying, recreating, and producing the cowboy image and lifestyle. Continuing the heritage of an original movement is different than creating a copy. I don't think it can be both. Most of his comments center around the idea that something has been lost and some people are choosing through hard work to get it back or create something similar: to create the cowboy lifestyle and solidarity it brings. Recreating, producing and trying are significantly different than carrying on a tradition. If one is carrying on a tradition, then nothing has been lost. But if one is trying to recreate or produce a (new) tradition then something has been lost. In Rorty's terms this is ironic. Anything can be reinterpreted or redefined and total opposites can be combined. Opposites such as creating a new thing and carrying on a tradition do not have to be mutually exclusive. Illusion reconciles them. Illusion is the solution in postmodern times.

Americans are experts at producing high-quality simulacra and are accustomed to interacting with simulacra; they often prefer it to the real thing. According to Baudrillard the solution for many problems Americans face is to create a simulacrum. For him, American creativity has been delegated to the fabrication of simulacra. Is this the bedrock for American hope and confidence? Cowboy fellowships and arenas appear to function in this capacity.

At one point I questioned the cowboy pastor about the amazing church growth he has experienced in the last couple of years. His church has skyrocketed above five hundred members in approximately two years. He informed me that even though ranch cowboys are becoming scarce that rodeo cowboys are increasing because there is good money in it. He also stated people were coming to the church because, “they want to be associated with the old west atmosphere and cowboys.” He clarified, “they may only own one horse or a couple of cows but they want to connect with the culture.” He seemed to imply several times that even though large numbers of his congregation may not be “real cowboys” they wanted to be associated with cowboys or raise their children to be cowboys. All of which is O.K. to him. In fact, the pastor was extremely proud of the diverse group of people comprising his congregation. While some have big ranches or work with cows throughout the week, some drive from the city and some from suburbs to be a part of the community. For him creating this community held together by the cowboy image and cowboy illusion is not easily done, it takes much effort but the rewards are worth the challenge. Reflecting on his comments, I cannot help but think, “What a pastiche of people drawn together and held together by illusion.”

The cowboy illusion draws a favorable response from many other diverse groups, not just good ole white boys from the south. There are “honky tonks” in Japan where people are dressed in wranglers, cowboy hats and listening to country music. Like the Cowboy Fellowship Church, almost anywhere one can find groups who are creating or clinging to certain parts of the cowboy image or culture: some as an escape, some to form

connections. This is accomplished in large cities, rural areas, reservations, Europe, islands in the pacific, etc.

For example, near the Sam Houston National Park I have witnessed numerous trail rides with predominantly black participants. Their actions highlight this phenomenon rather vividly. For instance, the black trail riders travel on horses and wagons (with car tires not wooden wagon wheels) that carry huge speakers playing a variety of music such as rap, soul and country music. Some participants are wearing wranglers, boots and cowboy hats and others are wearing warm-ups, Nike's, and NBA replica jerseys. It seems almost anything can be incorporated into or blended with the image of the cowboy. People's answers and actions seem to indicate at some point that solidarity is more important than consistency in the image that creates it.

I interviewed one of these black trail riders riding a horse on the side of the street. He let me know quickly he would not consider himself a cowboy. He is an eighteen-wheel truck driver who is gone for months at a time. But, he likes to get out and ride a horse once in a while. Like members of the principally white cowboy church, many of the black trail riders would not consider themselves cowboys. Many do not own horses or cattle or participate in rodeos, but the trail rides are fun. The trail rides provide a medium for fellowship, entertainment and activity. It is an escape from everyday life or normal weekends.

As an aside, I wonder how other travelers and law enforcement officers typically respond when approximately a hundred blacks cruise through town slowly, drinking

alcohol and playing music loud enough to be heard for half a mile. As they witness the trail riders most people seem to be very accepting and respectful. I am inclined to believe that since these same actions are taking place under the umbrella of the cowboy image; the black participants are not hindered or antagonized. Instead they are offered much more tolerance and approval.

The power of the cowboy illusion in Texas to cut across racial lines in some avenues is an interesting sociological phenomenon. The illusion operates for many as an overriding identity status that is more important than racial identity. But I question like Rorty might what this identity status is contingent upon. Let me provide a few interviewees remarks to highlight my point before discussing contingency. Consider the following quotes.

Mr. Chevy

Alright, going back to when I was a kid and we did have to gather the cows with horses and we actually had to do the work, I thought *the very best cowboys we had were black*. Some of the black guys around here I remember, Wilma Washington, a girl that Sara and I try to help, her grandfather was a man named Butch Washington. I think he was the best horseman I ever saw as far as just riding a horse. Some of the black men here were fantastic as far as roping and riding and chasing and gathering cows; they were good. I think Jeb Tate, who died some years ago, was as good a cowboy as we had around here. There just wasn't nothin' he couldn't do with a horse and a rope and a dog.

Clayton

I know some good black cowboys. They're *as good as any white cowboy* that I've know. *I see no difference in em*. They either know what they're doing or not. Uh, there's been some real good ones from around here. Some of em are dead and gone now. I can't say there's any difference (between white and black cowboys).

I asked Clayton the following question, "Do you think people perceive black cowboys different than white cowboys?" He responded as follows:

Cowboys don't, but maybe people who are not see them as different. *Cowboys don't see any difference.* If he's good he's good and if he's not, he's not. It really doesn't have anything to do with his color. You take a lot of people who are racist to the bone, but if there's a black cowboy *they feel different about them than they do other black people.* That's just the way it is. I don't think you can find any cowboy that knew a black cowboy and they just feel different about them. There's a mutual respect for them and what they do and how they do it.

These quotes both seem to highlight an interesting perspective a few whites have about black cowboys. Both Mr. Chevy and Clayton are saying similar things. Both are saying that being a cowboy is more important or respected among cowboys than race. According to their statements, the difference between white and black is unimportant in their minds when considering solidarity between cowboys. I question the validity of these remarks. At this point, I only have a hunch, but I doubt the durability or totality of this solidarity. It is possible, I guess. I will have to explore it further, but I think it will be similar to the type of solidarity a Vietnam Veteran once described to me.

A white veteran went into great detail about the bond he formed with other soldiers who were black. He was proud of himself because during the war, he did not treat the black soldiers differently and even became best friends with one or two Blacks. When I asked about these friends now, he had no idea of their whereabouts. For him, their friendship and solidarity did not transfer to the United States once they returned home. His war experience did not lead to more tolerant or positive outlooks on Blacks in general once back in the states. He has made countless racist remarks and commonly refers to Blacks as niggers. The war made it "O.K." to be friends with a black person. Likewise, the cowboy illusion seems to afford it participants this temporary reprieve, but I doubt its salience across social contexts or other social illusions.

Possibly, postmodern cultural illusions such as those embedded in cowboy culture are powerful enough to unify such groups given the appropriate spin. Remove the cowboy from the traditional context, and the possibilities seem endless. Who wouldn't want to put their own spin on the cowboy? It is such a moving force in pop culture. It makes sense that it benefits many groups to simply put different interpretations on the cowboy and use them for their own purposes. Lyotard acknowledges this as a method commonly adopted in postmodern societies. He draws attention to the heavy emphasis put on the *method* of utilizing new language and interpretations itself. It is this method of engaging in language games that leads to solidarity between those who play the games.

Lyotard would claim cowboys are not bound together because they share a common ancestry or because they are real cowboys or because they are cowboy Christians or because they are black cowboys. Instead the binding mechanism is that they choose to enter the same cowboy language games. They capitalize on the solidarity based on imaginative identification or redescription offered by postmodern illusions such as that of cowboy culture.

Rorty asserts that this kind of solidarity is not the totalizing harmonious construct it is often portrayed to be. It is not an absolute solidarity. It is contingent on many contradicting postmodern forces. First, he draws attention to the fact that any notion of solidarity formed in the community of *we* is based on the existence and exclusion of *they*. What is different about the postmodern cowboy experience is that *they* are no longer the Indians.

In traditional times, cowboys and Indians were actually enemies. Nowadays cowboy and Indian merge into one image, one illusion, and one language game. They are no longer enemies. They are partners in the same dance. Contemporary cowboys are just as likely to wear Indian paraphernalia as they are to wear cowboy hats and boots. They celebrate the romance and freedom embodied in the image of the ancient Indian warriors and wandering nomads as much as they celebrate John Wayne. Lost is any reality that often Indians and Cowboys were killing each other and competing over valued resources. Now both images enhance the other. Both Indian and Cowboy are beacons of light in the chaos of today. Both images magically transport people back to days when men were free and frontiers existed for them to conquer. I am not mentioning this to imply that Rorty is mistaken. There is still a *they*, but the *they* is likely a postmodern *other*. The *they* for the cowboys is not the Indians anymore, and the *they* for the Indians is not the cowboys.

It is just as likely today that a Native American will not condemn the cowboys of the past or present, but even go as far as to stake claim to the cowboy image themselves. I have heard people point out to others that the Native Americans lived more like cowboys than the actual cowboys. When watching John Wayne movies, some Native Americans will identify with the cowboys or heroes of the movies, not the Indians. They emphasize that their ancestors were actually the ones who were the expert horsemen and courageous warriors able to brave the elements and remain true to their sense of self. This is how cowboys are portrayed, so it makes sense that they would be drawn to this portrayal.

Cowboys and Indians are friends now, like soldiers in Civil War Reenactments from the North and the South. Both sides are clinging to an illusion extrapolated from its

historic context. So they are comrades in the same battle. They are actually working together as Rorty's *we*. Fighting the same *they*. The imitation Civil War soldiers may actually change sides from one weekend to the next if there is a shortage of soldiers in one camp. Likewise, today it is an easy transition and blurry line between cowboy and Indian. It is as easy to find cowboys at contemporary Pow Wows, as it is to find Indians at rodeos.

Maybe postmodern solidarity stemming from a postmodern medium such as the illusion of the cowboy can be interpreted as being truly beneficial for individuals and society as a whole. If someone knows that the illusion is just a charade, is aware of the contradictions in the illusion, but still values the solidarity he feels with others, then he is not blinded and mindless. Many participants are aware of the postmodern aspects of cowboy culture, but still enjoy its impact in their lives. Some are blinded, but still report experiencing solidarity and enjoyment. If the illusion is open to all and no group is excluded from participation then the next step is to explore if this postmodern solidarity harms or alienates others.

If Rorty is right, who is the *they*? Who is being left out of the cowboy image or illusion? Who is the *they* that aids in the solidarity of the *we* by its exclusion or marginalization? My first inclination, based on the interviews I have conducted and my own observations is to answer that the *they* is an imagined *they* (a generalized other) as opposed to any distinct group of people. At first it seems everyone can lay claim to the cowboy image, and participate in cowboy culture. Almost any class, racial or ethnic

group can carve out their own niche and representation of the image to suit their own solidarity needs. This is an idea I will have to investigate further.

Summarizing, involvement in cowboy representations and culture creates solidarity. Not the all-encompassing solidarity envisioned by the enlightenment, but rather a solidarity forged by the creation of language games, illusion and simulacra of cowboy cultures. This solidarity can be considered a positive benefit of postmodernity, none the less. It unites people of many races, nations and backgrounds and provides a medium for social exchange and personal interaction that seems very satisfying to most of its participants. Most cowboy participants share this interpretation, even though their experiences and descriptions are mingled with considerable blindness, chaos, contradiction and segregation. This is evidenced by the inconsistency and contingency in cowboy definitions, identities, hierarchies, and the separation of black and white cowboy functions. This work is just a piece of the story and does not answer who the *they* is.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION: THE POSTMODERN COWBOY HERO

Open spaces, a rough frontier where there were still dangerous Indians, both from the north and the mountains to the west, and labor performed almost entirely on horseback began to create those attitudes and values known in New Spain as *charro*. The *charro* was not just a horseman or a cowboy; he represented a genuine, if somewhat limited culture and way of men of the old Aztec empire. The *vaquero* might still be legally and socially a peon—but he rode horseback, and this changed his outlook. There was an old saying; to be a *vaquero* was to be a hero; to be a *ranchero* was to be a king. (Fehrenbach p74, 75)

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and news stations were broadcasting the images of catastrophe, dehydration, flooding, looting and chaos rampant in Louisiana. Jake, Mr. Chevy's son was moved by empathy to offer assistance. Jake is an internal medicine doctor who graduated at the top of his class. He was offered a position at the prestigious Mayo clinic, but chose to stay close to home and specialize in hematology at Capitol Regional Medical Center. After seeing the devastation in New Orleans, Jake decided he would assemble a team of doctors and volunteers and drive to the hardest hit areas. Later when I interviewed Jake he commented on his decision to make the trip:

The principle motivation was just that people needed help and it did not seem to be coming. Just the desire that I had to do something. Oh, probably the same motivation behind any endeavor like that. You always want to be really needed, and to do good things. The pictures and the images they were showing from that area gave the impression that people were in dire straights. And certainly, some areas they absolutely were.

When I was informed Jake was going to go to Louisiana, I decided to ask permission to tag along to provide support. I invited my friend Eric along when Jake said it would be beneficial to take as many people as possible. Jake sent out a call to all the

doctors and first year residents at Capitol Regional to join him on the expedition. To his surprise, none of the residents who are first year doctors volunteered to go. This particular fact irritated Jake for several days. He could not understand why young residents just starting their careers who have nothing else to do would not seize this opportunity. Jake emailed all of the doctors of the hospital hoping for a large favorable response but only two doctors Cathy Ann Freedman and Gill Battle answered the invite.

After the trip, I asked Jake, “Why do you think you were one of the few doctors to go?”

I don't know. People kept asking me, ‘Well what group are you going to be a part of? Do you know what you are going to be doing? How do you know you are going to go where you are needed?’ Most people said they wanted to go, but they wanted to make sure it was something organized. But the problem was, there was nothing organized. Some people wanted to go but were hesitant. Truth is, no one wanted to take charge. At some point, people have to stop saying that and someone has to say, ‘I'll take charge whether you make the wrong decision or right decision.’ My decision to go, or our decision to go... I mean I don't think we accomplished as much as I hoped to accomplish, but shit I had to do something! The motivation was clearly to help and the reasons others didn't go, I don't know.

Prior to leaving for Louisiana, Jake informed me we would pull out first thing Friday morning. I asked how long he thought we would be gone and he replied, “I am not sure, but I will probably come back by Wednesday night.” This was just one of many of the unknown variables that might have led to such a small turnout. People are accustomed to order and predictability and this trip did not offer such comfort. Seemingly, many people have developed such a dependency on routine, predictability and order (McDonaldization), that they are not willing to risk taking a trip that is full of unknown variables, even if the trip will provide relief or help to others. Jake however

seems to excel in these types of situations, and I have come to believe this is associated with the cowboy spirit. Jake at times does not seem to be so quick to make such a connection. Yet, he does mention it when he explores his own motivation and actions. But, he humbly qualifies his actions by stating,

Of course, I was in a position where I could get the resources to go. Being from a rural area, you have the things they need...generators, diesel. A lot of the things people down there just did not have. That assisted me. The generators, the trailer to haul the livestock, the additional diesel tank, just things we use on the ranch. The assets were available because I do what I do. Like the people that went along with us. They had some camping gear, but they did not have those things.

But I did not think it was that simple. Many other people who possessed the means to go did not go. There is a difference with Jake.

This trip was designed to be a medical relief trip. But as time went by, I realized it carried a greater significance and a deeper meaning for Jake and surprisingly myself. I had no intention of writing about the trip before leaving, but as events unfolded, I began to see a connection to contemporary cowboys. I discovered sociological factors at work that my normal participant observation had not revealed. I developed deeper insight into the spirit and experiences driving Jake and our mission, and consequently a deeper insight and appreciation for contemporary cowboy culture. By the end of the trip, I had a new understanding and interpretation of the cowboy spirit primarily based on Carl Jung's (1969/1959) concept of rebirth.

Jake has been married 12 years and is the father of four boys. He lives in Morgan and owns about thirty crossbred cows. Crossbred cows have been genetically mixed with various breeds of cows to select for desired traits. Jake raises these cows to produce show

steers from their offspring. He lived on a small ranch during his childhood that is now about 900 acres. Reflecting on this childhood he states,

I grew up basically on a small family farm; 300 acres. My father was a veterinarian so I was exposed to animals. I was there for sick animals, deliveries, and autopsies so I had exposure to animals and livestock from an early age. I had animals and I had a horse or a pony when I was about ten years old.

Jake shared he always wanted to be a cowboy during his childhood. He dreamed of being a cowboy the way other children dream of being a fireman or policeman or astronaut. Thinking back he claims,

Yeah, I mean Yeah I guess when I was younger, when I was a teenager an adolescent I didn't really under... I thought being a cowboy was fine, like a potential career. I didn't really realize as a career there's not really anything out there, other than being a rodeo cowboy, which is completely different. It is just an athlete. It's uh, that's just what they do. I um, I guess its a lot like most young kids-it's a policeman, a fireman, a you know a cowboy.

Jake aspired to be a cowboy from a young age and eventually did embrace the cowboy lifestyle as he moved into his teenage years, but later he realized he could not depend on being a cowboy for a suitable career. Seemingly, a sobering realization hit Jake and likely has hit many other aspiring cowboys. Many young athletes encounter a similar realization when they realize they will not be able to play pro sports for a living. There is a large supply of athletes but few positions for them to fill. Likewise there are a large number of aspiring cowboys but fewer and fewer jobs for them to occupy. Jake states,

Now what are they (cowboys who gone through cowboy training on ranches) going to do with that when they are done. They are probably going to have to go find a real job. Most of the guys I know around here that are hired cowboys are young. (The pay is inconsistent). There is no benefit package, and there is no insurance. It is an ok way of life when you are young for a few years or working your way through college, but is not a promising career.

In our interview, I asked Jake, "Do you consider yourself a cowboy?"

Hmm, not as much as I used to. When I was kid I certainly did consider myself a cowboy, but now I don't uh... Um, I like to think I have a *cowboy spirit*. I have gotten away from riding the horses and doing the cowboy thing. But I still think of myself as a cowman, which is kind of different. The cowboy is the guy that is out working the cows, the guy you would actually hire to help you, but uh but the cowman has a different connotation. It's the guy who owns the cows, has the ranch. A cowboy is the one who works on the ranch. They end up being one and the same. Most cowboys as they get older, hopefully want to be the cowman. The cowboy is more of the act of handling the cows; rides, ropes brands etc. You can't be a cowman if at some point you were not a cowboy. I couldn't become a doctor and then buy a ranch and put a lot of cows on it and then really call myself a cowman. That's my interpretation.

Even though he believes he has that cowboy spirit and once was an official cowboy, Jake now defines himself as a cowman. Jake attributes this transformation mostly to age and maturity. However, he does concede that they are one and the same, so in a round about way Jake does see himself as a cowboy. He began to think of himself as a cowman and not a cowboy the first time he was forced to call other cowboys to help him work his cows or build fence. As he described this call to hire other cowboys, I thought of the similar call he sent out to me and the other doctors at the hospital to help him on the trip.

Jake had a desire to go, was willing to lead, but needed other doctors and helpers to assist him. In a sense, Jake was filling the role of cowman on the trip to Louisiana. He provided the leadership, supplies, trucks, and assembled the team. The other doctors, Eric and I were the cowboys and Jake was the cowman or the trail boss. With Jake as the trail boss, the other two doctors were the skilled cowboys and Eric and I were the lowly cooks and wagon drivers. Eric and I were needed to drive the maroon dulley truck, to help loading and unloading and carrying out various errands. We were not going on a trail ride, or going to rescue helpless settlers from raiding Indians, but it felt like it. It felt like a combination of a heroic rescue mission and a college road trip. It was thrilling, exciting,

and dangerous and we were not bound by time or rules. We were heading off into unknown territory with a lack of clearly defined goals or boundaries. Unlike college road trips, this adventure was guilt free and hangover free. It had all the positive aspects of a road trip without the negative consequences.

Jake called his father to get some of his ranch hands to gather supplies and prepare the trucks for the trip. The ranch hands washed out the cow manure from the trailer, topped of the diesel tanks, cleaned the trucks and loaded the supplies. They loaded approximately fifty bottles of water holding 5 gallons each. The type of bottled water that comes in blue plastic bottles and is used in office water machines. They also tossed in twelve cases of small 12-ounce water bottles. They loaded three large gas powered generators that roll on wheels, and a propane cooker with seven additional propane tanks. The men added ten red five-gallon gas cans, and seven two-gallon gas cans for the generators. The doctors brought boxes and coolers of medical supplies and medicines. These included items such as surgical gloves, first aid kits, and numerous types of medicines such as insulin and painkillers. While we were loading, Jake's mom assembled three large boxes of food, which were more than enough for five people for a week. The ranch hands placed two large white coolers with water, sodas, oranges, and apples in the bed of the maroon dolly, and Eric and I added a medium green cooler with similar contents. Two small coolers were placed inside the trucks, so we could grab drinks and snacks without stopping. Eric and I added numerous camping supplies such as tents, sleeping bags, blankets, camping chairs, lanterns, a Coleman butane cooker and cooking supplies. Jake and the other doctors also brought similar items. Jake enthusiastically

brought an army cot to sleep on for the trip that he just purchased a few days earlier. He also handed out 4 Motorola walkie-talkies that he purchased for the trip.

Jake decided we would take his F250 Diesel Power Stroke Extended Cab white truck and his twenty-seven foot cattle trailer along with the maroon dully belonging to his father's company. The reason for taking the maroon dully was because it is equipped with a 100-gallon diesel tank in the bed. This would allow us to make the entire trip with both trucks without the need to refuel at a gas station. Reports from the news broadcasts indicated that gas stations anywhere near the devastation of Katrina were destroyed. As we traveled we discovered that even an hour from the coast, stations were without electricity so the pumps would not work. Stations that were open had lines as long as a half a mile. We saw one station, which was functional the first day of the trip, had been vandalized overnight and all the pumps were laying flat on the ground and the store completely shut down.

We added two more unique items that influenced our interactions on the trip. I almost felt like a cowboy myself traveling with these last additions: a long black twelve-gauge shotgun and a hand pistol. As instructed, the ranch hands had placed the shotgun on the floorboard directly behind the driver's seat, but in the middle of the row so that the driver could grab it quickly. Two boxes of new shotgun shells were stuffed in the open compartment in the driver's side door. The boxes were tall enough that they stuck out about two inches, which also made them easy to retrieve. The hand pistol was zipped in a small canvas case and closed in the glove box in front of the passenger's seat. If the decision was mine, I would have objected and not allowed the guns in the truck.

However, the decision was not mine and it did not trouble me enough to resist. I quieted the dissonance I was feeling with the thought I knew the guns would not be used.

I am well aware people have many different values when it comes to guns, and I did not have a problem submitting to Jake's decision to carry them on the trip. Even though it did not really trouble me, I was not totally comfortable taking the guns for a few reasons. First, accidents; I have heard many times people are more likely to shoot themselves, family members or friends than they are to shoot an attacker. Second, I did not want to get in any trouble with law enforcement officers, and third I did not want someone to steal the guns or who knows what else. Plus, I did not want to be forced into a moral dilemma where I might be tempted to use the guns to defend us. This thought seemed ridiculous, even while I was thinking it. I knew I would not need or use the guns on the trip, but it was peculiar how much I kept imagining myself being "forced" to use them. I had a vision of Eric getting attacked and me grabbing the gun and...

As we were driving, I continued to have mixed feelings about the guns. On one hand, I would never keep a gun in my home and the thought of me driving with guns was definitely an unusual experience. I also felt I had to be responsible and make sure Eric did not handle or do anything with the guns. Eric was definitely fixated on the guns. He informed me he never fired a gun, so he exhibited the same fascination a twelve year old shows the first time he gets to shoot. It is strange the effect guns have on boys and men alike. It is as if guns have a hypnotic magnetic power. I have to admit I too was feeling the effects, but I was choosing to be more reserved and to display calmness. But my

imagination was very active on the inside. I kept imagining scenes like attackers trying to steal our cargo and coming at us with guns...I would snap out of it and think "That is ridiculous Ron."

It did not help that before we departed the ranch hands were constantly talking about the looting taking place in New Orleans. Jake's parents were especially worried and even fearful. Many people were claiming that tension was high, that "they" were going to claim marshal law and that people were getting hijacked and robbed at gunpoint in Louisiana. On the news or by word of mouth, I heard numerous stories of people being shot, helicopters being shot at, shoot-outs etc. One of the ranch hands told a story about a relief team stopping at a cop checkpoint. The cop asked the driver if they had a gun and the driver said no. So, the cop gave the driver a gun that had been confiscated and told the driver to be careful. Of course, I did not believe the stories, but they still created a certain amount of uneasiness. Eric responded, "I am going to go get my 9." In street slang or gun talk this would mean he was going to get a 9mm handgun; but I knew what he meant. He was making an inside joke and I laughed when he left and returned with a 9-iron golf club from my golf bag.

I have listened to sociologists who have covered numerous catastrophes. They claim that news coverage is often over-hyped and falsified when reporting vandalism or looting. For example, reporters will film people from a distance who are retrieving items from their own store or home and claim the people are looting. Eric commented on the footage of looters in New Orleans on television and I assured him that the stories and the

amount of looting were probably grossly exaggerated. I confidently told him, “We won’t see anything like that. We’ll get there and everything will be calm, you watch.”

Nevertheless, there was a certain amount of nervousness, and even excitement in the air as we headed out. The guns symbolized a break from security and predictability. They represented an element of danger, a break from the norm and strangely enough they represented supplies and weapons. I have little experience with guns, and I have only truly associated them with recreation and hunting, and even hunting seems like recreation or sport. But this time the guns were for protection. They were loaded in the truck numerous times before, but this time they were for self-defense, they were loaded to shoot people not animals or targets. So the guns carried new meaning for me, a meaning that was likely more common to cowboys who envisioned fighting Indians or shooting Grizzly Bears. In Jungian terms, the guns were a symbol of rebirth. They were reconnected to the essential nature of their collective ancestors. These two particular guns were never carried for such a purpose and probably never will be again, but for a few days they were reborn. They occupied the same position and character of Old West cowboy rifles or six shooters. The guns were a manifestation and a symbol of the transcendence of life induced by the trip.

Despite the serious nature of our trip and the addition of the guns, the initial experience seemed surreal and even superficial. As we departed it felt very much like the Yee-Haw scene in *City Slickers*, when Mitch (Billy Crystal) and his friends start the cattle drive. As they start out they yell “Yee-Haw” and wave their hats in the air as dust flies and cattle bellow. Just a few days before each left the normalcy and emptiness of

their everyday lives in New York City to participate in the cattle-drive for a ranch in New Mexico. They were full of excitement and had all the stuff: horses, ropes, cows, and hats. Something was missing though. The cattle drive was “real”, but they weren’t real cowboys, they were pretending in a real setting.

Just like the actors in *City Slickers*, I too felt like I was just taking a short vacation. Going to Louisiana was a welcome break from everyday life, an excursion, and a chance to get away and not think about business as usual. The gravity of the situation did not totally register with me. Our team did not have horses and cows but we did have pick-up trucks and a cattle trailer. We were not going on a cattle drive, but we were going on a long trip into potentially dangerous and devastated land. We would not face Indians but possibly looters. Even though I knew this would not happen, we had real guns and we had the same Yee-Haw excitement. I felt like a cowboy, but not a “real” cowboy. I felt like Mitch, a weekend warrior, a *City-Slicker* cowboy.

I asked Jake, “Did you see a connection in your decision to go and being a cowboy?” His answer surprised me and was quite insightful. I assumed he would say no, but this was not the case. His answer provided me the first glimpse at a connection with the trip and cowboys in light of Carl Jung’s concept of the rebirth archetype. Jake answered,

If you listen to the old country songs, well there was a classic. What was that old Willie Nelson song, um *My Hero’s Have Always Been Cowboys* actually the name of the song. Basically, It implies that there is an *underlying spirit* that the cowboy does not care whether you like him or not. He would like for you to like him, but he is not going to go out of his way or change his mind or do something just so you would. It also implied this independent spirit and getting things done and a desire to help. Not to mention the ability to do things on your own. Even if you don’t have money or things. It’s an ability to get it done.

Jake is describing the model inner-directed cowboy, who is guided by his own internal piloting and not the opinions of others. He will not change his personality to please others and he is able to overcome obstacles with a deep inner reserve of strength, skill and perseverance. This is the underlying spirit of the cowboy that Jake sees operating in himself. This is the underlying spirit that seemed to surface during the trip. Many respondents claim that “real cowboys are a dying breed,” but that the spirit of the cowboy lives on. After the trip to Louisiana, I am inclined to agree. Inner-directed cowboys are dying and only exist in small numbers, but the inner-directed cowboy *spirit* is alive and well. I witnessed its rebirth on the trip to Louisiana. I was impacted by its appearance first hand.

It is Jung’s theorizing that offers a fundamental understanding of this occurrence of rebirth. In Jungian terms, contents of the collective unconscious are known as archetypes. The collective unconscious is not individual but universal and is deeper than the personal unconscious. It is inborn and does not arrive from personal experience and acquisition. Individuals possess a superficial layer of personal unconsciousness, but Jung asserts that the larger collective unconscious is the key layer. Springing from this layer, archetypes are “archaic or--I would say--primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (p. 5). Jung states, “The archetype is empty and purely formal nothing” (p.13). Once it is perceived it has passed through the individual’s consciousness (p. 5). “The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear” (p. 5). For example, the

rebirth archetype can occur in various domains as an experience of transcendence or as a subjective transformation. Jung describes five fundamental forms for the rebirth archetype to express itself.

Rebirth (renovation). The fourth form concerns rebirth in the strict sense; that is to say, rebirth within the span of individual life... This word has a special flavour; its whole atmosphere suggests the idea of renovation, renewal, or even of improvement brought about by magical means. Rebirth may be a renewal without any change of being, inasmuch as the personality which is renewed is not changed in its essential nature, but only its functions, or parts of the personality, are subjected to healing, strengthening, or improvement. (p.114)

The inner-directed cowboy spirit was reborn in Jake during our trip. His youthful ambitions were fulfilled in an opportune window of time and circumstance. He could not have a career as a cowboy, but for this trip he could experience a renewing in his personality; a Jungian rebirth. He could function out of the adventurous, self-sufficient, heroic cowboy spirit detailed by Willie Nelson. Like the guns, Jake's essential nature stayed the same, but his purpose and self-definition was altered. For a few brief days the inner cowboy spirit was not a dormant piece of his soul. It was able to express itself in action and personality. I was fortunate enough to witness this rebirth, and similarly I passed through a rebirth of my own.

Riesman states,

Certainly, it is ambition that strikes us as an outstanding trait of the heroes of boys' literature in the era of inner-direction. Moreover, it is an ambition with which the child reader can identify, even if the particular goal—to fight Indians or find the treasure or North Pole or swim icy rivers or detect crime—is at the moment a remote one; that is, the reader could in fantasy emulate the moral qualities of the hero, such as his bravery and his self-control. (p. 101)

This is exactly the process Jake esteemed and the one I felt we engaged. Riesman himself even throws out the example of fighting Indians. We were not fighting Indians or fantasizing by reading a story. I was not imagining being Old Shatterhand while reading a Karl May book, but I was visualizing heroic deeds, overcoming obstacles and exploring dangerous lands. The medium was not a book but an actual trip. The enemy was not Indians, but Hurricane Katrina. Our team was given a live opportunity to emulate inner-directed heroes, and we accepted.

This is similar to Mitch and his friends in *City Slickers* pretending to be cowboys while actually doing cowboy work. They were not reading a story about a cattle drive, but they were participating in an imaginative narrative provided by a semi-controlled cattle drive. The cattle drive had a beginning and an ending and the actors were moved from plot to plot within the story. They had considerable freedom to navigate and influence scripts, but the general story would be the same. So, for two weeks they could pretend to be real cowboys while actually doing cowboy work.

For us who went to Louisiana, the preparation and actual events of the trip were also a break from the norm. Like Mitch and his friends something was missing. So, our imaginations filled the gaps. We also could pretend to be “real” heroes, even while doing something that truly was heroic. This is comparable to a movie in which the main character plays the role of an actor. Timothy Beal in *Roadside Religion* (2005) describes a similar effect in a variety of domains.

...Compare this dynamic to the theater experience, in which a degree of unreality is important to the audience’s imaginative participation in the story world of the play. The experience of the theatrical drama as real often depends on more or less unrealistic stagecraft: a stage, two-dimensional facades and other backdrops,

makeup, and costuming. As the narrative drama progresses, the audience becomes less and less aware of the distance between them and their everyday world on the one hand and the actors and their story world on the other. (p. 45)

I was very much engaged in the process Beal is describing. At the beginning of our trip, nothing felt real. Only as time passed, did I truly get caught up in the events of the trip in a convincing fashion.

Riesman states, “Thus, while these heroes, like the modern heroes, almost invariably won, the reader was encouraged to be concerned not only with the final victorious outcome but with the inner struggles that preceded it and made it possible” (p.101-102). Riesman is describing the same type of goal-driven, ambition-laden connection to heroes that Jake is alluding to in his comments, but Riesman also details the importance of the preexisting inner struggles. He describes the preceding inner-struggle as an integral part of the process of emulating inner-directed heroes such as cowboys. This inner-struggle was evident in Jake as he wrestled with going to Louisiana. This inner-struggle was evident when his fellow doctors did not join Jake as he anticipated. Nevertheless, Jake made the decision to go and was determined to stick to that decision. Jake even claims that this perseverance and self-sufficiency is part of the cowboy spirit and he embraced these qualities in the midst of conflict and resistance. This behavior exemplifies the inner-directed qualities Riesman is describing.

Willie Nelson’s heroes have always been cowboys, and Jake always dreamed of being a cowboy and consequently a hero. He had dealt with his own inner-struggles as an adolescent when he realized he could not be a cowboy as a career. He would have to change his goals and career ambitions. However, the desire to be a cowboy, to be

adventurous, to be self-sufficient or even a hero never truly died. In our interview, he even admits that this was part of his motivation for being a doctor. Being a doctor has given him many opportunities to save peoples lives and be a hero. But this trip offered him the chance to reconcile all of these aspects of his personality. He could be a hero, doctor and cowboy all at once.

As we traveled on our way down Interstate Highway 10, Jake was the noble fearless leader, the one with drive to help others and the personality and resources to make a difference. Eric and I thought the walkie-talkies were cool and reminisced about walkie-talkies that we had as children. Back then the signal was so weak you could only get twenty feet away to hear, but our imaginations took over and we had hours of fun. These modern walkie-talkies were powerful and covered several hundred feet. Eric and I regressed with the walkie-talkies in hand. We were like little boys playing war. “10-4, 10-4, Roger, over and out!” Of course we had to come up with funny handles for one another too.

Jake drove his truck and trailer as if it was a sports car. He weaved in and out of traffic easily. I was impressed with how he avoided cement railing and traversed narrow bridges. I ran interference like a good wingman. I followed Jake closely and tried not to let any cars between us, and when Jake signaled to make a lane change I strived to get in the lane when needed to hold up traffic. But, as we drove through Baton Rouge Jake almost jack knifed into an eighteen-wheeler. He was traveling about 70MPH on I10 when he realized he would have to take highway 12 because officials would not let anyone travel directly to New Orleans. So, he moved quickly into the appropriate lane but

realized a little too late that the traffic was at a complete stop. Jake had to lock up the brakes and swerve to miss the eighteen-wheeler. It was a close call.

Once on highway 12 we headed for Slickton. Jake had previously contacted hospital authorities in Slickton and was given permission to offer assistance. Jake wanted to go to New Orleans, but the medical officials told him they were sending a large number of the evacuees who needed medical attention to Slickton. Jake complied but had a desire to get closer to the hardest hit areas. On the way to Slickton Jake received yet another call and was redirected to Cornerstone Hospital. This was a small hospital and was even further from New Orleans.

In Cornerstone we made a wrong turn which took us through a devastated part of town. Cornerstone is probably an hour north of the Gulf Coast, but Hurricane Katrina caused considerable damage to this area. Moving slowly down the street, we could see thousands of hundred foot pine trees strewn everywhere in all directions. The reality of Katrina hit me for the first time. Almost every house we passed had two or three trees lodged in its roof. Pine needles and pinecones covered seemingly every flat surface. Power lines were not only down, but were cut, split, and thrown like spaghetti in yards by Katrina. The power company crews that had already begun the long road to recovery. Residents were outside working to clear brush or pile trash.

After traveling about two miles Jake slowed down considerably. As he did, I noticed several hundred people standing at a gas station. They covered the entire parking lot clustered in small groups averaging four or five. There were few children and many of the male standers were not wearing shirts. There were only one or two cars at the gas

station and the station itself was closed. My emotions were pricked and I began to actually understand that people did not have electricity or running water. But, they had time; lots of time, since there were no jobs to work at, no gas for cars and no stores were open. They had lots of time. We had sympathy for these onlookers but did not stop to help. We wanted to reach our destination first and offer assistance where the local authorities directed. Eventually, we corrected our navigational mistake and made our way to Cornerstone Hospital.

Cornerstone Hospital seemed vacant. The building itself looked only a few years old, but was particularly small for a hospital. There were no cars in the front of the building. There were no people going in and out of the large sliding glass front. There were only a few cars on the side of the building. The parking lot was covered with pine needles and pinecones and trees were down around the perimeter of the lot, but overall the hospital was in excellent shape. Jake pulled directly in front of the main row of parking spots in the front corner of the hospital. Maneuvering a cattle trailer of that size is almost equivalent to driving an eighteen wheeler, so Jake positioned the trailer so he could make an easy get away. He did not hassle with trying to find a parking spot, but pulled in sideways and parked his truck and trailer across about five parking spots.

A woman in purple nursing scrubs pulled up, got out of her car and began to walk to the back of the hospital. Jake and the other doctors waived her down and caught up with her. After a few minutes they came back to Eric and I and told us the emergency room was in the back and they were going to go see if they could help. Eric and I waited

with the trucks. After a few moments, Eric decided to get out the “9” to kill time. Within minutes we had made a game out of hitting pinecones instead of golf balls.

Within twenty minutes Jake and the docs came back and told us it was a bust. To their surprise the emergency doctors did not need or want their help. The local doctors actually had less work than normal, because many of the patients that would routinely come in were staying home. Finding the hospital desolate was a surprise and it was a definite contrast to the reports on the news. To reconcile the difference, I concluded that this hospital was too small or insignificant to be in the loop for the primary relief effort. Jake decided we would continue further west and south to Slickton.

Arriving at the hospital in Slickton, the scene was totally different. Two helicopters rested in the grass field diagonally in front of the hospital between two different parking lots. The larger chopper had just landed and the blades were still moving the grass in all directions. The smaller two-seat chopper was empty. The hospital in Slickton was considerably larger and cars filled the front parking lot and even spilled over into grassy areas. To access the hospital grounds we attained clearance from a temporary checkpoint set up by guards and policeman at the main entrance. I began to get excited because of the activity all around. People were walking back and forth between buildings (the emergency room was a smaller independent building separated by the main entrance road and two small parking lots). In addition to helicopters, there were EMT stations in smaller parking lots, plenty of cop cars and an FBI mobile trailer behind the emergency room. I was glad to be in the midst of the action.

We were directed to park by the other long trailers near the emergency room. Once again the docs departed and went to the main hospital wing to apply for service. Oddly enough they came back with the same news; they were not wanted inside the hospital. The local staff was able to handle the patient load because they actually had fewer patients than usual. My excitement was premature. Something did not register. There was too much activity for nothing substantial. Our team decided since it was late afternoon that we should stay at the hospital for the night and reevaluate in the morning.

During this time, a few helicopters started flying in and out but there were no evacuees on them. The EMTs who were sitting around began to unload their trailers and set up generators and a triage processing area. Jake questioned one of the head EMTs, who informed him there would be a large number of evacuees from New Orleans flown into the hospital in a few hours. The evacuees would be processed by the EMTs and then given access to food, water and the restroom. During this time they would be relocated by bus or ambulance depending on their condition.

With renewed excitement we decided to help with the process and began by loaning one of the generators for fans because the humidity and heat were scorching. We moved the trucks and trailer to the back by the FBI truck. As we began to assemble chairs and tables no one seemed to be in a hurry and there were not clear expectations about how to set-up or who was in charge. A paramedic who was driving an ambulance informed us, "At the last place the teams set up a processing center things got out of control." He claimed the evacuees were angry, tired and restless and began to cause a

disturbance. He added that paramedics had to abandon the site because people were trying to steal medications and other supplies from the vehicles.

Somehow in the course of preparation, the EMTs and the security guards assumed Jake and the docs were assigned to process the evacuees. Everyone began to defer to the docs and thought they were in authority. No one on our team said anything to discourage this belief. Secretly, Jake told us, "If no one really knows who is in charge, I am totally comfortable taking the lead and we can handle the situation." At that point, we followed Jake's direction and adopted our management role. We were not going to shy from the responsibilities because we drove all the way from Texas to help so we seized the opportunity. As darkness fell, we instructed others on how to align the tables and we positioned the boxes of surgical gloves we brought with us. The docs situated their stethoscopes around their necks and loaded their fanny packs with first aid supplies. Jake even had a light that strapped to his head that kept his hands free from holding a flashlight. This of course made everyone one else jealous.

At the conclusion of this preparation, the EMTs and guards started asking who is really in charge: FEMA, the Hospital, the FBI? FBI is a bit misleading. There was only one FBI agent, unless there were more in the FBI trailer, one guy was it. Interestingly, the relief teams concluded the FBI agent was in charge but not because of their knowledge of government protocol. They reminded me of getting a math question right but using the wrong formulas to get the answer. Essentially, they were saying the agent must be in charge because he was carrying several guns and one was an automatic machine gun strapped to his leg. In the midst of the relief effort it boiled down to one simple point,

highlighted by one paramedic's comments, "Someone authorized to carry that kind of weapon must be in charge!" Maybe because the gun was so visible people made a connection with authority. His guns were not reborn in this crisis, like our guns. His guns were designed for the reason he wore them. Actually, I am sure he was the legitimate chief authority in the situation and he acted accordingly, but the reflections others had about his authority were almost barbarous. After him there was not a clear chain of command, so people still remained in a slight state of uncertainty.

Nevertheless as darkness crept in we had a semblance of a processing center with a triage area. We strategically placed tables and yellow caution tape to direct people to water, the restrooms or the hospital if necessary. An hour later ambulances began to fill the parking lots and streets. Within the next thirty minutes approximately twenty-five ambulances were parked waiting with the lights on. As everyone waited, most of the drivers were resting or even sleeping. I was curious why I did not see hardly any additional paramedics and I am not sure where they were, but I assumed resting in the back of the ambulances. This was the plan: 1) helicopters in 2) process evacuees through triage area headed by our team 3) EMTs assist 4) Evacuees move either to ambulance, bus or hospital. However, no buses; there were no buses. After another hour of waiting we were informed that the whole operation was postponed until the morning because the buses did not arrive. Ughhhh!!!

Jake said that the hospital would give us a room for the night and walked us over to check in. A security guard was policing the main entrance but Jake said, "We're the doctors from Texas." The guard did not hesitate to let us in. Immediately inside

approximately ten to fifteen people were noisily bustling around the main nurses' station on the left. While we stopped to find out who was assigning the rooms, a nurse came up to Eric and asked, "Are ya'll the docs from Texas?"

Eric answered quietly, "They are. We are just assistants."

But, she halfway cut him off and because of the noise and business of the area did not really grasp the qualifier he offered. She heard "Yes."

The nurse said, "Oh, thank you so much for coming!" and a few others joined in with more gratitude.

Eric and I answered, "Your welcome."

"They think were doctors." Eric turned and whispered to me. I returned a quiet laugh and a smile. We were enjoying the moment and the effort it would take to correct the mistake did not seem warranted. People were handling more serious matters.

At that moment one of the men at the back desk asked loudly, "Dr. Battle?" "Dr. Battle!" Dr. Battle was one of the doctors on our team. Before we assembled the triage area he was able to leave a message for the FEMA dispatcher for the region. The doctors wanted the FEMA officials to know their availability for service and willingness to go anywhere. The dispatcher was returning the call to give orders. Dr. Battle addressed the dispatcher but shortly after handed the phone to Jake. After hanging up, Jake shared that there was a shelter the dispatcher wanted us to go to the next day.

The staff personnel assigned us room #103 and #104 and proceeded to ask our last names to give us wrist bracelets. Once again Eric and I were mistaken for doctors, because our labels started with "DR." At that point we were enjoying our special status.

They gave our team two rooms that were reserved for security teams from another district, but the teams had not arrived yet. Walking the corridors Eric joked, “We need to be the kind of doctors that can’t help out in an emergency.” Pretending to be in an emergency scenario, Eric said in a deep voice, ‘Sorry mam’ I can’t help you. I am just a Proctologist?” So he concluded, “Yeah, we need to be Proctologists or Neurosurgeons. That way we can still be doctors, but will have a good out.” Even Jake who is normally reserved and serious had a good laugh about Eric’s improvisation.

Reaching the rooms we began to discuss who should sleep in which room? Everyone said that it did not matter, so I immediately disclosed that I do not snore. Jake and Eric both echoed my claim, so we collectively decided snoring was the best criteria to consider and Jake, Eric and I took the first room. There were two automatic hospital beds in each room, so Jake enthusiastically brought his new army cot and unfolded it in the middle of the room. It felt like we were camping out, and Jake was enjoying his chance to “rough it.” But, we were far from roughing it. We never expected to be sleeping in nice beds or have such special treatment when we left Morgan. We assumed we would be sleeping in the cattle trailer or tents. But the hospital was running back-up generators, so our rooms had air conditioning and running water. We even had the privilege of taking showers. At that point, I felt a little guilty. We were getting special treatment but had not actually done anything significant or helped a single person.

As Eric, Jake and I turned off the lights and settled down a nurse rapped on the door. Jake answered, but stayed behind the door because he was shirtless. The nurse said the security team was here and someone wanted to make us move. After she thought

about if for a second she told us to stay put and said she would work it out. She asked Jake to write the names of all of the doctors with our team, their specialty and which room they were staying in. Jake wrote that Eric and I were Neurosurgeons. So now it was official. We all had a good laugh and went to bed.

In the morning: nothing. I was surprised. The buses never came so the evacuees were not delivered to the hospital and at least half of the ambulances had departed. So, after another let down, we dispatched to Cornerstone High School as instructed the night before. Despite all the commotion we left another hospital that did not need our help. We were informed the local high school had been transformed into a special needs shelter, but we anticipated another unproductive outing because we were going back to Cornerstone further away from New Orleans.

Pulling up in front of the High School, we parked on the main road and not in the parking lot. Once again we were positioned for an easy get away and Eric and I stayed with the trucks. Jake and the doctors went in to evaluate the situation, and Eric and I waited for thirty minutes expecting Jake to return with familiar news. However, this time Jake called out on the walkie-talkies, "Were going to stay here guys. Come check in."

"Roger that" we answered with enthusiasm.

A sheriff directed us to the desk and we were issued identification. Actually, the I.D.'s were economical Cornerstone High School visitor stickers with a large blank space. As Eric and I wrote our names with black markers, the receptionist asked what group we are with. We informed her that we are with the doctors from Houston and Eric

tried to convince her he was a Neurosurgeon, but she wasn't buying. Thus, we were officially no longer doctors, but our time to help had arrived.

The halls of the shelter were busy with people and filled with various machines, beds and medical equipment. The gymnasium, cafeteria and a large commons area were converted into the main housing areas. Approximately 300-400 evacuees were housed in the shelter. Flooded out of their facilities in New Orleans, two groups of nursing home residents were moved to the shelter. One group occupied the cafeteria and the other the commons. The gymnasium was crowded with evacuees with conditions requiring special attention. For example many were disabled, elderly, blind, or mentally handicapped; and a few people were amputees and others were diagnosed with mental illness. In addition to special needs patients, evacuees who were not able to get their medications were sent to the high school to see the doctors for prescriptions and checkups. These patients could not stay at the shelter but still benefited from the makeshift triage facilities.

At Cornerstone High School a FEMA unit was managing the shelter. They had a team of approximately twenty people color coordinated in brown uniforms. The team consisted of a couple of doctors, EMTs, pharmacists and nurses. After introductions, the FEMA director instructed Jake and the other docs to work the triage area. The shelter was organized, and the greeters and volunteer workers were in good spirits. The FEMA personnel were cordial, but seemed very disinterested overall. They had the same kind of emotionally distant affect McDonald's workers maintain behind the counter. They had the "been there done that" syndrome. Later, members of their team shared that this was their third hurricane in a month and this was business as usual for them. Jake also

attributed part of the apathy to a lack of pay. He claimed the salary for a doctor working for FEMA compared to other doctors is significantly lower.

During our follow-up interview, Jake revealed some of his disappointment, “I was very pleasantly surprised that the hospitals and shelters were very well organized on their local level. ...The only disappointment I had was that we made the long trip and I guess I had secretly hoped that everyone would say, ‘Oh, thank (goodness) y’all are here. There is so much for you to do.’ Actually, quite a few people were very appreciative. Several evacuees were amazed that we would travel so far to help. Initially, the FEMA team did not express much gratitude when we arrived, but by the end of the day they changed.

After the short debriefing the three docs Jake, Cathy Ann, and Gill went to work right away. They were eager to do anything after our previous disappointments. Cathy Ann fashioned an army fanny pack around her waste. She had bought it from army surplus store and it had a neat belt equipped with technical gadgets that was the envy of the entire team. Settling in, the docs began interviewing evacuees and determining their overall condition. They wrote prescriptions for people who lost their medicines and needed a new doctor. Those with pressing needs or special needs were treated immediately or admitted into the shelter. For example, one man’s collarbone was broken when two trees fell on his house during the hurricane. He had lost his home and his ability to take care of himself. A few people were stitched and released.

The docs also made rounds to all the evacuees who were stationed in the gymnasium. The docs stayed on their feet all day processing evacuees and orchestrating service for the special needs patients. Jake and the other two doctors were actually doing

the job of the EMT doctors. The EMT doctors were content to let Jake and the other doctors do the majority of the work.

Jake worked incessantly throughout the day, and only took a few minutes to grab a snack at lunch. The team processed 172 new patients the first day of work, while at the same time overseeing follow-up care for evacuees in the gymnasium. To do so, the three doctors made sure that certain people who needed assistance with eating and other basic functions were continually helped. Eric and I adopted the role of nurses to carry out their orders. We assisted several people in using the restroom and we also changed adult diapers. We assisted the doctors by positioning patients for examination, moving oxygen tanks, changing sheets, cleaning messes and whatever else was necessary. Many of the tasks were mundane but under the circumstances the rewards and impacts of such actions were far reaching.

We fed the elderly and handicapped, we helped patients like a 95-year-old woman named Emma Bakersfield who needed to be rotated every couple of hours because of bed soars. We soon realized one of the biggest needs Emma and other residents had was a need to talk and have someone listen. Emma was not able to contact any members of her family. She was alone. Phones were not working and no one in her family knew she was in the shelter. So, Eric and I sat with Emma and listened and shared our lives with her. She was proud of her age and how much she had worked in her lifetime. She was proud to have her own home. Life seemed simple for Emma and she was not overwhelmed by the storm. In fact, she was very optimistic and joyful. She wanted to know all about my family and about Eric's girlfriend. Eric actually got an earful. Emma told him the key to

life was to work hard and that he “better be a good boyfriend and he better be faithful.” Very respectfully and sincerely Eric assured Emma he would do so. Emma was confident Eric would do what was right because she reasoned anyone who would come so far to help others had to be a good person. She told us where she lived and made me promise to bring by my family and Eric to bring his girlfriend if we came back through Louisiana.

Through the course of the day, our team ministered relief to hundreds of people through medical and emotional support. Evacuees were thankful to tell their stories and some just needed to vent their frustrations. Others needed companionship or a sympathetic ear. Jake concluded, “We didn’t practice any fancy medicine, but the experience was worth it, we got to see a lot of people who just needed help and listened to a lot of stories of how people got out of New Orleans, and the surrounding parishes.” Whatever the need, our team did the best we could to meet it. By the end of the day, I felt like a hero.

A group of trustees from one of the local prisons were stationed at the shelter. Trustees are prisoners with shorter sentences who have displayed good behavior since being incarcerated. They are allowed certain freedoms and desirable jobs compared to other prisoners. At the shelter the trustees helped clean the bathrooms, load and unload trucks, cook and serve meals and assist with patients along with numerous other tasks. Eric and I made friends with several trustees and helped them unload relief trucks bringing food, water and supplies. This friendship paid off because that night the prisoners had appropriated a large amount of beef and were barbecuing behind the school. At the end of the day they treated Eric and I like honored guests. We were told a

company donated the meat because they had no way to keep it cool. Electricity was still out so the story was feasible enough to not question. The pork chops were too delicious for me to ask any skeptical questions. These guys were working hard and they deserved some fringe benefits.

The first night at the shelter Cathy and Gill slept on spare cots in the gymnasium. Jake, Eric and I slept in the cattle trailer. We parked the trucks and trailer directly on the school's main grassy yard. The normal rules of property and parking were on temporary hiatus, which added to the excitement of the adventure. It wasn't the same as sleeping out on the prairie under the stars during a cattle drive, but I imagined it accordingly. We were camping out and we had earned a good night's sleep. We were excited to be able to sleep in the cattle trailer-just to say we did. Jake set up his army cot and his sleeping bag again, using his old pillow, which was missing the pillowcase. The trailer would have been pitch black except Cathy Ann gave us a glow stick she picked up at the army surplus. It was an eight-inch tube filled with a curious chemical that would emit a mesmerizing fluorescent green light for twelve hours once squeezed. I made a mental note to buy some next time I went camping. This was a delightful simulacrum, much better than a lantern.

Eric and I crawled up into the overhead compartment of the trailer to sleep. The stainless steel was ice cold and Cathy Ann offered her foam egg crate for us to sleep on, and I quickly claimed it. Later Eric protested, but I did not let guilt sway me to share. It was not really big enough to sleep on without us being uncomfortably close, so I justified my claim by pointing out I did all the driving. We could have managed to share it, but I whined about my back and told Eric he would have to rough it since he is younger. In

addition, Eric and I did not think to bring pillows like Jake, so I grabbed the only roll of paper towels I could find and used it as a pillow. The roll was actually a perfect fit for my neck and head. I slept quite comfortably. Eric froze. He also had to sleep with his contacts because he forgot to bring solution. The disparity in our arrangement was an enjoyable subject for verbal jousting throughout the trip.

We started the second day at 6am and the entire team worked long and hard. The EMTs did not give us a final count for the second day, but reported that we helped well over 200 people. I was especially proud of our accomplishment. I know that we were a valuable source of relief and encouragement in the midst of significant loss. When I mentioned this sense of pride to Jake he responded, “That is one of the reasons people go into medicine; certainly, why people become surgeons. When you save someone’s life, it’s amazing. And everyone around you is praising you. You can’t beat that kind of feeling. When we all left, we wanted to help. We weren’t doing it for ourselves.”

Epiphany!

Everyone came together.

Everything came together.

We did *it!*

Everything clicked; progress, modernism and postmodernism, solidarity and the cowboy spirit. We were heroes!

Our team came from different backgrounds, age groups, genders, religions etc. I did not go on the trip for the same reasons as Jake. I did not share the same cowboy

upbringing as Jake. Jake commented on his motivation, “ I don’t know if that motivation ties back into being a cowboy and my upbringing unless you tie it back into that basic spirit I mentioned before: that cowboy spirit-self reliance and always wanting to help.” Yes, our motivation was different. My intentions were not as noble as Jake and I was not raised as a cowboy. I never had aspirations to be a cowboy. However, we both shared something special on this trip and the result was progress. We entered solidarity via the cowboy spirit.

In *City Slickers*, Mitch and his friends are just on vacation at the beginning of the movie. They are just out to have a good time, but everything changes. After many setbacks, after many challenges and mistakes something wonderful happens to their team. But first, Curly their trail boss dies. The professional or “real” cowboys get drunk, cause trouble and abandon the team. A few team members quit and head back. Eventually, only Mitch and his two friends Phil and Ed are left. The three have almost lost everything when a terrible storm hits and they reach a steep hill coupled with a deep and swift river. At that point Mitch’s friends begin to yell at one another.

Phil screams, “Look we did the best we could. Let’s just leave the herd and get the hell out of here!”

“No! A cowboy doesn’t leave his herd,” Ed answered emphatically.

“You are a sporting goods salesman!”

“Not today.”

At that point, in the midst of their postmodern simulacra version of a cattle drive everything came together. They were no longer pretending. They decided to move the

cattle across the river in spite of the great risks. They risked their own lives and safety to finish the cattle drive like real cowboys. Mitch almost dies saving a calf, but his friends rescue him. Doing so, the three become one. They are joined in solidarity. They are united by one cowboy spirit. As a result of their bond they are able to bring in the herd and finish the cattle drive. In the end the progress they made and their accomplishment were undeniable. Likewise while helping others our team went through a similar Jungian Rebirth of the *Vaquero* Spirit. On the surface things first appeared shallow and fake, but a significant transformation took control. We were forged in solidarity and even I shared briefly in the cowboy spirit Jake esteemed. We did not shoot the guns, but we were contemporary cowboys.

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