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## COMMENTARY

HOLISTIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PARTICIPATORY CONNECTIONS ON THE PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION

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### ABSTRACT

This article argues that when applied anthropology is conducted as genuinely participatory, community-based research, it is not just a method but a theory that challenges the epistemological paradigm of traditional research. Five community-based projects on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota are discussed, including: 1) a tourism initiative of the Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce with regional National Park Service interpretive staff; 2) the Oglala Sioux Parks and Recreation Authority's efforts to create the first Tribal National Park out of the South Unit of Badlands National Park; 3) The Lakota Funds' new Child Development Accounts and the financial literacy curriculum designed for kindergarten through eighth grade; 4) the Wounded Knee Community Development Corporation's summer youth construction project; and 5) First Peoples Fund's research on the opportunities and constraints for Native artists on the Northern Plains. Colorado State University graduate students and a Pine Ridge community development practitioner critically assess the participatory processes they practiced and the outcomes that could not have been accomplished without integrating the theory and methods of participatory, community-based research.

**KEY WORDS:** Participatory research, Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, interactive development

### INTRODUCTION, by Kathleen Pickering Sherman

Since the heyday of "action anthropology" in the 1960s (Ablon 2012), researchers and graduate students have been presented with what is characterized as a choice between traditional, theoretically-driven research or applied, and by extension, atheoretical research that, while potentially useful on the ground, lacks the same intellectual rigor and contribution of traditional research. Applied anthropologists have often conceded this characterization of their work, willingly sacrificing the accolades of the ivory tower for their commitment to helping make a difference in the "real world" (Stapp 2012).

By way of illustration, this article argues that: 1) when applied anthropology is conducted as genuinely participatory, community-based research, it is not just a method but is theoretical; and 2) it is not possible to claim participatory methods alone while retaining the epistemological paradigm of traditional research that fails to integrate this theory of participation.

The illustration that follows is drawn from participatory research conducted on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota by five graduate students in the master's and/or doctoral programs at Colorado State University (CSU). These students were trained to understand a participatory approach not as a methodological choice but as a theoretically-driven outcome of indigenous peoples' forced incorporation into global capitalism over the last five hundred years, and their culturally-defined responses to that colonial and neo-colonial history. A development practitioner and scholar local to Pine Ridge (St. Pierre 1992, 2003; with Long Soldier

1995) then provides an interpretation of these research results to initiate further refinements to the theory of participation.

### THE THEORY OF PARTICIPATION, by Kathleen Pickering Sherman

The theory of participation embodies post-colonial theory in a practice that attempts to decolonize research and higher education (Smith 2012; Brydger 2012). This theoretical understanding is reflected in movements toward more collaborative approaches where, rather than having one epistemological paradigm dominate, multiple paradigms of knowledge construction are accepted on an equal footing (Ross et al. 2011). For anthropology in particular, the culture-bound nature of knowing must be acknowledged and understood before any integration of knowledge systems is possible. When traditional research is conducted without this acknowledgement, the arbitrary assertion of Western European cultural dominance is ideologically masked as "objectivity", the selection of agendas of power as a neutral "selection of methodology", and the structural barriers to indigenous inclusion as "institutional integrity" (Smith 2012). Furthermore, the efforts of traditional academic researchers to use their results to implement policy change and institute programs of reform end up disempowering the communities they are attempting to "help" with the oppressive message that local experiences and insights have no value in solving local problems (Freire 2000). Thus, traditional academic research presents a paradox to academics who want to support ameliorations or even transformations of capitalism to alleviate poverty, injustice,

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and violence, and yet are part of the academic structure that is itself a product of the historical trajectory of capitalism (Wallerstein 2003, 1991). Academics cannot empower oppressed communities to transform the current political economy until they acknowledge and respond to the power relations that the current academic system implies.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the difference, both in method and in theory construction, between traditional academic research and participatory or community-based academic research. Because the colonial power relations underlying Western institutional forms of knowledge construction are atheoretically ignored, traditional academic research retains control over theory selection, relevant literature, hypothesis formation, research conclusions, and theory refinement. The integration of local or indigenous knowledge is limited to the appropriational experience of providing information to external researchers (see Figure 1). Because there is no community buy-in with respect to the focus, purposes, or applications of traditional academic research, the quality and accuracy of the information provided is automatically suspect (Smith 2012). This significant shortcoming to traditional academic research has been easily glossed over, since the conclusions, peer reviews, and funding of future research proposals all rest safely within the hands of those who share the epistemological perspectives of the West.

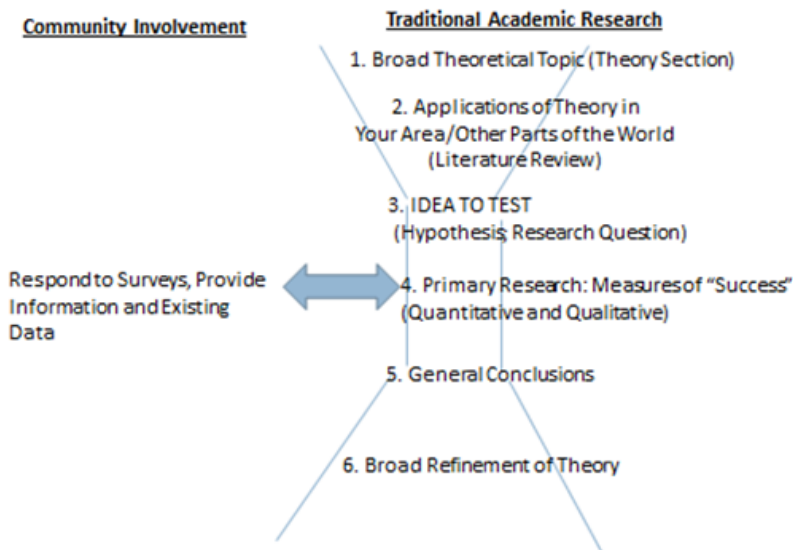


Figure 1: Community Involvement in Traditional Academic Research

In contrast, a genuine integration of the theory and practice of participatory academic research demands community involvement in every stage of planning, implementing, and understanding research about that community (see Figure 2). The product of genuine participatory research is accurate,

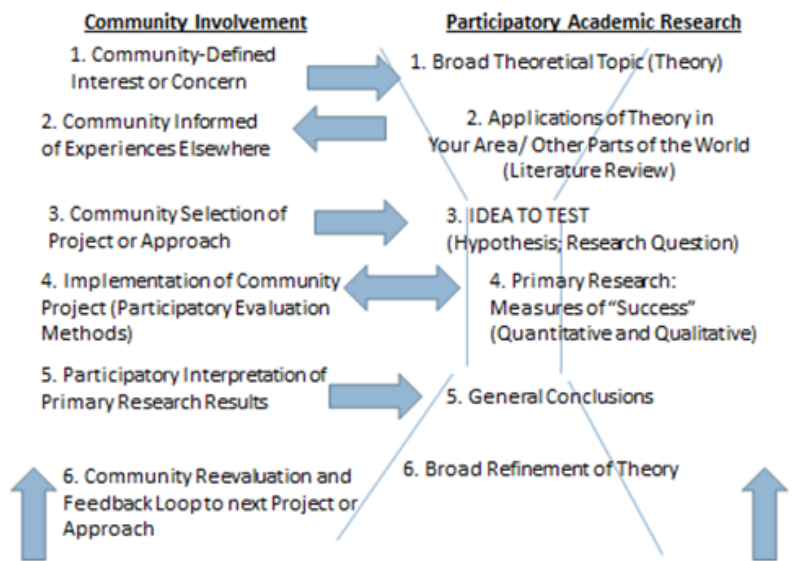


Figure 2: Community Involvement in Participatory Academic Research

useful and collaborative. Without the buy-in of community members, the accuracy of the data being provided will remain suspect. Reflexively, unless the results of the research will be useful to the community, it is difficult to achieve true community buy-in. Without collaboration among researchers and community members, the usefulness of the research to the community itself may be illusory. Without this ongoing collaboration, the deeper culturally-based meanings and understandings that give significance to what otherwise is superficially observed can be lost or misconstrued (Bopp and Bopp 2006). Furthermore, participatory research has the potential to support transformative movements that increase well-being, especially for poor and marginalized communities, by honoring their experiences and insights (Chambers 2007).

The case studies that follow illustrate what is gained by adopting a theory of participation. Graduate students enter into a community process that defines their research goals, and places their participation into a timeframe that extends well beyond their personal goal of obtaining a degree. The students' research is encompassed by the immediate interest of community members and organizations in relevant questions and accurate results. The students' limited knowledge is mitigated by the framing and interpretations of community members engaged in the research process they themselves own. The final academic products are simply milestones in the self-determined community and economic development that the students have had the privilege to experience.



## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: THE PINE RIDGE PROJECTS

### The Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce, by Andrea Akers

In 2009 the Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce (PRACC), located in Kyle, South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, received a grant from the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) for a proposed project entitled "Oglala Lakota Voices." This project sought to accomplish many goals, but they were all under the guise of tourism development. One major goal was to change perceptions about the Lakota and the Reservation. PRACC developed an innovative approach to this problem in solidifying partnerships with regional tourism entities. These partnerships were facilitated by Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with Badlands National Park (BADL), Mount Rushmore National Memorial (MORU), and Crazy Horse Memorial (CHM). The MOAs arranged for the exchange of printed materials as well as small displays among PRACC and the three parks. In addition, a Lakota cultural sensitivity training was developed and provided to these and other partners (including Wind Cave National Park, Jewel Cave National Park, Black Hills National Forest, Custer State Park, and the South Dakota Department of Tourism).

The ANA required an external evaluator and due to Professor Kathleen Pickering Sherman's long-term relationship with the Tribe, and more specifically with PRACC, she was hired to evaluate the three-year project. Three months before the "Oglala Lakota Voices" Project was initiated I participated in my first ethnographic field school for eight weeks with Sherman on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. After this life-changing experience I not only dedicated my class projects and my senior honor's thesis to topics concerning Pine Ridge, but I also took every opportunity to travel to the Reservation to participate in Sherman's projects. In April of 2011, one month before I would graduate with my B.A. in anthropology, Sherman came to me with a proposition. She asked me to take her place in assisting PRACC in their first cultural sensitivity training for the employees of tourism providers in South Dakota because she would be away for the summer as a guest lecturer in Indonesia. She offered me the opportunity to work with PRACC and their hired consultants to carry out the training and more specifically to implement evaluative surveys before and after. I eagerly accepted, hoping my two years of experience working with the Lakota would give me guidance.

After a fairly successful training in May, 2011, I became more involved in the "Oglala Lakota Voices" Project, including the later May, 2012, training (which was now entitled "Destination Pine Ridge"), but also in helping to collect and analyze tourism data (visitor surveys and locational data from guest books and information requests). By August, 2011, it was becoming clear that this project would become the core of my master's thesis. Over the next nine months I attended two partner meetings which brought together representatives

from PRACC, several NPS parks, Crazy Horse Memorial, and the state Tourism Department. In early spring I worked closely with the hired consultant for the training to integrate the information we had gathered from the partner meetings and to improve the format of the training and presentation. An important addition was a second day bus tour of the Reservation. During this time the consultant and I solicited and trained four Lakota facilitators to make presentations as part of the training. Finally, at the end of May, with the help of ten of my colleagues from Colorado State University, the training of over 100 participants and tour with 40 participants both were accomplished (with only minor complications).

However, my involvement did not end here. We urgently reconvened with more partner meetings; the ANA grant and the MOAs were ending and we needed to secure funding for future trainings. Another need to address was the upcoming "Impact Visit" from the ANA scheduled for early August, 2012, where PRACC was to present in detail what had been accomplished over the past three years of the "Oglala Lakota Voices" Grant Project. Again I helped to facilitate the partner meetings and brought together three years of evaluative data for the ANA Impact Visit and Final Report. Not surprisingly, even after the end of the initial grant cycle, I am continuing to assist PRACC in maintaining its partnerships and in further developing the "Destination Pine Ridge" training.

The above narrative describes a participatory research initiative. As an anthropologist I am dedicated to the Lakota people, and instead of proposing my own research agendas for the community, I respond to solicitations for my expertise on a range of research projects as well as other services (like strategic planning, conference planning, and facilitation). Another integral piece of participatory research is capacity building, which this project achieved, especially in the usability of evaluative data and in the partnerships built. In the end this project was deemed useful, accurate, and collaborative, for the role it plays in tourism development (including attracting outside funds); in the rigorous methods of evaluation; and in the participation of all stakeholders throughout the process.

#### *Response from Mark St. Pierre*

My wife and I operate a small inn on the Reservation. If tourism is ever going to be meaningful in terms of the Reservation economy (i.e., jobs creation), beyond selling dream catchers at Wounded Knee, we will need to generate more traffic. If existing tourism businesses are to survive and grow, and more are to be born and succeed, then the inflow of tourism dollars will have to rise. The Chamber's board and executive director received a \$1.2 million ANA grant to achieve this goal. A strategy to create a relationship between PRACC and the regional National Parks was jointly evolved, with Colorado State University input and a viable visitor center, developed on the Reservation.

As a former PRACC Director, for me this provides an instructional moment. Just because PRACC has a board does not mean that the board is representative of the community,



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knows much about tourism, or knows how to drive up tourism numbers. Some folks who have invested their resources and time into these businesses do not belong to PRACC. Thus, working with them, soliciting their ideas in the strategizing, planning, pre-writing, and writing of the grant (an absolute ANA requirement) is essential. As for the ANA grant monies, while the Pine Ridge Visitor Center, housed at PRACC, was well achieved (but initially invisible due to lack of signage), an exponential growth in tourism numbers was not. However, the "Destination Pine Ridge" trainings marked the first time many stakeholders from both on and off the Reservation met in an effort to enhance Reservation tourism. With continual connection and collaboration, hopefully tourism numbers will noticeably increase and enhance the Reservation economy

## The First Tribal National Park, by Ashley Cobb

As a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology at Colorado State University, I am working with Kathleen Pickering Sherman, members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and representatives of Badlands National Park to document and evaluate the creation of the nation's first Tribal National Park. Participatory methods are essential in this case, as the land and the people working to preserve it have a long and contentious history. I begin with a discussion of the history of the site and move into how participatory research has been applied in this case study.

The site of the proposed park is the South Unit of Badlands National Park, which is owned by the Oglala Sioux Tribe and currently managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The South Unit lies entirely within Pine Ridge Reservation and encompasses 133,000 acres of mixed grass prairie and badland formations. This area has a wealth of paleontological, ecological and cultural resources and is historically and spiritually significant to the Oglala Sioux People (OSP).

A brief history of the area provides the context for the current collaborative effort between the Tribe and the NPS. The South Unit contains the Stronghold District, which is the area where the survivors of Wounded Knee fled and held off the US army after the massacre in 1890. In 1942 Congress removed the South Unit from the Reservation for use as an aerial bombing range. One hundred and twenty-five families living in the area were relocated before bombing began. In 1963 the bombing range was declared excess to the needs of the federal government and returned to the Tribe with the provision that the lands be part of the expanded Badlands National Park and managed by the National Park Service. The collaboration between the Park and the Tribe began in earnest in 1976 under a Memorandum of Agreement which requires that the Park Service consult with the Tribe on management of the land. The MOA is still the primary management document for the South Unit.

In 2006 Badlands National Park began the General Management Plan (GMP) process for the South Unit with the goal of establishing a unified vision between the Park Service and the Tribe for the future management of the land. The

preferred alternative for the GMP is to create a Tribal National Park. The scope of the GMP does not include the logistical necessities of this collaborative effort. These logistics will be negotiated through legislation and a new MOA between the Park and the Tribe.

While the creation of the GMP for the South Unit has been hailed as an example of positive collaboration between the Park Service and the Tribe, to date, members of the Tribe have been largely denigrated to the role of observers and participants instead of active decision-makers in the collaborative effort.

The goal of this research project is to promote sustainable action on joint conservation by engaging stakeholders in the evaluation of the Tribal National Park process. Participatory evaluation is the ideal tool to promote stakeholder ownership and community-level change, because it emphasizes capacity building and commitment of all stakeholders to reflect, analyze, and take responsibility for implementing any changes they recommend (Suarez-Balascar and Harper 2003). In the context of this project, the stakeholder groups are primarily Oglala Sioux Parks and Recreation Authority (OSPRA) employees and employees of Badlands National Park.

There are four components of participatory evaluation: 1) qualitative observation; 2) systematic surveying; 3) data analysis; and 4) contextualizing, which involves comparing this case study to macro-level data on similar collaborative efforts. To date, I have engaged in three years of participatory observation with the Tribe and the Park Service, attending joint meetings and interning with both organizations. During the summer of 2012 I conducted 28 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of their personal and professional goals and concerns about the project. While the majority of this research focuses on organizational dynamics, the perspective of the Tribal community must not be ignored. To create a comprehensive case study, I also will explore longitudinal data regarding Lakota stewardship values gathered by Sherman as well as public comments from the GMP process. Furthermore, Badlands National Park representatives, as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, conducted public scoping with Tribal members. This information addresses tribal perspectives on the preferred management alternative and could offer valuable insight related to the larger community's perspective on the Tribal National Park process.

The potential impacts of this project are nested within three socio-political scales: 1) participatory evaluation can promote local stakeholder ownership of the process and enable a functional process through which OSPRA and Badlands National Park can work collaboratively; 2) the publication of this research in cooperation with the stakeholders can help inform other efforts that seek to integrate tribal knowledge and stewardship with federal management practices in the United States; and 3) the knowledge gained from this case study can help inform collaborative efforts among indigenous peoples and national protected area management efforts at



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the global level. The tool of participatory evaluation has been under-utilized in collaborative conservation to this point, and its application and facilitation in the Tribal National Park process will expand our understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

*Response from Mark St. Pierre*

Since 1976 the dream of the return of nearly one-quarter of the Pine Ridge Reservation has grown into the dream of Lakota National Park, the first Native American National Park in the U.S. There have been a number of significant players in the last 47 years. Many people involved in the process have not recorded the history of the various movements, stalemates, and personalities that have created the present situation. OSPRA has a board of tribal members elected in each district of the Reservation. The return of this land represents a dream, not only of its return but of respect. Equally important, the Lakota Park represents a financial engine in a land where jobs are desperately needed. If the Tribe has had a shared dream over the years—something every stakeholder/tourism business owner is involved in—it is this, and Ashley's work with the board (recording the history and documenting the long struggle), therefore, became possible.

## **Lakota Funds: Leading an Economic Resurgence through Youth Empowerment, by Heather Lausch**

Lakota Funds is a community development financial institution (CDFI) leading an economic resurgence of the Oglala Lakota Oyate on the Pine Ridge Reservation through culturally appropriate strategies reigniting the traditional Lakota spirit of productivity, commerce, and trade. Lakota Funds' goals are not only to help develop the economy, but also to combat poverty and build the family core around the benefits of employment, education, and financial literacy. Without a vibrant economy, concepts of savings, budgeting, and lending are insignificant. Therefore, a holistic approach must be taken to create a more sustainable economy on the Reservation.

While continuing to work with adults, Lakota Funds wanted to initiate a new program focused on educating youth about financial literacy, the economy and community on the Reservation, as well as the traditional economic ways of the Lakota. The novel idea was to create a Child Development Account (CDA) program geared towards first through eighth grade students that connects a matched savings program and financial literacy.

Lakota Funds "seeds" each account opened through the CDA program with a \$50 deposit. Families that participate in the CDA program deposit \$100 throughout the year in their child's savings account, which will then be matched by Lakota Funds 3:1. Thus at the end of the school year the child will have \$400 in his or her savings account. This pattern of savings continues for eight years, thus the savings account grows throughout childhood. One annual withdraw is allowed for school supplies or medical expenses for the child.

In addition to the matched savings program, children and their families take part in training and education to provide a solid foundation that helps the children understand the benefits of savings and how to be responsible for their accounts. Starting in the 1st grade, children attend monthly lessons featuring financial literacy education and child development, including foci on leadership and the taking of responsibility for the natural environment. To bring together the whole family, each family attends quarterly meetings where they participate in financial literacy education and family building activities, personalizing each topic to the importance of their particular family history and traditions.

I was grateful to be brought on board by Tawney Brunsch, Executive Director of the Lakota Funds, and Kathleen Pickering Sherman, Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Colorado State University, to help create the curriculum and evaluation tools for the CDA program. I first researched "best practices" of similar CDA program and learned that the Lakota Funds program was truly one-of-a-kind. In similar programs, governments funded the accounts, not the families, so there was little family involvement or investment. Most programs were not connected to financial literacy training, so the youth would have the money but may or may not know how to deal with it. Other times there were good programs for financial literacy training in schools for youth, but they were expensive and therefore not accessible to everybody.

After my initial research, I worked with Lakota Funds to create a CDA program that fit the cultural norms of the Reservation. We had to take into consideration ideas like enhanced transportation, socio-economic incentives, and how to get parents initially involved. Since the Reservation is such a rural and spread-out place, where to hold these meetings and how to get the children and families to attend was one of our biggest obstacles. It was finally decided that the children's portion of the lessons would be taught at their school during school hours, while the family meetings would be held in the evenings at the Lakota Funds office. We also made sure to include culturally appropriate artwork from a local artist, stories that related to the children's lives on the Reservation, lessons that discussed local natural resources, and historical traditions of the Lakota people. Ideally, we would have immediate feedback after every lesson from the teachers, children, and their families to change and improve upon the curriculum in order to ensure each lesson's cultural relativity and appropriateness.

While the CDA program is still in its first year, some preliminary results from a discussion and survey of parents at the first family meeting are available. The initial parents stated they already had an understanding of the importance of savings, which likely correlates with their motivation to enroll their children in the program. However, we still are looking for more participants and two of our main questions are: 1) Why are families not jumping at this opportunity? and 2) How do we get more people motivated? Based on several informal interviews done on the Reservation, parents state that many families do not have a "culture of saving" so they do not un-





derstand the importance of this program. There is a difficult self-reinforcing cycle, where children grow up without financial understandings, and then later when opportunities arise for their own children they do not see the importance of such a program. Children may grow up without any real understanding of financial literacy. Will the CDA program be able to break this cycle?

*Response from Mark St. Pierre*

Economic victimization, consumer fraud, usury loans, bad checks, and ruined credit are constants in the lives of all economically marginalized people, no less for the people of Pine Ridge. In the 30 years of the Lakota Fund's evolution one of the biggest obstacles to an individual getting a business loan has been bad credit. As a founding member of the Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce, I know that anyone involved in local business development understands that high energy, independent problem solvers/doers are rare in any society. When these ideal candidates for small business and job creation surface on the Reservation, there is a desire to let them have a shot, no matter their financial histories. The Lakota Funds board and staff have, with the help of Heather, evolved a method to address equity and credit-building issues in a multi-generational way with this unusual CDA program. In a tribal society where there are no age-segregated activities, the idea of generations creating savings accounts, learning home budgeting, and studying consumer education to stabilize and improve their credit ratings, is the result of pursuing another shared tribal dream: to impact poverty and envision more opportunity within Reservation boundaries. Heather used her energy and talent to help the Lakota Funds create, institute, and evaluate this effort.

### **The Wounded Knee Community Development Corporation Youth Building Initiative, by Michael Brydge**

Participation is the active engagement of the minds, hearts and energy of people in the process of their own healing and development. Because of the nature of what development really is, unless there is meaningful and effective participation, there is no development (Bopp and Bopp 2006: 85).

Keeping this philosophy in mind, I acted as an engaged participant of community development in the Wounded Knee District. Participating in previous projects initiated by local organizations, such as Lakota Funds and the Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce, and working with Kathleen Pickering Sherman prepared me to engage with Lakota community members in participatory development. In 2009 three CSU students, four locals from the American Horse Creek in Kyle, South Dakota, and I constructed a tool shed from blue prints that were scribbled onto a piece of junk mail. These actions, coupled with continual reflection on the Reservation economy and its communities, eventually led to an invitation by the Wounded Knee Community Development Corporation

(WKCDC)—a Lakota initiated and directed organization—to participate in its first Youth Building Initiative. The WKCDC anticipated two outcomes: 1) youth with adequate carpentry skills; and 2) a new community building. In fact, the processes engaged throughout the initiative led to so much more.

From its 2009 beginning, WKCDC recognized Lakota youth as an important voice for defining community needs and as an overall asset to community development. The board realized on the Reservation, as did McGee and Greenhalf (2011: 28) in Africa: "Children and young people, despite their demographic weight [i.e., large population], are traditionally, culturally, legally and structurally marginalized from decision-making processes." In a conversation with Mark St. Pierre, the CEO of the WKCDC, he stated emphatically: "When these kids realize they can do something with their hands, that is the beginning of a personal transformation of self-perception" (St. Pierre, personal communication, 2012). This transformation of perception is necessary in a time when "...the communities' perception of themselves is helpless" (St. Pierre, personal communication, 2012). Although their self-perceptions, more accurately described as self-deceptions, are by-and-large created by abuses and neglect, both historical and derived from the outside, transforming such self-deceptions must come from within. Beck and Purcell (2010: 49, italics added) purport:

The work starts from where young people are in relation to their own values, views and principles, as well as their own personal and social spaces. It seeks to go beyond where young people start, to widen their horizons, promote participation and invite social commitment, in particular by encouraging them to be critical and creative in their response to their experience and world around them.

The youth, age 14 to 19, worked approximately 20 hours per week, but no more than eight hours a day (aside from those who worked voluntary, unpaid overtime). Of the 13 who started the job, three males did not complete the program due to various circumstances, while the two females—aside from painting—concentrated on indoor office tasks. Days were long and occasionally I would end the day with a 90 mile, one-way trip to Rapid City for building materials. During the four weeks, the youth: 1) created friendships within communities and between insiders and outsiders; 2) embodied a spirit of volunteerism, giving to their district; 3) learned job training skills; 4) felt self-empowered; and 5) created an economic and community asset. They learned how to function on a job site as a construction team—to work together even though some of them were from communities that are historically antagonistic toward one another. In addition, they came to respect me, a human who, through skin tone and university status, is symbolic of the colonizer.

Some of the youth began volunteering. Others were zealous to the point of working in situations prohibited by the government program that was paying them. Once, when we were





told they had to come down off a ladder, because federal regulations prohibit them from ascending above four feet, several of them scoffed and said, “just check us off the clock, then, and we’ll work for free.”

During the program, youth cleaned out the entire building and premises; tore out, replaced and finished drywall; installed floor tile at two entry ways; replaced doors and windows; repaired and trimmed out windows; reframed an exterior wall; tore out and replaced damaged cedar siding; and primed and painted the exterior. After that, two young men joined construction crews during the remainder of the summer in Rapid City, South Dakota, and Greeley, Colorado. Additionally, one youth patched drywall in the basement of his *unci* (grandmother), a skill which we had learned together. One of the main goals of the initiative was to provide job skills to the youth to enhance future career opportunities, but in parallel, the youth could make changes in the households and communities they were living in at the time.

These youth joined their talents and energies to create an economic and community asset. As a non-profit, the WKCDC is continually strapped for funding. Remodeling the building, however, increased the organization’s net worth by \$30,000. Having been on the verge of demolition a year earlier, the building now serves as a reminder of the beauty within the district, as well as the outcomes associated with validating youthful voices and assets. They can be depended upon to assess community needs and build a better future for their people.

#### *Response from Mark St. Pierre*

The WKCDC, a three year old 501-c-3 non-profit, has a board comprised of tribal members from across the Wounded Knee District. I serve as CEO. Sustainable jobs creation is the mission of the CDC. It is the wisdom of the board that young people need to be involved in thinking about, problem solving on, and investing in improving their own communities. Numerous (and constantly growing) NGOs populate the summer landscape on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation with service learners. These are non-Indian youth and adults who come here “to help” by fixing up public facilities, homes, and gardens, running church schools, and distributing clothing and other collected items. I have seen this process grow over my lifetime. Adding to dependency, eroding self-respect, and diminishing internal human capacity are the sad results. With the full approval and support of the WKCDC board, Michael worked with 13 Wounded Knee District youth to salvage and remodel an abandoned one-room school house. The young male and female community members learned how to plan, dismantle, and restore the outside of the building while also learning how to install doors, windows, tile flooring, and sheet rock. A community liability was turned into an asset which now includes an after-school activity center as a dream fulfilled. Everyone benefited and Michael participated in hands-on organization and development work that was the foundation of his master’s thesis.

#### **Artists of the Northern Plains Research Study, by Patrick Dorion**

The Artists of the Northern Plains Research Study (ANPRS) is an example of how participation may occur at several levels. The project began as a partnership between First Peoples Fund (FPF), a non-profit located in Rapid City and working with Native artists; Artspace, a non-profit specializing in creating affordable space for artists; and Colorado State University. The purpose of the study was to understand the infrastructural barriers and general limitations that Native artists contend with in the Northern Plains region. Participation occurred at a basic organizational level in the creation of a survey tool, where each group brought its own perspectives and set of knowledge to the project. Discussions took place over several months, in person and through conference calls, where team members were able to bring up concerns, offer ideas, and make revisions to the content of the initial survey. By creating the necessary space for various perspectives to be heard, as a group we managed to avoid the power struggles that can defeat a development project before it begins. Organizational learning was a personal priority for me. As a student I had come to be involved with the project academically through my connection with Kathleen Pickering Sherman.

A vital aspect to ANPRS was the connection FPF had with the Native artist community. As a local institution (situated in the closest South Dakota city to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation), FPF has ten years’ of experience working with Native artists, and also has developed relationships with other local institutions in reservation communities. Although we wanted to understand the needs of Native artists, we did not work from a “needs-based approach” (Phillips and Pittman 2009: 39-40). FPF was able to provide the project with local knowledge to create more meaningful survey questions (appropriate to Native artists), but within this local context questions were not overly defined. At its heart ANPRS was an asset-based mapping exercise (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993: 5-8), focused on representing the wide array of perceptions artists had of their community. By entering the community humbly, viewing artists as assets, and allowing community concerns to be internally-driven, the data from this project will allow FPF to leverage outside resources more effectively.

An entirely different level of participation occurred on the ground with the implementation of the survey. As field-worker for the project, I was responsible for conducting the interviews, along with the help of an outstanding fieldwork team. Contacts at Red Cloud Heritage Center, Lakota Funds, and the Pine Ridge Area Chamber of Commerce served as helpful starting points to identify local artists. The hope was that through building community relationships, the artist population on Pine Ridge would start to emerge. In total, 102 surveys were completed in six weeks over June and July, 2011, on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River Reservations. It is at the local level that ANPRS truly transformed into a participatory project, as the artists themselves became active agents in the process of understanding the kinds of infrastructural barriers





ers that exist on the Reservation. Two important factors helped facilitate their participation. One was the strength of the survey, which balanced both quantitative and qualitative questions. Creating the space for artists to talk about what mattered most to them was a critical step towards understanding the challenges they face. A second factor was the choice to approach reservation art communities informally at the local level to gather data through face-to-face interviews. "Research" is often bureaucratic and dehumanizing (Smith 2012: 42-52), and as a result is resisted by many communities. Giving a human face to the project and letting go of the need to control the interview process added a level of credibility to data which we would not have been able to gather otherwise. This process was supported by the large number of respondents, all of whom were referred by other artists through snowball sampling. Unlike "research," I found that artists invited me into their homes to sit down and talk for an hour or two, taking time away from their family responsibilities and their work. Additionally, the fieldwork team allowed the interview process to evolve. At first, conversations were labored by the inexperience of the interviewers. After gaining some confidence, we were able to let survey protocols act as guides for generating informal conversations, which in turn created a comfortable atmosphere where artists' voices could be heard.

In general, ANPRS found artists had significant barriers of access to materials, transportation, and markets to sell their artwork. For instance, 68 percent of all artists do not have access to the materials they need for creating their artwork, or, must travel over 30 miles to get them (Northern Plains Artist Market Study 2012: 10). This process is conflated by distance, time, and available financial capital. Making it easier for artists to get what they need would allow them to create more at lower cost, and thus could have a positive financial impact on Reservation communities. Insights also were gained into the ways that knowledge is transmitted among artists, which is fundamental information for any community outreach. Artists communicate and learn about their art business through informal networks, which makes traditional marketing efforts inappropriate. FPF can use their community contacts to market their programs more effectively and educate artists about their options for assistance. But, the lasting effect of the study will be its use as a starting point for engagement with the Native art community. Lakota people are the ones who stand to gain or lose the most from any future project, and whose voices must drive the choices being made. Sixty-one percent of all interviewed artists have an annual household income of less than \$10,000, and 30 percent receive more than half their income solely from their art business (Northern Plains Artist Market Study 2012: 14). Yet, there seems to be great potential to grow the economy at Pine Ridge, as long as the statistics are not disconnected from the context in which they were derived.

ANPRS illustrates that the importance of building community connections and personal relationships in any research

undertaking cannot be overstated. I am thankful for the relationships I have built with FPF, Artspace, Kathleen Pickering Sherman, and the 102 artists whom I spoke with. It has been through these relationships that my own learning was facilitated, and through local participation that ANPRS will have a chance to address issues that are meaningful to local artists.

#### *Response from Mark St. Pierre*

In alignment with the First Peoples Fund's desire to improve the lives and incomes of the regions' Traditional and Contemporary Artists, Kathleen Pickering Sherman and the CSU Department of Anthropology graduate program were approached. As someone who owned the first Native Art gallery in South Dakota, these issues have been of lifetime interest to me. Inexperienced idealists often zero in on folks' art as a way to stimulate more income for Reservation-based families. It is as if the artists themselves do not have a community and do not understand the very real resource and market issues (reflected in a fair return on time and material invested) that exist. Qualitative experience must be converted to quantitative research so that grants can be written to try and ameliorate the condition of poverty experienced by these artists. Patrick, through the help and involvement of 102 individual producers, was able to quantify the poverty and the related issues of distance, access to raw materials, and access to good-paying markets. Although a stranger here before his research began, Patrick was very successful in first finding, and then soliciting, information on experiences and problems which may result in the First Peoples Fund adjusting its mission plan and programming. If so, this will become more useful and relevant to Native American artists in South Dakota.

#### **A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER'S RESPONSE, by Mark St. Pierre**

For over forty years, while working on economic and community development in Indian Country, I have noticed that research projects on reservations are funded more regularly than grants that try to address or improve the actual problem being researched. The latter are much harder to come by. This can be maddening if you are a results-oriented professional. Academic institutions, their faculty, and their army of graduate students have all the credentials funders are looking for, with the proper caché including (but not limited to) stability, non-profit status, proven research ability, academic credentials, a solid accounting structure, and a culturally admired institution to receive the funding.

The granting agency or foundation, while requiring that the information be disseminated, does not usually insist that it "come home" in any useful way, or at all. It generally belongs to the researcher, hence all the citations and footnotes in academic writing. The grant recipients/researchers are also from the same "trusted" cultural and experience set as the funders so that makes life, communication, and mutual admiration (respect and comfort between funder and recipient) easier as well. Benefits to the university department are money, income,





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career and reputation enhancement, publishing, and promotion. The department gets masters and doctoral papers which, of course, create graduates (critical numbers) and in turn validates careers, departments, and the foundations—and the grant dollars expended. Does the research ever affect those being researched? Generally not. There are those that question the morality of this approach, especially in working with impoverished tribal communities, often existing 180 degrees in hardship and privilege from the world of the researchers.

In the case of the Department of Anthropology at Colorado State University, all of the Reservation-based student efforts (exemplified by those reported in this commentary) must be planned with and must directly benefit the organizations that provide the research opportunities (a requirement pioneered by Kathleen Pickering Sherman). In this model, goals and objectives to be accomplished, along with the kind of participation and research methodology, are developed in collaboration with tribal entities. Since I live and work on the Pine Ridge Reservation I am keenly aware of the historic context of all of the organizations involved in this article, the collaborative effort's etiology, and in some cases have observed all or part of the collaborative process.

From 1968 to 1972, I was trained in the classical community problem-solving model. My undergraduate educational program utilized a broad range of applied disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and economics, where a practitioner works directly with and often for community people to address a problem, need or want, very much in the vein of Paulo Freire's or Sol Tax's approaches. I have worked within the community's understanding of what would improve their quality. As a result I have been an enabler on a broad range of quality-of-life issues/solutions like public safety, the arts, education, and economic development in Lakota Country. It is in this context that my comments should be viewed.

The CSU students come here, a place known for poverty and hardship reflecting a non-Western culture, with a trust in Professor Sherman. In every real sense they come also as economic and cultural transplants, similar to myself 40 years ago—as nervous strangers. Thus, some level of courage and commitment must have been encouraged and developed invisibly before most of them arrive. Most have chosen CSU because of the reputation Sherman and her past students have earned. Some have been here for shorter periods in previous years, but are now working directly with the people here on long-term projects.

This cultural stretch is critical to them as professionals, but also useful to their Pine Ridge collaborators, since the students are also emissaries from the educated—and often privileged—class of the dominant Western society. They bring in new or unfamiliar ideas, approaches, or theories. They also provide an interesting distraction as they are new faces from “the outside world,” just as studied as are their Reservation informants and at times also as entertaining, knowingly and unknowingly.

There are some adaptations on both sides that must take

place for Sherman's participatory vision to be realized. On the Reservation people behave toward elders with a high level of formality, respect and deprecation. A young man might listen to some elders visiting but would never participate, whereas Western young people are expected to be able and—more important—culturally often more than willing, to state their opinions. Left to themselves, American graduate students often do not desire the companionship or ideas (acquired wisdom) of older people outside of academia, so the very social place of a tribal 25-year-old is “suspended” for these “young” CSU students once here. Conversely for Lakota, this occurs out of deep, culturally-based politeness. Lakota people are generally polite listeners and do not want to offend, even if they deeply disagree with what they are hearing. There also can be gender issues such as a young white woman asking private information of an older Lakota woman, or worse, of an older Lakota man.

All of these cultural differences aside, most of these students return again and again, deepening their understandings, and in some cases, deepening their real friendships with each visit. The “world taken for granted” that these students live in and construct through their social contacts in Fort Collins and abroad generally has no meaningful place or use for anyone but young people aged 18 to 30. The degree to which this is true is not perceived or understood by them. They exhibit little existential insight about their own existence or their own quality of life beyond convenience. Coming to the Reservation and realizing that their way of seeing the world and their relative privilege is not held by everyone, alters their core perceptions. This benefits these graduate students in ways too vast to go into here, their maturation being the least.

These students have, in most cases, become involved with Pine Ridge organizations that have developed over a long period of time as a result of a shared understanding of problems by tribal people. A large amount of human energy has already been invested into addressing Reservation problems. This energy has helped begin to pave the way to very real and shared tribal dreams of sovereignty and economic independence. One of these shared, larger dreams is a good quality of life with opportunity for those who want it.

The graduate students whose work is reflected in this article learned of and internalized a Lakota Vision, and thus contributed to activities and future dreams that have evolved on the Reservation over long periods of time. The origins of these dreams are here. Their research and organizational skills are contributing to promoting Lakota objectives by *participating* with Lakota organizations, often at their direction.

The principle purpose of a university like CSU perceiving and using Pine Ridge as a human laboratory should be to prepare social science graduates to involve themselves in communities, other than their own, over a career and therefore to become effective researchers and/or change agents. The purpose should be to help build these communities based on their internal dreams and visions. While the vast majority of graduate students studying here will not become change





agents, many will become teachers whose time here will become a critical reference point and bring authenticity to their classes—and even to their degrees—as now-papered “experts” on Indians in the eyes of Euro-American academia.

Personally I would hope their time here prepares them for making a difference given their youthful energy and education. I hope it helps them discover their purpose, their passion. Studying poverty on the Reservation is important only if it results in improving the quality of life of those studied, and in understanding that they—the people of Pine Ridge—in turn stand for economically oppressed tribal people worldwide. In the spirit of participatory academic research, those who participate in these studies and related activities deserve to see these students go on to improve the quality of human life wherever their destinies takes them. It is my dream that they will all go on to lead lives filled with efforts that improve the quality of life for others, using their time here as inspiration and guidance.

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