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MODES OF ALLOCATION AND THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS

by David T. Jones

INTRODUCTION

This research proposal has evolved out of a class assignment in a "methods" course in cultural anthropology. The assignment required "real but small-scale fieldwork" in a "community" of the student's own choosing. This approach was based on the belief that anthropology is only learned by doing anthropology. One of the objectives of the course was the designing of a research proposal which would have some merit and which would be based on the fieldwork.

The community selected was a small group of American Indians who met weekly in a prayer group at a local church under the sole direction of an American Indian woman. The All American Indian Tribes Prayer group, as it is called, is primarily a religious organization. The commitment of its founder and director is "to meet the spiritual needs of the local Indian population." Yet in its application to the Indian community it fulfills more than a religious need. It serves as an economic resource and provides an opportunity for the social interaction of the group members.

Since the group is a religious organization it was anticipated that the direction of the research project ultimately would lead to a study of culture change in the context of conflicting religious values and beliefs. Although the general concern with culture change has been retained, it has been approached through a study of the economic rather than the religious system. The choice was based on the belief that the economic approach provided (1) a more powerful tool in explaining the political and social structure of the group; and, (2) had more potential for explaining the differential rates or levels of acculturation present among the group members and, by extension, of American Indians in general.

THE RESEARCH PLAN

1. The Data: Briefly, the economy of the group can be described as the redistribution of money, goods, and services obtained from various sources located mainly outside the Indian community. The responsibility for obtaining and distributing these rests solely with the director. Some food is given out to members at the regular meetings. But primarily the distribution is made from the director's home where she maintains stores of food and clothing.

The basis for the distribution of the goods is primarily according to need. But gifts of food and clothing are also given to others as tokens of friendship or expressions of appreciation for faithfulness in attending meetings.

This system of allocation of goods is at the same time both a unifying and a disruptive factor. The director acknowledges that members will sometimes fall away from the group because they have not received equally.

2. The Theoretical Orientation: Two models provide the theoretical basis for the paper. (a) Following Karl Polanyi, Bohannan (1963:231) has identified three basic modes of allocation: reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. Reciprocity is described as involving the "exchange of goods between people who are bound in nonmarket, non-hierarchical relationship with one another". Redistribution is defined as "a systematic movement of goods toward an administrative center and their reallocation by the authorities at the center." And finally, "market exchange is the exchange of goods at prices determined by the law of supply and demand."

(b) McFee's suggestion (1968: 1096-1107) that a "matrix model" rather than a "continuum model" is of greater utility in assessing individual acculturation is particularly applicable in the situation dealt with here. The continuum model locates degrees of acculturation along a continuum ranging from Indian-oriented to White-oriented. Implicit in this model is the notion that the acculturation process is a replacement process. Indian values and activities are replaced by white values and activities, for example.

The underlying assumption in the matrix model is that, at the level of the individual, the introduction of new ways does not necessarily eliminate or replace old ways. The retention or replacement depends on whether the old ways are seen as having "continuing utility for the individual" (McFee 1968:1101). In brief, "acculturation can be supplementing as well as replacing" (Stern 1966:100 as found in McFee 1968:1101).

The matrix model is a situational model. Indian-oriented and white-oriented situations are identified and described. An individual is then "measured" or rated on the basis of his capability of participating in the various situations. In effect, each individual is measured on two scales: that of Indian and that of white orientation.

3. Objectives and Hypotheses: The primary objective of this study is the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the principles of allocation and the functioning of those principles within the prayer group. Secondly, it is hoped

that an understanding of these principles within the group can be a basis for greater insight into the problems and processes of acculturation faced by all Indians.

Two hypotheses are advanced: (1) that the system of redistribution and reciprocity practiced within the group provides an explanation for the political and social structure of the group; and (2) that this non-market system of allocation serves as a deterrent to acculturation in that (a) participation in the market exchange system of the dominant culture is relegated to a secondary role among the individual members and (b) that such a system fosters dissonance and thereby diminishes the ability of the group to act corporately.

4. Techniques and Procedures: In gathering the information collected to date, both interviews and participant observations have been used. Both these approaches will continue to be used but now with the focus on the economic system.

Additionally, a socio-economic field schedule will be prepared. It will be geared toward McFee's suggestion of identifying situations, in this case economic situations, primarily, which can be identified as either Indian-oriented or white-oriented and can be used in measuring individual acculturation.

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