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"How Do I Deal With These New Ideas?": The Psychological Acculturation of Rural Students

David M. Dees
Kent State University Salem

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This study explored how an awareness of psychological acculturation can help faculty to understand rural/Appalachian students' classroom experiences. By using a thematic analysis technique, selections from student journals were identified that captured the perspective of being a rural/Appalachian student adjusting to the new cultural system of a college classroom. By focusing on 16 self-identified rural/Appalachian students, the researcher identified the attitudinal positions of assimilation, separation, and integration as students negotiated this intercultural experience. This paper identifies the complexity of rural/Appalachian cultural identity and also suggests strategies on how faculty can help students cope with oppositional knowledge they encounter in the university classroom.

I have always enjoyed exploring issues of diversity with teacher-education students. Every semester there always appears to be several students who are particularly influenced by these issues. Sarah was one of these students. Each night in class, Sarah was excited by the ideas that, in many cases, she was hearing for the first time. Some concepts, such as gender equity and identity, moved Sarah to think differently about herself and her role as a teacher. In her writing and conversations, both in and out of class, Sarah expressed her excitement about these "new" ideas on her own role as a female professional. Then Sarah stopped coming to class. I have had students disappear on me before, but Sarah was different. She had enjoyed these ideas. Sarah's disappearance was a mystery.

Three weeks later, the mystery was solved. I received a call one afternoon from a women's shelter informing me that Sarah would not be returning to my class. It appeared that Sarah's husband did not appreciate the change that was occurring in his wife since her return to college. After becoming abusive to her one evening, Sarah and her children left for the women's shelter. She could not return to class because her husband would know where and when to find her. It is highly unlikely that my class alone caused such turmoil in Sarah's life. Spouse abuse is much more complex than this. However, this experience forced me to reflect on how students live with the confrontational issues they sometimes encounter in our classes. Sarah was one of the inspirations for this study.

Introduction

Sarah, like many of the students at the Kent State University Salem Campus, would be classified as a rural/Appalachian student. This campus is located in Columbiana County, Ohio, which is the northernmost Appalachian county in the state. A predominantly white (96%), high-school educated (17% with some college and 7.4% with a Bacherlor's degree) population, Columbiana County shares many of the demographics common throughout Appalachia (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). On this campus, 73% of the students are female, and the average age of the student population is 30. Many of the students are first-generation college students. As suggested by the average age, many are attending college due to life circumstances arising from a changing and diminishing local economy.

Adjusting to the new realities of a college classroom can be a difficult task for many college students. However, students with a set of cultural knowledge and values different from those explored in the college classroom face the additional task of acculturating themselves to this new environment. In many ways, students become newcomers in a dominant cultural system that, at times, appears to be ideologically opposed to the values expressed in their home culture. This study examines how students from a

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David M. Dees, Educational Foundations and Special Services, Kent State University Salem, 2491 State Route 45 South, Salem, OH 44460. (dees@salem.kent.edu)

rural/Appalachian background adjust to the cultural norms of a university setting.

Psychological Acculturation

Psychological acculturation, first identified by Graves (1967), is defined by Berry (1990) as the "process by which individuals change, both by being influenced by contact with another culture and by being participants in the general acculturative changes under way in their own culture" (p. 235). Rather than focusing only on the group-level changes that occur in diverse cultural group interactions, psychological acculturation examines the impact of intercultural relations at the individual level. Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen (2002) contend that to realize the psychological acculturation of the individual, "we need to consider the psychological changes that individuals in all groups undergo, and their eventual adaptation to their new situations" (p. 352). They continue, noting that "this requires sampling and studying individuals who are variably involved in the process of acculturation" (p. 352). In an attempt to respond to Berry's challenge, I examined, from a qualitative perspective, the process of acculturation experienced by students self-defined as part of a rural/Appalachian culture as they engage in an intercultural exchange with the university culture.

Although Berry's work has primarily focused on the psychological acculturation of immigrant groups, I believe that his research can deepen our understanding of the intercultural exchange that occurs in a university setting. Like immigrant sojourners into another culture, rural/Appalachian college students encounter brief visits into a dominant cultural system that may be very different from their own. The university classroom, through power relationships that are constructed through cultural norms such as grading, classroom expectations, and professor–student relationships, becomes a cultural system with hidden rules that may be difficult for students to negotiate. Additionally, when the dominant culture, represented in this study as the college classroom, presents ideas that conflict with the students' home culture, an added sense of stress is created in the students' lives. These student "immigrants" are forced to make very difficult choices: adopt the ideas of the dominant culture, deny these ideas, or negotiate some other form of cultural adjustment. The overall intercultural exchange that occurs for rural/Appalachian newcomers as they negotiate the ideologies presented in the college classroom has similarities with immigrants adjusting to a new cultural system. The students in this study attended the university and encountered brief visits into a cultural system that was different from the home culture they returned to each evening. This intercultural exchange created pressure in their life and required them to develop various attitudinal positions and adaptation strategies to deal with these differences. From this perspective, Berry's work may provide insights in understanding the psychological acculturation of rural/Appalachian students.

Without question, adjusting to a new cultural system can be a very stressful process. Berry (1995) notes that the

> new circumstances that often accompany acculturation, which appear to result from psychological conflict and social disintegration, such as an increase in homicide, spouse abuse, or a decline in mental health status . . . has been termed acculturative stress, and is characterized by a qualitative change in the life of the individual or community. (p. 475)

Witnessed in Sarah's story, rural/Appalachian students have to negotiate between two very different ideologies. This causes personal stress and, in some cases, physical and emotional conflict that adds new dimensions to the college experience.

Acculturation Strategies

Berry (1970; 1974; 1980; 1997, 2004; Sommerlad & Berry, 1970) has examined the acculturation strategies of individuals for over 30 years. From his original work, he has asserted that individuals manage intercultural exchanges based on two primary factors: (a) the individual's attitude towards maintaining cultural heritage and identity and (b) the type of relationship the individual is seeking with the dominant group. Depending on the interplay of these two factors, individuals will choose one of four attitudinal positions. These acculturation attitudes include assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. *Assimilation* is where "individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural heritage and seek daily interaction with other cultures" (Berry, 2004, p. 176). An example of this strategy is the immigrant who feels his or her culture is backwards and therefore strives to identify with, and find relationships within, the new cultural system. *Separation* is when individuals place "a value on holding on to their original culture and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others" (p. 176) in the dominant culture. From this perspective, the individual may view the new cultural system as immoral or unjust and therefore will strive to maintain distance from the values exposed in the new cultural system. *Integration* is where the individual has an "interest in maintaining one's original culture while one is in daily interaction with other groups" (p. 176). An individual using this strategy sees values in both cultural systems and strives to find a balance between the two. *Marginalization* is where "there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance . . . and [the individual has] little interest in having relations with others" (p. 176-177). This

strategy represents the immigrant who finds little value in either cultural perspective and in many ways wants to create a completely different cultural identity.

Berry's (2004) acculturation strategies provide an interpretive frame for analyzing the intercultural experience of individuals encountering a new cultural system. This perspective provides insight into the cultural experience that occurs at the individual level. By using the psychological acculturation perspective outlined by Berry and others, I addressed the following questions:

1. Do rural/Appalachian students view the college classroom as an intercultural exchange?

2. Which values and cultural rules in the university setting do rural/Appalachian students view as ideologically opposed to their home culture?

3. Do rural/Appalachian students use similar acculturation strategies as immigrants adjusting to a new cultural system?

4. Does Berry's model provide insight into understanding the cultural experience of rural/Appalachian students?

5. What pedagogical insights can be gleaned from understanding the cultural experience of rural/Appalachian students' adjustment to the university setting?

In short, the goal of this study was to identify the qualities of rural/Appalachian students' experiences as they adopt and/or adjust to a cultural system that at times appears to be unlike their home culture.

Methods

Participants

Many of students at the Kent State University Salem Campus are rural/Appalachian individuals. The participants in this study were primarily from the southern portion of Columbiana County and the central portion of Carroll County, Ohio. These two sections of Ohio could be characterized as rural, with rolling hills and vast farming space. This area has experienced difficult economic times in the last 10 years and is adjusting to a new and ever-changing economy. All of the students involved in this study were enrolled in teacher-education courses at this campus.

Sixteen of the 37 total students enrolled in two introductory educational foundations classes were self-identified as living in a rural/Appalachian setting and agreed to participate in the study. Ten participants were nontraditional students (over 24 years of age), 9 of whom were female; 4 of the 6 traditional-age students were male. All 16 participants were white. One participant was a white nontraditional male. Participants' socioeconomic status was not assessed in this study.

Each participant was asked to keep a personal nongraded journal that charted his or her reactions to the course material discussed during the semester.[1] These foundations courses focused primarily on the creation and analysis of cultural identity, the impact of culture on the learning process, and the importance of the teacher in the cultural reality of his or her students. Students were encouraged to monitor their reactions to the material, how this material may challenge their fundamental beliefs, and how this material may impact their personal lives outside the classroom.

Journal Analysis

The students' journals primarily focused on course material that caused conflict and/or clashed with what they defined as rural/Appalachian values. Participants were asked to reflect on how they dealt with the cultural clash that occurred between their home and university cultural systems. It is important to note that none of these participants lived in a dorm or individual-apartment setting: The nontraditional students had their own families and homes, and the traditional-age students all lived at home. This environment encouraged a more constant cultural exchange than if these students lived on campus and outside of the rural/Appalachian setting. Simply stated, participants were always returning to their home culture to live with these challenging ideas.

Rural/Appalachian culture was defined during a class conversation regarding the identification of various cultural systems familiar to these students. To these participants, rural/Appalachian values and culture include (a) realizing the importance of family, (b) a strong sense of community, (c) a belief that common sense is better than intellectual ability, (d) a mistrust of those outside one's community, (e) a belief in gender-role stereotypes, (f) a strong work ethic, and (g) a strong belief in religious faith. It was from this definition that participants self-identified as rural/Appalachian students. Similar to the Appalachian values defined by Jones (1994), participants expressed that many of the ideas expressed through lectures, readings, and course assignments in university classrooms challenged these rural/Appalachian beliefs and cultural characteristics. The participants defined this cultural clash as a difficult "cross-cultural" encounter that was creating complications in their educational experience.

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[1]This research project conformed to the guidelines of Kent State University's Human Subjects Review Board.

Method of Analysis

The journal entries were analyzed by using the qualitative thematic approach outlined by van Manen (1990), who described three means through which a researcher can identify representative thematic phrases: the holistic or sententious approach, the selective or highlighting approach, and the detailed or line-by-line approach. Van Manen describes this process in the following manner:

> 1. In the [holistic] reading approach, we attend to the text as a whole and ask, *What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?* We then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.
>
> 2. In the selective reading approach, we listen to or read a text several times and ask, *What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?* These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight.
>
> 3. In the detailed reading approach, we look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, *What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?* (p. 93)

By using van Manen's (1990) selective reading approach, I identified thematic phrases that served "to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon" (p. 92) of being a rural/Appalachian student adjusting to the new cultural system of a college classroom. Students were categorized into each acculturation strategy if over three-fourths of their journals were representative of a particular perspective. By using the students' own words, this project identified how rural/Appalachian students express the attitudinal positions of assimilation, separation, and integration as they engaged in the college experience. (Marginalization, the fourth attitudinal position identified by Berry (2004), was not identified due to the nature of this study.)

Member checking was used to verify the categories of assimilation and integration. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) note,

> The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. If the investigator is to be able to purport that his or her reconstructions are recognizable to audience members as adequate representations of their own (and multiple) realities, it is essential that they be given the opportunity to react to them. (p. 314)

Each of the students in the categories listed above was given a draft of the final paper. After reading the draft, all of the students agreed that they had been placed in the appropriate acculturation category.

Results

Assimilation

As noted above, Berry (2004) defines the assimilation acculturation strategy as one in which the individual is focused on moving away from his or her home culture and adapting attitudes more similar to the dominant culture. The students in this study who demonstrated the strategy of assimilation were doing so because of specific issues on which they diverged from their home culture's perspective. Their assimilation strategy is not an overall assimilation; it is specific and issue driven. For example, Steph, a nontraditional student, highlights her passion to address and change her rural/Appalachian culture's attitudes towards gender and race. Due to diverse and complex life experiences, Steph believed that she had already dealt with many of these personal and conflicting issues in the past. However, the following journal excerpt highlights how her struggle with educating her community on race and gender has remained a constant and ever-changing process in her life.

> I was the first woman to join the Ruritan club. Many men threatened to quit. It was o.k. For a year before I joined, I volunteered without benefit of membership; all the women did so. The reaction I got from the men, I expected. The reaction from the women was a whole different experience. One woman . . . actually came up to me and got in my face and let me know that I ruined the boy's night out. If I wanted to be a "do-gooder," the women had their own club where they had their little community projects, why not go there? I had no intention of quitting until we were holding a fund raising dinner and one member told the other "Yep, the realtor was showing the house next door to a n----- family, so I just leaned over the fence and told them what a shame it would be if that house burned down one night after they bought it." They thought that was hysterical. . . . We typed a letter of resignation the next day.

As Steph highlights, gender and race are key issues in which rural/Appalachian culture at times comes into conflict with the ideas expressed in a university setting. In her personal

life, she is trying to create change and open the perspectives of others in the community. Unfortunately, there is a personal cost to this perspective. Later in her journal, she outlines how higher education has contributed to this personal cost.

> I like school. I do not deny my background—just stay quiet about it because really who cares? I am almost 50. That was a long time ago; I had the opportunity to break free and build a life after childhood. . . . It is the *community* where we feel the pressure.
>
> Sadly, I only have a few good friends left since returning to school. The rest think I am too radical, and I suspect they feel abandoned. I have, however, made new friends. I have met the most interesting people in school, both professors and fellow students. . . . It is a bitter-sweet experience. . . . I am becoming more cautious and guarded with respect to people outside of my classmates and immediate family. To them, I have become more outspoken in my beliefs and views. We discuss things in greater detail now.

Steph has found a bittersweet joy in the university culture. As she noted, she has broken free from some of the pressure to conform to the racial and gender ideologies expressed in her local community. However, it has cost her relationships. It is important to note that she is still committed to creating change in her home community. She has assimilated to the ideas of the university culture but is still striving to help her own community grow. There is a passion to both continue to grow personally while also helping her local community experience new ways of thinking. Her commitment to community, a rural/Appalachian value, adds to the stress of this experience.

Jamie is a similar example of this assimilation perspective. Jamie is a traditional-age student who has been active in social projects around the world that were initiated by her church. Many of the ideas expressed in class aligned with her new way of thinking about the world.

> My mother is a bit more open to new ideas. . . . I have elected myself to be the educator of my family and my community on global awareness—although I don't know if I can change their beliefs (for this is something they must have a personal desire to do); but I can share with them the knowledge I have gained through experience and the university setting—and hope to continue to gain throughout the rest of my journey.

Again, like Steph, Jamie is striving to educate her family and home culture to new ways of thinking. At a young age, she has designated herself the educator of her community to help them grow with her on this journey. Again, imagine the stress this causes these students as they try to help others adopt a new way of thinking.

Sam, on the other hand, has had a very different experience with this struggle. Sam is a traditional-age student who has not yet broken free from the stress of acculturating to this new ideology. In Sam's journal, however, one can see the commitment to changing and becoming more open to other ways of thinking:

> I can't talk to my father about anything controversial. In short, he has problems with black people, gays and women. . . . I grew up vowing never to be like him. This led me to think of others. I opened my mind about topics while he kept his closed. Since high school and college, it has become apparent that I have different views. . . . He is nice to black people in public, but will say "n" at home like it is o.k. I hate it. When I say this, he gets mad and a fight ensues. The fighting sucks. . . . I just can't talk to him. I feel like a big fish in a small pond. My father is homophobic. He believes that all gays are going to hell. "That's why God destroyed Sodom and Gomorra!" He says that all of the time. He told me that I couldn't talk religion with him.

Sam is moving away from his father's belief system. He tries to open his father's eyes to a new way of seeing others, but conflict ensues, creating further stress for him. Sam identifies more with the views expressed within the college setting and is on his way to adapting more of these ideas in his personal life. One wonders if Sam, like Steph, will return to his local community to help create a change in attitude.

Separation

Berry (2004) defines separation as the individual wanting to hold onto his or her native cultural ideology and avoid contact with the dominant cultural system. As expected, an example of this acculturation strategy is difficult, if not impossible, to identify from the students in the study. By definition, students using this strategy would remove themselves from the study.

However, one student arguably is representative of the separation acculturation strategy. This student, who referred to himself as "The Duke," was having a particularly difficult time adjusting to the ideas expressed in the university classroom. It began with our in-class discussion on inclusion. To Duke, students with special needs should not be included in a regular classroom. In class, he stated that "these students hold the normal kids back, and this inclusion stuff is part of the liberal agenda to impose immoral values on my com-

munity." For him, inclusion is part of the university culture that imposes an immoral ideology on "normal" kids and in turn is "dumbing down" our schools. Many students in the class cast disappointed looks towards Duke, but at the time, the conversation moved in a different direction, and nothing further was discussed on this issue.

However, this was not the case on another occasion. The topic of homosexuality was discussed in class later in the semester. After several moments of silence and frustration, Duke could no longer remain quiet. His statement was so strong that it was easy to recall verbatim after class. He started with, "This is what is wrong with public schools today. . . . You are promoting homosexuality and forcing it on our students. It is subversive, but there is an attempt in all public schools to make everyone gay!" I was intrigued by the accusatory nature of this statement. I questioned Duke on what type of subversive things he believed teachers were doing to promote homosexuality. His response was telling. To him, any attempt *not* to challenge and question homosexuality is an attempt to promote "that lifestyle." He noted that the bible was very clear on this issue by stating, "It is Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve." Without question, this statement struck a nerve with many of the students in the class. One of the other rural/Appalachian students was quick to challenge Duke with another section of the bible that stressed loving one another and not judging others without first examining oneself. After several minutes of debate, the class came to a consensus that this was an issue we would never agree upon.

In an effort to close the discussion, I made a point that may have pushed Duke to his separation strategy. I highlighted that regardless of the personal beliefs held by each of the students regarding homosexuality, they all needed to come to terms with the fact that teaching requires unconditional love. Even though they may feel uncomfortable and challenged by gay students, as future teachers, they must come to love their gay students as individuals, or they may never be viewed as a trustworthy and supportive teacher to any students. After that, we moved on to another topic.

Duke never returned to class. I received periodic e-mails from him stating that he was missing class because he could not get off work or that he was having trouble with his truck. I continually tried to reach him, but to no avail. He finished other classes that semester, but never returned to mine.

Duke did not submit a journal for me to evaluate. Thus, categorizing his disappearance as a separation acculturation strategy may be considered a leap on my part as a researcher. However, given his in-class behavior prior to the event, and the revelation of his strong biblical beliefs during this heightened moment, I am certain that Duke strongly believed that this university class was challenging his biblical beliefs. Rather than reflect on these ideas, he opted to stop attending and to avoid the reality of this "other culture." This separation strategy allowed him to maintain his current biblical beliefs that, to him, are an important part of rural/Appalachian culture.

Duke's example highlights an important idea regarding the interpretation of the diverse perspectives within rural/Appalachian values. As noted earlier, all of the rural/Appalachian students acknowledged that religion is an important part of their cultural identity. In this example, however, one can see the diverse interpretations of religious perspectives within the rural/Appalachian culture. For Duke, religion was clear on challenging and questioning homosexuality. For another student, religion encouraged her to practice love and self-reflection. The diverse perspectives of this event reveal the complexity of rural/Appalachian culture. They also reveal how cultural difference, even within a group, can lead to personal stress and conflict.

Integration

The third acculturation strategy defined by Berry (2004) is integration. The integration strategy is used by individuals who are trying to both interact with the dominant culture while simultaneously remaining connected with their home cultures. As defined by one student in his journal, "It's like being a coin with two sides. . . . When I am at home I try to keep my thoughts to myself. At college I try to talk to fellow students and expand my knowledge." Avoidance of the cultural difference at home is a common strategy found in many of these students.

Berry's (2004) integration strategy represents a bicultural approach to intercultural exchanges. In Berry's model, individuals have a desire to be successful in both cultural systems. However, as Birman (1994) notes, "most researchers on biculturalism have not sufficiently articulated a precise operational definition of biculturalism" (p. 270). Birman's challenge was apparent in this study.

In the analysis of the data, two distinct approaches to integration were identified. The first approach identified in the journals is representative of LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton's (1993) alternation model. They write, "The alternation model of second-culture acquisition assumes that it is possible for an individual to know and understand two different cultures. It also supposes that an individual can alter his or her behavior to fit a particular social context" (p. 399).

From this perspective, individuals learn the "game" of both cultures and are able to switch in and out of two culture settings without difficulty. Various examples of alternating between home and university culture were identified throughout this study.

Joe is a traditional-age student who represents integration through an alternating approach. One of Joe's issues is that he agrees with many of the values and ideas expressed at home, yet he also realizes that his family sometimes is too narrow in their thinking. In one section of his journal, Joe

notes that he is not necessarily in agreement with the ideas expressed in class regarding homosexuality. However, he also has a different view from his home culture:

> The values and morals that rural families have are pretty much set in stone. There is no option. You either agree with them or you don't talk. This makes college very challenging and difficult because in class you talk about and learn about ideas that very well may go against your personal views or your family's views. For example, my family is very much against homosexuality. So I know not to say anything about homosexuals being alright people, unless of course I am ready for some sort of lecture. I personally do not agree with homosexuality, and I feel it is wrong. But I can still socialize and get along in a society, where, like it or not, we have gay people in our culture. Just certain subjects such as homosexuality and race make it hard to talk to your family about stuff that you are learning in your college classes. To deal with this, I rarely talk to my family about things or ideas that I learn in college. Which can be irritating because sometimes you would like to share your life with your family. I don't talk about school with my parents, so I can avoid such remarks as "who tells you this stuff" and "since when do you think like this?" Being a rural student is difficult because you learn new ideas and would like to talk about them, but you know your family will think you are strange.

Joe avoids exploring the controversial issues at home in order to maintain his integration strategy. He realizes that to explore and investigate these ideas at home would cause stress and conflict that, at this point in his life, he is not willing to engage in. As he notes, he wants to share and discuss these ideas, but the cost may be too great for him in regards to his family. It is also important to note that he is not exclusively committed to accepting the university cultural system. He is not as extreme as his home culture on these issues, nor is he as liberal as the ideas expressed within the university setting. For Joe and other students, integration through alternation requires silence, both at home and in the classroom, so they can show respect for and commitment to their families' values while simultaneously having success in the university culture.

Some participants revealed a slightly different approach to integration. In part of their lives, as with Joe, there is an alternation strategy to maintain a connection to both cultures. In other parts of their lives, they have adapted a more assimilationist approach and are committed to teaching others from their home culture about new ways of thinking. In many ways, these individuals are forming a new identity that represents a blending of these two very different acculturation strategies.

Birman (1994), in an effort to broaden conceptions of biculturalism, presents a different category for this group of students:

> The individual who is highly identified with both cultures and participates behaviorally in both is likely to have synthesized, or "fused," the two . . . he has transcended the limitations of both [cultures] and seeks the companionship of others who have also synthesized the two into a new hyphenated identity. (p. 278)

For Birman, the blended bicultural individual is defined as an "other" in both cultural settings.[2] When the student is at home in the rural/Appalachian culture, he or she is seen as being too universitylike. While in the university setting, he or she is seen as being rural/Appalachian. For these individuals, this blending of the two cultural systems creates a unique cultural identity. Additionally, these individuals strive to find others who have redefined themselves in this way.

Cassandra is the first example of students representing a blended bicultural approach. Cassandra is a traditional-age student from a very rural setting and has strong ties to her family and church. She has been excited by some of the new ideas she has been exposed to at the university. Others, however, she has found problematic. Her blending approach surfaces in her journal entries:

> Sometimes I don't know what to think. I do think that I am glad that I am a traditional student who hasn't gotten hard-and-fast opinions of everything from having certain life experiences. I have been thinking about the reactions in the last two days of family and co-workers when I talk about our class discussion and why we were talking about homosexuality. My mom acted as if it were something we shouldn't be talking about; I am paying a college to teach me about educational psychology, not to tell me whether gay and lesbian acts are okay or not. . . . Dad says nothing, like always about school, except the occasional "good job" at the end of the semester when he sees my GPA. . . . It's not even something I can talk about at work without people being weird, how much more so would it be awkward with a "farmer" community schoolchild who could never approach their church-going mother or their four-wheel-drive truck-owning, beer-drink-

[2]See Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) for a further discussion on blended and alternating biculturalism in the context of African-American and Mexican-American adolescents.

> ing, John-Deere-hat-wearing father about anyone being gay. But how can I have a classroom where I can influence students to make moral and ethical decisions in all areas of their lives, yet be approachable about taboo issues?

In this section of Cassandra's journal, you can see the integration acculturation strategy at play. She has ideas and concerns that she shares with her family and co-workers, but she feels that the overall environment is not welcoming to this way of thinking. She sees identity, at this stage in her life, as something that can be recreated and shifted as she experiences new perspectives. Cassandra is not completely avoiding the issue that creates conflict in her home culture, but she is approaching this topic with sensitivity towards, and a respect for, the rural/Appalachian culture. She knows that being accepting of homosexuality is an important thing, but she also knows that this topic needs to be approached in a reflective manner to create change. Again, like the blended bicultural individuals described by Birman (1994), she is seeking relationships with others by shifting their way of thinking in a very subtle manner.

In another section of her journal, Cassandra discusses an event that occurred in her church one Sunday evening. After listening to a guest minister highlight the damnation of homosexuals, Cassandra was so upset that she had to leave the church. She writes,

> When we discussed the minister on the way home, my mother told me that he has good intentions and is trying to help people; when I told her I thought he was doing more harm than good, she and dad both got frustrated with me since they were part of the chorus of "amens" as I was walking out. Before I struggled with accepting diversity, I probably would have not have been half as easily frustrated with him tonight and I wouldn't have said anything to my parents. But I now feel strongly that we should be loving everyone, including the 71-year-old minister who has a different world view than I do.

In her new identity, Cassandra has found a way to balance her religious commitments in the context of sexual identity. For Cassandra, the main focus now in her rural/Appalachian religious perspective is unconditional love. If she practices unconditional love, she can now find ways to rethink and reframe homosexuality without having to compromise some of her religious convictions that are so important to her cultural identity. Additionally, through unconditional love, she can find ways to connect with others who are different from her. She had blended her religious rural/Appalachian values of unconditional love with the university cultural perspective that expresses openness for sexual identity. Additionally, she is seeking out relationships with others of like mind as she constructs this perspective. This is further explored with respect to:

> Generally, I share most of my life with my mother, including the ideas we explore in class. Usually I do not share with my father unless it is something I know he is interested in. . . . Reading *Brown v. Board* last semester put quite a strain on our relationship some days, since my mother's childhood afforded racial slurs as common language. I was told two things when I was young about selecting a spouse. If you decide to move in together before you get married, you will pay the entirety of the bill for the wedding. And he better not be black. It was understood that Papaw's pretty blonde-haired singer girl was not to even befriend a black man, let alone marry one.
>
> My mother and I had many conversations on the topic of unfair stereotypes and racism, and countless times I urged my mother to expand her way of thinking to include black people in the category of greater good of mankind. However, several weeks ago my mother and I were to meet friends in Niles, but we made a wrong turn and ended up in a low-income area of Youngstown. We were very lost and there were black people all around who we could have easily asked for directions, but I asked my mom to get directions from the skinny white girl working the drive-thru at a gas station ½ mile back. My mom commenced telling me how I was just as prejudiced as she was, and that I should stop preaching to her about her attitude towards blacks and other persons of color. It makes for a rough time mentally . . . trying to figure out if I should try to trust people whom I have been told since I was a small girl are lazy and they beat their wives or . . . are slow to work and will try to rape me. . . . . I feel this class may be helping me and yet causing much frustration at the same time.

This telling journal entry highlights how stressful it can be when one is living between two cultural systems. Cassandra is trying to help her mother grow and redefine her perspective towards others as she has in this new cultural identity. Like other blended bicultural individuals, she is seeking to find others that can appreciate this blended point of view. However, it appears that her mother is trying to find ways to remind her that she has not deviated too far in her own thinking. Cassandra's struggle in her new identity construction is apparent in this section of the journal. She is stuck

in the middle, pulling and being pulled from both cultural realities as she is creating a unique cultural identity that strives to balance the best of both cultures.

Holly, a nontraditional-age student with several children, also reflects this interesting balance between two cultural systems. She tries to help her children and husband frame important issues, particularly regarding race, differently as she has in her new cultural identity. In many ways, she is trying to build relationships with like-minded thinkers in her own family as she lives with this new cultural perspective. With her extended family, however, her approach is somewhat different:

> I don't really try to express the discussion in class with my father because I don't believe he will change. . . . I talk to my husband about the class discussions and he has since changed his attitude about people of color so that our girls won't grow up with the ignorance that we did. I try to integrate the ideas of the university into my home by talking to my children about these racial ideas. . . . I grew up with my father telling me that I was never to date a black man.
>
> My dad is always saying n------. I just look over it even though it is wrong, because he is my dad and I love him. However, I do not want my children to grow up racist. I do tell my Dad and the in-laws not to talk like that in front of my kids. . . . I grew up thinking blacks were not supposed to talk to me.

Holly has created a blended bicultural perspective that is committed to her family and her home culture, but has moved outside of their thinking on certain issues. She is committed to integrating different ideas into her children's lives so they will view the world from a holistic perspective. She also notes that she has had some success with helping her husband to reconsider some of his personal beliefs. She is striving to build relationships with like-minded individuals in her own nuclear family. Again, balancing between commitment to her family, with their rural/Appalachian perspective, and commitment to new ideas found in the university setting, Holly has created a complex and unique cultural identity that has blended many of the best ideas from both cultures. However, with her father she adapts the alternating strategy and avoids conflict with him on racial issues.

Holly and Cassandra highlight the complexity of the cultural identity struggle in blended biculturalism. As with all of these students, the intercultural conflict arises out of family commitment. As noted above, rural/Appalachian students have a strong commitment and love of family that, in some cases, makes blending a difficult strategy to adopt. Thus, although they have adopted a blended bicultural perspective for themselves, when dealing with other members of the extended family, they use an alternating approach on some issues in an effort to not jeopardize the family relationship. Therefore, these individuals weave in important ideas from the university culture into their new identity, while simultaneously finding ways to maintain the family commitment that is an important part of their rural/Appalachian culture. They are finding ways to maintain both values in this new cultural identity.

Marginalization

Due to the design of the study, identifying examples of marginalization was difficult if not impossible. Berry (2004) defines marginalization as the acculturation strategy in which the individual is not interested in contact with either the home or the dominant culture. Participants in this study self-selected to be a part of the research. Those students, one can reasonably infer, have desire to connect with the university culture, e.g., to take the time to create and submit a journal to the professor. From observing their attitudes in class discussions and written assignments, I believe many of my students use this strategy; however, I could not find a clear sample of this strategy in the submitted journals. Many students in my class express a disinterest in connecting with others in that world. Likewise, many of these same students express a disinterest in the discussion of rural/Appalachian values. Unfortunately, none of these students agreed to participate in this study.

Discussion

University instructors need to understand the shifting emotional reality that intercultural students' experience. As witnessed in these students' journals, acculturative stress is part of their experience. From the abused student who was the impetus for this study to the others who described confusion and frustration, acculturative stress is apparent in the rural/Appalachian college student's life. Particularly in the areas of race, sexuality, and gender roles, rural/Appalachian students experience personal stress that they must negotiate as they encounter conflicting ideas. For many in this study, the responsibility to family, community, and religious values forces them into a push-pull relationship that can be difficult. Other students strive to bring their families along with them as they grow and reshape their thinking. Another group uses avoidance as the most opportune strategy to reduce the stress in their life. Still others create a unique cultural identity that shares the important values of both cultural systems. A final group of students shuts off the university ideas and fight to maintain their own values and cultural systems. In all cases, students feel a great deal of acculturative stress as they negotiate this intercultural encounter.

Berry (2001) contends that the dominant group's acculturation expectations may be responsible for the acculturative

tion strategy used at the individual level. In this study, the dominant group is defined as the university classroom. Berry (1974, 1980) has found that dominant cultures can express one of four acculturation attitudes towards newcomers. Berry et al. (2002) state that

> [a]ssimilation, when sought by the dominant group, can be termed the "melting pot." When separation is demanded and enforced by the dominant group, it is "segregation." For marginalization, when imposed by the dominant group it is a form of "exclusion"….Finally for integration, when cultural diversity is an objective of society as a whole, it represents the strategy of mutual accommodation now widely called multiculturalism. (pp. 355-356)

Due to the impact that the dominant culture's attitude can have on the immigrant group's acculturation strategy, professors should examine their own attitudes and classroom practices. Which acculturation strategy are we encouraging in our own classrooms? What are our intercultural expectations of rural/Appalachian students (multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, or exclusion)? Professors, administrators, and staff can benefit from examining the impact that our attitudes, practices, and overall university structure can have on rural/Appalachian students as they attempt to gain access to higher education.

The challenge to college educators of rural/Appalachian students is a complex and difficult one. Although not directly discussing education in a university setting, Howley, Howley, and Pendarvis (2003) provide a provocative insight that educators should consider. These authors note that rural commitments, often in conflict with more cosmopolitan ideas, are typically characterized as simplistic ways of thinking. They note that teachers often promote this perception of rural life even when teaching in a rural setting: "Teachers often reinforce these responses instead of countering them by honoring the rich complexity of rural life, the value of local knowledge, and the importance of developing intellect" (Howley et al., p. 82). They further note that "teachers who do not respect a style of living born of local knowledge are likely to evoke resentment and disengagement among students rooted in such knowledge" (p. 85). As college educators, we should consider other ways of thinking and expressing without promoting perspectives that devalue the rural experience.

That said, we should not overly romanticize the rural perspective and deny the complexity of rural identity. We must continue to find ways to challenge our students regarding racist, homophobic, and gender perspectives that limit and deny access to others in a diverse and democratic society such as ours. As educators, we need to recognize the acculturative stress associated with cultural growth while simultaneously providing a means for continued growth to occur. As Howley et al. (2003) caution, "cultural formation . . . [is] contradictory, embodying at one and the same time features that liberate and constrain individuals and groups" (p. 90).

One model that may help with this delicate cultural dance that occurs in the college classroom is the caring-centered multicultural perspective. By combining the ideas of Dewey (1916, 1938), Freire (1970), Noddings (1995), and others, Pang (2001) has defined the caring-centered multicultural approach this way:

> [Multicultural education] seeks to develop happy, creative, ethical, and fulfilled persons who work towards a more compassionate and just society. Multicultural education, as part of a life-giving process of growth and joy, focuses on teaching the whole student with the goal of academic excellence and developing the potential of each student by integrating three critical belief systems: the ethic of care, education for democracy, and the sociocultural context of human growth and development. (p. 60)

If educators start from a caring position by striving to identify and understand our students' acculturative stress, we then can create a context for change. By modeling for them a sense of understanding and by providing students with examples of how their peers have negotiated these conflicting cultural realities, our rural/Appalachian students may develop strategies for creating change in their personal lives. This, in turn, will prepare them to become stronger democratic citizens that are committed to a democratic way of living. This difficult task must start with an understanding and appreciation of the contradictory nature of the lived experience that many of our rural/Appalachian students encounter every day. Once this trust and understanding is established, new ways of thinking and living can be introduced and modeled as our students explore a different view of the world.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the complexity of rural/Appalachian students' cultural conceptions. Students struggle to form a more holistic view of the world while maintaining important cultural perspectives regarding sense of place, community, and family. These struggles are complex and always in flux as students negotiate the cultural system that exists within each university classroom. As educators in the university setting, understanding the complexity of this struggle may provide insight into our own practices and perspectives towards rural/Appalachian students.

The rural/Appalachian students in this study were socialized into a strong commitment to family, community, religion, and traditional gender roles. One of the greatest strengths in this value system, commitment to family and community, may make socialization into the university setting a difficult task. However, if we, as university educators, practice careful reflection of our own attitudes and values regarding rural/Appalachian students, we may identify strategies that will serve to reframe our own classroom practices. In this manner, we can help our students grow and adjust in meaningful ways. Additionally, we, ourselves, can learn from our students as we co-construct realities and practices that can help to reduce the acculturative stress that is created through the educational experience.

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