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## “I Live Hopi, I Just Don’t Speak It”—The Critical Intersection of Language, Culture, and Identity in the Lives of Contemporary Hopi Youth

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Despite having been immersed in the Hopi culture throughout their lives, many of today’s Hopi youth do not understand or speak their heritage language. This article highlights the notion of “affective enculturation”—the development of an emotional commitment to Hopi ideals—cultivated through the myriad practices that comprise the Hopi oral tradition. This ethnographic study focusing on the cultural and linguistic experiences of 3 Hopi youth revealed that (a) even without a strong origin in the language, youth learn to act, think, and feel Hopi through their active participation in their Hopi world and (b) language is only *one* of the many ways to experience and learn one’s culture. Nevertheless, these youth contend that the Hopi language is fundamental to “fully” participating in and understanding the Hopi way of life—a finding that offers hope for reinvigoration and (re)acquisition of the language among all generations.

**Key words:** Indigenous language, language ideology, language and cultural maintenance, language revitalization, youth identity

Yeah it’s important to speak, but that’s not all that counts. Because a Pahaana (Anglo) can learn how to speak it, speak the language, but they don’t know the meaning behind it, or the actual culture, the in-depth stuff; [so] then they’re not Hopi. They don’t practice our religious ceremony[ies] and they don’t *live* Hopi; [so] then they’re not Hopi. (Dorian, age 19, a nonspeaker of Hopi; emphasis added)

Dorian’s statement conveys a strong cultural identity developed through a life immersed in the Hopi culture. However, like many Hopi youth, Dorian does not understand or speak her heritage language. Such youth may find themselves positioned on the fringes of their speech community. Thus, Dorian’s assertion, “I live Hopi, I just don’t speak it,” which titles this article, draws attention to the notion of *living Hopi*, a posture viewed as underlying how contemporary Hopi youth define and assert their personal and social identities as members of Hopi society.

This stance places an emphasis on *active* participation in the Hopi religion, customs, and traditions as leading to the acquisition and demonstration of appropriate cultural standards of conduct and attitude in everyday life, while moving toward a deeper understanding of the purpose and meaning of cultural traditions in the Hopi way of life. I maintain that language is inherent in the myriad social, cultural, and religious practices of Hopi, still primarily an oral society. These

practices provide the context for *language as cultural practice* for which a proficiency in Hopi (receptive and productive ability) is not a prerequisite.

The 3 youth participants of this study—Dorian, Jared, and Justin—were born into Hopi culture, raised on the Hopi reservation in northern Arizona, participated in cultural traditions from early childhood, and, as young adults, expressed a strong affinity for their heritage culture. By birthright, these youth acquired “cultural markers of identity”—maternal clan identity, maternal village affiliation, birth and ceremonial names—and the privileges of participation in Hopi society. Thus, in spite of the fact that, as Dorian further stated, “Most of the time when you’re growing up, it’s English [that is used to learn the culture],” Hopi youth internalize the expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that define them as Hopi individuals.

Nevertheless, Dorian, Jared, and Justin contend that the Hopi language is a fundamental aspect of living Hopi, a perception that became more acute with their entry into young adulthood, as their Hopi linguistic shortcomings manifested in what Dorian called the “missing piece” in the social and religious realms of Hopi life. She stated, “in Hopi, everything [knowledge, ceremonies, song, traditions] is passed down orally,” so language “plays a big key . . . in the learning process [of Hopi culture].” In this article, I explore the critical intersection of language and culture in the Hopi identity-formation process, expressed in Hopi as “*Hak sinmuy amumum Hopiqatsit ang nūutum hintsakme, Hopisinoniwtingwu*” (When one participates along with others in the Hopi way of life, one becomes Hopi). By examining the cultural and linguistic experiences of these youth, I draw on the expressions of their lived experience to illuminate the notions of and links between “living Hopi,” and “language as cultural practice.”

I begin with a brief overview of contemporary Hopi society—the Hopi people, their reservation lands, and the vitality of the Hopi language as well as a description of contemporary Hopi youth. Next, I describe the research methodology, including my position as an “insider” researcher. I follow with ethnographic portraits of the 3 Hopi youth. A glimpse into Hopi epistemology provides the cultural context for the oral language experiences of these youth in the traditional practices of Hopi naming, planting corn by hand, and song in ritualized performances. According to Heath, such practices are identified as examples that stand “within an array of other communication forms . . . [and as] symbol systems [that] hold different levels and types of influence in different societies” (cited in Ochs, 1988, p. ix), all of which work to ensure that the individual becomes a competent member of society.

## CONTEMPORARY HOPI SOCIETY

### *Hopiit*, the Hopi People

The Hopi people, who call themselves *Hopiit*, are the westernmost of the Puebloan groups (Rushforth & Upham, 1992). A kinship-based matrilineal society, the Hopi occupy a portion of their aboriginal lands in northeastern Arizona. The Hopi reservation encompasses 1.6 million acres situated on and around the 3 southernmost fingers of Black Mesa. Slightly more than 7,000 of the 12,000 Hopi reside permanently on the reservation in or near 12 villages of the 3 mesas.

Traditionally, the residential unit was the extended family, but today's Hopi households are composed mostly of nuclear family units. While the incorporation of a cash economy and Western education into the Hopi way of life are evident, each village continues to function largely as a socially, politically, and ceremonially autonomous unit. Village life continues to revolve around a ceremonial calendar of ritual events conducted to summon the rains that nourish the crops, as well as the physical and spiritual essence of the Hopi people.

### *Hopilavayi*, the Hopi Language

The Hopi language stands as “a separate branch within [the] Northern Uto-Aztec” language family (Hopi Dictionary Project, 1998, p. xv). Most speakers regard the language as having 3 dialects—First Mesa Hopi, Second Mesa Hopi, and Third Mesa Hopi—all mutually intelligible across the villages. Hopi continues to be the viable medium of intergenerational interaction during cultural activities. Thus, Hopi remains a language still spoken by all generations, including children, but it is undergoing a rapid change evident in its diminishing use as a language of interaction between generations, ambivalent attitudes toward the language, and the incorporation of English into speech—realities expressed by one grandparent study participant, Clara, with her words, “*Anaave alöngti. Pahankwasa yu'a'atof[a]*” (It [the prominence of the Hopi language] has really changed. They [the Hopi people] are always speaking English).

A 1997 reservation-wide language assessment confirmed that a significant language shift had occurred. English was the primary language in at least half the 347 households surveyed (representing 1,293 individuals), particularly among younger Hopi (HLAP, 1997, p. 6). The survey also identified schooling as a significant contributor to the rapid language shift. This linguistic situation raises compelling questions about the vitality and continuity of the Hopi language and culture: What is the impact of language shift on the identity formation of Hopi youth? Are youth still learning the social and cultural knowledge that leads to the development of the cultural ethics essential to becoming a competent and contributing member of Hopi society? What is the impact on how Hopi youth view the Hopi language? And, more importantly, how will today's Hopi youth ensure Hopi cultural and linguistic continuity and vitality for future generations of Hopi?

### *Hopitsatsayom*, Hopi Youth

Many of today's Hopi youth are born into and grow up in their village communities. Raised among their immediate and extended families, youth participate from birth in the myriad activities associated with Hopi cultural institutions that continue to be practiced—baby namings, ceremonial initiations, weddings, social dances, planting corn by hand, and religious ceremonies. With the construction of a junior/senior high school on the reservation in 1986, lengthy durations away from home at distant boarding schools are a thing of the past (Qoyawayma, 1964; Sekaquaptewa, 1985; Simmons, 1971; Yava, 1978). Most youth attend one of 7 elementary schools in the village communities and transfer to Hopi Jr./Sr. High School for grades 7 through 12. Western education is highly valued; its acceptance and integration into the Hopi way of life is premised on an understanding that the benefits of an education will enhance the lifeway of the individual as well as the collective.

Hopi youth are highly experienced with mainstream society due to increased mobility, media, technology, and regular off-reservation family and school excursions. Following commonly held expectations associated with Western education (e.g., economic opportunities), most youth will venture into the wider society for varying durations of time. Of those who remain on the reservation, most will actively participate in the traditional activities. However, an ominous uncertainty surrounds Hopi linguistic continuity, as a Hopi speaking ability is not a prerequisite for participation in these cultural traditions.

At a series of village forums held in 1997, older Hopi speakers voiced their observations about the consequences of Hopi language shift among younger Hopi. Younger Hopi are perceived as *tsàatsayom*, children who, despite their chronological age, have not yet learned the precepts that guide one to think maturely and behave in a distinctively Hopi manner. Community members, grandparents, and parents who actively participate in traditional activities point out their lack of preparedness to attain a deeper, or spiritual, level of understanding of these activities. More troubling are the behaviors and attitudes perceived as *qa hopi*, not Hopi—no longer behaving humbly or having “respect for anything” and increasing involvement with substance abuse, gang membership, and domestic violence—activities that violate principles of the Hopi way of life. They have become “strangers” in their community. Clara, a grandmother participant, stated that she has considered confronting youth with the questions, “*Um himu? Um hintoqoovi qa Hopiituqayta?*” (What are you [a non-Hopi]? Why haven’t you learned to speak Hopi?). Although harsh, her thoughts convey a strong link between language, culture, and identity while pointing to the intergenerational tensions surrounding this linguistic crisis.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### An “Insider” Researcher

Hopi was my first language, but at the age of 8 and coinciding with a humiliating school experience related to my lack of proficiency in English, I ceased speaking Hopi. Retaining a receptive ability in Hopi, I began to struggle to express myself in the language I had spoken with ease as a child. My mother’s words, “*Um tsayniiqe as paas Hopiningwu*” (When you were a child, you were fully Hopi), in response to my attempts to use the Hopi language in conversations with her, conveyed a strong link between language and cultural identity; her words struck deeply. Moreover, my children, who are biracial and were raised for the most part in an urban, interracial, monolingual English household, did not acquire the Hopi language. Conceding my role in contributing to their feelings of alienation and estrangement from their Hopi community remains difficult.

Investigating Hopi language shift with a focus on youth came about as I assisted Emory Sekaquaptewa, research anthropologist in the Bureau of Research and Anthropology at the University of Arizona, in providing Hopi literacy lessons to Hopi youth in reservation schools. I was intrigued by the fact that despite being immersed from birth in the Hopi environment and culture, these youth were nonusers of Hopi. Further, given the history of linguistic oppression in Anglo-American schools, I found it ironic that these youth sought to learn their heritage language in school. Recalling my mother’s words expressing the strong link between language and identity, I began to ask, what is the role of the Hopi language in how Hopi youth define and assert their identities as members of Hopi society and as Hopi citizens in the broader sense?

This shared experience with the study participants—language shift in my own life—established that I was *involved* in the Hopi social world (cf. Mason, 1996, p. 61). And, as a researcher in my own community, I was also *epistemologically privileged*.

### Multiple, Intergenerational Case Study

A multiple, intergenerational case study approach was employed for the larger study of which this article is part (Nicholas, 2008). My goal was to understand the impact of modernity and rapid change on Hopi language ideologies and practices as experienced across 3 generations and households. Data were collected using Seidman's (2006) tripartite phenomenological interview model, which combines focused life histories with in-depth interviewing and participant observation. This interview sequence provided an effective and culturally appropriate venue—collecting oral stories—for establishing the context and source of participants' "memories of injustice" and "diversities of truth" (Smith, 1999, pp. 144–145, citing Bishop, 1996). My frequent travels to Hopi to participate in cultural and ceremonial activities and to visit extended family were highly conducive to participant observation of the "daily routines, conversations, language and rhetoric used, [and] styles of behaviour (including non-verbal)" (Mason, 1996, p. 61) practiced in homes, the village, ritual performances, and community events.

### Study Participants

My previous work with students enrolled in Hopi language classes at the Hopi Jr./Sr. High School and my frequent visits to Hopi netted the participation of the 3 Hopi youth at the center of this study, former students in Hopi language classes, as well as their parents and grandparents—a familial intergenerational model for examining language shift. This focus changed with the passing of Dorian's and Justin's maternal grandmothers and the withdrawal of Jared's grandmother as data collection began. With the exception of Dorian and her parents, who insisted that their actual names be used, pseudonyms are used for all study participants.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS: DORIAN, JARED, AND JUSTIN

At the time of the study (March 19–October 25, 2003), each of these youth was 19 years of age, a recent graduate of Hopi High School, and adjusting to young adulthood. Like their mainstream counterparts, their combined experiences followed a progression of preschool, elementary school, and junior and senior high school and its array of academic and extracurricular activities. They also had the opportunity to remain intimately involved in their respective village communities and Hopi culture, thus, the manner in which they lived their lives and the perspectives they developed reflect a strong cultural influence.

### Dorian

A salient image of Dorian is that of a petite, vivacious, and precocious young woman, self-assured and confident in manner. At the time of the study, she, a younger brother, and her mother comprised the immediate family household; they lived in a mobile home, one of many

clusters of residential units along the base of the village mesas. The second of 3 children, Dorian was born in a border town at the northern boundary of the Hopi reservation. Her older, married sister lived in a mobile home next door, and her father lived near Kiqötsmovi Village at the southern base of Third Mesa.

Dorian's mother's home village of Supawlavi was central in her early childhood memories. She vividly recalled the daily routine of visiting and caring for their maternal grandmother; it was the "protocol," as was active participation in cultural activities in the village. In high school, she was a member of the cheerleading squad and the cross-country track team, one of the first females in the school's wrestling program, and she attended summer camps for the performing arts in California.

At the time of the study, Dorian was the reigning Miss Indian Arizona. Through this experience she gained a broader insight into tribal people, tribal nations, and Indian issues. She also gained a better understanding of the cultural significance of Hopi women, developed pride in representing herself as a contemporary Indian woman, and recognized the role of the Hopi language in constructing a uniquely Hopi cultural identity.

Dorian identified 2 career aspirations: (a) to pursue a career in the performing arts with the vision of a school of theatre arts for and on Hopi and (b) to work in some capacity with children. Dorian also aspired to be "fully" Hopi. While she experienced and lived her life as a Hopi, actively "learning the basic things we [Hopi people] do in English," she expressed a significant void in her cultural experiences: "If you don't know it [the Hopi language], you don't really understand [Hopi culture]."

## Jared

Physically, Jared is a strapping young man whose reserved demeanor veiled a sensitive, thoughtful, serious nature. At the time of the study, Jared was experiencing his first semester at a community college and living away from his village community and family for the first time. The youngest of 4 children, he was following in the footsteps of 2 older siblings by moving to the city. A second brother was living at Hopi. The more than 10-year age difference between Jared and his siblings distanced him from their company and attention; he described an early childhood spent predominantly in the company of his mother and maternal grandmother.

He recalled strict disciplinary guidelines as key factors in keeping him clear of the negative influences of substance abuse and gang membership. Many of his friends and family had succumbed to these during their adolescent years, and he now expressed satisfaction in maintaining a good reputation personally and on behalf of his family.

As Jared moved through junior and senior high, his extracurricular interests changed from sports to music, and he pursued mastering the guitar; practicing filled most of his unstructured time. Jared saw music as a way to resist and counter the pressures of adolescence and young adulthood (gang membership and substance abuse), and he pursued this passion as a career goal. Because his biological father's absence in his life left a significant void, becoming a good husband and father was an important aspiration. He emphatically stated, "when I get married, I'm gonna be the only one who doesn't get a divorce or have to pay child support. [And if] I have kids of my own, I don't want to be like my father [absent from his life]." Being subjected to comments from Hopi speaking community members such as, "How can you be Hopi if you can't speak it?" further implanted a strong message for Jared, a nonspeaker of Hopi, about the link between language and identity.

## Justin

Justin's shy, soft-spoken demeanor confirmed a gentle and sensitive nature underlying his strong sense of family responsibility and self-discipline. At the time of the study, he was living with his parents and his 11-year-old sister, awaiting the arrival of another sibling. Justin was a proficient speaker of Hopi but preferred to use English in the interviews. His professional goal was to become a massage or physical therapist. He planned to attend a college in Phoenix, Arizona, but stated, "when I got out of school [graduated], things changed a lot. . . . It [attending college] just never happened." Instead, he was busy tending his own and his family's fields, working alongside his stepfather on construction projects and continuing to be actively involved in traditional *kiva* (ceremonial) activities. He rationalized that possibly he was not yet ready to pursue higher education but asserted, "I'm still gonna do that [go to school]."

Justin was born in Keams Canyon, a tribal agency community on the Hopi reservation, but grew up in his mother's Third Mesa home village. With the exception of "getting away for awhile" for summer visits with extended family in New Mexico, Justin had never lived off the reservation. He recalled his early childhood by saying, "I usually just hung out by myself. . . . I usually just played outside my grandma's house."

Justin had been active in both traditional planting of corn and *kiva* activities since early childhood; using the Hopi language was central to these activities, "singing and just talking [in Hopi]." He understood "the songs, the language, what the people say." Thus, he described his Hopi language proficiency at "about 75%," but added, "I still wanna learn more of what things mean, and I'm still learning it as I'm getting older."

## Summary

These brief ethnographic portraits demonstrate that contemporary Hopi youth, even without a command of the Hopi language (Dorian and Jared), develop a strong orientation to the Hopi way of life by "living Hopi" and gain varying degrees of competency in these socially defined contexts (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). I describe the notion of "living Hopi" as a process of affective enculturation (cf. Eggan, 1970) underlying the Hopi identity-formation process. This is expressed in the Hopi words, "*Hak sinmuy amumum Hopiqatsit ang nūutum hintsakme, Hopisinoniwingwu*" (When one participates along with others in the Hopi way of life, one becomes Hopi). By "living Hopi" one can experience and learn Hopi culture through song, dance, cultural institutions, ritual practices, traditions, and ceremonies that comprise the Hopi oral tradition. Hopi oral tradition has transported the origin and philosophy of the Hopi way of life across time and continues to connect the Hopi people to their ancestral past. In order to explain how this is reflected in the life histories of these Hopi youth, I pause to consider aspects of Hopi philosophy and values conveyed through oral tradition.

## THE ORIGIN AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE HOPI WAY OF LIFE

The origin and philosophy of the Hopi way of life are embedded in the Hopi Emergence story. The Emergence story is still recounted with the words, *I hapi tutavo*. . . (This is our teaching



[regarding the Hopi way of life] . . .) The essence of the Hopi Emergence story is encapsulated in the following excerpt<sup>1</sup>:

We, [the Hopi people] at that place [of Emergence] received our life path; what kind of life we were to lead was made known to us. It was by means of corn, cultivating corn that we would survive and where [the environment] we were to undertake this life sustaining practice. This way of life would be one of hard work; survival would be a struggle. However, by means of our belief [in this way of life], and because of our faith, a greater power [the Creator] would take pity on us and bestow upon us drops of rain. (E. Sekaquaptewa, personal communication, November 10, 2003)

The Hopi way of life is guided by principles of *humility* and *reciprocity*; if Hopi people live properly, following a moral and spiritual path, moisture in the form of rain—a precious commodity in this high desert landscape—will be ensured and they will attain physical and spiritual fulfillment. This teaching is reinforced through both the religious and secular activities of the Hopi people. Whiteley and Masayesva (1998) state, “Hopis regard ritual, if performed properly—the cardinal values are pure intentions and good hearts in harmony with each other—as instrumentally efficacious” in preserving, communicating, and transporting the philosophical principles that continue to give purpose and meaning to the lives of the Hopi people (p. 191).

#### AFFECTIVE ENCULTURATION THROUGH HOPI ORAL TRADITION

I’m Squash [Clan] . . . My mother is Pumpkin or Squash [Clan] and my father [is] Corn Clan. . . . My mom’s from here, *Supawlavi* [Village] and my dad’s from *Hotvela* [Village]. . . . My baby name, the one I go by is, Samimana, which means Corn Girl. (Dorian)

The Hopi identity-formation process begins at birth and is encapsulated in the following Hopi expression:

When one is born, through the mother[’s clan lineage], one gains membership in her community of kin [a birthright], and through one’s birth name [bestowed by one’s paternal clanswomen], one comes to have all the paternal male clan members as fathers—becomes a child (not a clan member) of the paternal clanspeople. By [birthright and] one’s [paternally bestowed] name, one inherits the privileges of participation in all [Hopi] ritual practices. (E. Sekaquaptewa, personal communication, November 9, 2006)

By birthright, the Hopi child acquires cultural markers of identity—maternal clan identity, maternal village affiliation, birth and ceremonial names, ascribed roles established through the clan-kinship system—and the privileges of participation and increasing involvement in Hopi culture. At birth, the female infant is ascribed the role of *kya’a*, maternal aunt, to the children of the male members of her clan. The male infant, *na’amingwu*, “becomes a father” to all children whose fathers are members of his clan. Birthright, clan membership, and such inherited privileges also bring duty (conduct owed) and obligation (socially imposed duty) to an increasingly expanding community of kin.

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<sup>1</sup>Due to space limitations, the original Hopi in which this quotation, and others of older Hopis cited here, is not included. For original Hopi transcriptions, see Nicholas (2008).

## Hopi Naming Rituals

Hopi naming rituals are a means for sustaining the reciprocal relationships “between individuals and groups in the human world,” which begin at infancy (Sekaquaptewa & Washburn, 2004, p. 467). These kinship connections are defined through the use of specific kinship terms: *itangu* (our mother); *itana* (our father); *itàaso* (our grandmother); *itàakwa* (our grandfather); *taha* (maternal uncle), and *kya’a* (paternal aunt)—and their respective responsibilities and obligations encompassing secular and ceremonial Hopi life. The Hopi individual receives numerous names as a participant in a series of initiations that mark significant rites of passage throughout life.

In their responses to interview questions about their Hopi names, Dorian, Jared, and Justin referenced a “baby name” and “an initiation name,” indicating that each had also experienced the naming ritual as part of her or his initiation into the *katsina* society.<sup>2</sup> Dorian elaborated:

Well, [it] depends. Right now, I’m kind of iffy on which one I should go by; the ones that were given to me as a baby, or my initiated name. So, my baby name, the one I go by is, Samimana, which means Corn Girl. And then for my initiated name, I go by Soovenmana, Star Girl.

Dorian’s “baby” name—Samimana, or Corn Girl—reflects her father’s clan family, the *Qa’öngyam* (Corn Clan). Soovenmana (Star Girl), her initiation name, reflects the fact that her chosen sponsor for initiation into the *katsina* society was a member of the *Qalngyam*, or Sunforehead Clan. Through her baby name, Samimana, a connection to her father’s clan family is established. Her role and obligations to this clan family are twofold: (a) as a child of her father and therefore the male members of this clan—*ti’am*, or *mööyi*—her female responsibility is that of a female child to her “fathers” (both her biological father as well as all the male members of his clan), that is, preparing food for them in various contexts (home, ritual performances, religious ceremonies); (b) to her father’s sisters and female clan members—her *kyamat*, paternal aunts/grandmothers—to whom she must demonstrate the Hopi attribute of industriousness by grinding corn. The relationship between the female Hopi child and her paternal clanswomen, while limited in daily life, is formally acknowledged at the *Powamuy* ceremony where she will receive a plaque as a gift from the *katsinam*, a symbolic reminder to grind corn—be industrious—and take it to her paternal clanswomen, *kyamuy*.

Use of kinship terms “obligates” people to one another. The evidence of this learned sense of duty and moral obligation toward “family” are conveyed in Dorian’s and Jared’s expressions:

It’s the protocol to take care of her [maternal grandmother] daily. . . . Within the immediate family, it’s [the responsibility] actually first [my aunt] . . . then it’s my mom, and then it’s my sister, and then it’s me. . . . I know how to wash her. I know how to cook for her . . . give her medicine and things. (Dorian)

I just thought to myself. If I would do that [engage in negative behaviors and] I had lots of opportunity to do that . . . [I asked myself,] “How would they react to me [if I got into trouble]? How would they react to my parents?” I don’t want my parents having a bad name because of me. That’s just another thing that kept me out of trouble. (Jared)

<sup>2</sup>In Hopi belief, *katsina* (sing.) is a spirit-being and *katsinam* (pl.) are spirit-beings who come in the form of rain to provide the essential moisture for the corn and “for their part, have control over the rains” (Hopi Dictionary Project, 1998, p. 134). If the people have prepared their prayers with an attitude of sincerity and have been living a good life in the “Hopi way”—a moral existence and by ethical conduct—they have demonstrated that they are “deserving” of their coming. The *katsinam* come to the Hopi villages, the “earthly world” of the Hopi, in response to their prayers with the promise of all things—bountiful harvest, harmony, life (Nicholas, 2008, p. 263).

The sense of duty and obligation expands to the “community” in the Hopi sense, as understood through Justin’s and Dorian’s recollection of the words of wisdom frequently voiced by their maternal grandmothers:

Always help people because . . . all [one’s] life, somebody will help you. And that’s just what I’m doing, helping my dad and helping my mom’s side, my other *tahas*, and just helping ’em as much as I can. (Justin)

Don’t be mean to anybody . . . [because] you never know if that person might help you out [or] you might need that person’s help later on. (Dorian)

These relationships are also acknowledged in the *social* way one acts toward certain kin, and are formally acknowledged through ritualized performances and social dances discussed later in this article. They serve to establish allegiance to the larger Hopi community, further promoting the sense of communalism. However, adherence often exerts undue pressure, as expressed by Jared:

We’re all related, [by] clans, [and it involves] certain responsibilities that our clans have to do [ceremonially for each other]. . . . We have to come out here [and help]. . . . When I don’t come [or] take part, I feel guilty and then feel sorry about it later.

Nevertheless, a “sense of belonging and responsibility” is attained, a strong component in the development of *affect* and a *sense of aesthetics* for the Hopi way of life. Each of these youth had been encouraged and guided by significant kin in conducting themselves according to Hopi standards. “Playing the part” of one’s role in the described social arenas of the kinship network is as important as the ability to use the language. As one Hopi elder stated at a public forum, “If you are Hopi, you will never forget your culture because you know who you are, and you . . . know what your responsibilities are [to your family, community, people, and the world].” (Village of Lower Munqapi, 1997).

### The Ritual of Planting Corn by Hand

The language and that [planting], that was the most [of what] I learned when I was growing up . . . how to plant with a stick [*sooya*], on your own instead of having somebody else doing it for you. . . . Way back then, that’s how we survived—[by] planting the corn. We ate from what we planted and that’s what kept us alive. (Justin)

Justin’s statement underscores the notion of language as cultural practice; that “words have a home in the context of culture—in the course of daily activities, in social institutions . . . they have meaning within these contexts” (E. Sekaquaptewa, cited in Nicholas, 2005, p. 31). Justin and Jared each confirmed that planting corn by hand—traditionally part of the practice of making a living by farming, preparing for one’s family economic responsibilities, and as upholding a spiritual duty—remains basic to the contemporary Hopi way of life.

Whiteley (1998) describes the practice of planting corn by hand, *natwani*, as “a worldly reflection on one’s self-practice and conduct” in reference to the successful growth of “crops, children, or other fruits of personal effort; if they turn out well they accrue to the individual’s virtue” (p. 41). Justin’s statement, “You can talk to the plants; they’re just like your children. So, [you tell them] ‘Just be strong as you’re growing up. Don’t let anything bother you.’ And they’ll hear you,” exemplifies the role of language in “practicing” culture.

Black (1984) adds, “A symbiotic and complementary relationship is seen to pertain to corn and humans. Young plants are cared for as children by people; if they are properly cared for, encouraged, and prayed for, they are able to mature. (p. 286). Encouraging and nurturing words expressed thusly in Hopi, “*Uma hapi ö’qalyani. Uma qa tsaakwiwyungni. Uma kyaktaytotini; su’qawyani*” (You [my corn children] desire to be strong. You are not to wither. You have a speedy growth; be confident) are integral to the “proper” care of one’s corn children (E. Sekaquaptewa, personal communication, May 25, 2004). Justin confirmed the use of this oral tradition in tending to his corn children. Song words also convey these messages. A grandparent study participant, Clara, recalled this practice vividly in memories of her childhood:

At that time, the men at their fields, would go along singing, because, in effect, they were taking care of their plants [as if they were children]. With much happiness, they were tending to them [the corn children].

Among contemporary Hopi youth, Justin is one of few who have accompanied male kin to the fields since early childhood, describing himself as a speaker as well. As such, Justin stated that he was “born and raised” to become a Hopi farmer. This belief figured significantly in his plans following graduation from high school. He stated,

For me, leaving this place and my farming, [and involvement in] the cultural [activities], that just got to me. [I thought], that’s [schooling] way down there [far away from Hopi], so I just left that [put thoughts of further education aside] just to [stay] out here.

His case provides strong support for the notion of language as cultural practice and the *affective* nature of involvement in such ritual activities. In contrast, for Jared the practice of caring for his “corn children” was disrupted by the absence of his biological father as well as by the premature deaths of his maternal uncles, the male kin who pass this tradition on to the young. He describes himself as a nonspeaker of Hopi.

### Song in Ritualized Performances

When that drum goes, you don’t hear it, you feel it. . . . You don’t know what they’re [men singers] saying, but you still get that feeling [of connection and common purpose] that you go by. (Dorian)

Each of these youth attached particular importance to Hopi songs as part of the “ritualized performances” (Sekaquaptewa & Washburn, 2004), indicating that songs still emit a powerful influence on Hopi people. Often referred to as “dances,” these include social, women’s and men’s societies, and katsina ritualized performances.

The cultural practice of social dances is the means by which Hopi children learn their kinship connections and appropriate behaviors in a formally acknowledged way. From an early age, they also begin to gain awareness of the religious aspects of Hopi culture. As participants, each of these youth frequented the kiva (the ceremonial chamber) where the preparation takes place. Preparation involves learning Hopi songs that accompany the dances, as well as the dance steps and motions choreographed by the men, through nightly rehearsals over several weeks prior to the public performance in the dance plaza. The messages relayed through song words “paint images of a beautiful world, prosperity; with the rains bringing all of that [beauty] so that people can *feel* good about seeing this image as something that they all would want”—affirming a sense

of aesthetics for the Hopi way of life (E. Sekaquaptewa, personal communication, May 25, 2004).

Through their performance, the dancers enable community members, who participate as members of the audience, to conjure up these images. Despite describing themselves as non-speakers of Hopi, Dorian and Jared expressed an understanding of Hopi songs and ritualized performances as both powerful and significant. For Dorian, it was a “good feeling” to be consumed—physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually—by the “awe-inspiring drama and intensity projected in these performances,” imparted through the whole “complex of performance features—[song] words, ritual, dance, clothing, and associated objects and images” (Sekaquaptewa and Washburn, 2004, p. 462). “It’s what your thoughts are . . . what’s inside of you that counts,” she stated. In fact, these youth were being socialized into Hopi society through the Hopi language in its most “spiritually powerful forms . . . [and] through which [the Hopi people] come in touch with the preordained world of Hopi” (E. Sekaquaptewa, 1997).

However, the “missing piece—speaking the language”—is brought to the forefront by Dorian’s experience as a participant in the women’s Basket Dance. She described her conscientious efforts to understand the Hopi songs that accompanied this female ritual performance:

Right now, I don’t know what the songs mean, but I’m still at that stage of learning [memorizing with limited comprehension] the words and the rhythm and how it’s put together. Then once I learn a full song, I’ll ask . . . my aunt—she’s in the Basket Dance—‘What does it [the song] say?’ And she’ll tell me.

Although recognizing isolated words, she added, “The rest, it’s like a puzzle, and I don’t have the missing pieces.” The missing pieces that eluded both Jared and Dorian are the meanings embedded in and conveyed through the Hopi language.

Young adulthood brings with it a new perception of youth, as expressed in the adage: “*Puma hooyi*” (They have “come of age,” reached adulthood, gained independence). In early childhood, participation was about “going out and having fun.” During adolescence and young adulthood, they participated in part to fulfill their familial and community responsibility, but now as young adults they also felt a strong “pull” to participate from a desire to feel good, important, and “connected” to something significant to the Hopi people—personal and spiritual fulfillment. As these youth widened their social roles in the community and pursued greater involvement in religious activities, they became keenly aware that Hopi linguistic competence was essential to fully participating in the *adult* social and religious realms.

The Hopi principles of life, embodied in the “metaphorical words and phrases” of katsina songs, are the “same conceptual metaphors that are found in Hopi songs [in the] historic and pre-historic past,” and are “perfectly clear” to Hopi who understand the language intimately (Sekaquaptewa & Washburn, 2004, pp. 458–460). Justin, privy to the Hopi world described and communicated through katsina songs, expressed a more ominous perception of language shift and loss.

People [the Hopi] . . . won’t know the songs to each kachina song or Buffalo song. . . . They won’t know it all. With the language loss, how are you gonna sing [internalize the meanings or pass them on to the succeeding generations]?

## CONCLUSION

Dorian, Jared, and Justin offer perspectives about their contemporary Hopi world in which the Hopi oral tradition remains integral. Their combined experiences and expressions of “living” Hopi confirm that the traditional identity-formation process continues to influence younger generations of Hopi. Conveyed orally, Hopi traditions communicate the totality of the Hopi way of life, an awareness that spurred a newfound motivation and urgency to learn the Hopi language, as voiced in Jared’s reflection: “It kind of makes you think again, you need to learn this if you want to progress and they [elders, ceremonial fathers] want to teach you more. They want you to understand it [the language] first.”

Further, Dorian’s words convey the understanding that language is “the clearest representation of that [cultural] thought”; thus, understanding cultural knowledge “become[s] pretty shallow” (p. 51) when learned through English or in an English-language environment (Hermes, 2005, p. 51). English and Hopi represent 2 distinct ways of thought and differing interpretations of the world:

We have to learn the language ’cuz my mom tells me there are some things you can’t learn in English because it’s just hard to explain it in English . . . Like me, I’m learning the basic [cultural] things we do in English . . . [But] if you don’t know it [the Hopi language], you don’t really understand [the Hopi culture].

Nonetheless, from a new awareness about their responsibility for Hopi cultural and linguistic continuity expressed by Jared and Dorian respectively, and Justin’s observation of a positive change in attitude associated with attaining maturity, these youth voice a sense of optimism:

People are gonna always have butterfly dances and kachina dances, and just other social dances. . . . That’s gonna involve Hopi [language], singing Hopi songs. That’s just how it’s [Hopi language and cultural practices] gonna keep going. (Jared)

A lot of our elders and our parents . . . are counting on us to keep the traditions going and that heritage, that culture . . . [but] I don’t think it’s fully complete without that missing piece of language, the tongue, the speaking. (Dorian)

I guess their grandma or parent said something to them that finally got into their mind so I guess they’re trying to learn now. (Justin)

More importantly, Justin’s assertion, “Since you’re Hopi, you’re brought up that way; you can’t let it go. It’s just gonna be too hard,” suggests that the younger generation, particularly those raised in the Hopi cultural environment, will hold tightly to the Hopi way of life; they are bound to it by habit, intellect, and choice.

The Hopi oral tradition—the “total communicative framework” (Crystal, 2000; Hall 1976) manifest in song words, prayer, teachings, ritual performances, religious ceremonies, and cultural institutions—encompasses the philosophical principles that have long given purpose and meaning to the lives of the Hopi people (Sekaquaptewa & Washburn, 2004). These transmission mechanisms remain endowed with an integrity that is upheld and maintained by continued practice of these traditions.

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