



Session for the 48h Annual Meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society – “Cultures of Healing” – Johnson City, TN - March 2013

SESSION TITLE: Healing In and Through Community, Re-Imagined: Cases from Central Appalachia

SESSION ABSTRACT: Taking our cue from research findings along dimensions of human experience ranging from the physical and environmental to the spiritual and religious, this session is designed to critically examine ways that different communities are imagined, constructed, and experienced and what these processes mean for individual and collective identity. We consider how community as reimagined and defined may offer potentially therapeutic alternatives to conventional beliefs and practices in the United States. These reimaginings take such forms as creating a local food “hub or seeking inclusionary ways of defining social space and group membership to the intentional use of environment—broadly defined—for personal and societal transformation. While the particulars of our ethnographic inquiries vary greatly, we share a deep appreciation for the need to capture lived experience and contribute to the public discourse about our subjects.

PAPER ABSTRACTS & PRESENTER INFORMATION

Brian A. Hoey, Session Organizer/Chair & Presenter [Associate Professor, Marshall University]

TITLE: Defining “Growth” in the Post-industrial City: Creating a Healthy Huntington

ABSTRACT: This paper explores how community may be variously re-imagined in order to promote incipient social and/or economic agendas born of progressive citizen and government initiatives aimed at “development.” Despite a recent history of bleak economic conditions and prevailing images of Appalachia as geographically—if not culturally —isolated, Huntington, West Virginia has been an ideal place to document innovative forms of entrepreneurship, community building, and place-marketing according to emerging cultural and economic models that stand in sharp contrast to a once dominant paradigm that has aimed to encourage capital investment through providing tax breaks together with cheap land and labor. Can Huntington emerge as a positive example of post-industrial, urban regeneration and social healing through a growing movement that attempts to transform the city from one defined by the productive capacity of factories to a destination for the “creative class” and an economic center specializing in higher education and biomedical services? Based on the findings of ongoing ethnographic research among citizen activists and local leaders, this paper contributes to the academic and popular

discussion of how U.S. cities like Huntington might seek a place that promises sustainable, restorative “growth” in a landscape shifted by profound economic changes.

BIO: Brian Hoey is an Associate Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Marshall University. He received his B.A. in Human Ecology from the College of the Atlantic and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan. His ethnographic research explores the social, cultural, and personal effects of post-industrial economic restructuring, migration, and place marketing. In addition to a continuing interest in career change, identity, and the moral meanings of work, Hoey has a longstanding interest in the anthropology of space and place and, in particular, therapeutic ideals attached to particular natural and built environments. Hoey has published on these and other subjects in the *American Ethnologist*, *City and Society*, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Ethnology*, and several book chapters.

Autumn Crank, Presenter [M.A. candidate, Marshall University]

TITLE: The Homeless Other

ABSTRACT: Social distancing and acts of “othering” are two processes used by both individuals and groups required to maintain close proximity. Whether this proximity is socially or geographically significant, these tactics are used to place physical or metaphysical barriers that set one social self apart from another. When individuals share similarities in social status and proximity, a social group may be formed. Social grouping is a mechanism that many people use to identify with characteristics of a particular group. Although this is a process that all individuals within a society practice at some level, it is one that necessarily creates divisions between insiders and outsiders who may not “fit” a given group. This paper is based on an ethnographic research project with a group of people experiencing homelessness, living in a shelter, and the individuals who worked around them in shelter area. By examining the area and conversing with the “homeless,” I observed the interaction between two different groups and found significant social distress among those who identified with the homeless. This paper will present findings from this study through the analytical lens of environmental and social health in order to show how social group distancing tactics affect typically marginalized, “at-risk” groups.

Farris Jackson, Presenter [B.A. candidate, Marshall University]

TITLE: Lost in TRANSLation: Gender-Bending and the Drag Queen Community

ABSTRACT: This paper will discuss preliminary findings from an ethnographic research project focusing on Drag culture and aspects of being a female-impersonator. Specifically, the focus in this project is the different ways that Drag is done by looking at the bar/nightclub, entertainment, theatrical, and celebrity aspects. I will highlight the fact that Drag performers do not always fit into transgender, transsexual, or transvestite categories. Further, I will examine the sociopolitical dynamics of this apparent sub-culture, while looking into the ways that political policy affects Drag Queens in the Tri-State area of West Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky. This work will be based on

observation of performances, backstage rooms, transgender support groups and LGBTQ clubs in the area. In addition, research includes group and individual interviews with regional Drag Queens. Group interviews will allow participants to respond to one another and potentially generate a strategy for initiating public policies that provide freedom to gender-bend publicly without discrimination. While the prevailing view in the United States is that gender has a clear line between males and females, Drag Queens challenge this simple dichotomy. I will argue that “trans” categories, with which Drag Queens are usually associated—while a useful shorthand—are hurting the Drag Queen community by making people feel left out and confused regarding their place in the larger society, and perhaps it is our tendency to categorize people that is the real problem.

Emily Cain, Presenter [B.A. candidate, Marshall University]

TITLE: The Eclectic Individual: A Study of Hare Krishna Devotees in the 21st Century

ABSTRACT: This paper will provide ethnographic insight into the notions of religious change and identity formation through the experience of Hare Krishna devotees associated with the New Vrindaban temple located in northern West Virginia. Specifically, the paper addresses how malleability and personalization of values and beliefs can have a healing effect on those who find themselves subject to outsider status. In my discussion, I will demonstrate how physical movement away from the temple community and into the mainstream community necessitates a transformation in ideology and self-identity. Through attendance of religious and social gatherings and interviews with both devotees and local non-devotees, I observed that movement into the mainstream community was accompanied by the creation of a new worldview which combined the individual’s status as both Hare Krishna devotee and mainstream society member, allowing their values and beliefs to provide them with a greater sense of power and benefit. This paper contributes to current discussion on identity formation and the progression of individual religious experience.

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