A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GRIEVING AND BEREAVEMENT RITUALS IN THE MUSCOGEE CREEK TRIBE

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

John, a young Muscogee Creek Indian, was employed by a community service agency that openly advertises its policies of cultural sensitivity in the workplace. One day at work his mother phoned him with a message that her uncle, John's great-uncle, had died. John's father was also deceased, and as the first-born son he was expected to take care of his mother and younger siblings during times of grieving. The first ritual was to occur in two days at dusk at the tribe's church. Meetings requiring his participation would follow for a minimum of four days. Understanding his responsibility to his family, John immediately contacted his supervisor to notify him of his great-uncle's death. The supervisor assured him that he might be excused from work to attend the funeral. When John informed the supervisor that he would not be returning for a week, however, the supervisor asked, "A full week? Because your great-uncle died?" Suspecting that the young man might be using the death of a somewhat distant relative to get a few extra days off work, the supervisor denied his request and allowed him only two excused days away.

This true example describes difficulty that may be caused by a lack of understanding of grieving and bereavement rituals among cultures. Cultural factors in bereavement are significant but have been largely ignored (Bonanno & Kaltmann, 1999).

Although much of society proclaims cultural sensitivity, this scenario clearly suggests a problem of lack of education and awareness in how these cultural differences are expressed. More specifically, the social construction of grieving and bereavement rituals varies among cultures and affects how loss is handled.

The existence of bereavement is universal. Death is difficult for everyone (Rosenblatt, 2001). Despite the various differences among cultures in grieving behaviors and methods of expressing bereavement, certain feelings are common. Although feelings may be similar, expressions and behaviors vary across cultures. This study seeks to explore and describe the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals that are unique to Muscogee Creek Indians. Understanding will lead to acceptance, and the acceptance of the Muscogee Creek Indians will allow the population more freedom of expression of cultural beliefs. The intent is to provide other cultures with information to increase knowledge and, ultimately, further understanding of the Muscogee Creek.

Background of the Problem

In Okmulgee, Oklahoma, there lies the headquarters of what was at one time a dominant force in native North America. Though this nation's lands once comprised a large section of present-day Alabama and Georgia (Debo, 1967), its current lands include a smaller section of central and eastern Oklahoma. The Muscogee Creek Nation has experienced a past of change, relocation, adjustment, and death. Many tribal members were killed in battles with settlers, in the Creek War of 1835 –1836, and in the Civil War of the 1860s (Muscogee Nation, 1992; Debo, 1941). The last few centuries of fighting

for their lands, adapting to various new settlers, and relocating to new lands has made Creeks familiar with loss.

Despite the challenges facing this population over the last few centuries, the Creek culture appears to remain intact. Certain characteristics of this nation of people have possibly ensured what appears to be a cultural survival, and the researcher proposes that these characteristics have also helped the nation's members adapt to change and loss. One characteristic of Muscogee Creeks is the collective system, providing built-in support from community or tribe (Kalish & Reynolds, 1976) within which the nation has traditionally operated. It appears that the people of the Muscogee Creek Nation use a structure of intra-familial support and an effective method of coping with death through bereavement rituals and grieving behaviors.

A review of literature on Muscogee Creek culture, Native American studies, and grief and culture produced gaps in information. Grief literature is extensive; however cross-cultural studies of grief are lacking. The available literature on Creek issues provided insight into Creek historical background and cultural patterns. Very little literature was available addressing current Creek culture, and literature discussing grief and bereavement issues among the Creeks was scarce. This general lack of research fuels this study. To better understand death and loss among Muscogee Creeks, more information is needed. Conducting an exploratory study is an effective way to access knowledge needed to understand this population's way of handling loss.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the social construction of grieving and bereavement rituals among Muscogee Creek Indians. The researcher's objective is to discover the patterns and expressions of grief dominant among the people of the Muscogee Creek Nation. The study includes exploration of bereavement rituals and methods used to deal with grief. The researcher will present an accurate picture of current practices of this population. In addition, the researcher will describe processes and rituals, increasing understanding of the Muscogee Creek family and community among other cultural groups. Finally, this researcher will generate a study that has value to the Muscogee Creek Nation by providing additional literature about its culture and customs.

Research Questions

Specific questions were asked to address the study's problem of lack of awareness, education, and literature on Muscogee Creek grief and bereavement and fulfill the purpose and research objectives of the study. Research questions are as follows:

1. How do members of the Muscogee Creek tribe construct grieving and bereavement rituals?
2. How does the meaning Muscogee Creeks associate with death affect the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals?
3. What factors contribute to the construction of Muscogee Creek grieving and bereavement rituals?

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Quantitative studies assume that generalization of findings is necessary for validity. To ensure that findings are accurate and reliable, they must reflect an aspect of universality within a sample or a population. Researchers' ideas on possible universal aspects of grief, however, are sharply conflicted. Some believe that the experience of grief is universal but that the expression of emotions varies across cultures (Kagawa-Singer, 1994). Others believe that the experience of grief may be based on how each culture or individual conceptualizes or constructs death. The fact that death is difficult may be the only commonality among cultures (Rosenblatt, 2001). Due to the cultural variation in grief and the doubt concerning possible universal aspects of grief, researchers must be aware of personal assumptions when conducting studies. Also, very little literature is available on the Muscogee Creek population. These arguments support the need for an exploratory study to generate knowledge on Creek grieving and bereavement.

For the above reasons, Neimeyer and Hogan (2001) recommend using more qualitative methods in grief research. Very little is known about grief and bereavement within the Creek Nation, and developing a valid, quantitative measurement by which to evaluate the subjects would be difficult. A quantitative study potentially eliminates relevant data about ideas of grief specific to the Muscogee Creek. Furthermore, attempts at objectivity needed to promote generalization may limit the richness of available data; qualitative studies seek to explore particular, atypical events, activities, or people (Creswell, 1998), and external validity, or generalization, is not a major purpose of case study research (Stake, 1995). Because of the specificity of the grief/bereavement phenomenon within this particular limited population, generalization is not the

researcher's primary goal. Rather, the primary purpose is to generate, explore, and describe grief of a particular group, the Muscogee Creeks. Thus, a qualitative study is the most appropriate design.

Definitions of Terms and Commentary

To clarify the meanings of significant concepts that form the basis of this study, the following terms are defined.

1. Culture: "Culture" is a term that is interpreted and used in a number of ways. For example, "culture" is often used as a blanket term to represent all variations between societal groups. Laird (1998) defined culture as "an individual and social construction, a constantly evolving and changing set of meanings that can be understood only in the context of a narrativized past, co-interpreted present, and a wished-for future" (p. 28). Laird (1998) emphasized the importance of seeing culture as a fluid concept capable of change, requiring a continual learning process of those trying to understand it. No point exists where an individual reaches ultimate knowledge and understanding of culture because it is continually in motion. Laird (1998) emphasized the importance of viewing culture in this context so individual biases can be addressed. This researcher must be aware of the influence of her culture of origin during data collection and data analysis. Although the researcher will attempt to minimize her biases and gain accurate understanding of the Creek position in dealing with grief, she must expect limitations and know that complete understanding may never be fully reached.

2. Grief: Throughout studies of death and dying, terms such as grief and bereavement have been used interchangeably. John Bowlby (1980) discussed the importance of distinguishing these terms with specific definitions. He defined grief as "the condition of a person who is experiencing distress at loss and experiencing it in a more or less overt way" (Bowlby, 1980, p. 18). Colin Murray Parkes (1972) defined grief as "an emotional and behavioral reaction to the severing of a love tie" (p. xi). To understand the nature of grief and how it is expressed by the Muscogee Creeks, the researcher must be open to consider the presence or the absence of similarities of the Creek grieving and bereavement with that of mainstream Western culture.
3. Bereavement: *The Handbook of Bereavement* defines bereavement as "the objective situation of having lost someone significant." (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993, p. 5). This concept represents an overall state that often triggers an emotional reaction such as grief. Like grief, this state may exist in all cultures, varying in length and intensity.
4. Mourning: This term refers to "the actions and manner of expressing grief, which often reflect the (mourning) practices of one's culture" (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993, p. 5). The term is used in the variable of socialized mourning period in this study.
5. Rituals: This term is defined as "unique beliefs, customs, and behaviors of every culture in attending to the deceased: disposing of the body, incorporating into religious ceremonies, prescribed acts of mourning, and official remembrances" (Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993, p. 35). Many cultures have their own

particular method of handling grief and bereavement, often using rituals. Those rituals used by the Muscogee Creek will be explored in this study.

6. Tribe: "This term usually denotes a social group bound together by kin and duty and associated with a particular territory. Members of the tribe share the social cohesion associated with the family, together with the sense of political autonomy of a nation " (Marshall, 1998, p. 674). In this study, this term is considered to be a large familial, political, and social group within which the participants belong, as opposed to a small group of immediate family.
7. Family: "The family is an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties" (Marshall, 1998, p. 221). In mainstream culture this term also includes 2-3 generations of children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, great-aunts, great-uncles, and cousins. In Muscogee Creek culture, family tends to be larger and includes more distant relatives.
8. Muscogee Creek Nation: This term identifies a group of Native American people who have occupied North America for several centuries (exact time of their arrival is unknown). This nation has its own government, language, culture, and land. The people that comprise this nation are the participants of this study.
9. Construction: Construction is a piece of knowledge or reality, the development of which is contingent upon the culture and/or history of a society. The piece of knowledge is dynamic; it does not represent absolute truth but varies according to an individuals' perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Social construction may occur as a result of an individual's interaction with the environment. Social

Constructionism, a conceptual framework which mandates the construction of knowledge based on interactions between participant and environment, as well as participant and researcher (Neimeyer, 1998), is the theoretical perspective on which this study is based.

10. Constructivism: Constructivism is a recently evolved paradigm of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Within Constructivism, the nature of reality is relative. The relationship between researcher and participant is interactional and results in creation of knowledge.

Summary / Overview

Studies in Native American, particularly Muscogee Creek, issues are scarce. This significant segment of Oklahoma culture is under-represented in literature. Very little information is available on constructions of grieving and bereavement in Muscogee Creek culture. The lack of information concerns this researcher because of the potential positive impact the present information could have on other cultural groups and members of the research community. Knowledge of this group's successful adjustment to change and loss could benefit other cultural groups. The researcher is interested in discovering the processes behind what appears to be successful adjustment to loss of Muscogee Creek tribal members. Differences in bereavement rituals between this population and those of mainstream society are often misunderstood. Data of this type will produce a greater understanding of Muscogee Creeks in the research community and among other cultural groups in mainstream society.

The following chapter reviews literature on two topics significant to this study: 1) Muscogee Creek culture and 2) grief and culture. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Social Constructionism, the theoretical framework used in this study. Chapter III includes a description of design, sampling procedures, instrument used, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and issues of rigor (Creswell, 1998). Chapters IV and V present the results that emerged through a detailed analysis of data gathered, notes taken, and interviews conducted. Each code is explained, supported with data, and interpreted. Chapter IV discusses constructions of grieving and bereavement rituals and the relationship between the two. Chapter V discusses aspects of Creek culture and how they influence the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals. Chapter VI interprets the results according to social constructionism. A discussion of strengths and limitations of the study is presented, contributions to society are discussed, and suggestions for future research are made.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review consists of three sections, including: 1) Muscogee Creek culture, 2) grief and culture, and 3) Social Constructionism. The first strand describes Muscogee Creek history, Native American political issues, Native American culture, and Muscogee Creek culture. The second strand contains studies on grief and culture, the role of families in grief, American cultural grieving patterns, and Native American grieving issues. Finally, the theoretical framework of Social Constructionism is presented.

MUSCOGEE CREEK CULTURE

Through many drastic changes during Muscogee Creek history, this nation has appeared to remain adjustable, resilient, and strong. The ability of the Muscogee Creeks to adjust to change may give them a seemingly extraordinary ability to cope with loss and death. Throughout history, the focus of the Muscogee Creek culture moved from that of conquest to that of survival (Wickman, 1999). The Muscogee Creek Nation has incorporated flexibility and mechanisms that have ensured their survival. "Their world was capable of incorporating the New without destroying the Old, and their descendents not only survive today but also succeed as a discrete culture as a result," (Wickman, 1999, p. 7)

Muscogee Creek History

Muscogee Creek Indians represent a remarkable history, inhabiting North American lands for centuries. Although their date of origin in North America is unknown, it can be traced back to at least Pre-historic times. Maskoki people are made up of Creek, Seminole, and Miccosukee inhabiting southeastern United States and Florida (Wickman, 1999). All of these tribes commonly inhabited the Mississippi River and lived in the region within boundaries of the Atlantic coast, the lower Mississippi Valley, Tennessee, and the Gulf of Mexico (Josephy, 1991).

In Pre-historic times, the people in this region hunted Pleistocene animals using fluted spear points (Josephy, 1991). The Archaic Stage began 10,000 years ago when large animals were hunted, as well as deer. Gathering was rising in importance, and some tribes along the coast gathered shellfish while others gathered wild plant foods. Pottery was first formed 4,500 years ago along the southeastern coast by mixing clay with plant fibers. Migrants from present-day Mexico moved to the southeastern region in 1,700 B.C. and introduced agriculture (Josephy, 1991). Artifacts and earthworks indicate more people living in closer proximity (possible cities), common religion, and organized division of labor at this time.

In 1000 B.C. burial mounds appeared, characteristic of population growth, increase in trade activity, and appearance of more settlements (Josephy, 1991). People in southeastern tribes at this time lived in wooden buildings atop rectangular or pyramidal mounds. Eternal fires were cultivated inside the temples, and the flames were re-ignited annually. The temples and pottery were heavily influenced by the migrants from Middle

America. During 700-1600 A.D., Mississippian Temple mound cultures flourished in the Southeast, and the structures were larger, stronger, and more numerous. Three main centers were located in Spiro, Oklahoma, Moundville, Alabama, and Etowah in northern Georgia. The year 1600 A.D. characterized the breakdown of Mississippian culture, due to large population loss from disease brought by Europeans (Josephy, 1991).

Georgia and Alabama were occupied by a Confederation, known to the English as the Muscogee Creeks (Champagne, 1993). This name refers to approximately twelve subgroups that were previously divided into the "Upper Creeks," those living on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, and Alabama Rivers, and the "Lower Creeks," living on the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers (Swanton, 1998). The Muscogee Creeks formed a Confederacy that joined a number of clans and towns along these rivers (Debo, 1967).

This Confederacy grew stronger and more powerful with the arrival of White men (Debo, 1967) and encompassed approximately 50 towns that were divided into two categories, Red Towns or White Towns. Red Towns developed war leaders, and White Towns facilitated diplomacy and developed chiefs pursuing peace (Josephy, 1991). Red Towns controlled the Creek government during war, and White Towns controlled Creek government during peace (Champagne, 1993). All towns had an individual religious / spiritual identity. After emigration to Oklahoma in the mid-1830s, Creek government remained the same. Coweta became the primary Red Town of the Lower Creeks, and Tuckabatchee was the primary Red Town of the Upper Creeks (Champagne, 1993).

Settlements usually contained approximately 100 structures, made up of grass, mud, and poles (Josephy, 1991). The dwellings encircled a large opening reserved for activities, ceremonies, and parties. Tribal social organization was made up of seven

different units, including family, clan, and town (M. H. Wright, 1986). Women could own property, and families seldom moved, unless into a newly built house. Clans included family members that had a common ancestor through the female bloodline. At one time, clans within the tribe numbered in excess of 50, the most powerful of which were the Bear, Wind, Bird, and Beaver clans. Just like towns, clans were grouped into either White clans (promoting peace) or Red clans (dealing with war).

The chief was the primary leader of the town, a position obtained through heredity. The chief and main officers, each of whom was accompanied by an assistant or lieutenant called "heniha," attended the ceremonies (M. H. Wright, 1986). The highest war official, obtained through service and honor, was the "tustengugee". The Green Corn Ceremony, "Pushika," was held annually following harvest (Josephy, 1991). The ceremony celebrated renewing of life by resolving conflicts, disposing of worn pottery, cleaning the entire settlement, and eliminating old fires. A black drink was made by boiling the leaves of the Ilex cassine plant. Leaders and warriors who wished to obtain a clear mind and a strong body consumed this drink (Josephy, 1991). Creeks in Oklahoma today, however, use a plant called "red root" for the same purpose (M. H. Wright, 1986)..

During ceremonies such as the Green Corn Dance, town members camped in the woods all around the central square. The dances were rich with symbolism and Creek tradition (M. H. Wright, 1986). Ritual dances continued for two days and two nights, and the sacred fire was kept burning the entire time. Three or four arbors were constructed around the square, including: 1) chiefs occupying the west arbor, 2) warriors in the north arbor, and 3) leaders in the south arbor. Leaders chanted continuously throughout the dance to keep time.

Women were very involved in the dances and wore streamers and ribbons in their hair and on their dresses. Women leaders wore terrapin shells around their ankles to rattle and keep the dance rhythm (M. H. Wright, 1986). After the second day, fasting ended, and both men and women ingested the black drink. A feast was then held for everyone, and younger tribal members played games. After this, dances in which everyone took part were resumed.

During the nineteenth century, agriculture was utilized in small portions with gardens growing melons, tobacco, corn, and beans. Hunting and fishing brought freshwater fish, bear, deer, and birds (Josephy, 1991). People still gathered nuts and berries and prepared dishes such as hominy, jelly, cakes, and soup. Men wore breechcloths, leggings, moccasins, and mantles of feathers while women wore skirts of hide or grass and sometimes shirts. Tattoos were common throughout the region of the southeast.

When Europeans arrived, the Creek population sharply declined, and many fled from Georgia and Alabama to Florida to escape disease and death (Josephy, 1991). These Creeks often intermarried with African slaves, forming a new group the Creeks entitled "Isty-Semole," a term meaning "wild man". The name evolved to "Seminoles," which indicated that they were runaways from Creeks. Creeks were able to adapt to European lifestyle more quickly than other tribes and, thus, became named one of the "five civilized tribes" (Josephy, 1991). Despite this, United States government forced their migration during the 1830s to land deemed uninhabitable by White people west of the Mississippi River.

Although guarantees were made to the Muscogee Creeks that their lands would not be ceded, treaties contradicting those guarantees allowed White settlers to move into Indian Territory in 1828 (Muscogee Nation, 1992). To compensate for this offense, all Muscogee Creeks still in Alabama were guaranteed, through a treaty in 1832, their own allotted lands that could be sold with judicial permission. Many of the Muscogee Creek were deceived, however, with dishonest sales, leaving them without their money or their land. When these families returned to their original lands in Alabama and received opposition from new owners, the Creek War began and continued from 1835 to 1836 (Muscogee Nation, 1992). Many Creeks were finally removed to Oklahoma by military force.

In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. John Blout and Davy Elliott signed agreements with Indian Commissioner James Gladsden in 1832 to move their towns from reservations along Apalachicola River to western lands in Oklahoma (Ellsworth & Dysart, 1970). Two other bands in this region refused to move. In 1834, the first bands headed west. Many Creeks still lived in Florida, particularly in the panhandle, in small groups in secluded places to avoid White people.

During the Civil War, many Muscogee Creek traveled to Kansas, although some stayed and joined the Confederacy (Muscogee Nation, 1992). When the war was over, the Muscogee Creek Nation was punished for those who joined the Confederacy, and their allotted tribal lands were eliminated by half. The Muscogee Creek Nation relocated to Oklahoma in the 1830s. The tribe later reorganized themselves in 1979 under the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936 (National Native American Cooperative, 1996).

After the relocation to Oklahoma, large landowners became powerful in Creek government (Champagne, 1993). An election in 1867 was conducted, using European-style ballot voting, according to a new constitution developed by these landowners. Traditional voters, who voted by lining up behind their preferred candidate, misunderstood the new way of voting and lost the election (Champagne, 1993). Large landowners controlled Creek government for the rest of the 19th century.

The Muscogee Creek Nation in Oklahoma currently has a population of 45,000 (National Native American Cooperative, 1996). Many tribal members are knowledgeable in the Muskoke language, which is spoken, read, and written (Muscogee Nation, 1992). The primary population areas are between the Verdigris and South Canadian Rivers, and the tribal headquarters is located in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Current United States policy reaffirms "the government-to-government relationship between the federal government and tribal governments," (National Native American Cooperative, 1998, p. 1-USA). This policy was signed by President George Bush in 1992 and allows for a liaison from the president's staff to handle issues with all Indian tribes.

Many members of the Creek Nation have successful careers and live in eastern Oklahoma, with particularly dense populations in Okmulgee and Eufala. The majority are members of the Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian Church (M. H. Wright, 1986). Some traditional rituals, such as the Green Corn Dance, are still observed though mainly for their historical significance.

Native American Political Issues

Nationalism and sovereignty are issues at the forefront of Native American political interest. Native American tribes have succeeded in maintaining some element of these powers for themselves, although they have been compromised greatly (Johnson, 1999). Most politics in Native America occur on local levels of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The issue of national sovereignty involves conflict with the United States government. Native American groups have, therefore, been able to take certain issues to the international level for discussion at the United Nations (Johnson, 1999).

The United States seeks to maintain sovereignty over tribal lands through issues of prosecution of capital crimes, resource use, and development of casinos and gaming (Johnson, 1999). A minimum of 125 tribes located in 24 states own gaming facilities; gaming is a widely known method of Native Americans for economic development. Tribes are currently attempting to find new ways (which do not compromise traditional values or health concerns) of improving their current conditions through economic development (Johnson, 1999).

Another important current political issue of Native Americans is repatriation (Johnson, 1999). Researchers and / or robbers mutilating Indian burial sites are greatly offensive to many Native American groups, including Muscogee Creeks. Often the human body parts and artifacts are collected and displayed in museums for the purpose of research (Johnson, 1999). This type of research contradicts the spirituality and sacred rituals of Native people (Johnson, 1999) and the Creek Nation. Creeks' offense to the crime increases necessity for the researcher's sensitivity while conducting this study.

The study also offers an opportunity to study Creek death and bereavement rituals using a method that is acceptable to the creeks. In addition, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed in 1990 to protect the rights of Native Americans and retain their power over their cultural objects (Johnson, 1999).

Nagel (1995) studied the phenomenon of ethnic renewal. Those claiming to be Native American tripled in number between 1960 and 1990, according to the United States Census. Since births and immigration alone cannot account for this increase, Nagel (1995) proposed that people are voluntarily changing their ethnic identity due to ethnic renewal. Nagel (1995, p. 947) defined ethnic renewal as, "the reconstruction of one's ethnic identity by reclaiming a discarded identity, replacing or amending an identity in an existing ethnic identity repertoire, or filling a personal ethnic void," and proposed three elements that increase ethnic renewal. First, federal Indian policy increased identity, communication, and affirmed Native American culture. Next, American ethnic politics, such as affirmative action and programs for minorities, increased financial and social rewards of being Native American. Finally, American Indian activism affirmed ethnic identity by redefining and re-establishing personal worth as a Native American (Nagel, 1995).

Native American Family and Culture

Native American culture encompasses variations within numerous subgroups, or tribes, in the United States, including "A minimum of 300 federally recognized tribes, 100 state historical tribes, and several dozen tribes with no formal recognition," (Van Winkle, 2000, p. 128). Prior to 1970, only 5 tribes had federally recognized status, but

this number has increased to over 300 (Van Winkle, 2000). To gain this status, a tribe must have a particular community with political processes in effect since before contact with Whites, be descendants of a historical tribe, and have maintained an independent government throughout history.

Despite vast diversity within the population, a few commonalities may be observed. The following section provides information on family and culture that may be generalized among Native American tribes. The information is also relevant and applicable to Muscogee Creek Indians, the group on which this case study is based. The subsequent section addresses cultural issues specific to the Creek Nation.

True Native American culture is often confused with images the media has generated of native people. Men are portrayed either as young and virile or as old, brave, and full of wisdom (Bird, 1999). Women are sexualized and portrayed as physically beautiful, strong, and attractive. This image objectifies Native American men and women, and the media has, until recently, presented these largely inaccurate images. Accurate portrayals of authentic, Native American experience, culture, and relationships have yet to be found in the media (Bird, 1999).

So what is authentic Native American culture? According to Robinson-Zanartu (1996), this question may only be answered through a genuine understanding of the Native American view of the world and value system. Whereas White Americans tend to see the world as linear, technology-based, and reductionistic, Native Americans generally see the world as circular, holistic, and harmonious with nature (Robinson-Zanartu, 1996). Native Americans are focused on the present and value patience, family relationships,

thinking and operating as a group, internal richness and character, harmony with nature, and spiritual depth (Robinson-Zanartu, 1996).

In traditional Native American culture, little facial expression is shown, and eye contact is minimal (Lee & Cartledge, 1996). With the exception of young children, physical touch is usually avoided. Personal space typically consists of 2-3 feet between adults, and the stance is usually side-by-side rather than facing one another directly. Time within this culture is viewed as cyclical or continuous; therefore, little attention is paid to specific time restraints. Silence and gentleness are valued as strengths and signs of maturity (Lee & Cartledge, 1996). Interrupting by Native Americans is rare, and listening carefully with eyes closed is considered respectful. Some Native American tribes communicate indirectly, value silence, and avoid prolonged eye contact (Van Winkle, 2000). Many Native Americans are taught to have an internal locus of control, to seek the advice of elders, but to ultimately make their own final decisions.

In traditional Native American culture, values include sense of belonging, mastery (cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual), independence, and generosity. Native American society emphasizes community and altruism, regarding gentleness as a sign of deep respect (Lee & Cartledge, 1996). Those not within the community are considered outsiders and do not easily obtain closeness with community members. The tribe is considered to be the primary social unit, and sacrifice for the benefit of others within the group is expected (Lee & Cartledge, 1996). Personally owned property is limited; everything is shared, and property is communally owned.

Native Americans view the family as a large network of extended family and clansmen, not all of which are tied by blood. This communal family is top priority, and

those outside of the family and community are considered outsiders (Lee & Cartledge, 1996). Elders are highly respected in this culture, and grandparents are traditionally the teachers of wisdom and maturity. Children are treated kindly and with respect, are not harshly disciplined, and receive minimal authoritative dominance. Parenting is passive and supportive, and correcting children is done gently (Lee & Cartledge, 1996).

The Native American family is an extended network, consisting of fictive kin who may fill the roles of actual aunts, uncles, and cousins (Stauss, 1995). Herring (1989) summarized the Native American family:

> The Native American extended family is the primary social, economic, and political unit. The Native American family structure contains unique perspectives on the roles of women and grandparents in its child-rearing styles. Most of these perspectives are shared by traditional, non-traditional, and pan-traditional family lifestyle patterns (p. 6).

Native American family strengths may not be measured by Euro-American ideas about education, family studies, social work, and literature. The Native American key to strength is balance and harmony with the universe. Deloria (1991) believed that strength in Native American families comes from the way in which personalities connect with power (energy in the universe) and place. Relational bonding provides harmony and balance to individuals and families and helps maintain family strengths (Stauss, 1995).

Stauss (1995) warned against generalizing traits of Native American families because of the vast tribal diversity. Study of Native American families can only be attempted through a systemic, holistic perspective. Stauss (1995) recommended searching for strengths in Native American families and in their ability to survive, rather than the perspective of traditional literature in looking for problems and maladaptive

behavior. Strengths of Native American families are unique; they bear some resemblance to Euro-American family strengths but have their own identity based on sacred, cultural, and political issues.

The structure and organization of traditional Native American society is unique. All Native American tribes are divided into clans, and the number of clans varies significantly between tribes (EchoHawk, 1997). Clans are divided into families, although all members of a clan are somehow related. Each member of a clan has a specific job or task that is important to the whole group. Within clans, elders and grandparents teach value systems and moral development to the children. Members within clans are interdependent and non-competitive. The clanship system promotes structure, cooperation between members, identity, and emotional support (EchoHawk, 1997).

Traditional culture only exists in pure form in a few tribes, particularly the Seminole, Miccosukee, and Mississippi Choctaw (Roth, 1992). Currently, tribal organizations are often corporate in nature with goals of providing services, sharing resources, encouraging the growth of their members, and conducting powwows (Roth, 1992). The present task of tribes is to advocate for their needs, improve current conditions, and establish state Indian commissions by focusing on relationships with the state governments. In recent years, contact between tribes has become stronger and more frequent. Coalitions between tribes are being built, and relationships between Native American groups and with non-Native American groups are being established (Roth, 1992).

Muscogee Creek Culture

Muscogee Creek culture possesses many of the general characteristics discussed in the previous section. One particular characteristic is that of gender roles. Muscogee Creek Indians in northeastern Oklahoma were studied qualitatively in 1980 and 1981. Bell (1990) examined Muscogee Creek subjectivity, language, and gender and found that men and women are seen as a separate people. Whereas men determine social reproduction, women provide the energy and vitality of reproduction through their menstrual flow. The Muscogee Creek language is also structured based on interlocking ideas about gender (Bell, 1990).

Kawulich (1999) interviewed and observed sixteen Muscogee Creek women while conducting a qualitative dissertation to explore their perceptions of work. These women conceptualized work in four ways, including work at home, public work, community / volunteer work, and home jobs / cultural work. Their choices for work were motivated by financial independence, people contact, love for children, flexible hours, helping others, and creativity. The Muscogee Creek women ranked their ethnic identity connections. From highest priority to lowest, they were 1) extended family and clan, 2) Creek Nation, 3) Native Americans, and 4) American mainstream culture. They also reported influences of Creek identity. These included extended family, shared heritage, tradition, culture, language, perceptions of others, and sense of belonging and pride (Kawulich, 1999).

Alcohol use has had a strong effect on members of this tribe, and many affected have not received treatment. Wing, Crow, and Thompson (1995) studied factors inhibiting Muscogee Creeks from receiving treatment for alcohol related issues.

Interviews were conducted with 390 tribal members. Nontraditional Muscogee Creek reported viewing alcoholism as a significant barrier to spirituality (Wing, et al., 1995). Traditional Muscogee Creek reported viewing alcoholism as an effect of spiritual dormancy. Tribal members often avoid seeking help for alcohol issues because of the possibility of being judged and humiliated. Family support and interdependence may thus have negative, as well as positive, effects. For instance, Muscogee Indians strongly hesitate to trust strangers and share their problems with them (Wing, et al., 1995). Also, the family opinions are always more important to tribal members than those of outsiders.

Muscogee Creek Grieving and Bereavement

As with many cultures, Muscogee Creek bereavement rituals have gradually changed over time. A few centuries ago, Muscogee Creeks buried their dead in large temple mounds. "'Muscogulges' of the eighteenth century built a three foot high log structure over the corpse, placed the body on a wooden scaffold or in a hollow log, then set fire to the cabin," (J. L. Wright, 1986, p. 26).

In the early 1900s, guns were fired outside the shelter to announce a death to the rest of the village (Smithsonian Institution, 1928). When one died in battle away from others, the body of the dead person was left in its exact spot. Tribal members returned later to retrieve the remains. The dead were buried in a sitting position with the face toward the east, often with a handkerchief in each hand, in a four-foot deep pit directly under the cabin or couch on which the person had died. Several of the person's favorite items (weapons, animals, blankets, pipes, beads, etc.) were buried with them. They were usually buried in their best clothing but without shoes. Those participating in the burial

were required to wash their hands in the same bucket before touching anything. This "purification" was to keep from contaminating the children. Those who were not relatives did not touch the body; if they did, it was believed that they would be the next to die. During the epidemics of 1837 and 1838, many bodies were not buried because of this belief (Smithsonian Institution, 1928).

A fire was kept at the head of the grave for four days after the burial, at which time those related to the deceased, both male and female, mourned loudly. They occasionally moved to other houses to avoid ghosts (Bushnell, 1920). Muscogee Creeks believed in life after biological death, "according to the tenor of their lives" (p. 11), meaning that the more positively and obediently they conducted their lives, the more honored they would be in the afterlife. It was believed that they were rewarded with "hunting in the realms of the Master of Breath or of becoming Seminoles, 'wanderers,' in the regions of the old sorcerer and of becoming great war leaders and swift hunters" (Bushnell, 1920, p. 11).

By the 1950s, Muscogee Creek burial practices had changed considerably, due to the influence of Christianity and mainstream culture in the United States. The body was then taken to a mortician and prepared for burial (Watson, 1950). If the deceased was of a Christian religious denomination, the body was transported to a church; if not, the body was taken to a camp house. The church bell rang from the time that the hearse approached until the casket was in the building and the mourners were gathered. Family and friends of the deceased gathered and camped throughout the days leading up to the funeral. If in a camp house, many sat up until midnight, then slept on the floor around the coffin. If in a church, women and children left at midnight to return to camps while

men stayed all night at the church. Someone stayed with the body constantly until burial. An all-night gathering, consisting of religious services and supper, was held the night before the funeral. Religious services were held all throughout the day of the funeral, and children were allowed to participate as desired. Friends of the family dug the grave because it was considered disgraceful for the family to labor or pay to have it done. A small covering, called a grave house, was built over the grave, at the end of which was a tombstone bearing a picture of the deceased (Watson, 1950).

Johnson (personal communication, May 8, 2000) indicated that present-day Muscogee Creek usually observe four days of tribal rituals following a death. Traditionally a family member stayed with the body continually until the burial, but now families make this decision individually. The body and casket are often brought to the home where friends and relatives visit, pray, and sing. The casket is covered with shawls, blanket, and personal items of the deceased to be given away after the burial. Many Creeks express their grief by cutting their hair short or letting it hang loosely. Some may refrain from dancing for one year (Johnson, personal communication, May 8, 2000).

In the Muscogee Creek tribe, the medicine man sometimes paints the face of the body at midnight of the fourth night, although this ritual may instead occur at the burial service (K. Johnson, personal communication, May 8, 2000). An all-night service is conducted where members of the family and tribe support each other while they talk, share memories, tell stories, and openly express emotions. Family members still often dig the graves by hand and enclose a suitcase of the deceased's clothes in the casket (K. Johnson, personal communication, May 8, 2000).

GRIEF

Grief and Culture

Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby in the late 1960s, has heavily influenced grief studies in mainstream United States culture. Bowlby (1980, p. 18) observed distraught behaviors of babies when they were separated from their parents. These behaviors appeared to be similar to those behaviors of adults who had lost a loved one. The basis for Attachment Theory is the idea that attachments are instinctual and that humans generally seek to preserve their attachments. Freud's Psychodynamic Theory influenced Bowlby in emphasizing the concept of grief work, the idea that grief must be addressed and resolved to ensure healthy adjustment.

More recent studies have challenged the ideas of attachment theory. Whereas attachment theory considers that denial of the feelings associated with loss is harmful, the Dual Process Model for Coping with Grief (Stroebe & Schutt, 1999) suggests that some denial is normal. This model defines two aspects of grieving and suggests that oscillation between the two characterizes healthy grieving. The first aspect, loss-orientation, includes activities focusing on the person who died or on the loss, including crying and looking at old pictures. Restoration-orientation, the second aspect, includes activities involved in resuming life without the person who died, such as making new friends and returning to work. According to the Dual Process Model for Coping with Grief, constant confrontation of the loss is harmful to the bereaved individual. Shuchter and Zisook (1993) suggested that minimizing negative emotions enables bereaved individuals to

function in everyday activites. Unlike attachment theory, this model allows for variation due to cultural influences.

Some researchers have attempted to find similarities in elements of grief across cultures. For instance, Parkes (1972) suggested that feelings of alarm, searching, mitigation, anger, and guilt are common to all cultures and may be experienced in any order. His studies indicated that socio-economic status, nationality, religion, and cultural and familial factors influencing grief expression determine the outcome of grief. During 1958-1960, Parkes (1972) interviewed 21 bereaved women, patients of Bethlem Royal and Maudley Hospitals, who had developed a mental illness within six months of the death of a spouse, child, parent, or sibling. A checklist was used to record the presence or absence of common features of grief, and the remainder of the interview consisted of open-ended questions about the bereavement experience. Significant results indicated a high level of reported guilt or self-reproach among the mentally ill (79%), compared with the population of widows who are not mentally ill (0-18%).

Bowlby (1980) also discussed grief experiences and beliefs common to many cultures. His studies indicated that similarities among most cultures include: 1) the deceased experiences life after death and maintains contact with the living for at least a short time, 2) those survived are expected to advocate blame toward the individual who caused the death, and 3) a socially prescribed mourning period is in effect. Similar to Bowlby, Lendrum and Syme (1992) identified three commonalities among cultural responses to death. These include 1) relationship with the dead loved one must change, 2) remaining family members place blame for the death and express anger privately or

openly, and 3) length of mourning period remains fairly constant (although social expectation of length of mourning period varies).

Literature has suggested that cultural grieving patterns may vary according to other factors, including age, gender, and type of death. Bowlby (1980) studied the differences between genders in dealing with loss of a spouse. Experienced social workers conducted interviews in the homes of 49 widows and 19 widowers in a community near Boston. Two further interviews were conducted thirteen months later to determine which early features of grief indicate favorable or unfavorable outcomes. Half of the cases were due to sudden death, and half were following a lingering illness. Data analysis indicated that widowers seemed less affected than widows during the first year. After two to three years, however, similar proportions of both groups experienced emotional and physical disturbances (8 widowers and 8 widows).

Researchers are somewhat divided in how grief varies across cultures. Important factors in literature that appear to distinguish cultural groups include bereavement rituals, ongoing relationship with the deceased, expression of emotions, and support systems. Lendrum and Syme (1992) suggested that conceptualization of death varies among cultures in numerous ways and is expressed through rituals. "Mortuary customs are the means whereby society structures or traces the progress of the deceased person along the mirrored path of his or her life," (Ramsden, 1991, p. 41). Cultures differ in their use of spirituality, mortuary customs, and emotional expression. Bereavement rituals are performed to moderate behavior, time, and emotions and to re-structure unstable social relationships.

Expression of feeling is congruent with the personality of the bereaved and may vary across cultures from somber withdrawal to overt display of feelings. According to DeVries (1996), cultural bereavement rituals assist sufferers in 1) regulating their emotions, 2) structuring their behavior, 3) promoting deeper relationships within the social system, and 4) representing ongoing life. When an entire society experiences a loss, these purposes of bereavement rituals may be disturbed. Cultural bereavement practices influence individual responses to loss. If a culture cannot perform its normal tasks due to trauma, individuals are left unsupported and forced to draw from their own personal resources. Regardless of the ritual the emotions of loss and disturbance experienced by those surviving the death of a loved one are universal (Kagawa-Singer, 1994). As the reader will see later, some researchers disagree with this idea.

A culture's conceptualization of death may define whether or not relationships with the deceased continue after the deaths. Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, and Stroebe (1992) compared modern America's ideas on the relationship with the deceased with those of other cultures. The Western view of most grief theorists suggests that breaking bonds with the deceased is important and that dependent relationships are unhealthy. Those who continue relationships with the deceased are considered maladjusted until grief work is completed and grief is resolved. Stroebe et al. (1992) suggests, however, that Americans may manifest broken hearts but not broken bonds. The researchers suggest consideration of grief in other cultures where continuation of relationships with the deceased is acceptable and healthy.

Stroebe et al. (1992) discussed Japanese, British, Egyptian, and Balinese grieving patterns. Japanese culture promotes and encourages continuation of relationships with

the deceased based on religious beliefs. Yamato, Okonji, Iwasaki, and Yoshimura (1969) compared grief among Japanese widows with grief among British widows. The Japanese, who were suggested by the researchers to be comparatively better adapted to their loss than their British counterparts, believe that contact should be maintained with the deceased. They believe that the deceased join the ancestors and remain accessible to the survived. This belief contrasted with the British value of the importance of terminating the bond. Wikan (1990) compared grieving practices of people from Egypt to people from Bali. Egyptians were encouraged to feel their emotions fully and to express them. Balinese were encouraged to ignore negative emotions and express only positive feelings. In Bali, if bonds with the deceased are not terminated, individuals may suffer ridicule and judgment (Wikan, 1990).

Among the many factors of grief that vary across cultures is grief expression. Expression of emotions, both positive and negative, may be a determinant of coping in individuals. Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson (1976) studied crying behaviors following loss in 69 societies throughout the world. Frequent crying at death occurred in 67 of those, and in 56 societies, crying was very frequent. The only inconsistencies were Balinese and Javanese, whose crying was "absent" or "rarely present." These data may reflect congruence in the extent of emotional reaction among cultures. In measuring anger and aggression, 66 societies were available for comparison, and 50 of those expressed anger and aggression over loss. In the remaining 19 societies, although anger was not reported, it may be present but hidden (Rosenblatt et al., 1976).

Bonanno & Keltner (1997) studied the facial expressions of bereaved individuals. Expressions of anger, contempt, disgust, fear, and a negative expression composite were

coded and rated by interviewers from videotapes of bereaved individuals six months after the loss. Interviewer ratings of each of these facial expressions were positively correlated with interviewer ratings of grief at fourteen months after the loss. In the same study, ratings of positive expressions (genuine laughter and smiles) were correlated with ratings indicating a decrease in grief at both fourteen months and 25 months after the loss (Bonanno & Keltner, 1997).

Another important distinction among cultures is the source from which individuals receive emotional support. Kalish and Reynolds (1976) identified two types of cultural support systems. These are collective and individualistic systems. Collective systems are familistic in nature; a family or tribe is a collective system that operates as a single unit (Kalish & Reynolds, 1976). Individuals from these systems derive emotional, social, and financial support from immediate and extended family or tribe. Collective systems of Asian subgroups and Native American tribes provide built-in support automatically available to those with whom the bereaved have a history. On the other hand, people who live within a collective system bear the risk of losing the entire system during one tragic event, such as a car accident or a natural disaster. Modern-day Creek culture derived from a tribal society and may be considered a collective system.

Individualistic systems of mainstream United States, however, allow the grieved to derive support from a number of sources within society. Emotional, social, and financial support is not automatically received from a collective group of family members around the grieved. Instead, support is derived from close friends, church members, coworkers, and professional mental health workers throughout society. Although these sources may seem less personal than the family, the individual has a wider variety of

sources from which to receive support (Kalish & Reynolds, 1976). There is little risk of the individualistic support system being completely eliminated in a single, tragic event.

Researchers' views on differences and similarities in grief among cultures continue to be sharply divided. Kagawa-Singer (1994) suggested that although emotional expression varies according to culture, the experience of grief is universal. In this view, the emotions of loss and disturbance are much the same among cultures (Lendrum & Syme, 1992) although experienced in varying degrees and expressed in a number of ways. To understand the complexity of cultural influences on grieving, one must recognize that some aspects of emotional and thought processes, structures of authority, and group behavior cut across all cultures (Kagitcibasi & Poortinga, 2000). Despite the wide variety of rituals, customs, and role expectations, most cultural groups seem to have these emotional and thought processes of grief in common.

Rosenblatt (2001), however, described grief and bereavement as being individually constructed according to one's experiences and culture. He stated that the only similarity is that "death may be difficult for everyone" (p. 297). In addition, Klass's (1999) cross-cultural model of grief suggested that there might be no universal emotions or universal interpretive schemas. On the other hand, he believed that there might be meta-interpretive schemas, or common causes of emotions, and death may be a universal cause of grief. The meta-interpretive scheme of personal loss and trauma, particularly in Europe and North America, may be a common theme by which to evaluate death (Klass, 1999).

Bonanno and Kaltman (1999) suggested that the variable of culture in grief is important and has not been adequately explored in research. These researchers attempted

to develop an integrative perspective on bereavement by using a social-functional approach to emotion. They believed that grief slowly reveals itself over time as a multi-faceted response to a particular traumatic event.

Families and Grief

Gilbert (1996) used the constructivist / interpretivist view to explore the concept of grief within the family system. She described grief as a complicated process of redefining one's sense of reality and attempting to re-establish stability and meaning after the death, facilitated by continued family relationships. Gilbert (1996) described families as structures containing grief, not entities of grief themselves. However, family members grieve within the boundaries of meaning defined by the family. Differential grief is the idea that different members of the family system may be at varying points in their grief process. Understanding that different expressions and experiences of loss are normal within families will lead to a more stable balance. Family disharmony and loss of equilibrium result from members being expected to display identical grieving patterns. Gilbert (1996) suggested the following ways to re-establish the family as a unit following a loss:

> 1) Accept the above differences in each other, 2) Reframe the differences and look for strengths in them, 3) Respect the differences and each member's need for privacy, 4) Communicate with each other, 5) Arrive at a common sense of "mission," and 6) Remember that families do not hold beliefs and feelings; only individuals do (p. 7).

The role of the family has an impact on the grief of its members. Moos (1995) found that families play an integral role in the process of grieving. She developed an

integrative model of grief using both individual and family ideas of grieving issues. This model, the Model of Family Grief and Coping, states that an individual family member's perceptions of death determine the family interaction patterns; there is a reciprocal relationship between family interaction patterns and family grief reactions, and also between family grief reactions and family coping strategies (Moos, 1995). Finally, family coping strategies influence feedback to a family member's perceptions (Moos, 1995).

Family also plays an important role in a child's adjustment to the death of a sibling. Balk (1983) studied the grief reactions and self-concept perceptions of teenagers following the death of a sibling. Results indicated that perceptions of family closeness and perceptions of personal communication with family members influenced specific emotional responses, including shock fear, loneliness, confusion, depression, and / or anger (Balk, 1983). These results suggest the importance of the family and the influence of family in the construction of grieving.

Cook and Oltjenbruns (1998) studied the bereaved family within Family Systems Theory. They saw the family operating as a unit with each member occupying a particular role within the whole. Developmental stage of the family also determined its effectiveness and method of dealing with loss of a member. Cook and Oltjenbruns (1998) also applied Family Stress Theory, with variables of stressors, family resources, and family's perception of the event affecting the ability of the family to cope with the loss.

Culture impacts family grief systems. Shapiro (1996) suggested that family change is guided by culture while remaining unique to each particular family. She

recommended that families restructure themselves, without the deceased member, in such a way that all goals and functions could be maintained efficiently. Also recommended was that the loss be accepted into the continual, though adjusted, family life cycle. Four problems all cultures must face during loss were identified:

> 1) Defining the relationship between the dead and the living, 2) Describing the nature of life after death, 3) Managing intense emotions of sorrow, terror, and rage evoked by death, and 4) Enabling the social reconstruction of ruptured social roles and relationships (p. 10).

She suggested that cultural bereavement rituals depict the culture's boundaries in expression of emotion and roles of family members as well as the community. Although the bereavement rituals are designed to aid families in coping with loss, they may not always be comfortable to the grieving family. Individuals vary tremendously in their reaction to the loss, length of time in grieving, and method of re-assimilating into everyday life (Shapiro, 1996).

Grief in the United States

Mainstream culture in the United States is widely characterized by its emphasis on the individual (Cable, 1998). Children are raised with the primary goal of "becoming one's own person" and developing independence. American values are characterized by emphasis on material gain, economic success, and the "fulfillment of the American dream." Emotional and familial independence are viewed as strengths, and family relationships are characterized by individuation and interdependence. Although somewhat influenced by patriarchy, these relationships tend to be more lineal than those of other cultures. This view has a broad impact on the nature of and basis for grieving.

Separation and privacy characterize the process of death and dying for Americans. The death often occurs in the hospital, which takes a proactive scientific approach focused on unconditional preservation of human physiology (Kagawa-Singer, 1994). Science is separated from the spiritual aspects of death, uprooting humans' acceptance of death as a natural event. The function of death is "to override the discontinuity of the individual and to ensure the continuity of the community" (Kagawa-Singer, 1994, p. 102); therefore, the positivist, scientific approach American culture takes to death retards its basic function.

American elders are often devalued and may endure a social death before their biological death (Glaser & Strauss, 1964). Older adults may experience feeling more ignored, tolerated, and isolated as their maturity progresses. This contrasts with other societies, such as some Asian American groups and Native American tribes, that revolve around wisdom and decisions of the elders and that make the elderly central to daily life.

Protestant Christianity is a dominant United States religion (Cable, 1998), and belief in the afterlife softens the frightening aspects of death (Blanche & Parkes, 1997). The social mourning period within mainstream Protestant America is approximately one month, although private mourning is socially accepted for up to two years. Rituals include the funeral and memorial services, which take place within one week after the death (Kagawa-Singer, 1994). Expression of grief is often private and subtle, and family members' acceptance of death is encouraged. Individuals in the United States often conceptualize death as an intrusion into life that must be resisted and controlled (Cable, 1998). Cable suggests a cultural tendency to avoid the pain associated with loss.

Rosenblatt (1992) defines grief as "blended emotional and cognitive reactions to loss," (p. 45). He indicates that grief among Americans might be recurrent throughout one's lifetime although it may not be ongoing after the first few days or weeks. Americans view grief as having to be completed in a defined period of time. Although grief may appear to be completed, individuals sometimes experience relapses, called recurrent grief. Since recurrent grief is discontinuous, it may not contradict American cultural norms. Rosenblatt (1992) identified five implications of grief recurrence, including 1) after a major loss, one may never be completely free of grief, 2) grief recurrence may come as a surprise, 3) recurrent grief encompasses not only sorrow but also fond memories, passion, comfort, and realization of the depth of one's feeling for the deceased, 4) since stimulated by reminders, grief recurrence may be controllable, and 5) some individuals may seek out reminders to remember the importance of the loss. Cultures vary drastically in how grief is understood, the extent that long-term grief is valued, and how "normal" long-term grief or its absence is considered.

In 1998, Cable studied the American culture of grief and its changes over time. In the past, grieving was characterized with more ritualistic behaviors, such as wearing black during times of mourning. Deaths often occurred in the home, making it more personal and less of a taboo occurrence. Grief was more familiar, occurred earlier in life, and Americans were less afraid of its implications. Now American culture "glorifies youth, beauty, and health, therefore denying the reality of death and the human experience of grief" (Cable, 1998, p. 61). The bereaved receives little support, is expected to minimize emotional expression, and is encouraged to replace the loss as soon as possible. Modern society has promoted values of control and predictability in the

United States, and emotions are thus devalued. Expression of negative emotions characteristic of grief is particularly discouraged (Cable, 1998). American culture encourages the grieving to "move on" and "let go" of their loss, rather than re-conceptualize the meaning.

Worden (1991) recommended four tasks for the grieved in American culture. These include: 1) facing the reality of the death through funerals, memorial services, and confrontation of the body, 2) working through the negative emotions associated with the loss, 3) acclimating to a new reality without the deceased, and 4) emotionally relocating the deceased and proceeding with life (Worden, 1991). The final task involves separating a place in one's thoughts and emotions for the deceased while developing a new existence in the absence of his or her physical presence.

Marrone (1997) suggested that the American way of viewing death is a concept called "invisible death," where ideas and emotions are silent and personal to the grieved. The approach-avoidance conflict may be a method of understanding American attitudes toward death (Kastenbaum, 1993). Those in mourning may avoid bereavement rituals so their negative emotions may be ignored. At the same time, mourners may want to be present to support other loved ones. The desire to approach the conflicting event grows simultaneously with the desire to avoid the negative emotions. Mourners may have a tendency to avoid challenging emotional situations, although they may vacillate until a decision is made (Kastenbaum, 1993). The approach-avoidance concept offers a more objective, accepting, and balanced method for viewing American concepts of death and dying (Marrone, 1997).

Native American Grieving

Although beliefs about death vary greatly among Native American tribes, Van Winkle (2000) identified a few similarities. Except for certain tribes such as the Hopi and the Navajo, commonalities among tribes include: 1) death is viewed as a normal occurrence, neither avoided nor focused upon, 2) death is part of an ongoing life cycle, and 3) death does not terminate one's existence but merely transforms it (Van Winkle, 2000). Native Americans believe that the worlds of the living and the dead occur simultaneously and are interactional. At death their bodies help the earth produce new life, continuing the harmonious process and balance of nature. The Native American Church, common among members of several tribes, combines traditional beliefs with Christianity (Van Winkle, 2000). Those who have died are believed to reside with the Creator and previously deceased relatives in the Next World and watch over the remaining family (K. Johnson, personal communication, May 8, 2000). Ancestors continue to influence daily life decisions indefinitely.

Bereavement rituals and concepts of death vary among tribes. Mandelbaum (1959) found that the Hopi Indians in Arizona forget the deceased as quickly as possible and proceed with life as usual. The Hopi Indians believe that contact with the body is unclean, that death should be feared, and that the dead may continue to exist without personal identity. Navajo, like the Hopi, avoid conversation about death and do not speak the name of the deceased (Van Winkle, 2000). They do not touch the body of a dead relative, but they bury him/her in a secluded area. Some Navajos believe that spirits of the dead seek revenge on individuals who have betrayed them.

Steele (1977) studied the family and social attitudes toward death of the Mayan Indians in Central America and found that this culture is very concerned with appearances. The primary goal is to receive family and community approval, and the funeral must therefore be congruent with the social and financial status of the deceased. A widow is considered unclean until the bond with the deceased husband has been broken, causing the widow to attempt to shorten the mourning period. The spirit of the dead is believed to linger temporarily before reaching its final destination. Proper burial procedures, carried out by the survivors, navigate the path of the spirit to its final resting point (Steele, 1977).

Summary

Although several studies have been conducted on grief and bereavement in the United States and in various cultures, very little literature was found focusing on Muscogee Creek grief and bereavement rituals. Although some research on Creeks has been conducted for certain purposes, little information is available regarding death rituals and practices. Because of the ability of this tribe to adjust to changes forced upon their culture and way of life, this researcher suspects their method of dealing with loss is exceptional. It is expected that considerable knowledge in the Muscogee Creek construction of grieving and bereavement will be generated from this qualitative study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The previous review of the history and culture of the Muscogee Creek Nation reveals several characteristics of the tribe. Although Creeks share certain cultural similarities with other native tribes, the population posses a unique identity based on history, family, and community. Grief researchers and theorists have studied various cultures and developed ideas on similarities and differences in grief across cultures. This literature review has summarized many of these studies for the purpose of distinguishing an effective theoretical framework through which Muscogee Creek grief may be interpreted.

Several researchers discussed throughout this review suggest that emotions, expressions, and rituals associated with grief are largely dependent on family, environment, and culture. Factors of grief may, therefore, be constructed by each individual or culture. Traditional theories of grief, such as psychodynamic and attachment theories were developed in White/European cultures. The assumptions underlying these theories may be inconsistent with Creek culture and may be inadequate to understand Creek grief and bereavement. Because of the lack of literature on grieving behaviors and bereavement rituals of Muscogee Creeks and the apparent differences between the population's culture and mainstream United States culture, the appropriate theoretical framework on which to base this study is social constructionism.

Four paradigms of inquiry, Positivism, Post-Positivism, Critical Theory, and Constructivism are common among qualitative studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Positivism assumes that truth is universal and often uses experimental, quantitative

methods to disprove propositions. Post-positivism is a softer version of positivism, representing the same goals but utilizing more quasi-experimental methods. Critical Theory assumes that reality is historically shaped and that the researcher and subject are reciprocally linked. Finally constructivism assumes that reality is relative and that results of a study are created during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Constructivism as a paradigm of inquiry encompasses several theories including constructionism (Guba & Lincoln, 1998), which will be used as the theoretical basis for this study. Within this framework, knowledge is seen as a social development that is contingent upon a society's cultural and historical background. Knowledge is dynamic and generated through "hermeneutical and dialectic methods" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 207) such as interviews and/or observation. Constructions change as an individual's concept of reality changes. The constructions do not represent absolute truth but vary according to perception and information available. The aim of constructionism is to understand (Crotty, 1998).

Social constructionism expands these ideas even further. Knowledge is suggested to reside not only in the environment and individuals' perceptions but also in interactions. Exchanges between persons and between person and environment, as well as researcher and participant, are sources of information. The basis of social constructionism is that amount of knowledge gained is constrained by language barriers and limitations of shared meaning (Lyddon, 1995). Cultural groups with different languages can perceive the world in radically different ways (Neimeyer, 1998). Therefore, social constructionism emphasizes the importance of language not only in the reflection of knowledge but also in its production.

For a social constructionist, reality exists on its own, but how it exists is socially constructed (Edley, 2001). Neimeyer (1998) discussed the idea of self as constructed by an individual based on other people, tasks, and environmental influences that enhance an individual's lives. Gergen and Gergen (1991, p. 78) described social constructionism as an epistemology in which "the emphasis is not on the individual mind but on the meanings of people as they collectively generate descriptions and explanations in language."

Rosenblatt (2001) applied Social Constructionism to cultural differences in grief. Ideas, emotions, and expressions of grief are constructed by cultural and social processes. Social Constructionism denies the universality of aspects of grief. The socio-cultural environment shapes the meaning of death and loss in each individual. "Social construction is, in part, a process of distilling, sorting out, and perhaps temporarily coming to terms with complexity, contradictions, ambiguity, and processes in the socio-cultural environment" (p. 287).

This researcher's own personal construction of grief influences her writings and presentation of data. For instance, in mainstream Western culture the primary approach to grief and bereavement studies is attachment theory, which was heavily influenced by Freud's (1921) psychodynamic theory. This theory, however, may appropriately describe grieving only in the European and Western cultures in which it was formed. Attachment theory emphasizes the notion of grief work, confronting negative emotions associated with loss to minimize denial (Bowlby, 1980). Literature indicates, however, that Muscogee Creeks may view death as a natural, cyclical process with emphasis on

acceptance and balance with nature. Although attachment theory may not explain grief within the Muscogee Creek, the researcher cannot be free from its influence.

Social Constructionism accepts that the researcher has been influenced by other theories and mandates that the researcher complete a critical self-evaluation of personal biases that may influence the study. Therefore, this framework may be an appropriate perspective from which to view Muscogee Creek grief and bereavement. The Social Constructionist theoretical perspective clearly matches this study's purpose of exploring the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals among Muscogee Creeks and will, therefore, be used as the theoretical basis in this study.

OVERVIEW

Recent studies in grief indicate that culture constructs the experience of grief. Family grieving may also be guided by culture although each individual and/or family may handle grief in a unique way. Cultures generate support for their members in various ways, and these support systems determine how grief is handled and how bereavement rituals are conducted. An overview of grief in the United States reveals an outlook on death that appears to be much different than that of Native American cultures.

Although universal aspects of grief may be observed, the concept of grief appears to be constructed according to culture and historical background. Muscogee Creek grieving and bereavement rituals may be a product of an individual's interactions with family, community, and environment. Social Constructionism is thus the theoretical framework on which this study is based. Chapter III outlines the research methods and

procedures used in this study for the purpose of exploring the social construction of grieving and bereavement rituals among the Muscogee Creeks.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The following chapter contains information on research methods and procedures. It begins with an explanation of researcher subjectivity then explains the rationale for the specific design. Immediately following are sections explaining sampling procedures, data collection procedures, and instrument used. Finally, the role of the gatekeeper, data analysis procedures, and issues of rigor are discussed.

Researcher Subjectivity

The role of the researcher in this process is that of listener and observer. The researcher is an outsider who is interested in what fuels the coping mechanisms of the Muscogee Creek. The researcher seeks to discover the internal traits of tribal members that promote Creeks' adjustment to loss. The researcher will maintain the role of passive, respectful observer and listener. Consistent with most cultural groups, Muscogee Creek families have a personal experience that separates and marks their identity. The researcher's response to knowledge gained from the Muscogee Creeks is therefore to attempt to identify and describe the factors that have contributed to the construction of grieving and bereavement riutals. A clear understanding of these factors will enable the researcher to accurately describe them in this report. Assuming an objective role may be

the closest a researcher from outside the group should attempt when approaching the Muscogee Creeks. Respect for the tribe, for the participants, and for the culture is an over-riding premise throughout the study.

Design

Literature on Creek grieving is scarce. Since very little is known about the topic, it may be incorrect to assume that Creek grief may be correlated with the grief of other cultures. The specificity of the grief/bereavement phenomena within a unique population calls for a case study design. A case study is "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through a detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). This study focused on the bounded system of the Creek Nation at the time of grief and / or bereavement. Case studies may be intrinsic (involving one case), instrumental (involving two related cases), or collective (involving several cases). The case being studied consisted of 27 Muscogee Creeks, thus classifying it as a collective case study (Stake, 1994), and involved multiple sites. Sources of information used for this study, as in most case studies (Creswell, 1998), were primarily interviews. Observations and document analyses were made when available.

Sampling Procedures

Participants in this study include a group of 27 adults age 18 or older who identified themselves as members of the Creek Nation and who are familiar with Creek cultural bereavement practices and rituals. The participants expressed an interest and willingness to participate in the study. The collection of subjects for the case study was

obtained initially through Nutritional Centers throughout Creek Nation tribal lands. The director of the Muscogee Creek Cultural Department travels frequently to these nutritional centers as well as to other various locations where he represents Muscogee Creek headquarters. The director agreed to endorse the study by attending a scheduled lunch with the researcher at five nutrition centers in five towns surrounding the tribal offices. All tribal members are welcome at these lunches, and adults age 55 and older are provided lunch for free. Many of those attending the lunch were older adults, although all ages were in attendance.

At the nutrition center lunch, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the group of attendees and requested their participation. Those who were age 18 or older and identified themselves as Creek Indians were given a copy of the oral solicitation form (see Appendix A) and asked to complete the form and return to the researcher. The researcher explained the number of participants needed and that completing the form did not necessarily ensure that an individual would be interviewed. These forms were stored in a manila envelope, in the researcher's possession, clearly labeled with the city in which the nutrition center is located. Names of all willing participants from each nutrition center were combined to form a list of possible participants, which consisted of 28 participants at that time.

The researcher then selected a sample of 25 participants from the list of possible participants by using purposive sampling techniques, strategies to select cases based on their specific contribution, not for generalizability (Isaac & Michael, 1998). Initially, maximum variation sampling, choosing sample members as diverse as possible (Creswell, 1998) in age, gender, and location, was employed. After several interviews

were conducted, the researcher realized that more variation was needed in the sample. The tribe is divided religiously between church members and ceremonial ground members. Most individuals in the original list were church members, resulting in lack of data from ceremonial ground members. To obtain the information necessary to gain an accurate picture of Creek grieving and bereavement, data were needed from individuals not included in the original sample or list of possible participants. Thus, snowball or chain sampling, an approach involving referral to possible future participants from current participants (Patton, 2002), was employed to find subjects who could provide the researcher with the necessary data. The Director of Cultural Research and several participants referred the researcher to possible participants who practice ceremonial ground rituals. Chain sampling enlarged the list of possible participants to 39. Interviews were conducted with 27 total participants, seven of which were obtained through chain sampling. The remaining 12 were either unavailable or did not represent maximum variation of the sample.

Only the researcher had access to the list of possible participants and the sample, thus ensuring anonymity of the participants. She chose the participants from the list independently and was, therefore, the only individual with knowledge of who comprised the sample. The researcher contacted each member of the sample individually and scheduled interviews.

Table 1 summarizes participants' demographic data, including variables of age, gender, religious type, and experience with loss. If a participant experienced no losses of those considered family members, the experience with loss category was labeled "minimal." If the participant experienced one to three losses, the label "limited" was

used. "Considerable" was used to label the category of any participant who experienced four to six losses, and those with seven or more were labeled "extensive."

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected primarily through interviews. Although most interviews were conducted individually, participants occasionally expressed preference to interview with another. In such cases, accommodations were readily made and co-interviews were conducted. Four co-interviews were conducted, involving eight of the 27 participants. In the first instance, a young female respondent requested the presence of her friend, also Creek Indian, at the interview. The second and third co-interviews both involved two participants who requested to interview simultaneously to conserve time. The final co-interview involved a participant who requested the presence of his wife, who is also Creek Indian. Both participants in all of the co-interviews signed participation agreements and were assigned a participant number. The participant number assisted the researcher in identifying participants without using names or information that could link the participant's identity to his or her interview data.

Interviews took place according to Creswell's (1998) recommendations for interview data collecting. Prior to the interview, the exact place and time for conducting the interview was determined; all interviews took place in an office at the nutrition center in the participant's community, at the participant's place of employment, or in his/her home. At the beginning of the interview, both participant and researcher signed a

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographic Data According to Religious Type

	Religious Type			
	Church	Both	Ceremonial Ground	Total
Number of Participants	12	11	4	27
Average age	61.5	51	52	55.8
Age range	42-79	21-65	47-59	21-79
Gender:				
Males	2	4	3	9
Females	10	7	1	18
Experience With loss:				
Minimal	0	0	0	0
Limited	2	5	3	10
Considerable	7	3	1	11
Extensive	3	3	0	6

participation agreement and informed consent form (see appendix C) outlining the purpose of the study and information requested from the participant. Participants were asked open-ended questions on the interview protocol and encouraged to respond in as much detail as they were comfortable in sharing.

According to Stake (1995), qualitative case study interviews rarely consist of a list of exact questions asked of each participant. Instead, participants are expected to have unique experiences that contribute to the study, particularly those who are sampled through maximum variation sampling. Interviewers should have a "short list of issue-oriented questions" (p. 65) that the interviewers can review with the participants before the interview begins. At the beginning of each interview, this researcher explained her short list of topics and that within each of them the participant would be asked "a couple of questions."

The lengths of interviews ranged from 15 minutes to three hours, averaging approximately 45 minutes per interview. Interview length depended upon individual participants and how much time each needed to respond to interview questions. The researcher recorded note jottings during each interview, and upon agreement of the participant(s), audio taped interviews for later review and transcription. According to Emerson, Fratz, and Shaw (1995), data collection should begin with note jottings of each interview, observation, and document analysis. After interviews were completed, most were transcribed verbatim. Detailed notes were typed for those interviews that produced less data and that were not audio taped.

Then the researcher contacted the participants again and attempted to conduct a short follow up meeting, lasting approximately 10-30 minutes, with each participant.

During the follow up meetings, the researcher presented the transcription or a detailed account of the researcher's notes of the interview, and the subject was requested to validate the accuracy of the information recorded in the interview. At this meeting, subjects were given a wind chime as a token of appreciation of their contribution to the study. Ten participants were unavailable due to illness or conflicting schedules. Follow-up meetings required that participants read a transcription in English, and it is possible that those ten had decided not to participate due to language barriers and/or illiteracy, although there were no indications of this while signing consent forms. Most of the participants who did participate in the follow-up had very little to add or change about the data. All interviews except three were recorded verbatim; therefore, absence of the ten follow-up meetings was unlikely to have affected the results of the study.

The amount of time between the interview and the follow up meeting was approximately 8-10 weeks. For those participants who were unable to schedule a meeting, a package was delivered or mailed to them. The package contained a copy of the interview transcription or a detailed account of the researcher's notes of the interview without any identifying information, a wind chime, a thank you card, a hand-written note requesting their feedback on the interview, and the researcher's address, phone number, and e-mail address. All participants were given the opportunity to review their interview data, make corrections, and provide feedback. Table 2 summarizes the sampling method used, follow-up meetings conducted, and audio taping according to religious type.

The researcher collected a number of pamphlets, flyers, and maps provided by the Creek Nation Tribal offices. In addition several newspaper clippings were collected from the Okmulgee Daily Times and the Muscogee Nation News; these documents provided

Table 2

Summary of Participant Interview Data According to Religious Type

	Religious Type			
	Church	Both	Ceremonial Ground	Total
Sampling Method:				
Maximum Variation	12	5	0	17
Chain	0	6	4	10
Audio taped:				
Yes	10	10	4	24
No	2	1	0	3
Follow up completed:				
Yes	7	6	3	16
No	5	5	1	11

data regarding Creek family and culture, which were analyzed and coded with the interview data. The only code from document data that was used in this study was "definition of family." The code emerged from a pamphlet the researcher received from the Creek Nation Office of Child Care, entitled "Balancing Work and Family." The pamphlet described ways members of the Creek tribe can preserve family while maintaining successful careers. The pamphlet also defined the Creek family and described roles of family members.

Observation notes were derived from an afternoon the researcher spent with a Creek family. She accompanied two gentlemen, fictitiously named Bill and Ted, to several cemeteries on tribal lands then had dinner with the family in their home. The researcher recorded detailed notes describing the gravesites, discussions with family members, behaviors of the family members, and interactions among the family members. Data from these observations were also coded with interview and document data. Codes from observation notes that were used in this study included "definition of family," "houses over graves," "church/ceremonial ground comparison," and "meaning of death." Data from these codes is explained in the results section. The researcher also recorded observation notes after attending a ceremonial ground stomp dance at the invitation of one of the study's participants. Although data from these observation notes were not used in the study, some were used to enhance description of Creek culture in Chapter V.

Anticipated risks:

All participants were adults age 18 years or older who expressed interest in participating in the study. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the

type of information requested, and an approximate length of the interview and follow up meeting. A risk, however, may have emerged due to the content of the interview protocol. Information requested was sensitive in nature and may have evoked emotions within the participants. Participants were thus given the option to "pass" on any questions they did not wish to answer. Another anticipated risk was the subjects' possible negative perception of a White American researcher. These negative perceptions included participants' feelings of vulnerability of sacred beliefs being exploited. To counteract this risk, all participants were given full knowledge of the study and its purpose, and participants chose whether or not to participate. No other risks were anticipated in this study.

Instrument Used

After reviewing the purpose of the study and signing the consent form, respondents were asked a series of questions developed from the study's research questions and literature review. The instrument used, an interview protocol with open-ended questions to obtain qualitative data, was developed in a series of steps. The steps were as follows.

First, the researcher developed questions that would elicit adequate information to address the research questions central to the study. The questions were based on five major constructs through which grieving and bereavement rituals may be explored. These constructs included bereavement rituals, grieving, meanings of death, family roles, and demographic information. Another question inquiring about a personal example was included to give the participants opportunity to provide additional information on any of the other five constructs.

Next, the researcher presented the instrument to her dissertation committee for review and approval. After the committee approved the interview protocol, the final step was taken. The instrument was presented to the gatekeeper, Director of Cultural Research at the Muscogee Creek tribal headquarters. He reviewed each question in detail with the researcher to ensure that it was logical and would make sense to the participants. At his recommendation, a further construct was added, a question about whether or not a participant's beliefs and rituals were traditional of the Muscogee Creek tribe. This final step was conducted in place of a pilot study because both the researcher and the gatekeeper were concerned that not enough Creek tribal members would be willing to participate in the study. To prevent using potential data sources for reasons other than for providing data for the study, the gatekeeper himself became the sole participant in a "mock" pilot study.

A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix E. Because of its extensiveness, some of the data collected from the interview protocol were not used in this study. The following is a review of the interview questions on the protocol that yielded data for each of the codes used in the study. The "data analysis" section explains in detail how the codebook was formulated with specific explanations of each code, sub-code, category, and sub-category.

The code "bereavement rituals" and the resulting three sub-codes of "rituals before burial," "burial rituals," and "rituals after burial," were formed from the resulting data provided from answers to questions 1, "Describe the tribal events and rituals that occur from the death of a loved one to his or her burial," and 2, "Describe the tribal events and rituals that occur after the burial of a loved one," on the interview protocol.

Within each of these three sub-codes emerged three or four categories that represented rituals that were frequently identified and described by participants. Question 2-c, "Is there a prescribed mourning period; if so, how long is it; if not, what is the typical length of time an individual is in mourning after the loss of a loved one?" yielded data specifically for the category of "socialized mourning period."

The code "grieving" was divided into three sub-codes. Data for the sub-code "individual coping / emotional expression" was derived from answers to questions 3-a, "What is your primary role in the family during grief; what are the behaviors associated with that role?" and 4-e, "How do you express your grief following the loss of a loved one?" Data for the sub-code "family coping techniques" was mostly derived from answers to question 5-a, "How does your family function during times of loss and grief?" on the interview protocol. Data supporting the sub-code "support systems" was mostly derived from participants' responses to question 3-c, "From whom do you receive most of your support during times of grieving," on the interview protocol.

The code "Muscogee Creek culture" was divided into five sub-codes, the first of which was "family." Data supporting this code was further divided into two categories, "definition of family" and "living arrangement." Data for "definition of family" emerged from the data set with out the specific prompting of an interview question. Data for "living arrangement" was gathered from participants responses to the demographic question, "family members who live with you?"

Data supporting the sub-code "meaning of death" was divided into three categories, including "spiritual views," "relationship with deceased," and "meaning of death." Data for "spiritual views" was derived from question 4-a, "What are your views

on death and spirituality; are they the same as traditional Muscogee Creek views?" question 4-b, "What happens to the spirit and the body after death?" and question 4-d, "Does life continue to exist for the deceased after the physical death?" on the interview protocol. Data for "relationship with the deceased" was obtained mostly from participants responses to question 4-c, "Do you continue to have a relationship with the deceased and communicate with him or her after the death; if so, how and for how long?" on the interview protocol. Data for the category "meaning of death" derived from participants' general understandings of death and the meanings they associated with it.

Sub-codes of "importance of the number four" and "sense of community" emerged from the general data set without the prompting of a specific interview question. These sub-codes were not further divided into categories. The sub-code "Indian medicine" also emerged from the data set at various places during the interviews; much of the data was also derived from question 1 and 2 regarding bereavement rituals from the interview protocol.

The final sub-code, "religion," was divided into three categories, including "history of division," "church/ceremonial ground division," and "religious type." "Religious type" was further divided into three sub-categories, including "supporters of church," "supporters of ceremonial grounds," and "supporters of both." Data for all of the categories and sub-categories for the sub-code "religion" generally emerged from participants' responses to questions 1 and 2 regarding bereavement rituals and question 4 regarding the meaning of death.

Data for Table 1 was obtained from the demographic questions regarding "age," "marital status," and "number of deaths of those you consider family." Data for

"religious type" was derived from the corresponding code. Each of these codes, sub-codes, categories, and sub-categories are listed and explained in Chapters IV & V. Data supporting the formation of each of the codes is included. The interviews produced much more data than what was used in this study. See Appendix B for an example of a complete interview protocol.

Gatekeeper

Prior to collecting data for this project, the researcher consulted with the gatekeeper extensively regarding the purpose and objectives of the study. As Director of the Cultural Department at the Muscogee Creek Tribal headquarters, the gatekeeper is in charge of approving and/or assisting all research projects conducted by outside sources. He reviewed with the researcher each question and sub-question formulated and included in the interview protocol. Changes were made based on feedback received from the gatekeeper. For instance, an item distinguishing whether the participant's view is traditional or contemporary was included at his suggestion. The main function of this step was to offer validity in place of a pilot study. Because of concern of limited number of participants, one insider was chosen to accomplish this validation instead of using potential participants in a pilot study. In addition, the gatekeeper assumed an important role in generating the list of possible participants. The gatekeeper expressed assurance about the feasibility of the project and encouraged and reassured its overall success.

Data Analysis

When the data collection was completed, all of the raw case data were assembled for analysis. Most of the interviews were transcribed; due to the amount of resources

required, however, not all interviews were transcribed. Detailed notes typed of those interviews that were not audio taped or that yielded less data than the majority of the interviews. The researcher listened to all available audio tapes of those that were not transcribed and ensured that all data had been recorded. Transcribers used signed an agreement to commitment to participant confidentiality (see appendix D).

The researcher then conducted the analysis in a series of steps according to Patton's (2002) recommendations. First, the researcher reviewed all the data, including observation notes, interviews, and documents, and indexed the data, separating it into basic categories. In some cases the data overlapped; some pieces fit into more than one category. After observations, documents, and interviews were indexed, the researcher listed the categories that emerged from that section. A total of 25 lists were generated, one for a composite of the observation data, one for the composite of document data, and one for each interview conducted, whether individual or co-interview. Wherever appropriate throughout the indexing process, categories that were identified in previous sections were used to identify new pieces of data. The purpose of this step, indexing, was to develop the categories in which the codes were based. The researcher used indexing to build a framework in which the data were organized.

The next step involved a second review of all data, during which formal codes were established, and the codebook was formed. The researcher assembled the lists of categories for each section of data. She began with the first list of categories and reviewed how they were connected to the data. Then she looked for converging ideas among the categories and pieced these together to form larger groups of data. Simultaneously, she looked for more specific pieces within the categories and separated

these into more detailed groups. The result was a hierarchical formation of ideas in which the data could be stored. This was the first step in forming the codebook.

The researcher then reviewed the next section of categories and their connections to the data. After making corrections where necessary, she integrated these categories into the existing hierarchy, building and restructuring when necessary. Some categories overlapped with others, and the names of categories were slightly altered as these were combined. In other cases, new sub-categories were formed. The result was a more detailed hierarchical formation than previously formulated. The researcher repeated these steps using the next list of categories. This process continued until all 25 lists of categories were integrated into one complete hierarchical list of codes.

A third review of the data and the coding system was then conducted. The researcher examined each code for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. According to Patton (2002), each code should represent a specific concept containing data that logically fits together, internal homogeneity, while maintaining distinction from other concepts, external heterogeneity. During this step some codes were combined, some eliminated completely, and the resulting codes were organized into a synthesized whole that represented a logical hierarchical picture. The coding process yielded a detailed index of codes, sub-codes, categories, and sub-categories related to grief and bereavement among the Muscogee Creek tribal members.

During the coding process, it became evident to the researcher that the amount of data produced by the interviews, observations, and documents exceeded that which was needed for this project; due to the data's depth and breadth, it was not all used in the present study. The researcher revised the research questions to produce a more focused

study, and the resulting research questions were those proposed in Chapter I. Only the codes relating to the research questions in this study were presented in the finalized codebook, which is located in Appendix E.

After the codebook was developed, the researcher separated the data into their perspective categories or codes, giving the researcher a more organized method for viewing the data. The researcher then identified each of the major codes in this study. She listed these codes, themes, or constructs in the results section with a discussion addressing the rationale for their inclusion. The researcher then provided data to support and confirm the themes that had emerged from the data.

The major constructs included construction of grieving, construction of bereavement rituals, meaning of death, and Creek culture. Within construction of grieving were three sub-codes, including grieving-individual level, grieving-family level, and support systems. Construction of bereavement rituals included ten sub-codes representing rituals that had been identified and described by at least half (n=14) of the participants. Three of these ten were not identified by half of the participants but were included because they were moderated by religious type.

The construct of Creek culture included sub-codes of family, religion, importance of the number four, sense of community, and Indian medicine. Two more categories were identified within family, including definition of family and living arrangement. Within religion were categories of history of religious division, comparison of church and ceremonial ground, and religious type. Religious type included three groups of sub-categories, including church supporter, ceremonial ground supporters, and supporters of both. The construct of meaning of death consisted of sub-codes of spiritual views,

relationship with deceased, and perspective of death. Due to the nature of this construct and its relationship with the other constructs, the researcher reassigned meaning of death to be a sub-code under Creek culture. Only three major codes remained, including Creek culture, construction of grieving, and construction of bereavement rituals.

Next, the researcher identified and defined variables that contribute to the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals in this population. In some cases, codes were combined to form these variables; for instance, definition of family and living arrangement were combined to form the variable "family." Also, spiritual views, relationship with deceased, and meaning of death were integrated to form the variable "meaning of death." In the case of the sub-code "religion," only the category "religious type" with sub-categories of "supporters of church," "supporters of ceremonial grounds," and "supporters of both" was converted into a variable. The rationale was that categories of "history of religious division" yielded insufficient data to produce an efficient explanation of its influence on the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals. Also, the category "church/ceremonial ground comparison" yielded data that supported similarities between church and ceremonial ground; the data for "religious type" supported the influence of churches and ceremonial grounds separately on the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals, and formulating a variable that represented similarities between the two was unnecessary.

Variables within the construct of culture included family, religious type, importance of the number four, sense of community, Indian medicine, and meaning of death. Variables within construction of grieving mirrored the codes: grieving-individual level, grieving-family level, and support systems. Variables within construction of

bereavement rituals also mirrored the codes and included waiting four days before burial, conducting a wake service, never allowing the body to be alone, including personal items in the casket, hand-digging graves, conducting a farewell handshake, covering graves completely, building houses over graves, using medicine for purification, and adhering to a socialized mourning period.

The researcher presents a diagram in Chapter IV through which the relationships between the variables were explained. Chapters IV and V identify and explain the major themes or constructs and provide supporting data. Several variables within Muscogee Creek culture emerged as contributors to the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals, and these are also defined.

Issues of Rigor

Johnson (1997) recommended that several types of validity be reached in conducting qualitative research, including descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, internal, and external validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended using terms more appropriate for qualitative research, such as credibility and transferability. Creswell (1998) recommended eight procedures that will increase credibility of a study.

The first of these procedures is prolonged engagement and persistent observation. The researcher spent with each interview as much time as the participant chose to take. This increased trust with the respondents, thus improving the quality of data gathered. When available, the researcher recorded field notes of observations of families and gravesites.

Second, triangulation, ensuring reliability of data by using multiple researchers, methods, theories, and sources of data (Denzin, 1984) is recommended. This researcher employed triangulation of methods by using interviews, observations, and document analysis when available. Multiple participants provided the same information, ensuring the use of data source triangulation.

Next, Creswell (1998) recommended peer review or debriefing to provide an outside source of validation. The researcher received debriefings on a regular basis from dissertation committee members who are not actively working on the project. Creswell's fourth recommendation, negative case analysis, involving revision of research questions in light of new data, was not conducted in this study. Research questions were revised, however, to narrow the scope of the project.

Creswell's fifth recommendation coincided with Stake's (1995) suggestion for member checking. This procedure involved feedback on the researcher's records from respondents after the interview was completed. The researcher used this procedure to reinforce what Johnson (1997) terms "interpretive validity." Follow up meetings were attempted with all 27 participants and completed with 17 participants. Also, two participants and the gatekeeper read the paper after completion to ensure that findings were valid. Clarification of potential researcher biases, Creswell's sixth recommendation to increase credibility, was addressed in an introductory statement of the results.

Next, two additional researchers were used to address the seventh recommendation, performance of external auditing. First, a researcher outside of this researcher's committee read three interviews randomly chosen by the researcher and verified the accuracy of the codes that this researcher identified; this process ensured

inter-rater reliability of the results. The outside researcher held a Doctorate of Philosophy degree from the same department in which this dissertation was written and had past experience with qualitative analysis and coding. Second, another outside researcher read the entire project after its completion to evaluate face validity of the project, whether or not it appears to make logical, practical sense (Isaac & Michaels, 1998). This researcher was studying in the department in which this dissertation was written and in the process of writing a qualitative dissertation. Finally, the use of thick, rich descriptions is recommended to increase accuracy of the findings. Descriptions were given throughout the results and interpretation to provide data about the researcher's experience and to increase credibility of the study.

Transferability is not of primary importance in case study research (Stake, 1995), but it does play a role in collective case studies. In this case, experiences of 27 participants were transferred to a population, and accuracy of the transferability was ensured by triangulation of data sources. Maximum variation was used to derive a diverse sample, and findings were still continually replicated by the participants. Redundancy of results indicates that the sample is large enough and that findings are transferable (Patton, 2002).

Summary

The preceding chapter described the methods used in developing this study and discussed the codes resulting from the data analysis. In Chapters IV and V, results and interpretations are presented. Chapter IV presents a diagram through which relationships between variables can be viewed and discusses constructions of grieving and

bereavement rituals. Supporting data is presented, and a discussion of the relationship between the two constructs is presented.

Chapter IV

RESULTS / INTERPRETATION

PERSONAL BIASES OF THE RESEARCHER

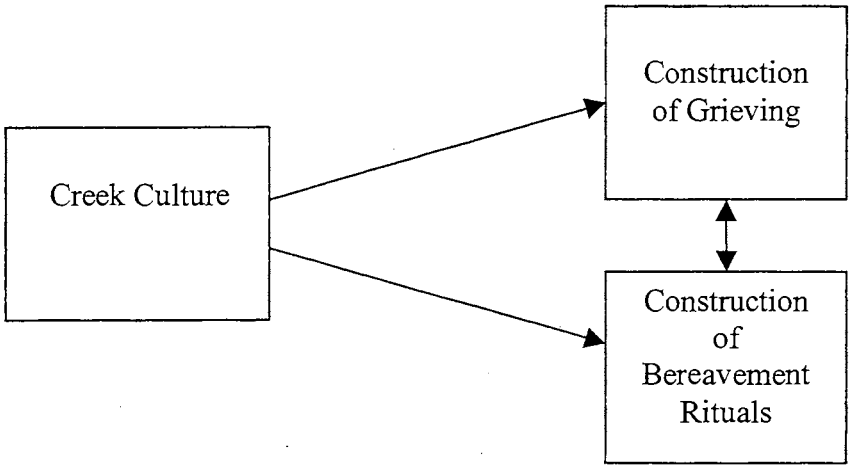
Social constructionism, as well as qualitative inquiry, requires that a researcher be aware of his/her personal biases toward a topic. This researcher has particular respect and admiration for those who appear to be able to successfully adjust to death and loss. Certain Native American groups have adjusted to the death, loss, and change in culture and location required of them throughout history. It is this researcher's biased opinion that these Native American groups have adjusted to the required changes and to the influence of mainstream United States culture more gracefully than most other cultural groups. This researcher conducted this study on the biased opinion that Muscogee Creeks do, in fact, have a successful method for which to adjust to losses, particularly those involving death of a family member.

To compensate for this personal bias, the researcher evaluated herself and the influence of her bias constantly during data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. Second, she conducted follow-up meetings with all willing participants, a total of 17, and received validation that the data had been recorded correctly. Second, she involved an outside analyst to validate the codes that she had identified from the study.

Third, she employed member checking from the gatekeeper and two participants to validate her interpretation of the findings. Finally, another outside researcher read this entire report to ensure face validity. Using these methods, the researcher was able to ensure that her personal bias did not influence the results to a harmful degree. Discussion on personal biases of the researcher is presented in greater detail in the interpretation included in Chapter VI.

The goal of Chapters IV and V is to present the results and reach an understanding of how grieving and bereavement rituals are constructed in the Muscogee Creek culture. The exploration of this topic yielded data that clustered around several themes, or variables, described in this section. The researcher proposes the following diagram, Figure 1, based on social constructionism, as a means through which the interaction of those variables might be conceptualized. Figure 2 provides a more detailed picture of the interaction of the variables.

Figure 1. Diagram for Viewing the Construction of Grieving and Bereavement Rituals in Muscogee Creeks



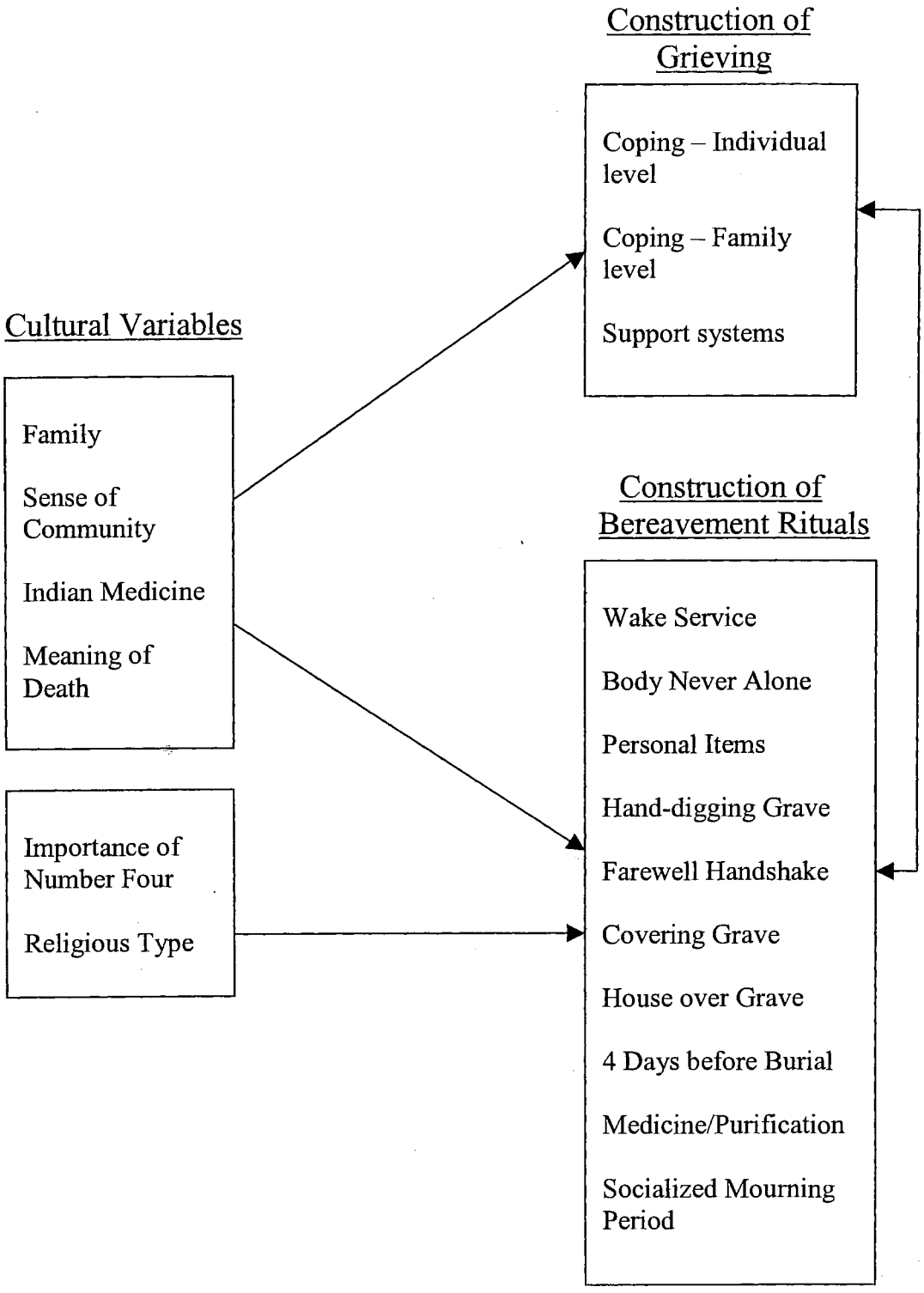


Figure 1. Diagram for Viewing the Construction of Grieving and Bereavement Rituals in Muscogee Creeks with Contributing Variables

The diagram identifies three major codes or constructs, including Creek culture, construction of grieving, and construction of bereavement rituals. Relationships between the constructs are as follows: 1) the construction of grieving in Creek culture is based on cultural factors of family, sense of community, Indian medicine, and the meaning of death, and 2) the construction of bereavement rituals in Creek culture is based on cultural factors of family, religion, importance of the number four, sense of community, Indian medicine, and the meaning of death, and 3) the construction of grieving and the construction of bereavement rituals have reciprocal influence. Chapter IV discusses two of these constructs: 1) construction of grieving and three levels that emerged from the data, and 2) construction of bereavement rituals and ten rituals that emerged from the data. The purpose of this chapter is to explore what grieving and bereavement rituals mean to the Creeks and to explore the reciprocal relationship between the two.

CONSTRUCT of GRIEVING

> When somebody loses a loved one or something like that, (others) think that they want to be left alone. But when I'm sittin' here right after I lost my (spouse), I was just wishing that just anyone would come visit me and just talk to me. That never did happen. (Family) don't live too far from me, but they never did come around. Just seemed like I was stranded, ya know. But I finally got over that.

This excerpt of a participant's interview was extraordinary because most participants reported receiving more than adequate family support. Consistent with this quote, many of the participants openly discussed their unique personal losses. These participants trusted the researcher with sensitive information about their special experiences with grief. The researcher experienced a reciprocal sense of trust and

intimacy with those participants and felt a sense of responsibility to handle data regarding their personal experiences delicately.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher became increasingly in awe of these participants and their seemingly selfless attitudes. When discussing grieving, participants often described behaviors that indicated focus more on others than themselves. The researcher sensed from all participants a determination for adjustment to losses of family members. To this group, positive adjustment was a foregone conclusion; no other options existed. The researcher wondered of the origin of this determination and if it helped to construct grieving.

Several themes regarding grieving developed from questions on the interview protocol and emerged from data provided in interviews without prompting. The researcher identified three major themes that are pertinent to the present study. The variables used to explore the construction of grieving among the participants in the sample included 1) coping – individual level, 2) coping – family level, and 3) support systems to explore the construction of grieving

Coping – individual level:

Most of the data for this variable were obtained from questions 4-e, "How do you express your grief following the loss of a loved one?" and 3-a, "What is your primary role in the family during grief and the behaviors associated with that role?" on the interview protocol. A dominant theme among the participants was that they prefer to be alone during times of grieving, particularly during emotional expression of grief. Only one participant reported a desire to be around others during grief to talk about the person

and to "let those feelings process through" her. A common perception among participants is that they are a "strong one" in the family and prefer to assist others during grieving while taking care of themselves individually. Here are some of the responses participants had when asked how they express their grief:

> Well, uh, that part is kinda hard. But, uh, you have to just overlook it. And just try to do your best and just go on, ya know. Some people that I've seen, they can't stand it, and they just have a fit, I guess you'd say. You know, screamin' and everything but it don't do no good to do all that. The only thing… that's what I even told my kids too, ya know. When their mom passed away, I said, "Just take it easy and be calm as you can and everything'll be ok." And so that's what they done. Some people, they just scream and everything but that part it don't ever do you no good. They done gone anyway.

> I prefer to be alone initially to cry. Then I like to be around family so I can support them. I'm more interested in taking care of myself, so I can then serve my family.

> I guess you'd say…. I couldn't… there was a lot of times I wanted to break down, you know… I don't know… sometimes I wished I had broke down. But I guess I had to be strong for my children.

> Because I said, "I could not break down…" you know at the funeral. But when I got home I just literally… I just let it all go. But I handle my losses away from them, because I don't want them to think that I am a weak person. I am a weak person when it comes to certain things. But as far as trying to be strong for them, was the role that I really needed to play. I think I did that as far as my children… and as far as trying to play that role for them, I knew I had to be strong for them.

> I felt like I had to be strong and not show any emotion in front of my mom or my children. My children were small at the time, and I felt like I had to comfort them and not show them how badly I was hurt. So I had to be the strong person.

> I don't really know how to express that, I just do my everyday thing.

I don't really know how you would... you would express your grief. But a lot of people, they try not to cry but it... it's to show that they're strong. But a lot of times, you can't hold back your tears. And you gotta show them. But I guess they show they're strong by not crying. And they say that they don't wanna cry for the kids cause they don't want the kids going through that kind of stuff. But a lot of times, that's about the only kind of grief that we show is just by... by our tears.

I think I cried a lot. I think without.. you know, I think I more or less went off to myself and cried a lot. Like if I was in the bedroom... then I think I cried a lot... Because my family don't show that kind of grief or... I mean, they're not like... the way I feel. You know, they're not emotional like me.

Oh, I think that – I like to be by myself. Think it out. I just like to be by myself. I tell my wife at this point, ...things happen, just leave me alone, I'll be all right – I know what this is, what's happened... but, you know, if I need to talk with someone...

Well, to me, I guess, to me, I want to be alone... I just wanted to handle it myself, you know, without affecting the family, you know, without being felt sorry... I didn't let it affect or show it emotionally or whatever, you know because I just kind of contained it within myself and was able to cope with it because there was a way I could do that in our... so that's how I handle my grief.

I cry a lot and often want to be alone.

I don't think I've really learned that yet, because I had to make myself cold, staunch, whatever you call it, to be able to survive... I didn't express my grief until almost a year, year and a half later... I don't do those things because I make myself so strong.

Coping – family level:

Most of the data for this variable were collected from responses to question 5-a, "How does your family function during times of loss and grief?" The majority of the participants reported that the family comes together and supports one another, talks about

the deceased family member, shares fond memories of the deceased family member, and laughs. A few exceptions were made, however. One participant reported the above behaviors during the four days before the funeral, then family members dealing with the death "in their own way" after that. Another participant reported that her family functions by "going back to the normal everyday thing... work." Two respondents reported that their families avoid talking about the loss until it is less painful. Participants' actual responses to this question were as follows:

> We was going to the cemetery, in my brother's... my older brothers and my sisters and I. And we was in this hearse. I mean the... yeah the family car. Then my brother was, instead of us keepin' the... I mean, being sad... he would tell us things that my dad would do. And we were all laughing. And about the time we all got to the cemetery, we was all laughing and everybody was looking at us...

> When another family member died, after the funeral everyone stayed around and talked about him. We talked about things he said and did, relived good memories of him.

> We (family) help each other out all the time. All during that time, we just help each other. At the funeral I got them all together, and we all cried it out together. Then we went to the wake service and the funeral, and we had gotten all the crying out of our system. Then we could just be normal at the wake service and the funeral.

> You just come together, and you work together at that time. We're church people, and we have to be strong for each other. It's hard because we fall apart, then they fall apart... we just kind of take care of each other during this time.

> What we did is we gathered around, and we had a prayer. We had to depend on each other, and we all depended on the Lord. My mom did a pretty thorough job with her family... She prepared us and helped us learn how to deal with loss before she left.

Well, in our family, it's kinda weird, but in our family, after the funeral of my dad and after the funeral of my cousins, we all met together. After everybody had gone we all met together and... you know, we shared things. And then, maybe somebody'd tell a joke or something. And from then on, it was like a little party. We needed that release, you know. And we remembered the funny things they did or said or whatever. And it would just be a laugh time for all of us. A release.

...Like I know of at least three times we've met together, you know, we just had snacks and fellowship. And before it was over it was all laughing and remembering the funny things and.. and different things that mom did or said or whatever... And so it was a great release because we all came together. Sometimes we'd stay up til about 1:00, 2:00 o'clock just being together there, lifting each other up, and having a good time.

So far my family, you know, at church... We talk about the good times. You know, and we sit there and talk about what he did in lifetime.

We don't like to leave the people alone. Even if they want to be alone... And we like to talk about the old times with 'em, you know. How their.. how their person was, you know, in life and what they would want... And the funny things... how they were and how they used to like to joke around.

We stay pretty much together. All together pretty much until after the funeral. We do a lot of talking.

And people would often sit up at night and talk and this was a good time for the family to reminisce and talk about the good things that happened with this person. And it's part of the grieving ritual to talk about this person and to make the connection with family members... We don't isolate ourselves. We make sure that we stay with the group because there's support with the group. And there's reassurance with the group.

All the family members come together. When my mom died, they talked about her and helped each other.

During times of loss and grief, we stick together...We just bond together and help each other... all of us.

Support systems:

Most of the data for this variable were obtained from responses to question 3-c, "From whom do you receive most of your support during times of grieving?" on the interview protocol. Responses to this question varied among five systems: 1) family, 2) church members, 3) God, 4) friends/community, and 5) ceremonial ground/clan/tribe. Most of the participants reported that their primary source of support during grief is family. Several participants expressed importance of the other support systems along with family. Four participants identified God as their primary source of support, and one identified a friend as the primary support. One participant expressed that although his primary support system was his family, he did not receive enough support from them.

Some of the participants' responses were as follows:

> Well, I guess you would say... uh... I guess, other than my family would be my brothers and sisters in Christ.

> ...My family. My brothers and sisters, children, I guess you'd say... I'm usually around my friends and my family.

> ...From my husband. You know, financially. But morally, from my children and my mom... I got comfort from being around relatives that knew him and grew up with him. That's the thing about our culture... our cousins are like brothers and sisters.

> ...From the whole family... mostly my cousins and my aunts... Our family gives each other plenty of support. Those closest to the dead person are surrounded by family. Everyone just makes themselves at home in each other's houses.

> ...Usually my kids. My children.

It'd probably be just my sisters probably.

...Now, it was my niece, and my husband, and my nephew at the time of my mother's death... You know... who supported me.

We depend on family, and that includes cousins, nephews... because usually they have a wake service and the only one's that are left are us. After midnight it is just... it seems like everybody heads home except for just the hard core family.

...Everyone in the family and the church.

...The whole stomp ground membership comes to support the individuals because it's part of that whole scheme of things... It's our extended family.

My best friend and neighbor, well, we kinda look after each other I guess. I check on him, and he checks on me. He keeps me pretty busy all the time.

...when you get past the immediate family, ceremonial ground, and the clans then you have that other layer of support out here from your other ceremonial members, like the (tribe) would be another layer of support for me.

Summary

Grieving among the Muscogee Creeks is a cultural construction. Wikan's (1990) comparison of grieving practices of people from Egypt and people from Bali yielded drastically different practices between the two. Whereas Egyptians were encouraged by their culture to allow expression of their emotions, Balinese were encouraged by their culture to express only positive emotions. The cultural background determined the construction of grieving among these groups, as it does for Muscogee Creeks.

Three aspects of Creek grieving emerged from the data, including individual level coping, family level coping, and support systems. While participants reported expressing emotion while alone, they also reported giving and receiving support on the family level. The researcher detected values of individual strength and giving to others, especially family, in her interaction with participants during data collection.

CONSTRUCT OF BEREAVEMENT RITUALS

Throughout the interviews, the researcher tasted the uniqueness and diversity of the Creek tribe. Not only do Creek bereavement rituals vary from other cultures but also they vary within the tribe. The researcher experienced initial confusion at the diversity of rituals performed followed by a prompt realization of the tribe's division between church and ceremonial ground, influencing bereavement rituals. The researcher was also impressed with the diversity within the tribe; rituals varied among ceremonial grounds, churches, and families. As one participant described,

> Yeah, usually it's pretty much the same thing, but I'll tell you what, if you go to another ceremonial ground, they'll tell you something different, or you can go to a church down the road and they have a difference.

Despite the variation, however, certain rituals were distinctly characteristic across the tribe. During the interview process, what was initially very interesting data collection on bereavement rituals quickly became mundane for the researcher. Data on this topic were the most highly replicated among participants in the study. The researcher identified those rituals that were described by at least half (n=14) of the participants as

variables in the construction of Creek bereavement. These included 1) conducting a wake service the night before burial, 2) body never being alone before burial, 3) enclosing personal items and food, 4) digging graves by hand, 5) farewell handshake, 6) covering grave completely by hand, and 7) building a house over the grave. Because of their strong representation among those active in ceremonial grounds, the researcher also included three variables that were not described by at least fourteen of the participants, 8) four days before burial, 9) medicine/purification, and 10) socialized mourning period, Table 3 lists the total numbers of participants who identified and described each particular ritual in his/her interview. These totals are also divided among three groups: church participants, ceremonial ground participants, and participants of both.

Most of the data regarding construction of bereavement rituals were obtained from answers to question 1-a, "Describe the tribal events and rituals that occur from the death of a loved one to his or her burial," and 2-a, "Describe the tribal events and rituals that occur after the burial of a loved one," on the interview protocol. The researcher did not necessarily ask questions about these specific rituals; in most of the interviews, identification of these rituals emerged from the participants. Participants repeatedly identified the 11 variables included in Table 3 as common rituals. Many of the participants also acknowledged that although these rituals still occur regularly, they are lessening in frequency due to changing times and the influence of mainstream culture. The influence of religious type appears to moderate the occurrence of waiting four days before burial, medicine/purification, and socialized mourning period while having no bearing on the others.

Table 3

Occurrence of Bereavement Rituals among Participants who are Members of Churches and/or Ceremonial Grounds.

Bereavement Ritual	Church	Ceremonial Ground	Both	Total
Four days prior to burial	3	4	6	13
Wake service	12	3	9	24
Body never alone	8	2	6	16
Personal items	7	3	7	17
Hand-dig graves	7	3	7	17
Farewell handshake	8	4	9	21
Cover graves	7	2	5	14
Houses over graves	6	3	5	14
Medicine/purification	0	3	5	8
Socialized mourning period	0	3	1	4
Total number possible	12	4	11	27

Wake service:

Among the 27 participants, 24 discussed a wake service the night before the funeral. Three were ceremonial ground members, twelve were church members, and nine were both. The participants reported the service ending at various times between ten o'clock in the evening and the next morning. During the wake service, there are numerous speakers, time for talking and remembering the deceased person, and periodic breaks for snacks. This service usually takes place at the church if the family are church members and at the person's home or the ceremonial grounds if the family are ceremonial ground members. The following responses were given by participants:

> The wake service sometimes lasts until midnight, sometimes all night...

> Once the body is taken, like his body was taken to church, and then they have the wake services that night. And usually our church goes til 12'oclock or sometimes it goes until all the ministers have preached. And then it's dismissed.

> This is what we call a wake service. Uh-huh. There will be different members, ministers coming in. If we don't have enough ministers there, they use ordained deacons to exhort to us. And we normally dismiss around between 10:30 and 11 p.m. Then we have what we call a midnight snack. And then if they decide to go ahead have service afterwards til maybe until midnight... or 12:30 or so, then they'll go ahead and do that. Otherwise, they'll go ahead and dismiss and probably, you know, that time.

> ...we did have a wake service at the church the night before the funeral until 10:00 p.m.

> ...the body is brought to the church or to the family's home, and they have a wake service that night. It might last all night, but no matter how long it lasts, there's someone watching the body at all times. Now the services usually just last until midnight, and whoever wants to preach can preach.

> ...of course the wake service starts about 7 or 8'oclock at night and it goes to about midnight or longer, it depends, you know, on what the family wants.

> ...Cause usually if they were like from the ceremonial ground, from 7 or 8, whenever they start, they let the preachers preach til 12'oclock. And then after that, they'll ask anybody do they want to come up and talk, you know, say something about this person or whatever they want to do, and usually a ceremonial people will come up and talk about it then.

> ...but traditionally, some of those people would take the body back to the residency of that individual and they would stay with the body all night. That's what they call a wake service. It was a quite humble type service traditionally, you know, but now we have ministers or preachers that comes in and preach, you know, and hymns or songs, you know, but the family members or friends, you know, they just stay up all night that night and that's why it is called a wake service, I mean...

Body never alone:

Many participants reported that during the four days before burial, particularly during the wake service, the body of the deceased person is never alone. A family member or a friend constantly accompanies the body until the burial. According to beliefs of some Creeks, the spirit of the deceased person is still on earth for four days after the death. Family members want to keep the spirit company and be with the spirit of their loved ones as long as possible before the burial. Of the sixteen participants that described this ritual, eight were church members, two were ceremonial ground members, and six were both. Here are some of their descriptions:

> ...And that there should be someone with the body continually for four days. That's out of respect and support to the family and respect to the person who died.

> ...they'll have someone stay up with the body all night long. The body should never be alone.
>
> And when nobody's there, there's supposed to be somebody staying up the entire night with the body at the church. It's kinda like a companion to that dead person.
>
> Somebody stays with the body at all times.
>
> It might last all night, but no matter how long it lasts, there's someone watching the body at all times.
>
> ...One of the family members usually sits up with the body until the burial; nobody sleeps too much.
>
> We do not leave the body lie alone for any reason. I mean, it's just our custom that we stay, that we're gonna stay up with the body and that anybody who wants to stay in there with the body, can. But it's mostly the family members that stays there...and this is considered that last days with the body.
>
> There's always, just like him, there's always somebody in church with him. You know, like there's always somebody in there with him.
>
> A family member stays with the body constantly until the burial.

Personal items enclosed:

Many of the respondents described the importance of enclosing the deceased person's favorite items and food in the casket. The family members and friends of the deceased person did this so that he/she would have needed items on the journey and would not get hungry. Often the person's favorite quilt was enclosed in the casket or draped over the casket to keep the person warm on his/her journey. Of the seventeen

participants who discussed this, seven were church members, three were ceremonial ground members, and seven were both. The following are some of their descriptions:

> Containers with the dead person's favorite foods are placed in the coffin and on the grave after burial. This must be done or the spirit will return to the home hungry.

> And as a custom, the favorite food of the individual that is deceased, we put 'em in a little container, you know, like a baby food jar. Put those, and we put their favorite food in there, and then we put it inside the casket the day of the funeral

> The deceased might have some favorite stuff, and they'll put it in a little sack and put in the casket. They might have some favorite foods or a favorite quilt.

> ...the person's favorite item can either be put into the casket before the services or right there at the end.

> And then during lunch time if there was something that she particularly enjoyed eating we would have little containers and put food in the casket with her. That, when she goes on to the other side she'll have her favorite foods with her... And sometimes, if you ever go to one, you see some beautiful quilts or Indian blankets or Indian jewelry or whatever, that's just... hate to see leave, but it's hers. And it's going with her.

> ...like her jewelry, indian jewelry and her glasses. And then we put extra pair of clothes in there for her, for her traveling clothes. And some different shoes. But she was buried wearing a nice dress. And we put an Indian blanket in there with her.

> And we included items that she appreciated. We put that in the casket...food, items that she appreciated...pictures of her family, grandkids, stuff like that.

> We would wrap them in their favorite blanket or quilt. And these days we still do that. You'll see sometimes it's still carried on, that they will put a quilt over the casket as it goes down into the grave. And we would also put small portions of food in the.. in the casket with.. with the burial.

> ...that morning they have to prepare just a little bit of food and they put it in, like a handkerchief and tie it up and they put it down at the foot.
>
> ...and right there at the end you put stuff in there that they like. Now they are going to have a 4-day journey to get to the creator so they are going to need food and...
>
> And they'll always use... they always send a blanket to cover him, and that's to keep him warm.
>
> We have a quilt that they normally.. we lay it over the top of the casket, once the casket is lowered into the grave with the quilt on top of it. And it's just signifying that we're gonna keep him warm through the winter and to the, uh... you know. So they will have warmth when they need it.
>
> That quilt goes down with them into the grave on top of the casket.
>
> And usually if there's a favorite quilt or a blanket or something that was hers it's put over the casket during the service and it stays on the casket as it goes down into the grave.
>
> ...so everyone, in a traditional family, everyone has a blanket - maybe a quilt - that has been made for them, or given to them and that is your "funeral" quilt so when they die they will get that quilt and put it across the casket and that way they would have something to keep them warm, as you would a flag for a veteran, but this one goes with them...

Digging graves by hand:

The majority of the participants reported that friends of the deceased person often dig the grave by hand. More often, a backhoe is being used, but hand-digging the grave is still common. The morning of the funeral, the grave diggers would get up early and fast while digging the grave with shovels. The fast might be broken at breakfast, lunch,

or supper following the funeral. Seventeen participants discussed this, seven from churches, three from ceremonial grounds, and seven from both. Their descriptions are as follows:

> Traditionally, men friends of the family dig the graves, but for the past 25 years or so, a backhoe has been used.

> They have the grave diggers. ... of the ceremonial ground. And before they... that morning they have to get up at sunrise. And they have to also fast. And then they stay down there the whole time. They don't come up for the services or nothing. They stay at the grave site.

> ... they usually go out early the last day and help with the grave digging and then the church feeds 'em breakfast.

> At about 6:00 or 6:30 the next morning the grave-diggers will gather, and the church will fix them breakfast. The grave-diggers are relatives of the family and friends. They go clean around the family cemetery and measure the grave and dig it. If there aren't enough diggers, they might ask the county to come dig the grave.

> And then in the morning they will give breakfast to the grave diggers and they... they find somebody to dig the grave. And they have to go without eating.

> They can request it. Yeah, they can request the county to come out and dig the grave, you know if they need to, or they know that their cemetery is got a lot of rocks or whatever. You know, that's when they request for a back-hoe to come out and dig the grave for 'em.

> That is what the men did, was dig the grave by hand. and sometimes these days it's just dug the morning of the funeral but that's not the way it used to be.

> ...they dug their own graves using a shovel and manpower, you know...

> And these are usually volunteers from the ceremonial grounds and maybe friends who just like to help and they all get their tools, just before daylight they start digging the grave.

Farewell handshake:

A common ritual described by the participants is the farewell handshake, or last handshake. Friends and family of the deceased at the burial gather a handful of dirt and throw it over the casket as it is being covered. This ritual symbolizes the expression of a final good-bye to that person. The farewell handshake was described by 21 of the participants; of these 21, eight were members of churches, four were members of ceremonial grounds, and nine were both. Here are examples of responses given by the participants:

> And then we'll do a farewell handshake. And what we do is just get a few pieces of dirt and toss it into the casket... I mean into the grave.

> ...Well, while the body is being covered, we do a "farewell handshake." Everybody there grabs a handful of dirt and throws it into the grave to say their last goodbye.

> Everybody says goodbye for the last time by taking a handful of dirt from the shovels and throwing it into the ground where the body is being buried.

> Before they cover the body up in the grave, they usually get a shovel and get a scoop of dirt, and you walk by and get some of that dirt and sprinkle it into the grave. You're saying farewell to your friend, and letting him go back to the earth.

> And then after that, it's kinda like a farewell handshake, the minister says, "Ok, you can say good-bye to her now." I've had them... seen them, the men take their shovel, and have a shovel full of dirt, and the people come along and take a handful of dirt and throw it down onto the grave.

> And then... when they put a little bit of dirt on the grave, they they'll have a shovel, two men will have a shovel filled with dirt, and then everybody lines up and they get to put dirt on the grave. And that's saying it's the last handshake and goodbye.
>
> We would have a last handshake, where we all threw dirt into the grave.
>
> We call it a last handshake, when everyone participates by putting a handful of dirt into the grave.
>
> ...they do their ceremony - what they call the "final handshake" or the "last handshake... they will take a scoop full of that fresh dirt and hold it out for these people to come by and take a clod of that to throw in there...
>
> ...and then the people are given the opportunity to say their final goodbye by throwing some dirt in and after it's over...

Covering graves by hand:

Many of the participants expressed the importance of covering the grave completely by hand. Friends and family of the deceased stay at the gravesite during the burial until the casket has been lowered and is covered completely with the dirt, usually by the grave-diggers. The farewell handshake occurs during this process as well. Fourteen participants reported on the importance of this ritual. Of these fourteen, seven were church members, two were ceremonial ground members, and five were members of both. The following are examples of participants' comments:

> I was attending a funeral, and they placed the coffin on the grave at the burial service. Then the funeral home requested that everyone leave. We were not allowed to cover the grave or congregate. It left me feeling very incomplete. I told my son that he better make sure that I am completely covered at my burial service!

> ...at the burial ground, at the cemetery, well, we don't leave the body until it's completely, you know... And then some families they stay around, you know.

> The men show respect by covering the grave, and they take turns with shovels. This shows they want to be with the dead person until the end.

> They'll go ahead and put the body down and do their own covering up. The men jump in and cover the grave themselves.

> ...we saw the bodies to the grave and we stay there til the last dirt is thrown on the grave.

> The grave-diggers cover the grave after the funeral home people put the casket into the ground.

> After the burial and everyone covers the grave, everyone stays until it's over. The grave is buried and there are songs that are sung as the body goes down into the ground. Also when we stay until the grave is covered, it's a closure. It's a finishing up of doing... going all the way, you know, until the little mound is put on the grave and the men know how to use their shovels and hoes and they make that little ground. And they tamp it down with their shovels and their hoes in order to make the mound and then lay the flowers over that.

> ...we bury our own dead. Usually, they put the body on the grave and leave - we bury our dead, we cover our dead, we put flowers, whole nine yards.

Houses over graves:

Several participants reported building houses over the grave after the burial. Participants gave diverse explanations of the origin of this ritual. Before removal to Oklahoma, Muscogee Creeks had been mound-builders and would bury their tribal leaders in mounds. Common members of the tribe were often buried directly under their

homes, where family still lived. This practice was outlawed by the U. S. government, and Creeks began to build replicas of small houses over the graves individually. According to one participant, the houses needed to cover the grave so that "if the spirit wanders, then it knows where to come back to. That little house is there." Another participant explained that the houses at one time kept the animals from digging up the decomposing body. Data for this code were collected from both observations and interviews.

Observation notes were recorded while accompanying two Creek gentlemen, fictitiously named Bill and Ted, to cemeteries on tribal lands. The researcher felt the eagerness and support of these men to assist her in conducting a successful study. Although the weather was somewhat compromising, the men willingly escorted her to several grave sites. Images of the graves and the houses carefully built over them vividly represented the closeness of families once united, soon to be re-united, according to beliefs regarding the meaning of death. Out of respect for the deceased and the wishes of the Creeks, pictures were not taken. Observation notes are as follows:

> The day was wet, gray, and the rain was steady all day. The soggy ground was very muddy and slippery, and Bill and I had to protect ourselves from getting soaked while exploring the cemeteries. The first cemetery was on the property of (name) Church. It was on dirt roads, and several small white buildings stood somewhat apart from each other in a clearing of a wooded area. Off to the side was the cemetery which appeared to occupy a somewhat small area, approximately 30 feet by 50 feet. Ted explained that even though it was small, many people were buried there. Ted described an occasion when he served as a grave-digger at a friend's funeral and unearthed another grave. The grave yard was chaotically arranged; in some areas graves were lined up, and in others graves were scattered. Some graves had monuments and head stones, and others were covered with short houses over the graves. Several were adorned with flowers, and the cemetery as a whole was fairly well mowed. Bill asked if I wanted a closer look at the graves, so we walked among the graves,

> careful to avoid walking over where the bodies lay, which would have been very disrespectful. Many of the graves had been destroyed in a fire a few years ago. A wooden house that had been damaged stood over one grave, lying exactly as if it had just been burned. Several other graves covered by houses were still intact, some made out of concrete and bricks and some out of wood. One grave was covered with a concrete slab about the size of a twin bed approximately 1-1.5 feet high. All four sides were layered in red brick, but the top appeared to be solid concrete. Several houses were made from white wood with pointed roofs, and these stood about 2-3 feet high. One house was colored bright blue. Bill pointed out a house covering that had at one time been filled with toys and dolls that had since been stolen or removed. Another unique house had a round top, also made out of wood. It looked much like a log cabin, and the roof was in the shape of a semi-circle of logs.
>
> As we continued our search around the Creek Nation tribal lands, we traveled further into the country on dirt roads through mud and rocks. Single houses intermittently lined the countryside. A single grave stood in the yard of several houses; four graves occupied the corner of the property of one residence. The grave houses were about two feet tall with identical wooden white frames and pointed roofs. About 50 feet away stood a swing set where children played. Further back into the woods we approached a family cemetery. Several graves, 10 to 15 total, occupied a small yard. The graves were lined in two rows, each with a white wooden house over it. All these houses were very similar to each other and to several in the first cemetery we visited. Because of the danger of trapping the car in the mud, we turned around and headed back.

These observations confirmed the descriptions given by fourteen of the participants. During interviews, participants who described the ritual of building houses over graves often did so with eagerness. These participants were proud of this ritual unique to the Creek heritage. Six of the participants who identified and described the houses built over graves were church members, three were ceremonial ground members, and five were members of both. Their descriptions included the following:

> And then, um, we have, uh like a nephew or something, that builds a little house to cover the grave. And they bring that down and put it on top of the house.... It's like a home today. So they say that they put a window on the east and west side.

Cause, uh, the window symbolizes on the east side that the sun comes up and on the west side that the sun goes down.

Usually they ask someone to build a little house over the grave. They used to bury the bodies under the family's house, but when they couldn't do that anymore, they started building these little houses. They might put flowers on the house and hang the person's favorite belongings inside the house.

So they started building little wooden houses over the grave and that way nothing could disturb it. And then later on they started building the rock surroundings with the concrete top over it... kinda like little... their home away from home is what it was. Then it got stronger and stronger with the concrete. And then some of them still do make little houses.

It used to be four days after you put the body away, is when they used to build little houses on the top of the grave, but they don't do that anymore. Cause you know, like I said, they all have to work and they just have to get a date... a certain date, where they can all get together to build this, and they will.

Then before four days are passed after that burial, the little house is built over the grave. So, at death or in the four days before the funeral... the family will arrange for someone to build their little house over the grave so that happens before another four days are gone.

a long time ago we had dirt floors and when a person passed on why they buried him in the middle of the house, in the floor, sort of thing, so... from that, when they bury them out there, they build those little houses.

...between the time the person dies and the actual day of burial, another group of individuals set aside to build the little grave house. When the grave house is complete, they paint it, or whatever... these folks carry the body to the site... The body is covered up and we just roughly place the house on top...

what I used to see was they used to build houses like she was talking about, little houses, some of them got a cement, you know, little houses on them, but most of them got them little houses on them.

Four days before burial:

Thirteen of the respondents discussed the importance of waiting four days after the death until the burial of the deceased person. Among these, three were church members, four were ceremonial ground members, and six were both. According to Creek beliefs, the soul remains on the earth for four days after the person's death. During these four days, the person relives his/her entire life and re-visits all places at which he/she dwelled on earth. One participant explained that Creeks also waited four days to make sure the person was not going to "come back to life." Here are some of the participants' responses:

> Yeah, we sit up four nights.... Yeah, yeah. But like everything else, it's dying out. But I think with the ceremonial way, that they stay up with 'em four nights and they bring 'em home...

> We normally wait about 4 days after a person has deceased. And we wait four days because we still feel that his soul is still on the earth for the four days. And he will still visit, like he will still visit our home for the four days.

> Whenever a death occurs, it's usually four days before they bury the body because they believe that the spirit, you know, hangs around the body, kinda lingers around for four days. And then, so if someone died on Monday they'd be buried on Thursday.

> I should've had someone be with the body at all times. For four days until they were put into the ground.

> ...some of them there are just kind of modern and, you know, they do it like the white man, short, short trip, you know, and the second or third day they have the funeral, but when I was a little boy they had four days and that was to allow the spirit to leave the body...

> I've been to a couple of funerals for non-Indian people. I go and it's over with - real short - and we're gone, you know, and that's one of the differences - we're a four-day process. Here in school you get teachers that don't understand this. If you said you were going to a funeral well you were gone all week, you know, and these are some of the things we have to make them aware of...

Medicine / Purification:

Several participants identified the importance of Indian medicine to purify themselves after being in proximity of the body or touching the ground and dirt under which the body was buried. Four purposes emerged from the cultural factor of Indian medicine; for bereavement rituals, however, the main purpose was for cleansing to keep bad spirits away. Many Creeks believe that being around the body or touching the dirt causes a person to be exposed to bad spirits which can cause physical illnesses, such as arthritis and cramps. Those who have been around death must cleanse and purify themselves of the spirits to prevent sickness. Participation in this ritual appeared to be strongly moderated by religious type. Of the eight participants who reported this ritual, none were church members, three were ceremonial ground members, and five were members of both. Here are some of their comments:

> Then after all of that is over, well they have what they call medicine, which is made for the ceremonial people, because that is more or less for them to, I guess you'd say, they wash up in it. Some would say it's not to have bad germs or not to take the spirit with you because when you walk on the fresh ground, well sometimes, you know, the spirit will come and visit you, or whatever. But when you wash up it's just to, you know, I guess you'd say... it's not really cleaning, it's just keeping you from being sick when you walk on that fresh ground.

> It's after the funeral and after they.. after they eat when they come back from the funeral cause you have to wash off all those.. you know, those spirits at the gravesite. You kinda wash your feet... That's how we started out in the church but there was a division in my church and they wanted to quit doing that.

> It's kind of hard to explain. When you're around dead bodies, it's harmful for you. So your system has to be flushed out, washed off... Mostly, I think, what old people used to say was that death will get into your system. And plus, it can harm the mind too, and emotionally, physically, and spiritually too.

> ... but the men would get medicine and put it in water and we would wash our hands and faces. And then they would sprinkle this medicine around the house and cedar would be burned. And we would take that cedar and cleanse our self with the cedar smoke.

> ... when I was a little boy, when they come out of church, there was a medicine man in a black car, or whatever, and we drank... and washed our face and hands and wiped it on our body to cleanse the spirit and then we would even go home and then some people would have their house doctored (?) if the spirits would hang around you would doctor your house where the spirits would go... Some churches have medicine after the funeral/burial just like at the ceremonial ground. Just some – the ones that are not very "westernized."

> ...the morning of the day of the service, the day of the funeral, sometime they would call on the - traditional people belong to a ceremonial circle - that they would call on the medicine man at that ceremonial crowd to prepare this medicine to wash for all those who took part or even the visitors are welcome to take it, a touch of that also, so that's to prevent any arthritic, or whatever, disease or sickness, causing it to be washed off, you know, because all of them are around that fresh dirt and stuff like that, you know, and especially the immediate family... At one time or another everybody touches that fresh dirt that could cause sickness or disease so that's what they fix that medicine for, is to wash off.

Socialized mourning period:

Socialized mourning period is a static amount of time that a person is expected by a particular group to be in mourning after the loss of a family member. The data for this variable were collected from question 2-c on the interview protocol, "Is there a prescribed mourning period? If so, how long is it? If not, what is the typical length of time an

individual is in mourning after the loss of a loved one?" Responses to this question overwhelmingly rejected the existence of a socialized mourning period.

Most participants reported that the length of mourning time was individually determined. Four participants indicated that there is a particular length of time; of these, three were ceremonial ground members, and one was a supporter of both ceremonial ground and church. These participants indicated that the mourning period was a minimum of four days after the burial, dependent upon familial closeness to the deceased and whether or not certain ceremonial rituals were performed. When a member of a ceremonial ground dies, all other members of the ground must wait until the first moon after the four-day period is over to dance, but immediate family members must wait longer. This variable appears to be moderated by religious type. It should be noted that two participants, who were church members, reported that if a spouse died, the remaining spouse should not date for a year, but both reported that abiding by this ritual was the family's choice. Here are some examples of participants' responses to this question:

> There is no specific time frame. There may used to have been, but now things are very mainstream. And as far as the grieving process, it is completely individual.

> Well, as far as children, as far as brothers and sisters, that have passed on, I have never heard of a certain mourning that you go through. But I was taught, if your husband or your wife passes away, then you won't mourn, but you don't see nobody else. Until a year after they had passed.

> I don't really think so. I mean, I know a ceremonial ground, before you're let into a dance, I think it's about a year, then you can go in.

> No. We just grieve at our own time. And when we say, you know, it's enough for us... then we do that ourselves.

There's no mourning period. It just depends on the person how long he is in mourning.

No, I never heard of any Indians being like that, it just depends on the person.

There's usually no set time.

It depends on how...how you felt about this person...yeah, how much love you had for the person is, I guess...

Yeah, after they're buried, you mourn for four days. Then you get back into the world...some other tribes have it a year, and some a season.

If that person just belonged to that particular ceremonial grounds, all of the members, they wait until - before they can take part in other things, they wait until the 30 days or the new moon. Immediate family members, they have a longer waiting period. In the early traditional way you were told, you wait a year, if it was immediate, and that's what I did, with my brother, I waited a year.

Yeah, for someone to, like I say, our ceremonial grounds are for the living and it is our belief that the new moon washes the ground and the people who are sick, so if a person died and his funeral was the fourth day - four days after his burial, let's say..... you're not allowed back into the ring until after the first new moon after the burial... The ceremonial ring... Now, if this kind of deal was, let's say, today and within four days a new moon come up - it's still within that four days, so you would have to wait until the next cycle of the new moon before the people that attend the funeral and people from this family - within the four days, okay? If the new moon is within that period, you wait for the next cycle, but they take the medicine and the herbs and if the new moon is on the fifth day, then they can come back in the fifth day.

It depends on how...how you felt about this person.

No, not in our family. There might be in other families, but not in ours.

> I don't think so. Some people believe that, but it's not typical. We believe that they've moved on, and they would have no more suffering. We should go on with our lives because the loved one has moved on. Sometimes family are gone from work for a few days to take care of other family.

Summary

Bereavement rituals that were common among the participants in the sample included 1) conducting a wake service the night before burial, 2) never allowing the body to be alone before burial, 3) enclosing personal items and food in the casket, grave, and house, 4) digging graves by hand, 5) conducting a farewell handshake, 6) covering the grave completely and by hand, 7) building a house over the grave, 8) waiting four days before the burial, 9) using medicine for purification, and 10) adhering to a socialized mourning period. Enclosure of personal items in the casket and performance of the purification ritual were included in a description by the Smithsonian Institution (1928) of burial rituals, meaning they have been occurring since at least the early 1900s. Watson (1950) also reported rituals of never allowing the body to be alone, conducting an all-night wake service, digging the grave by hand, and building a house over the grave.

RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIONS OF GRIEVING AND BEREAVEMENT RITUALS

How do the construction of grieving and of bereavement rituals relate to one another? Shapiro (1996) suggested that bereavement rituals depict a culture's boundaries in expression of emotion and roles of family members as well as community. Bereavement rituals are designed to, in turn, aid families in coping with loss. As

described earlier in this chapter, Creek expression of grief feelings often occurs while a person is alone, and coping with the loss often occurs during positive interactions on the family level. Support systems during times of grieving are often families of the bereaved. The importance of family and family closeness are values evident in both the construction of grieving and of bereavement rituals. The researcher therefore proposes that the two constructs have reciprocal influence. The researcher refers to sections earlier in the chapter for examples of raw data supporting both of the constructs.

The sharing and remembering that occur during grieving on the family level are directly correlated with some bereavement rituals. The wake service conducted the night before the funeral involves the entire family and close friends. Those involved spend several hours, sometimes all night, talking and sharing memories of the deceased. One participant described the wake service and its influence on the grieving process as follows:

> And people would often sit up at night and talk and this was a good time for the family to reminisce and talk about the good things that happened with this person. And it's part of the grieving ritual to talk about this person and to make the connection with family members. And the cousins would come or people that grew up or the children that grew up together were adults now. You know, and they would come and they would talk about, "Remember when grandma did this?" And it would help them through the grieving process. And if there were family members that needed special attention because they were having a difficult time, this helped them through it, because they were able then to talk their feelings out. They didn't have to hold them down, you know, or repress them. They used this time.

While grieving on the family level influenced the construction of the wake service, performing the wake service in turn facilitated the construction of grieving on the family level.

The value of family closeness also influences the reciprocal relationship between the construction of grieving and the construction of some bereavement rituals. The grieving patterns on the family level incorporate the importance of closeness and support of family members. Some bereavement rituals portray this value of closeness and involve attempts to remain close to the deceased as long as possible. Such rituals include enclosing personal items in the casket, never allowing the body to be alone, hand-digging graves, conducting a farewell handshake, covering the graves by hand, and waiting four days before the burial. The enactment of these rituals then maintains and reinforces the construction of grieving on the family level. One participant described this influence clearly:

> I make sure that we go through the rituals as they're set out to... the way we've been taught. And I take the time to let myself grieve. And I know that I'm going to hurt. And during that time that...that four days that the family is around, I make sure that I talk and I ask questions of the family members and get a dialogue or a conversation going. I go ahead and let those feelings process through me. I don't try to suppress them.

The bereavement rituals involve numerous family members; performing the rituals constructs a setting in which grieving on the family level easily occurs. The facilitation of grieving becomes a natural process. Family members are in close proximity and readily available to provide built-in support systems. Thus, bereavement rituals and grieving among Creeks incorporate reciprocal influence.

SUMMARY

In the previous chapter, the researcher presented a diagram through which the interaction of variables involved in the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals may be conceptualized. Subsequent sections addressed the variables associated with grieving construction and construction of bereavement rituals. Finally, the reciprocal relationship between the two was examined. Chapter V discusses aspects of Creek culture that emerged from the data set with examples of supporting data. The influence of each particular variable on the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals is then examined and discussed.

Chapter V

RESULTS / INTERPRETATION

We sat nestled in our lawn chairs and admired the clearness of the sky and the brightness of the stars that speckled it across the horizon. The energy of the night echoed like a drum, orchestrating sounds as busy as a city's streets at noon. The katydids hummed their excited song in unison. The sound of the bullfrogs brought up the base of nature's poetic ensemble. The drum pounded softly in the distance to initiate the beginning of the dance. Then it stopped, and all was quiet. Nature itself yielded to the sound of the drums. So harmonious is this culture of people with nature that as the dance respects nature, so does it respect the dance.

When all seemed calm, more calm than ever experienced in the hustle of downtown, a male voice emerged. The voice conducted the initial prayer over the dance in a language unknown to me, the Creek language. Then as quickly as sound had stopped, it started again. One man let out an initial whoop, and a group of male spectators from under one of the arbors emerged into the dance area, single file. Several women sitting elsewhere joined them in the circle, filing in so that a line ordered male, female, male, female, etc. was formed. The leader of the dance sang words to a song, while the others chimed in afterward, as if to answer a question or command. The women kept time by the shuffle of their feet. Some had turtle shells filled with pebbles tied to their ankles; many women attached cans filled with pebbles instead. Dancers engaged in very little upper body movement; the dance consisted of mostly shuffling to the chant, gliding their feet in short, quick steps along the ground. The dancers moved their feet in unison. The men chanted, and the women kept time with their rattlers. With the leader at the front of the line, those in the dance circled the fire numerous times, forming several lines in a spiral around the fire in the center of the circle. At the end of the dance, the rattling ceased, and the dancers accompanied the leader in a series of whoops as they returned to their seats. Other groups of dancers from around the circle repeated the ritual.

When I could hold my curiosity no longer, I quietly joined the spectators at the perimeter of the dance area. Standing so close to the chanting, singing, and rhythm was intoxicating. I finally joined the outer circle of dancers and walked around one evolution before beginning to dance. Then I began to shuffle to the beat behind the person in front of me. As I circled the fire, others joined in behind me, and the line grew longer. Soon I

was encased in a multitude of dancers, halfway between the fire and the perimeter of the dance area. Several lines of dancers occupied the area on both sides of me. The sound was deafening and overwhelming. The chanting and the rhythm took over my body and commanded its movement to the beat. I began to feel more like I was floating around the fire than walking, shuffling, or dancing. But I was not alone. I was merely a piece, a tiny part of a huge orchestra of sounds and movements, all flowing together in perfect balance. I was a single note in a Beethoven masterpiece, altogether with great significance and minor contribution. The beat was inside me; it flowed into and out of my being in complete balance. I was a part of this chant, this song, this dance, this people, this ground, this earth, this fire, this sky, and this universe. And we were all one. Such complete purpose and unity have I rarely felt in this life. I am forever moved.

The above observation notes describe the researcher's experience of a Creek stomp dance, a powerful piece of culture that is performed by ceremonial ground members of the Creek tribe. It has been an integral part of Creek culture for centuries before the development of Creek churches. At the invitation of a participant in the study, she attended the dance, after completion of data analysis of this project, which occurs from midnight until dawn during summer weekends. Chapter V explores several other aspects of Creek culture and their influences on the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how grieving and bereavement rituals are constructed according to certain aspects of Creek culture that emerged from the data.

CONSTRUCT OF CREEK CULTURE

Culture undoubtedly contributes to the meaning of death and the construction of grieving and bereavement of Creek Indians. According to Social Constructionism, culture is a determining factor in the development of grieving patterns and bereavement rituals. Dominant themes throughout the data set regarding culture were identified and

coded. These included family, religion, importance of the number four, sense of community, and Indian medicine. The following section explains each of these themes in detail.

Family

Consistent with Gilbert's (1996) constructivist view that family determines an individual's meaning of death, this study yielded that family is an important factor. The variable of family and its influence on the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals of the participants in the sample was developed through two codes, including definition of family and living arrangement. These codes derived from interview questions and themes emerging from the data set without prompting. The two codes were integrated to form the variable of family.

Definition of family:

This variable emerged from the data set through the coding process. In native tribes, concepts such as clan, tribe, and family sometimes overlap in meaning. Data were collected from interviews, observations, and documents supporting the researcher's suspicion that the term "family" typically means something different to Muscogee Creeks than it does to mainstream culture. To understand the influence of family on grieving and bereavement, one must have a clear definition of what the term "family" encompasses. A recurring theme throughout the three data sources was consistent with the definition given by Lee & Cartledge (1996), who suggested that family is a large network of extended family and clansmen. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents are all part of

one's family, and more distant relatives or "extended" family comprise one's clan. The Creek tribe is comprised of several clans, and it's likely that every person within a tribe is distantly related.

While accompanying Bill and Ted to several Creek cemeteries, the researcher learned about the Creek concept of family. During the drive around Creek lands, there were several opportunities for conversation. Ted explained his perception of the difference between families in White culture and in Creek culture. The observation notes are as follows:

> The conversation during the drive continued with Ted describing differences he perceived between White culture and Creek culture. He said that White culture was not very family-oriented. He described how a family he knew would get upset if extended family members or other adults would try to instruct or scold their children. But Ted described how his entire extended family was as close as his immediate family. When he visits his nieces, he gives them advice like he would to his own kids. He treats them like his own, and they treat him the same way. He explained that it was necessary to develop this closeness during the Trail of Tears. Everyone had to look out for everyone else in order to survive. They had to develop a sense of shared responsibility for each other's children. Ted spoke of how this is not the case in White families because they're so lacking in family closeness and shared family responsibilities.

Most of the participants in the sample considered their "family" to be children, grandchildren, siblings and their spouses and children, aunts and their spouses and children, uncles and their spouses and children, and cousins and their spouses and children. Grandparents and their siblings were also considered by most participants to be part of their "family." Many of the participants reported staying in close contact with these relatives. Examples of participants' descriptions of family from interview data are as follows:

That's the only thing about our culture... our cousins are like brothers and sisters.

To us, family means close; cousins and nieces and nephews are just like sisters and brothers to us.

The family was larger. The traditional Creek family considers immediate family what mainstream culture might consider extended family. My family has pretty much kept these traditional roles.

...that (family) could be the whole...the whole shebang of 'em. (Laughing) Cousins, and uncles, and all the kids, and grandkids...

Church and ceremonial ground...yeah... it's our extended family... My sister and my brother... And my children, and my brother's children. Plus our cousins, we make sure we keep in contact with our cousins from... Gosh by now, I guess they're fourth and fifth cousins. But they're ... well they're just our cousins. And like my first and second cousins are more like brothers and sisters than...

You know how (Creek) families are - really extended ...

...under that clan system... you always have a father or mother or whatever under that clan system so that's why we never had orphans... would be taken by the immediate clan father and raised them as their own...they kind of check on each other or, you know, or visit with each other ... kind of fill the position of the husband's role or whatever it was, to get that family back on track and everything else, you know, that's how that clan system works, you know, they kind of apply that, you know, so if the father passes on, then the clan father or sometimes it's their uncle that plays the role of that father...

...my extended family I spend a lot of time with. I have-adopted sons and daughters all across the nation. I have moms and dads and-brothers. We spend a lot of time with them

You know, the Creek people, we get closer to each other than the non-community because we have our immediate family, immediate siblings, and in the Creek language there is no such word as "first cousin". First cousins are considered my brothers and sisters also so we have .... the family ... then we have the clan system where if you belong to the same clan you are considered brothers and sisters...

Document analysis yielded slightly less specific, although not contradictory, information. The researcher obtained a pamphlet entitled "Balancing Work and Family" from the Creek Nation Child Development Center in Okemah, Oklahoma. The pamphlet was published by the Muscogee Creek Nation and defined family as, "family members, including spouses, children, and aging parents." Although aunts, uncles, and cousins were omitted from the definition of family, aging parents were included. Development of this pamphlet may have been influenced by mainstream culture's understanding of family. This partially confirms data, however, from both interviews and observation notes.

Living arrangement:

The researcher identified living arrangement to measure the physical proximity of some family members. The variable is defined as the number of family members living at the same residence. Data for the variable were obtained from question 6-g, "Demographics – family members who live with you," on the interview protocol.

Table 4 summarizes average numbers of family members residing in participants' homes and average generation spans, defined as the number of generations from the highest-order to the lowest-order generation. No participants reported a generation span of four or more. Ten of the twenty-seven, or 37%, of the respondents reported a generation span of three. The total number of family members residing together averaged 3.4 among the participants.

Table 4

Summary of Average Living in Participants' Homes and Average Generation Spans

	Average Living in Home	Average Generation Span
Church members	3.2	2
Ceremonial ground Members	3.25	1.75
Members of both	3.7	2
Total	3.4	2

Family as a variable:

Data from the codes definition of family and living arrangement were integrated to form the variable "family" in the diagram that influences the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals in the Muscogee Creek tribe. Family refers to a larger network of relatives, including cousins, aunts, uncles, and their spouses and children who are closer in emotional and physical proximity than that of mainstream culture.

Influence of family on grieving:

Muscogee Creek families include spouses, children, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, their spouses and children, and grandparents. Many of these family members are considered to be "extended family" in mainstream culture. This larger network provides individuals with a greater system of family support than that of mainstream culture. Kawulich (1999) found that Muscogee Creek women ranked extended family and clan highest in priority of ethnic identity connections and influences of Creek identity.

The construction of grieving in Muscogee Creeks appeared to be dichotomous. At the individual level, participants in the sample tended to handle their grief away from other family members. At the family level, participants reported that they typically coped with grief by "talking, laughing, and just being there for one another." On the surface, it appeared that these two statements contradicted each another. Further examination, however, indicated that this might not be true. Perhaps the support of the family leads these individuals to develop greater emotional strength and ability to cope with grief independently.

Participants also indicated that their primary support system during times of grieving is family. With many family members contributing support and completing tasks that the deceased person would normally complete, adjusting to the loss would be much more tolerable and grieving would be much more controllable than without those family members. Having a larger family in closer proximity would make this support system more readily available to participants dealing with grief.

Still, a large majority of the participants reported grieving behaviors of "being the strong one," "being alone during grief," and "expressing emotion when alone." Shapiro (1996) suggested that grieving reflects a culture's boundaries in expression of emotion. Perhaps these participants recognized the value of the Creek family network. To maintain such a strong system of support during times of grieving, each individual must contribute to the system. The strength provided to the participants during grieving enabled them to provide strength back to the system. Rather than focusing merely on receiving gratification for their own needs, these participants focused on contributing to the family. The participants appeared to incorporate a value of giving and service to the family in their grieving patterns. In this way, family influences the construction of grieving in Muscogee Creeks.

Influence of family on bereavement rituals:

An over-arching theme of the above rituals was the closeness of the family to the deceased person and his/her body. The wake service involved the family staying up all night together with the body, and someone, usually a family member, staying with the body constantly until burial. This was done so that the spirit and the body "would not be

alone." Enclosing personal items and food, typically prepared by a family member, in the casket indicated a devotion to and respect for the personal pleasures of the deceased person. Digging and covering the graves by hand, as well as conducting a farewell handshake, indicated a commitment and desire to be with the deceased person as long as possible. Finally, building a house over the grave represented a symbol of family, home, and a place to which the spirit could return.

The variable of family strongly influences the construction of these bereavement rituals. Shapiro (1996) suggested that bereavement rituals are designed to aid families in coping with loss. The Creek family includes numerous individuals, and many of the rituals, such as grave digging and covering, farewell handshake, and never allowing the body to be alone, require the participation of a large number of people. The personal relationship with the deceased, characteristic of families with close physical and emotional proximity, is maintained through rituals such as enclosing the deceased's personal items and favorite foods in the casket and staying up with the body at an all-night wake service. Bereavement rituals were constructed to accommodate and maintain the large Creek family system and the closeness of its members.

The remaining three variables, waiting four days before burial, using Indian medicine for purification, and adhering to a socialized mourning period, were characteristic of participants who have some degree of participation in ceremonial grounds. The influence of family on the construction of these rituals is unknown.

Religion

After beginning the interview process, various pieces of data emerged regarding religion in the Creek culture. The researcher quickly became aware of a division in the Muscogee Creek tribe that very significantly affects numerous aspects of the culture, particularly religious beliefs. Some of the participants explained the historical background behind this division, which originated with the introduction of Christianity to the tribe. When churches were first established among Creeks, they were formed in a structure very similar to the ceremonial ground. The churches were located near the ceremonial grounds, so many Creeks often attended both. Many of the beliefs and rituals were also similar. As time progressed, the separation between the two became more distinct. Church members perceived that some of the "traditional" Creek beliefs defied Christianity, and preachers spoke out against the ways of the ceremonial ground. Members of ceremonial grounds began to perceive that the church was trying to "westernize" the tribe and remove its "traditional" practices, thus robbing the tribe of its cultural identity.

The Creek tribe is currently divided between supporters of the Christian church and supporters of the ceremonial grounds. Although Creek churches and ceremonial grounds practice many of the same burial rituals, the belief systems appear to be distinctly different. Because of the historical roots behind the division, some participants have developed very strong opinions, steeped in emotion. These participants appeared to feel that they had to reject the beliefs of the other system to maintain loyalty to their own. Examples of strong opinions of participants that support either church or ceremonial ground, but not both, are as follows:

But because of European influence, we were told that... they didn't understand us first of all, and they misinterpreted us. That's when we sort of went underground and a lot of it started dying out because as we became educated and having to live in the other culture, we began to give up our Indian ways.

...They used that process to convert the Indians to Christianity. Our people thought that they were God's people. They were the forgiven people. They were so close to nature rather than what was taught to them during this conversion process and hymns. That's where this Christianity came in - it came from overseas....that type of Christianity came - was brought to the Indians during this conversion era and so ...that took place to convert a traditional Indian to Christianity. Some of the words I don't like to use is "brain washing" which that's what it amounts to...

The main reason for Columbus to come here was to avoid religious persecution but that's exactly what they done to us, you know - we had this - in our ways, you know, we have God and we have the people - there's a direct link between us and God. When the Europeans came over they brought with them ... constitution ... so what they did, they added a double layer of authority between the people and God and they called it the constitution because our government, our ways, it's all one.

...but you have Christian people among the Creeks now and you've got the traditional people - that's where your factions are, but I think the traditional way is the least understood and the most misunderstood.

It's the religion, it's the government, it's the people, it's all one, the original separation because everything we do is for a religious purpose, with God in mind - we procreate first, we ask his blessings first... When the missionaries came in and started changing our ways even the churches still abide by some of our traditional ways but it's not as much any more... we have a - there's a friction between the religious.... and the traditional ....

I used to be the leader of the stomp dance. I used to speak from the stomp ground - she used to shake shells - we all did things but when we became Christians these things that we used to do were put behind and what we're doing now is preaching the word and telling people about how to get to heaven, that's where we are at now. But I don't push them away because they are my... They are good people but they are just lost people...

> A lot of our people, they're saying, "Well, we're just like the church, we're just like a church. They have a chief, they call him the chief, and assistants, we have women leaders and we have - we're just like a church. No. The Bible don't tell me that. I can't go that way. I used to be one of them, as I said, now don't get me wrong. I used to be one of them, we both were, but then we got out of that and got into Christianity this is where I have to stand and I have to believe what the Bible says.

> Well, uh, stomp-ground people, the only thing they believe is in the grounds, you know… the dancing and having their ceremony out there like that.

> ...there's no spirituality in the stomp dance the way you are in Christianity but a lot of them believe that's their religion and they die believing that. Of course, it's not up to us to say they must change their lives - the Lord must - but there's nothing spiritual about the dance, you know, but....sacred, you know, there's a lot of them that they believe that is going to save them, but its not, there's nothing spiritual about it.

While the division was distinct among some of the participants, others found similarities and comparisons between the two. Participants who felt they could support both churches and ceremonial grounds formed a third group. Once again, while traveling to Creek cemeteries, the researcher conversed with Ted about this issue. Ted explained his perception of this third group, members of both, and how it was formed. Observation notes were as follows:

> Ted explained that wherever there's a Creek church, there's a Creek ceremonial ground nearby. He explained that the preachers preach against the ceremonial grounds, but when the stomp grounds (ceremonial grounds) come alive during the summer, the preachers might even be right there participating. Even though it's spoken against by the church, many Creeks participate in both church and ceremonial ground activities. They are what Ted referred to as "Winter Christians." Ceremonial grounds have stomp dances in the summer that usually last all weekend, causing the Winter Christians to miss church. We drove past the ceremonial grounds near the church, but I was unable to inspect the buildings.

Interview data yielded similar descriptions of the comparison between the physical structures of the two religious systems. Participants that fell into the group "both," however, often had belief systems that were also compatible with both church and ceremonial ground. By attending both institutions, their loyalty to neither one was compromised. Here are some of the explanations members of the third group gave regarding the church / ceremonial ground comparison:

> Well, the Creeks can either be church members or ceremonial ground members. The church takes communion, and the ceremonial grounds use medicine. The church came from a mixture of ceremonial beliefs and mainstream Christian beliefs.

> Way back when the missionaries came over, they wanted to know about the ceremonial grounds. And they were told it was the same way as they do things. It was like a church. So they got a pastor, and evangelist and deacons. The ceremonial grounds are the same way too. They got a chief, assistant chief, a speaker, and all down through just like a church. Church and Creek ceremonial ground beliefs are about the same. Both believe that all go to a resting place, called Paradise, and wait for the Creator to come. Like I said, the ceremonial grounds is just like a church. Indians, when they talk about God, they all believe in God. In the church, they focus on Jesus, and they do the same way in the ceremonial grounds. At the Green Corn dance, they cut green wood and use four woods that represent the cross. Same thing as the church. The name is different than Jesus, but it's the same person. After they go to Paradise, they wait for the Creator to come. It's the same thing between the church and the ceremonial ground. After the Creator comes, they all go to either Heaven or Hell.

> Well, I actually go to both... basically they're about the same... Yeah, they're pretty much parallel, I've been noticing that the church and the ground bury them basically the same. They both face the east in church and the ceremonial grounds are open east.

> And my grandma tried to raise us both ways, you know, ceremonial... cause they were both the same. Then I guess it got whatever, but they went separate. They decided to build a house for church. Which the ceremonial people was still on the outside how it used to be.

Yeah, it's pretty much the same... Like for the church people, if you go and ask them, "How was you raised?" They would say, "Ceremonial." They would say they were raised both ways too. Cause every church and every ceremonial has a name the same. Like my ceremonial ground is (name). (name) ceremonial ground. And my church is (same name). (Same name) Baptist Church. But usually there's the same church as the ceremonial ground somewhere.

...they (ceremonial people) believe in the same things as God, you know, that they believe in, they've just got different names for Him. But if you look at it, it's the same person that they worship.

We're ceremonial people. But we do have some Christian influence early in the 50's and 60's. And then our original community went all inactive. So all those people went to a church the (Name) Church, an all Creek church and mostly (name) people. So once the ceremonial grounds went inactive, then people switched to the church.

And, so we had our cities, we had towns. And in the... there's a definite structure on how our towns were built around the... and it's based still.. we carried it over to the stomp ground. In the center is the fire. And it's built with four directions. The logs built in four directions. The people dance around the fire. Then you have the main... that arbors around the square ground that we call now, and then you have the camps, or the people that come to participate in that stomp ground. That's the very same structure as the Baptist churches and the Methodist churches in this area. I remember when I was growing up, we still had a wooden stove in that church inside the church building. And the stomp ground is oriented to the east (unintelligible). The churches are the same way. In the middle of the church was the wooden stove so the fire was in the center. The people sit around in the church. The men are on one side, and the women on the other side. The minister's at the front in the west, just like the chiefs and the warriors on the stomp ground sit in the west of the stomp ground. Same pattern. Fire in the middle. People around it. And then, camp houses around that in a circle. Same structure carried over... many people who are Baptist now and have grown up in the Baptist church, don't realize that it's built on that same structure as our ceremonial grounds are.

Because the ceremonial ground is first, before the church, and the church is kind of set up the same way the ceremonial ground is set up, with the church here, and they will have these camp houses around it. It's like the ceremonial ground. You've got all these different clans around it.

Religious Type:

The division between church and ceremonial ground in the Creek tribe affects numerous aspects of Creek culture, including spiritual beliefs and rituals conducted. Spiritual beliefs and rituals affect the meaning a person associates with death, as well as the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals. The religious division, therefore, permeates the core of this study. The researcher identified "religious type" as a variable with three groups: 1) church supporters, 2) ceremonial ground supporters, and 3) supporters of both. Each of the participants fell into one of these three categories. The researcher believes that Creeks who ascribe to neither churches nor ceremonial grounds comprise a fourth group, although not represented in this study. Only participant number 15 in the sample belonged to this group. This participant grew up in a Creek church and had extensive knowledge of Creek families, culture, and church rituals. The researcher, therefore, assigned her membership to the church group. Table four lists religious type for each participant. Of the entire 27 participants in the sample, 12 were church members, 4 were ceremonial ground members, and 11 were both.

Influence of religious type on bereavement rituals:

The spread of Christianity to a large portion of the Muscogee Creek tribe resulted in sharp division in the tribe between "traditionalists," or ceremonial ground members, and church members. This religious division has affected the tribe in many areas, including spiritual views and rituals conducted. Watson (1950) reported that Muscogee Creek burial practices changed considerably by 1950, due to the influence of Christianity.

The variable "religious type" influenced the construction of bereavement rituals. Many, but not all, of these ten rituals were performed by Creeks before the influence of Christianity. What influenced the formation of the rituals at that time is unknown to this researcher. After Christianity became an integral part of the tribe, most of these rituals were performed by members of churches, ceremonial grounds, and both. Therefore, religious type only influenced the construction of the bereavement rituals that were unique to one or the other. Using medicine for purification and adhering to a socialized mourning period were not performed by any of the participants who were church members only. Waiting four days before burial was performed mainly by members of ceremonial grounds and both.

Socialized mourning period was strongly moderated by religious type. Only ceremonial ground members reported a socialized mourning period, which varied according to the person's familial closeness to the deceased. The origin of this ritual is unknown to the researcher, but the length of mourning period appears to be influenced by another variable, the importance of the number four. The discussion of this variable will elaborate further on this topic.

A traditional belief of ceremonial ground members was that being around dead bodies or touching the earth under which a body is buried was harmful to a person physically and emotionally. A person could contract arthritis, cramps, and depression from attending funeral or burial services. Because of this traditional belief, Creeks purified themselves using herbs and medicines provided by the medicine man. Another traditional belief of ceremonial ground members was that the spirit stayed on earth and re-lived his/her entire life, revisiting all the places he/she had been while alive, for four

days following the death. One participant explained that this belief may have derived from a historical, practical need to make sure the person is actually dead before burying him/her. These traditional beliefs of ceremonial ground members lead to the custom of waiting four days before burial.

Importance of Number Four

The importance of the number four appears to affect bereavement rituals and also emerged from the interview data without prompting. This theme was coded and identified as a variable in the study. According to the participants' descriptions of bereavement rituals, periods of time were often calculated in four-day increments. For instance, a fire was built in the ceremonial grounds or in the house where the casket was placed for four days before the burial. A fire was also built at the person's home or at the gravesite for four days after the burial. The socialized mourning period for participants in ceremonial grounds was a minimum of four days. Churches also appeared to revere the importance of the number four by waiting four days before the burial and acknowledging that the house must be built and placed over the grave within four days following the burial. It became evident that this number had particular significance to the Creeks. Participants described the importance of four as follows:

> And then we wait four days. Everything's four... It's just always been that way, for the four seasons... And don't ask me why. But there must have been a reason why, they always told me that, you know.

> Well, like when my dad died, well, mother went out there and put logs four ways Like for the four seasons... And she burned those logs that way for four nights.... That was her way. The old way. Me being the modern way, I just ran a electric

cord out there and hung a light bulb (laughs) on the extension cord, and I burned it for four nights that way.

The only thing I can probably say is we do everything in fours...symbolically, there are several things in fours... four directions, four seasons, all of that. Natural things usually come in fours.

Four days - four sacred colors - everything's on fours... All the healing chants that supposedly came from the creator and given to the American people, especially the Muskogee people, were in fours. Healing chants and stuff, you know, everything they do is in fours... Four carnal directions. Sometimes the colors coincide with those directions and the psychic insights into this medicine - making...

Four is a sacred number for all Native Americans. When you listen to the .... history, it indicates that ... the four carnal directions, you know, four phases of the moon - all these were lessons that was told to the Creek people after day one and so everything came in fours; the four fires and the four winds and the four colors, so for that reason, you know, that's....and we just started doing things in fours... The four carnal directions, the four winds, the four faces of the moon.

Well, I think mainly because there's four seasons, four, everything... you know, the moon changes every four - everything is done in fours - like the north, south, east, west - fours - everything is done in fours. I think that's one reason why...and as far as that, we do ours, even though we go to church and everything, we still bury the dead on the fourth day, always on the fourth day and if the fourth day falls on a Sunday then we go to the Monday.

There is a lot of interpretation on our Indian ways - what you are talking about there, about that fourth day - it's just something that's been handed down and we just picked it up and we still go on with it. We don't have no understanding of why we do that - nobody knows why we do these things, but we are just doing it because that's the way we were taught when we were growing up, you know... A lot of churches do (hold services on the fourth day) because, you know, that's just the way they work.

Influence of the importance of the number four on bereavement rituals:

Importance of the number four emerged from the data set as a value in Creek culture. Creeks had a close relationship with nature and a respect for its cycle of events. Nature yields four winds, four primary colors, four directions, four seasons, and four phases of the moon. These elements operate in balance with one another. The importance Creeks placed on the number four derived from a historical value of commitment to the harmony and balance of nature. This variable might be better named, "importance of nature's balance." Data supported that this variable contributed to the construction of three of the bereavement rituals.

The first of these, waiting four days before burial, is evident. Whereas the ritual might have developed historically from practical reasons, making sure the person was dead, the value and respect for nature's balance was evident in this ritual. Consistent with the completion of the cycle of the moon in four phases and the cycle of a year in four seasons, a spirit completed his/her journey on earth to re-live his/her life in four days after the death. The burial did not occur until this journey had been completed.

The second ritual, socialized mourning period, was also constructed for members of the ceremonial grounds from the influence of the number four. A minimum of four days in mourning occurred after the burial of a loved one. Those in the ceremonial ground of a person who died often had to wait until the first new moon after the completion of those four days before resuming their dances. Family members had to wait up to a year depending on their familial closeness to the deceased. The importance of the number four clearly had an influence on the construction of this ritual.

The final ritual, building houses over graves, traditionally had to be completed within four days following the burial. The influence of time and level of acculturation has moderated the four-day requirement considerably. In current times, the house is built over the grave at the convenience of its maker, but traditionally the importance of the number four influenced the construction of this ritual.

Sense of community

Another aspect of culture, sense of community, appeared to influence the meaning of death of the participants in the sample. This theme emerged from the interview data without prompting and was coded and identified as a variable in this study. A sense of community was evident in families, in churches and ceremonial grounds, in rituals, and in support systems in grieving. The following are examples of sense of community provided by participants:

> ...when you lose somebody, I mean they're all there for ya, you know. Just like when my grandmother died now... I took her to the (name) gym, there in (a town). And when I did, I worried about, "Now how am I going to feed all these people?" You know, because there's a bunch of people down there for the evening meal, you know... the night of the wake service. And I told my sister, I said, "How are we gonna feed all these people?" And so we went home and made stew and chili, and I think of course we had sandwich meat and everything. And when we got down there, the community, and the people from this community had brought a bunch of stuff down there. I mean, that table was filled with food, you know.

> So, when you lose somebody, there's a lot of love behind it. I mean, people don't go around hug each other and kiss.. peck each other's cheeks. But when you lose somebody, I mean, they're there for you, you know. You've got friends and all of your relatives, you know, they're all there for you, you know. I mean, it's always been that way for everybody around here I think. We're all there for each other.

Again, it's community. That's kind of what I was telling you about who you are and who I am. I mean, you have a community of people, a tribe of people... I've been to so many funerals. I wrote this article one time about how going to so many funerals is probably considered unhealthy for a child. We went to funerals of people we didn't even know. But as a community, or tribe, it's your responsibility to go. The family is the community. And see, that's the Creek way. That's a Creek value, and you love the people. And you help them. And you do what you can, even with your attendance.

And this.. this all stems back to Mississippian times because we were communal. Our tribe was communal... the holy church comes together to support the individuals and at the stomp grounds. The whole stomp ground membership comes to support the individuals because it's part of that whole scheme of things.

...That's all part of the communal philosophy of our...the Muscogee people...as a people, we help each other get through crises. We help each other celebrate in the good times. We come together and we help each other. And our tribe is an extended family that helps us. So, our tribe or our church or our ceremonial grounds, our extended family that helps the individuals get through a death. It's very practical.

Well, back in Georgia, you know, they even had community public garden and everybody got together and planted gardens to supply the whole village. You know, everybody worked... but at the same time they respected each of the clan, you know, they didn't go in there and try to rip each other off, or whatever, you know, and they just lived and worked together

...when you get past the immediate family, ceremonial ground, and the clans then you have that other layer of support out here from your other ceremonial members, like the (tribe) would be another layer of support for me. People from (tribe) would be another layer of support for me, Alabama would be another layer of support so you are never ever really left alone in our society.

Let's see, there was recognition of my parents, even at the ceremonial grounds when we went back. They didn't specifically call their name, but I knew they were talking about us. They said, "You belong here. Your people are gone, but you belong here. Always remember that."

...because a lot of our people was raised in both ways, they may have gone to church at a young age and as they got older they changed direction or vice-versa

> and if it's that type of person then they may have a short service, but in the end, everybody stays there that wants to stay and they continue with their stories and things through the night…

> Then everybody from outside… you know they'll have so many people, they'll be outside. Everyone won't all fit in the church. And then start with the outside first. And they'll all come in. And they'll view the body. And then they'll shake all the family members' hands… give 'em support, say a few words to 'em, and hug 'em.

Influence of sense of community on grieving:

Sense of community is a dominant theme in Muscogee Creek culture, and it influences the family system and the construction of grieving. The Creek tribe is based on a structure that begins with family, enlarges to tribal town or ceremonial ground, overlaps with clan, which is considered extended family, and finally encompasses tribe. Each system, or community, is nested in a larger community that provides additional support. Kalish and Reynolds (1976) described collective systems as those that involve a large group of people, family, clan, or tribe working together, providing support for one another, and acting as a unit. The Creek community operates as a collective system from the level of family up to the level of tribe. Mainstream U. S. culture, however, reflects individualistic systems where support is obtained by a number of external sources, such as counselors and coworkers. Differences in these systems of support contribute to misunderstandings between the two groups.

As in the discussion of the influence of family, data on individual-level grieving and family-level grieving appeared to produce a contradiction. Participants frequently reported a preference of grieving and expressing emotion when alone but reported family coping techniques of "being there for each other, talking, and laughing together." Careful

analysis yielded that participants are committed to preserving the family and not necessarily interested in personal gain. The strength of the system is thus maintained. Gilbert (1996) suggested that reality is constructed by family and that family members grieve within the boundaries defined by the family. In Creek culture, this means that family grieves within the boundaries of community.

Similarities between family and community are evident, so it is important to distinguish between the two. In Creek culture, family is simply a smaller community. Although family is made up of a larger group than in mainstream society, it still encompasses a group bounded by some type of relationship and/or blood bond. Community as identified here is more of a philosophical term describing social processes and interactions. This term may be applied to groups who are larger than families and whose inter-connections are more distant than those of families. The same principles that explain the construction of grieving from the influence of family operate similarly in explaining the influence of community. Individuals from the clan or ceremonial ground might fill the role of the dead family member and complete those tasks that the deceased person would normally complete. This would facilitate adjustment to the loss and affect grieving patterns.

Family, a smaller community, was identified by participants as their primary support system. Other entities identified as support systems included friends/community, clan, tribe, church, and God. Most of these systems are based on a sense of community. Participants reported that even Creek churches operate in ways similar to those of ceremonial grounds and are based on communal behaviors. Sense of community is

directly related to families and support systems, therefore influencing the construction of grieving among Creeks.

Influence of sense of community on bereavement rituals:

Shapiro (1996) suggested that cultural bereavement rituals depict community roles. As described in the discussion of the construction of grieving in Muscogee Creeks, sense of community is a dominant theme throughout the culture. Family is a smaller community based on close ties, and community is extended family, clan, tribal town, or tribe and is based on more distant ties. Many of the bereavement rituals are based on extended family or community participation. Participants consistently reported the participation of "everyone that knows the person, the whole shebang," from church, from ceremonial ground, from tribal town, and from extended family or clan. The ritual of an all-night wake service involved numerous speakers and people talking about the person and fond memories together. Hand-digging and covering the graves required the help of numerous volunteers, as does the farewell handshake and the building of the house over the grave. The performance of these bereavement rituals is dependent on the participation of community. In this way the cultural sense of community, much like family, assisted in the construction of Creek bereavement rituals.

Indian medicine

The next variable used to explore the Creek culture of the participants in the study emerged from the data set. The interview protocol did not include a particular question that addressed the role of Indian medicine in grieving, which appears to be somewhat

moderated by religious type. Indian medicine was reported to alleviate physical ailments in general, as well as for more specific use during grieving and bereavement rituals. Three themes emerged from its specific use during bereavement, including cleansing to keep bad spirits away, helping the griever through the grieving process, and treatment for depression. Seven participants reported the use of Indian Medicine specifically for handling grief and depression, all of whom identified their religious type as either ceremonial ground or both ceremonial ground and church. Another participant identified its importance for physical health in general. Responses of some of these participants, according to the emerging themes, are as follows:

For depression:

> We use Indian medicine to help us feel better. It takes away the depression. Not exactly sure what is in it, but it has been passed down for generations, and it still works.
>
> You wash from the top down and you drink some and you wash your legs and make sure nothing is left and it runs off into the earth and you feel light-hearted and you want to laugh again, not immediately, but you - it says that it won't pull you down and so when all that is done…

For grieving:

> And then after they eat, they usually have a wash behind the church. And you drink it and you can wash off with it. And it's to help you with your grievance… But you start from your head and work your way down. You look toward the east when you do it.

For cleansing from bad spirits:

> Some churches have medicine after the funeral/burial just like at the ceremonial ground. Just some, the ones that are not very "westernized."

For a combination of all three purposes:

> ...but if a person is in that grieving stage for a long time, as I say, it could develop into a sickness or it deals with spirits drifting away from that person...At that stage this person has one of two things if he or she is traditional if she's a traditional she can go to their ceremonial medicine man for treatment or probably the doctor for an antidepressant or whatever is diagnosed, you know, but that's what they do and if they decide to go to a traditional medicine man then he would fix that treatment for her, like something to bathe in and wash off and especially to get rid of or alleviate that depressed feeling that they go through.

> ...herbal medicine to wash off... when you're around dead bodies, it's harmful for you... it can harm the mind too, and emotionally, physically, and spiritually too.

For general physical illness:

> ...oftentimes there's what we call Indian sickness and if a person has that type of sickness or disease, the best specialist in the world is not going to help you; if you lay down in the best hospital in Oklahoma, you know, you're not going to get treated and there's this alternative treatment that these people can go into and that was discussed several years ago...

> She was 98 and 9 months old I guess it was when she passed on a couple of years ago, three years ago. Both of my parents were believers of the herbs and roots, using traditional medicine and stuff like that you know and one time I took her to the hospital for the first time. She was in her 70's pushing 80 I guess and the doctor asked me if she was on any medication and I said "No" and his response back to me was, well she has vital signs that are better than a 40-50 year old lady. He said, "What kind of treatment is she on?" and I said, well, she believes that healing medicine and that's all she uses...

Influence of Indian medicine on grieving:

The Creek medicine man was described as a very spiritual man who was skilled in treating the physical and emotional sicknesses of the Creeks. Some participants reported that these men were successful in treating illnesses within the Creek people at times when the medical doctors of mainstream society were unsuccessful. Creek medicine men were

revered and respected among the tribal members, and one participant described them as "powerful."

Three purposes for Indian medicine during grieving and bereavement rituals emerged from the data. Two of these specifically addressed the emotional state of the bereaved, including treatment for depression and help through the grieving process. When a Creek person experienced depression or sorrow caused by the death of a family member, the ceremonial ground medicine man can treat the person with herbal medicine. Through medicine, Creeks understand that grieving and feeling sorrow is expected, is treatable, and is not likely to be permanent.

An emotional sickness, such as depression, which is often triggered by grief from a loss, can also be remedied through the Indian medicinal treatment. The formulation of the treatment is unknown to the researcher, but according to participant interview data, the effect is similar to that of an anti-depressant pharmaceutical prescribed by a physician in mainstream society. Although depression as a result of grieving might not be expected, it is not uncommon, and its effects are treatable. In this way, the influence of Indian Medicine helps to construct Creek grieving.

Influence of Indian medicine on bereavement rituals:

One of the three themes that emerged from the data on Indian medicine specifically addressed bereavement rituals. This was the use of medicine for the purpose of cleansing and purification from spirits. A traditional Creek belief is that being in close proximity with dead bodies and/or spirits can cause a person physical or emotional harm. Contact with the dirt used to cover the casket can cause illnesses. A few participants

reported that walking over dead bodies in the cemetery can cause arthritis, cramps, and sore joints. Several burial rituals involve close contact and interaction with the dead body and/or the earth covering the grave.

The medicine man uses herbal treatments to cleanse all who attended a funeral or burial. Each person washes his/her face, hands, feet with the medicine, and drinks the liquid. The purification ritual cleanses the person from spirits and sicknesses associated with death. Because of the cleansing and purification process Creeks are able to interact closely with the body without contracting illnesses. Creeks are able to perform rituals consistent with values of closeness to the deceased person and staying in his/her presence as long as possible. Indian medicine thus influences the construction of bereavement rituals.

Meaning of Death

The meaning Creeks associate with death is supremely important in the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals among Creeks. Three codes regarding meaning of death emerged from the data set, including spiritual views, relationship with deceased, and meaning associated with death. Using these codes, the researcher formulated a variable, meaning of death, which contributes to the Creek construction of grieving and bereavement rituals.

Spiritual Views:

Creek views on spirituality have a strong influence on the definition or meaning the participants associated with death. As expected, specific views on death and

spirituality were somewhat moderated by religious type. Certain very important aspects of these views that construct the meaning of death, however, were quite homogenous among the participants, regardless of religious type. All 27 of the participants believed in life after death and a person's continued existence in a "better place," whether in the Spirit World, in Heaven, or in the Circle of Elders. All 27 participants believed that not every spirit goes to the "better place" after death; some go to a worse place, whether existing on earth in a disturbed state or proceeding to a literal Hell. To these participants, death is not synonymous with finality.

The data for this code were obtained from questions 4-a, "What are your views on death and spirituality? Are they the same as traditional (ceremonial ground) Muscogee Creek views?" and 4-b, "What happens to the spirit and the body after death?" on the interview protocol. Data from this code were combined with relationship with deceased and emerging data from the interviews to form the variable meaning of death. The following are examples of participants' responses to these questions separated by religious type:

Church:

> Well, when a person dies, well the way that we believe... I'm a Baptist, and the way we believe in our way is if a person been going to church according to the Bible you know... and if the person is saved and he have a chance to meet the Lord but people that is nothing' the ceremonial ground they don't have no choice, ya know... According to the Bible, the saved don't worship the fire. And that's what they do, ya know... worshipin' the fire... they got their own ways from the church. They think the fire gonna save them. But in our Christian way, we don't believe that way...The body just stays here... there's a half-way point between Earth and heaven that's called paradise and that's where all the spirit is stopped now until the day of the judgment....and if their work is good then they go to heaven if they're not then they come back down here.

My beliefs are Christian. I believe in Heaven and Hell, and that everyone must be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ and have a relationship with God to go to Heaven. Otherwise, you go to Hell. I have hope of seeing loved ones again in Heaven… If they're a Christian, their spirit goes to Heaven. If not, they're spirit goes to Hell. No matter what, the body stays in the grave.

So, my belief as a, I guess you would say, in death is… there is a heaven and there is a hell. Me, myself, I choose that. Nobody chooses it for me. I choose it myself. But like I said, I wasn't raised around that stomp ground. I was raised in church. And I guess you would say, the traditions part of it… you would have to live in our tribe in order to understand it… The spirit or the soul, they go to heaven. But that's if you're saved.

But the spirit continues to go and it's like four days after the burial that the spirit is still on the earth. It will come to visit with us. And we'll know, like uh… we can feel like uh.. somebody come by us, you know, that's just like the wind coming by, and we know that's the individual… Now it goes into a place that we call paradise. We believe as Indians that… I'm gonna say Creek Indians… because we believe after that, they go to a place called paradise. And they stay there and they're asleep. We consider the body as sleeping until the Lord blows the trumpet.. or the angel blows the trumpet. And then once they rise and then we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And then is where we're determined whether we're gonna go to heaven or we're gonna go to hell.

Your soul is going to live. Everyone. Either in Heaven and Hell, we don't know. If you believe in the Lord and did what he told you to do, you'll go to Heaven. Only God knows who goes to Heaven. The body deteriorates because we're going to go back to the dust.

When you die, the spirit goes to God. Then on Judgment Day, you'll be judged according to how you lived your life. God judges you, and you'll go to either Heaven or Hell. Your body stays in the ground, but your spirit goes to God.

Ceremonial ground:

We believe that we're going to the Spirit World or the next world…we believe that we go to Heaven… Some are stuck here for their… and that's why we have to have as much knowledge as we can and that's why they have to get right and stay right and obedient… and that's what "Creek" is about. Before you can be

obedient you have to have a certain amount of meekness and humbleness – what I call the spirit that permeates the body. When you are at that point – and I think we are supposed to get to that point … then that transition is there, and those people go on – but those people (that) are difficult people…and those that weren't ready to make that transition won't.

They are close because, there again, I have been brought up as a traditionalist, you know, and of course I know the Christianity side when it talks about spirit… when a person dies we believe that the spirit leaves the body. …it's kind of like what it says in the Bible – we don't know how it's going to happen. My belief is that when a person dies the spirit leaves the body so the only thing that's going to the cemetery to be buried is the body going back to the ashes or whatever.... When a person passes on the spirit makes the travel or re-lives the life of that person and goes through the life in four days…and later we'll go to the spirit plain but traditionalists believe that they don't go to heaven or hell or whatever, you know, because our people didn't believe in that, you know. It was never, it was never defined that way to us but there is a spiritual, or a spirit realm or... it's where all the spirits are, I guess. I don't think it's in heaven or whatever but I think the spirits are still among us…

Because the soul, according to our beliefs in the traditional way, that person, that soul, that spirit, whatever you want to call it, remains on earth for four days and during this four days and nights they travel to every place they have ever been in their life when they were little. I believe they go to another place and they see all of our family and friends that have gone on before us and they see us, they watch over us. I believe there's a place like that.

Both:

My views are Christian. I believe that you can go through all these rituals, and you can do all these good things, but if you don't have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ it doesn't matter. You must be saved by Jesus to go to Heaven.

You know, we set rules – you've got to believe this way; you are supposed to worship this way…And I have a hard time with that. There's a part of me that feels like they (spirits) may linger here before they take leave. You know there's always some things where some people say, "I saw so-and-so or something – you know, like the day after they passed away or something. I believe that's possible. I don't believe they go up, those that believe that and those that try to live a good life and try to do what's right. I feel like those that didn't believe that way, that resisted that belief or didn't believe any of that, I feel like they are just – they're

miserable. They are just out there. That might be their hell. Just being here and not really being here and not being able to go up even though they realize that, yeah, I should have followed that life and that belief but I'm stuck here now.

...the body deteriorates but the spirit goes on to somewhere. And I believe that the spirits of those people that have died before us can see us or are aware of us. I feel like that when we die, our spirit will go to be with those people and it will be like a big reunion. And it will be a pleasant thing. And it will be a good thing. I believe in heaven, but I don't expect it to be streets of gold and pearly gates. I don't know if we're bad, if we'll go to a bad place. I don't know if somehow we'll pay for our... what we've done bad and the harmony will come back in balance when we die. If that's maybe part of what our spirit has to take care of in those four days. I don't know. I wonder about that. And see those are the questions that Christianity and even some of our traditional people can't really answer for me.

When I was raised, that I thought that they went to heaven or hell too. But, you know, here for the last few years I really got into ceremonials. And they tell me... They tell me that the way they taught... you know I couldn't interpret how they say it, they were talking in Creek.. I don't know. They said it actually isn't a hell. He says, there's God and he's coming to get all his people. And where we're livin' now, we're living in hell now. This is hell.

That would be where it would linger for four days with the body. And then... then it would have to go through it's journey...

Church and Creek ceremonial ground beliefs are about the same. Both believe that all go to a resting place, called Paradise, and wait for the Creator to come. Like I said, the ceremonial grounds is just like a church. Indians, when they talk about God, they all believe in God. In the church, they focus on Jesus, and they do the same way in the ceremonial grounds. At the Green Corn dance, they cut green wood and use 4 woods that represent the cross. Same thing as the church. The name is different than Jesus, but it's the same person. After they go to Paradise, they wait for the Creator to come. It's the same thing between the church and the ceremonial ground. After the Creator comes, they all go to either Heaven or Hell.

Yeah, I believe that on death, you know, it depends on how the person is... how they live. Because I believe that you don't really have to go to church to believe in the Lord Jesus. You can go out in the woods and still have the same... I believe in what's in your heart, you know how that person is. I think there's

> good in everybody, no matter what. And sometimes all Christians are not really Christians. I mean, they may go to church, but that doesn't make 'em Christians. You can go to the ceremonial ground, and you can see some that are really there for the... the show. Just to show off. So there's both ways.

Relationship with Deceased:

Whether or not an individual's relationship with a deceased person continues after the death may influence the meaning he/she attributes to death. The Western view of most grief theorists suggests that breaking bonds with the deceased is important in adjustment to grief. Stroebe et al. (1992) suggested, however, that continuing bonds with the deceased, as exemplified by other cultures, was acceptable and healthy. Data supporting this code appeared to indicate a tendency to continue bonds among the Creeks as well.

Religious type appeared to have limited influence on relationship with deceased. Some very important commonalities emerged across religious types, however, which contributed to the meaning participants associated with death. None of the participants reported communicating with the deceased on a regular basis following the death. Although several participants reported episodes of brief contact with their deceased loved ones, the vast majority reported that they do not continue the relationship with the deceased after death. Several participants reported incidents where they had seen or heard the deceased person or sensed his/her presence, but these were not continuous. Finally, most participants reported that they would see their dead loved ones again after the participants had died.

Data for this variable derived from question 4-c, "Do you continue to have a relationship with the deceased and communicate with him or her after the death?" from

the interview protocol. Several participants, across all three religious types, gave detailed descriptions of incidences where they had felt, seen, or heard their deceased loved ones. Others reported leaving out small amounts of food for the spirits to eat when hungry. The following are examples of these accounts:

Church:

> I just seen her spirit, ya know, in the hallway, about twice. And then, I'd hear her in here rattlin' some dishes. But, seemed like to me it was real, but it wasn't (her), but I guess just to show that her spirit is still around... Well, first I never thought nothing' of it. And I was just settin' watching television and seen somebody come down the hallway and I looked and she turned around and goes back and she went in the bedroom. I got up as fast as I can and went in there and there wasn't nobody there. And then second time it done it again, but it didn't come all the way to here, it just come about half way and went back the same place in the bedroom... but it wasn't (her), you know, it was only this spirit I guess, ya know.

> In my dream, he'd come to me and he said, "Mom!" He had this big 'ol smile on his face. And I said, "(Son)!" And he said, "Mom." And I said, "(Son)!" He said, "Mom, I'm home." He said, "Mom, I'm so glad to be home." And I woke up. I was thinking, Lord, that's all I needed. So to me, you know, that was the Lord saying, "You asked, and this is what I'm giving you." So that's my own (memories). And, after that, you know, I miss him. I miss him. But then, to me, that dream, you know, the lord was telling me, he's home.

> Not personally. I don't have a relationship, but I feel my father's presence sometimes. It may be in a bird or something...sometimes I might see a bird sitting there and it seems like it might be my dad.

> No. I will see them again in Heaven but not here. Our mind plays tricks on us, and we think we see them or hear them, but it's not real. We miss them so much. Sometimes I think I've seen my brother, but it's just my mind. When I die, though, I'll see them again.

> My mother had a walker and I could hear her walk, you know, from the kitchen to her room or whatever. And I could count the steps, how long it would take her.

One time I knew that, even though it wasn't a actual sound, maybe it mighta been my heartbeat. But I could hear her walking from the kitchen to her bedroom cause her walker was going, "Thump. Thump. Thump." You know… In the same rhythm and the same time that she took to go to her bedroom. So, it was either that I could hear my heart beating or that I was actually hearing something. It wasn't anything scary because I recognized the sound. And I know that she's in heaven. But her soul may still be.... influencing my remembering of her, and I could hear it.

Ceremonial grounds:

Also, like the night of the wake service, you know they used to fix up plates of food for the spirit, just little stuff – the spirits supposedly don't eat, they just taste the food and the reason I say the spirits are still among us is because our people experience a disease or a sickness caused by the spirits. So many that even around here I can sense or feel those spirits… our elders used to say, like you leave a leftover on the table, don't come back and eat it later if you've got leftovers because the spirits will partake of that food, you know, and you eat after it and that's causing – that creates sickness… I don't think they're confined to one area or one spirit world or whatever because due to the experience of our native people, sometimes they make theirs visible or sing around the ceremony proper or wherever they've been around, at your house or just everywhere. I just think they are just like we are but we just can't see them.

…and during this time the family members they have to put out food at their home, or at the home or in my case, my brother, in my home, at my mom's home and at his home. You put food out because the spirit is still there and they need to eat. It is parallel to putting out cookies and milk to Santa Clause, you know, we put out food for them to eat. You do that every night until they are buried…

We feel that when a person dies that his spirit still roams the sacred earth, still lives, certainly, and the last place he visits is his home. (Inaudible) The windows are open, the doors are wide open – you know, because we all have been told that the spirit would come back so leave it like a normal day and it's to let the spirit have a free roam of the place.

Both:

Well, I would wake up, and I could hear her in the kitchen. I could hear the pots and pans. I could hear her coming through the kitchen door. Because she would

> push that door… you could hear her coming through the living room… Not once we ever get scared because we knew that was our mother… Sometimes even in our dances… I believe that they come back and join us. They dance with us.

> When my uncle died when I was a little girl, I felt someone cover my legs with the covers. But nobody around did it; everybody said they didn't touch the covers. I believe it was my uncle that covered my legs. I don't have any direct communication with a dead person. I might see them in my dreams sometimes, and talk to them in my dreams…

> Well, I speak to her like she's in the room. I guess we spent so much time together, it's like she's with me all the time. I miss her quite a bit. I have sometimes heard her grunting at night in bed, so I know she's there with me.

> I don't really communicate, but I believe that my grandma…she'll come back and visit. And she knows what's going on down here. And I think she's proud of us. You know, and she lets us know that she's there. Like my grandma, she mess with our hair. And we can feel her playing with our hair.

> She told me, she said, "If I die before you," she said, "I'm gonna come back and pinch your toe."… And do you know just before Thanksgiving (after her death) she did pinch my toe. I mean, it wasn't no brush. It was a squeeze. But I knew it had to been her. Because I had funny feelings from my legs up to my knees, you know. And just thought to myself, "Well now, what was she trying to tell me," you know?

Perspectives of Death:

The remaining data were coded as "perspective of death" and emerged from the interview process and were not directly solicited. This data involved expressions of participants' general ideas regarding death. Here are some of the participants' descriptions of their perspectives of death:

> …we had a few ceremonies in regards to death because, to us, we would rather celebrate life over death, even though grieving is a natural process.

My personal view, after my own brother passed away is that it is a part of life - death is a part of life - it's the hardest part of life and everyone has to die because it is a part of the cycle, nature's cycle and that everybody has to grieve in their own way.

...people are just there, they start to tell stories and things about the person. A lot of laughter. It's not at that point a sad time. They are celebrating this is life...

And I believe that life is a circle. And that somehow I've reconciled in my life that there is one superior supreme being. And through that supreme spirit or energy or being or whatever that is, is how things came so that that energy or whatever that is, whether you call it God, or Wiponga... those Creek words... whatever that is. We don't know what that is. That's part of the mystery that we'll learn after we die. That energy had a part in creating everything that there is here on earth. From the soil, to the water, to fire, to the animals, birds... And because I believe that, I can justify evolution. Because I believe that the Creator started with the small things and created into larger animals and people happened later. So, I can reconcile that and I can believe in a God and evolution because I can see how it could happen. So, I believe that everything is cyclical. It's like, what goes around, comes around...life and death are all part of a continuum.. for everything. Everything has a large cycle.

So I believe there's that time, then you have to move on. I believe it's a really difficult experience for people. It's a difficult experience for all of us. We try to understand, and all of that. But we're just human, so it's a difficult time. We believe that we're going to the Spirit World or the next world...This friend of mine told me about this old man and I told him about death, and he said, "We're put on this earth to show our kids how to die."

Well, my views on that is, I believe that the Lord allows us the time that He wants us to be on earth. And if we have completed our job that He has sent us down here for, then He calls us home whether we're ready or whether we're not ready.....and so when I have to encourage other people that are in bereavement at the time, I try to let them know that the Lord had a special reason to call 'em home. Because He doesn't want them to suffer. They've gone through suffering and He knows how their aches and pains were. And He does not want them to be in that position anymore. So that's the reason why He calls 'em home.

... but we don't have a word like the white man that says "goodbye". We have a word we say, "until we meet again," wherever they are going or wherever they are going to be, in the world beyond, or where we meet again, so we have songs like that.... when we meet again.

...But we don't say goodbye, we'll say, "We'll see you later." We don't have a word for goodbye.

And sometimes it's time for things to die and it's time for you to let go. I believe that. And I believe that many times when a person dies, often in that family, a new baby will be born. And that's like that cycle is picked up and carried. So, we shouldn't be afraid of death.

I believe that there has to be a balance in life. There is positive and negative, hot-cold.. salty-sweet.. everything in life.. sadness-happiness... If we maintain a harmony, that we will affect everyone around us... and I believe that I can affect... What I do affects... it's like a ripple effect. And everybody else has that ripple effect. Therefore whatever we do can affect... I can affect my neighbors. I can affect my tribe. I can affect my state, my nation. I believe that that idea is possible. So I should maintain a harmony. And I should try to get my family and my children in a harmony... If I do something to get out of balance, I cause an imbalance that has to be corrected somehow. Sometimes that correction comes or that out of balance will affect us in illness or if I get too stressed I get migraine headaches.

Well, just like when you mourn, but also then, you're grateful. While they were here, they were your friends, they were your companions, and that you learned a lot from them. And that you always take something, I guess you'd say, you always remember something that they've done and you always remember their ways. And it's just something, to me, that I was glad that I had met 'em while they were here. Otherwise I would never have known them.

We all need to be strong and know that the person is a Christian and going to Heaven.

Meaning of Death:

The previous three codes, spiritual views, relationship with the deceased, and perspectives of death were analyzed and integrated into one variable, meaning of death, to understand the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals among Muscogee Creeks. The researcher initially proposed that Creek meaning of death would be moderated by religious type. A closer look at the data, however, yielded surprisingly different results.

The results indicate a common conceptualization of death across the participants despite differences in religious types. Although opinions about specific factors regarding death differed, the general meaning associated with death was constant. The participants in this sample do not see death as the end of a journey but merely a transition. Death is believed to be a natural occurrence and part of the cycle of life. Death is not an event to be feared but an event that will reunite Creeks with deceased loved ones. This example from one of the participants demonstrates this belief:

> My uncle passed away last year, or two years ago. And this would be his wife. I know she was up with the body, you know, a lot. And she kept on talking to him. And we was getting ready to have church service, and she got sick. So her daughter ended up taking her outside. And she said, "Go back in there and tell him I'm coming. I'll be back to see him. I'll see him soon." So they took her to the hospital and she died. So the day of his funeral is when she died. She died early that morning.

Observation notes confirm interview data forming the variable, "meaning of death." The afternoon spent with Bill and Ted brought opportunities for discussion on several topics. During this time, Ted described the way he perceived that most Creeks conceptualize death. Observation notes are as follows:

> Ted explained that to Creeks, death is just another part of life. It is a normal thing that would happen. Under normal circumstances, death is considered neither a terrible tragedy nor a time of celebration. It is simply the next step in the cycle of life.

Ted's perceptions appeared to confirm the ideas that participants had described regarding the meaning associated with death. Data for this variable derived, in part, from codes of spiritual views, relationship with deceased, and perspective of death.

Influence of meaning of death on grieving:

The meaning that participants associated with death was that death is a natural part of life. The world operates on a cycle, and death is a natural part of this cycle. The function of death is "to override the discontinuity of the individual and to ensure the continuity of the community," (Kagawa-Singer, 1994, p. 102). Therefore, there is no finality in death; it represents merely a transition point in the life cycle. Life continues to exist after death, and it does so in the presence of loved ones who have previously died. Death is thus not an event to be feared. Several participants did report, however, that death is difficult for everyone and that it might be the most difficult part of the life cycle.

The meaning of death influenced the grieving patterns of Creeks. Gilbert (1996) suggested that meaning associated with death is defined by family. Grief emotions were expressed inwardly and handled by themselves or through talking and laughing with other family members. Perhaps the participants' perception of death, continuation of life and the absence of finality, influences the grieving they experience. Although death is difficult, and loss of a loved one requires a challenging adjustment for everyone (Rosenblatt, 2001), these participants as a whole were certain of their coming reunion

with loved ones who had passed. This belief of reunion with family may influence Creeks' tendencies to turn to family to cope with loss. The meaning of death of the participants appears to be integral in the construction of grieving.

Influence of meaning of death on bereavement rituals:

To these participants, death is a natural part of life. It does not represent an "end" but merely a transition. Although the relationship with the deceased does not continue directly, participants believed they would meet their loved ones again. Some participants believed that spirits exist on the earth and visit people on occasion.

The construction of several of the rituals appears to be influenced by beliefs about death. Waiting four days before burial, never allowing the body to be alone, building houses over the graves, and enclosing personal items and favorite foods in the casket are directly associated with the belief that life exists for the deceased after death. The physical intimacy and contact with the earth inherent in rituals such as hand-digging and covering graves and the farewell handshake are associated with the belief that the body goes back to the earth, and the cycle of life continues. It is likely that this belief regarding death influenced the construction of bereavement rituals.

OVERVIEW

The researcher's interest peaked during exploration of cultural factors of the Creek tribe. Whereas the purpose of this study was to investigate current practices in the tribe, the influence of historical patterns was obvious. The influx of Christianity into the

tribe strongly affects current Creek practices but has only done so for the last 50-100 years. The researcher felt torn between focusing on current practices only, which heavily involve the church, and exploring historical patterns, which heavily involve the ceremonial ground. The researcher experienced the tribe as divided and its cultural patterns as dynamic. Laird (1998) described culture as fluid and constantly changing, and this was consistent with the Creeks. As time passes, fewer tribal members ascribe to the traditional ways of the ceremonial ground due to the influence of the church and the level of acculturation into mainstream society. The Creek language is slowly being replaced with English, and according to Social Constructionism language is paramount to constructing meaning in a culture.

Still, the Creek language is spoken and traditional culture is practiced currently in the Creek ceremonial ground. Some ceremonial ground members feel that their culture has been robbed by United States' government and society, decreasing the level of trust in researchers from mainstream society. Despite this suppression that ceremonial ground members have often felt, some ceremonial ground members participated in this study. The researcher was honored by this display of trust. One participant invited the researcher to the stomp dance described at the beginning of this chapter. She wishes to conclude this chapter on the influence of Creek culture by continuing her notes of the stomp dance:

> The stomp dance. This is the glue. This is the blood of this life force called Creeks. This is the common denominator that holds the culture intact. With intoxicating magnetism, these people are drawn together through their spiritual bonds to the earth. The union with nature brings together these people to the earth, to each other, and to their God. Energy flows from the unity, and the energy produces and creates life. The cycle was nourishing and strengthening and addicting. The force was greater than I, although I contributed to its existence.

> Finally, I understood. The nature of the cycle involves a great bonding which creates energy that is fed back into the cycle. These people, this culture, are not diminishing. As long they have their dance, this culture will live.
>
> Then out of nowhere I saw it. Two tiny, distinct red lights flashed in the darkness near the forest floor. There was a small figure of a young boy, maybe 6 or 7 years old, running across the rocks and weeds surrounding the dance area. On his feet was a brand new pair of Nike shoes, on the backs of which the bright lights flashed. Those lights represented a flash back to reality, back to mainstream society. Despite the deepness of these woods, the darkness of the night, and the pureness of this cultural heritage, influence of an outside world could not be avoided.

Summary

The results of the data analysis and the three major constructs or themes that were coded in this study were presented in Chapters IV and V. Chapter V discussed Creek culture and explored how six cultural variables including family, sense of community, Indian medicine, meaning of death, importance of the number four, and religious type influence the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals. Chapter VI will summarize the study and present major themes that address the research questions.

Chapter VI

SUMMARY / CONCLUSIONS

...All sounds, all fears, all loves.

We are all creators. We breathe.
To speak is to form breath and
To make manifest sound into the world.
As I write, I create myself again and again.
Re-Create.
And Breathe.
And I see that I am not one voice, but many:
All colors, all sounds, all fears, all loves.

-Joy Harjo, Creek

This poem, written by a Creek Indian (Harjo, 1997), eloquently describes the processes involved in the creation of knowledge. She beautifully explains her interaction with the environment and the resulting construction of her personality. These same processes construct grieving and bereavement rituals in the Creek tribe. This chapter discusses the contribution of environment and culture to these constructions using the theoretical framework for the study, social constructionism.

GRIEVING AND BEREAVEMENT RITUALS AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

How does all this fit together? The last section provides a description of each individual influence on the constructions of grieving and bereavement rituals in the Muscogee Creek tribe. This section alone, however, does not adequately explain grieving and bereavement rituals as social constructions. Social constructionism is characterized by four elements: 1) evaluation of preconceived notions toward a phenomenon or population, 2) history and cultural background, 3) influence of social interactions on knowledge, and 4) social action taken as a result of knowledge formed (Burr, 1995). All of the variables discussed interact together as a result of social processes of Muscogee Creeks, which were in turn influenced by their unique cultural background and history. The interaction of participants with the researcher constructed the form of knowledge, influenced by the researcher's personal biases, presented in this paper.

Evaluation of preconceived notions:

The personal background of the researcher shapes her preconceived notions toward the topic of this study. The researcher's experiences with death of family members have been minimal. The researcher has found adjustment to change challenging, and she has been fascinated with those who are able to adjust and cope with loss and change successfully. Many minority cultural groups have accomplished the laborious task of adjusting to the culture in mainstream United States. It is the researcher's opinion that among those groups that made the adjustment in the most

graceful, unpretentious way is a group of Native American tribes. Throughout a history of mandatory changes in culture, language, religion, and physical location, many Native American tribes have adapted, survived, and maintained their native heritage. Among these tribes is the Muscogee Creek. Although the Creek tribe is religiously divided, many members across this division celebrate and perform common rituals that are characteristic of Creek tradition.

The cultural survival of the Muscogee Creeks lends evidence to the ability of this tribe as a whole to cope and adjust to loss and change. The researcher has conducted this study under the untested notion that the tribe is in the process of successfully adjusting to mainstream culture. The researcher also had a biased opinion that Creeks as a whole are able to cope with the losses of family members. She believed that the grieving and bereavement rituals were constructed in such a way that adjustment was certain. In addition, the researcher had a preconceived notion that traditional, or ceremonial ground, rituals, rather than church rituals, might be greater contributors to the tribe's ability to adjust to change. The researcher attended a ceremonial ground stomp dance after completing data analysis of this project, and the experience further influenced her preconceived notion. These personal biases might have affected the outcome of this study.

Social constructionism challenges the researcher to question her own perspective and be suspicious of potential biases that may cloud the results. The researcher performed steps to counteract the influence of her background on this study. First, she was committed to constant awareness of potential biases and preconceived notions as she collected data, analyzed the findings, and interpreted the results. Second, once the data

were recorded and transcribed, she conducted follow-up meetings with every willing participant. A documented account of the interview, whether researcher's notes or an exact transcription, was provided to every participant for his/her review. At this time, participants had the opportunity to provide feedback and make corrections of any mistakes in data collection to the researcher.

Once the data were corrected and analyzed, the final project was read by the gatekeeper and two participants to ensure correct interpretation. An outside researcher was consulted during data analysis to confirm inter-rater reliability. The outside researcher verified that the themes emerging from the coded data from three randomly chosen interviews were consistent with those identified by this researcher. Finally, another outside researcher reviewed the final project for face validity. Both outside researchers have previous experience with qualitative research. In this way, the influence of the researcher's personal biases and preconceived notions, an important influence identified in Social constructionism, was minimized.

History and Cultural Background:

The historical and cultural backgrounds of Muscogee Creeks are important elements in constructing reality. Not only is knowledge relative to cultural beliefs during particular time periods, but also current knowledge is a product of the historical and cultural background (Burr, 1995). The values of individuals' strength, expressing emotions and grieving alone, and supporting one another in a group comprise the current reality of Creek grieving. Cultural influences constructing this reality were discussed in the previous section. The historical background of this cultural group involves surviving

for centuries in what is now Southeastern United States despite losing many tribal members to diseases and war. Many Creeks also died during the relocation to what is now Oklahoma. The historical theme of having to be strong to survive influenced the current construction of grieving in the tribe.

Meaning of death is perhaps the most influential cultural factor on the construction of grieving. One participant reported that death is difficult for everyone, and another participant stated that death is the most difficult part of life. Rosenblatt (2001, p. 2), a proponent for social constructionism, suggested that "death may be difficult for everyone," but that its difficulty may be the only commonality regarding grieving and bereavement rituals among cultures. The cross-cultural model for grief also suggested that the only commonalities across cultures are the causes of emotions (Klass, 1999). In other words, death as a cause of grief may be the only factor Creeks share in common with other groups; all other factors discussed in this study are constructed by cultural and historical influences.

Bereavement rituals involving participation of large families or communities, events occurring in time tables of "four," rituals involving physical and emotional closeness to the deceased, the understanding of life as a cycle, and the role of Indian medicine have culturally and historically influenced the construction of bereavement rituals in the Creek culture. The current construction of bereavement rituals, however also results from more recent social influences, such as mainstream society and Christianity.

Historically, the tribe was victim to diseases such as small pox to which the tribe's immunity was extremely low. At that point in history, it made sense to cleanse

and purify oneself after exposure to dead bodies to ensure that any diseases would not be transmitted further. The use of Indian medicine for cleansing and purification after burial rituals was a constructed part of reality. Although Indian medicine is still used for cleansing and purification following burials among ceremonial ground members, its frequency has greatly declined, according to the participants. This group's reality has shifted over time and the influence of mainstream culture and Christianity. The threat of fatal diseases has decreased due to improved medical techniques. Also, Christianity has influenced some Creeks to receive cleansing, purification, and protection from other sources, such as prayer to God.

Historically, Creeks believed that the spirit stayed on the earth for four days following a person's physical death. During this time, the spirit completed a journey through which it relived its entire life on earth, re-visiting all the places he/she had been on Earth when alive. At the time when this was the dominant belief among Creeks, the bereavement ritual of waiting four days before burial represented this socially constructed reality. Historically, this belief may have had practical significance as well to ensure that the body was actually dead before burial. Currently this ritual is performed, but results indicated that it is performed much less frequently by participants from churches than by participants from ceremonial grounds. Due to modern technology, Creeks are able to determine whether a person is dead or not well before four days are completed. Although the influence of Christianity changed this reality for some participants, those from ceremonial grounds still held the belief that the spirit roams the earth for four days following death. Historical beliefs combined with current beliefs and culture thus influenced ritual of waiting four days until burial.

Bowlby (1980) suggested that most cultures include a socially prescribed mourning period, but most of the participants indicated that Creeks do not. Historically, the mourning period represented cultural beliefs of the importance of four and devotion to family and clan. Mainstream culture, which has a relatively short socialized mourning period (Cable, 1998), influenced the construction of this ritual. Many Creeks must return to work quickly unless the loss occurred in their "immediate family," as defined by mainstream culture. Creek culture has not been influenced to the degree that it has adopted the socialized mourning period of mainstream culture, but it has to the degree that socialized mourning period is not part of the current reality of most Creeks. History and culture have thus constructed (and deconstructed) socialized mourning period.

Influence of Social Interactions on Knowledge:

The social interactions of Creeks influenced the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals. Creeks interacted with each other and with the environment, both resulting in the construction of new knowledge. As Creeks interacted with each other, reality was constructed, maintained, and reinforced. The value of community within the culture led to the development of bereavement rituals and grieving techniques involving groups of people. Performing these rituals that required community participation then reinforced the value of community.

The interaction of Creeks with members of other cultural groups and mainstream United States culture also constructs reality for the Creeks. The spread of Christianity and other religions inside the Creek tribe resulted from interactions with other cultural groups. Particularly for Creeks who are employed by businesses in mainstream society,

time restraints and job demands influence the construction of reality. For instance, employers in mainstream society may not understand an employee's need to take a week off work for the death of a fellow clan member. The relative may be considered "distant" to the employer who has a very different definition of family than that of the Creek employee. Because his/her financial income is based on mainstream culture in this example, the Creek employee's reality is influenced, therefore influencing the construction of grieving and bereavement rituals.

Social Action Taken:

Finally, social action results from the formation of knowledge. This discussion has noted several ways in which knowledge is constructed, including participants' interactions with each other and with environment, historical background, cultural identity, and participants' interactions with the researcher, who is influenced by her own personal background. Burr (1995) suggested that knowledge and social action accompany one another. As described earlier in this discussion, formation of knowledge was evidenced by grieving behaviors and bereavement rituals performed, as reported by the participants. In other words, the grieving behaviors and bereavement rituals are the social actions resulting from new knowledge. These actions represent overarching themes that define the current construction of grieving and bereavement rituals in Muscogee Creeks. The overarching themes are listed in the following summary.

SUMMARY / OVERVIEW

In summary, a number of over-arching themes emerged that directly address the research questions in the study. The research questions, with the corresponding supporting themes, are listed below:

Research question 1:

How do members of the Muscogee Creek tribe construct grieving and bereavement rituals?

Supporting themes:

a. Grieving is constructed from historical and cultural factors.

b. Bereavement rituals are constructed from historical and cultural factors.

Research question 2:

How does the meaning of death affect Muscogee Creek construction of grieving and bereavement rituals?

Supporting themes:

a. The meaning Creeks associate with death, that life is a cycle, life continues after death, and that Creeks will be reunited with dead loved ones when they die, constructs grieving in that grief is experienced by everyone, eases with time, and is not permanent (relationships will be resumed at death).

b. The meaning Creeks associate with death, that life is a cycle, life continues after death, and that Creeks will be reunited with dead loved ones when they die, constructs the Creek value of accepting and embracing death, evident in

bereavement rituals such as hand-digging graves, never allowing the body to be alone, enclosing personal items in the casket, and covering the grave completely by hand.

Research question 3:

What factors contribute to the construction of Muscogee Creek grieving and bereavement rituals?

Supporting themes:

a. Grieving is constructed from several cultural influences, including family, community, Indian medicine, and meaning of death.

b. Creeks value strength in individuals and prefer to be alone and express emotions while alone during times of grieving. Also, Creeks value family and perform grieving behaviors that reinforce the strength of family as a system which, in turn, reinforces the strength of its individual members. This cycle influences the construction of grieving in Muscogee Creeks.

c. Creeks value sense of community as a strong system of support during times of grieving. Grieving behaviors of Creeks maintain and reinforce the sense of community as they do with family and thus influence the construction of grieving.

d. Indian medicine influences the construction of grieving by providing relief from depression, resulting in the belief that grief is natural, treatable, and not permanent.

e. Bereavement rituals are constructed from several cultural influences, including family, religious type, sense of community, importance of the number four, Indian medicine, and meaning of death.

6. The Creek value of closeness of family members influences construction of bereavement rituals such as conducting a wake service, never allowing the body to be alone, enclosing personal items in casket, digging the grave by hand, conducting a farewell handshake, covering grave completely, and building a house over the grave.

7. Religious type influences the occurrence of bereavement rituals; conducting wake service, never allowing the body to be alone, enclosing personal items in casket, digging the grave by hand, conducting farewell handshake, covering grave completely, and building a house over the grave are performed by members of churches, members of ceremonial grounds, and members of both. Using Indian medicine for cleansing after the burial and adhering to a socialized mourning period are performed by members of ceremonial grounds or members of both church and ceremonial grounds; waiting four days before the burial is performed by all three groups but more ceremonial ground members and members of both identified and described this ritual than did church members.

8. The Creek value of sense of community influences the construction of bereavement rituals such as conducting a wake service, never allowing the body to be alone, digging the grave by hand, conducting a farewell handshake, covering the grave completely, and building a house over the grave.

9. The Creek value of the importance of the number four influences the construction of bereavement rituals such as building a house over the grave, waiting four days before burial, and socialized mourning period.

10. The availability of Indian medicine and the belief that being in close proximity with dead bodies can cause physical and emotional illnesses influences the construction of the bereavement ritual of cleansing/purification after a burial.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Limitations of the study:

Several significant limitations may have prevented this study from generating complete, descriptive answers to the research questions. They are as follows:

1. Obtaining clear, detailed, descriptions of family roles in bereavement was challenging. Cultural differences between this population and the researcher may have inhibited the researcher's ability to understand and correctly record the information provided by the subjects. According to Laird (1995), full understanding of a particular culture by an outsider to the culture may be unreachable.
2. Many members of the Muscogee Creek tribe are acculturated to varying degrees into mainstream American society. It was challenging for the researcher to integrate the data from participants of different ages and degrees of acculturation to form an accurate picture of grieving and bereavement rituals in Creek culture.
3. Some participants hesitated to reveal information about sacred ceremonial ground rituals. Wing et al. (1995) suggested that Muscogee Creeks strongly

hesitate to trust strangers, and this was true of ceremonial ground participants. Although participants from churches appeared to have no difficulty sharing their grieving patterns and rituals, participants from ceremonial grounds willing to discuss their rituals were more challenging to locate. Two participants from ceremonial grounds and one from both church and ceremonial ground explained their hesitations as follows:

> Some of them I can't (explain) because some of those rituals are sacred rituals – if people come out - and that's why they just skim the top when they talk about that. "The Unwritten Law", the traditional unwritten law, is what takes place in those ceremonial propers, you know, a long time ago…

> … many Creek Indians might be "cautious" about participating in the study for 2 reasons. 1) because the researcher is White, and 2) because the research is being written down. Some Creeks feel that information should be written down to preserve traditions and culture that may be lost. Others, however, feel that their culture and traditions are theirs and should not be shared with others. This is particularly true of ceremonial ground traditions…many think that because of the sacred, personal nature they are not for the White man. They don't want to be made into a "science project" and be observed by others who don't truly understand the spirit from which they developed.

> …it's really difficult for me to be doing what I'm doing now, you know, I have mixed emotions about what I'm doing. Am I selling my people out or am I saving my people in the long run because if I can educate the outside world as to who we really are maybe there will be less attrition on us because they can realize what we're doing and maybe there will be some higher level of respect for our ways and that way they won't intrude on us…so I have mixed emotions about what I'm doing, but…I feel I need to educate the non-Indian world as to who we are, what we do, and why we do what we do.

Chain sampling was employed to derive a sample with representation of ceremonial ground members. These participants were assured that the

researcher would handle the data they provided in a manner that was sensitive, professional, and respectful of their cultural heritage.

4. Because of the nature of the grieving issue and the sensitivity of personal loss, the topic was particularly difficult for some to discuss. Some participants chose not to answer certain questions about personal experiences that were painful or uncomfortable for them to discuss.
5. Triangulation of methods was often not available. Whereas interview data were plentiful, observation notes and document analysis data were not. Triangulation of methods was available for only the following codes: definition of the family, houses over graves, church / ceremonial ground comparison, and meaning of death. Data used for this study were repeated by several participants, ensuring triangulation of data sources. Also, inter-rater reliability was established through triangulation of analysts, and member checking was used to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation of the data. These methods of triangulation compensated for the lack of triangulation of methods.
6. The researcher was unable to completely prevent her personal experiences from influencing her data collection and data analysis. Her own social construction of grief and bereavement issues affected her interpretation of the data. Social constructionism, the theoretical framework on which this study is based, recognizes this bias as unavoidable. According to social constructionism, knowledge is built through interactions between participant and environment as well as between participant and researcher.

7. The researcher was an outsider. Because the researcher was not Muscogee Creek, some potential participants hesitated to participate in the study. Some members of this population were suspicious of the motives behind researchers studying Creek culture who did not originate from the Creek Tribe. The second set of interview notes from limitation number three states, "...because the researcher is White..." and explains this rationale in detail. Some members of the population felt that information about Creek sacred rituals is not for those outside the tribe and should not be shared with others. Because of this, some potential sources of important data were unwilling to participate in the study.
8. The purpose of this study was to explore the social construction of current practices among the Muscogee Creeks. More data on historical background, however, would have enhanced the understanding of grieving and bereavement rituals as social constructions.

Strengths of Study

1. The topic is infrequently represented in literature. Studies of grief and bereavement of the Creek population are scarce. The completion of the study helped remedy the problem of lack of available research in this area.
2. The field of grief research is enhanced. Grief and bereavement studies on groups of particular cultural origins are poorly represented in literature. This study will enhance the field of grief research by focusing on a specific cultural group.

3. Understanding of the Creek population in mainstream society will increase as a result of the study. Many members of the Creek nation are employed in mainstream society, which is characterized by wide cultural variation. As described in the scenario presented at the beginning of this study, misunderstandings of Creeks may result in inhibition of practicing Creek cultural rituals. A greater understanding of rituals in mainstream society may lessen the frequency of this inhibition.
4. Subjects volunteered for the study, resulting in effort from the subjects to fulfill the study's research objectives.
5. Many Creeks were willing to share knowledge about their cultural background. Although the Creek population has some controversy with whether or not information about Creek culture should be documented and made available to other cultural groups, many members encourage studies to be conducted. The participants chose to participate and support the success of this study, thus supporting the education of other cultural groups on Creek cultural background.
6. The Muscogee Creek Nation endorsed the study. The researcher approached the tribe to seek permission and endorsement of this project. The director of the Cultural Research Department at the tribal headquarters supported the researcher and encouraged its overall success.
7. Triangulation was used in several forms to promote the quality and accuracy of the study. Among the methods used were triangulation of data sources, and triangulation of analysts, and triangulation of methods to a limited degree.

Chapter three addressed issues of rigor and described how standards of quality were met in this study.

8. Numerous data were collected regarding current grieving and bereavement rituals among Muscogee Creeks, ensuring a solid data base from which the findings were supported.

IMPLICATIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The readers of this research paper are likely to be members of mainstream society. All readers who interact with Muscogee Creeks will have a better understanding of the culture and the needs of its members during times of grief and bereavement. The information will positively influence current business policies on bereavement of employees. Friends, family members, and co-workers of Creeks will be more equipped to handle the needs of Creeks and encourage expression of the cultural heritage during loss. Counselors, physicians, and human service professionals serving this population will provide better services for members of the population. Finally, institutions of government and education can use this information to implement policy sensitive to the needs of this cultural group. The diversity of mainstream society will, therefore, be better understood, encouraged, and celebrated.

This study is merely an introduction to the topic and has revealed several areas for potential future research. According to Social Constructionism, historical background is an important element in understanding the current Muscogee Creek construction of knowledge and reality. A detailed study on Creek history and how it affects current

grieving and bereavement rituals would improve scholarship on this topic. Future research might also focus on a specific group within the Creek tribe. For instance, a study of the rituals specific to ceremonial ground members would provide more detailed information. An even deeper study might focus upon the development of a particular ritual, such as the use of fire or Indian medicine. Finally, studies of other Native American tribes would enhance literature. The topic of grief and bereavement among Native American tribes has barely been touched in research, and this author encourages increased development of its future scholarship.

A further note is that any further studies on native cultures need to be sensitive to tradition and the wishes of members of the population. Traditional Creeks, or ceremonial ground members, tend to be very cautious of sharing personal customs and sacred rituals with researchers. Given the nature of the Muscogee Creeks' historical background and the cultural division within the tribe, the hesitation evoked by ceremonial ground members to participate in such a study is reasonable. When conducting studies, researchers need to incorporate a global theme of respect for the Creek tribe and its culture. Conducting a study under any other premise will yield misunderstandings of this culture and unproductive results.

The researcher wishes to conclude the study with a poem written by a Creek woman (Chaudhuri & Chaudhuri, 2001, p. 185) about the death of a Creek warrior and the lingering spirit of a culture feared to be lost. This colorful expression reveals the spirit behind the last journey and the meaning of death for many Creeks. An understanding of grieving and bereavement among the Creeks could not be better articulated.

A Muscogee Journey

Oh warrior! On your last journey
Tarry a little under that tree
Gathering strength with the black drink
In your vision quests, you were always free

No race, age, or gender escapes the struggle
Or the celebration of busk
The poisoned spirits of battle now are cleaned
Head lying eastward awaiting the dusk

Kind to relatives, seen and unseen
For pangs of hunger, mother earth had been kind
Prayed to seven directions and fed the fire
Now you must leave the last dance behind

Oh warrior on your westward journey
An older Beloved Man you will never be
But at the end of the day you'll climb to the Milky Way
From where grandfather sun meets the shining sea

-Joy Chaudhuri

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

ORAL SOLICITATION

Appendix A – Oral Solicitation

Hello! My name is Andrea C. Walker, and I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University. Under the direction of Dr. David E. Balk, I am currently working on my dissertation. The purpose of my dissertation is to explore the grieving behaviors and bereavement rituals of Muscogee Creeks. In order to gain this knowledge, I would like to interview individuals who are willing to discuss their knowledge of current (and traditional, if possible) Muscogee Creek bereavement rituals and their personal experience of the loss of a family member.

I am respectfully requesting your participation in the study concerning your perception of the role of the family in Muscogee Creek grieving behaviors and bereavement rituals. Your participation is solicited by volunteer basis and is very important to the success of this study. Your cultural background and personal experiences with loss will provide critical information necessary to explore this topic. I assure you that your identity will be safeguarded and that your name will in no way be connected with interview data.

Please complete the blanks below with your name and phone number and return to me. From the list of volunteers, I will select 30. (Though your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated, I may be regretfully unable to interview all who volunteer.) I will be the only person who knows the identity of those who are interviewed. I will then contact you to schedule an interview at your home or at the Nutrition Center in your community. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate.

Participant information:

_____ _____

(Name) (Birth date: mo/yr only)

_____ _____

(Address) (Phone number)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Appendix B

Interview Protocol
Project: The role of the family in Muscogee Creek Bereavement

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Position of interviewee:

Questions:
1.Describe the tribal events and rituals that occur from the death of a loved one to his or her burial.

a. Who does or does not participate in the events and rituals?

b. How are those participating in the events encouraged to do so?

c. How is your grief different when you know ahead of time that someone in your family is going to die?

d. Where is the deceased typically buried?

2. Describe the tribal events and rituals that occur after the burial of a loved one.

a. How frequently do you typically visit the gravesite?

b. Are there additional memorials and services that take place after the burial? If so, explain.

c. Is there a prescribed mourning period? If so, how long is it? If not, what is the typical length of time an individual is in mourning after the loss of a loved one?

3. According to your position in the family (mother/father, son/daughter, grandparent, sibling, cousin, aunt, uncle, great-aunt, great-uncle, in-laws, etc.), what role or roles do you play in bereavement rituals and grieving practices?

a. Which of these do you see as your primary role in the family during grief? What are the behaviors associated with that role?

b. What does your family expect of you during times of grieving and loss?

c. From whom do you receive most of your support during times of grieving?

4. What does death mean to you?

a. What are your views on death and spirituality? Are they the same as traditional Muscogee Creek views?

b. What happens to the spirit and the body after death?

c. Do you continue to have a relationship with the deceased and communicate with him or her after the death? If so, how and for how long?

d. Does life continue to exist for the deceased after the physical death?

e. How do you express your grief following the loss of a loved one?

5. Tell me an example of when your family suffered a loss of a member and the grieving process that followed. Can you tell me about an example of when the grief process was incomplete?

a. How does your family function during times of loss and grief?

b. Does each member receive enough attention and support to facilitate adequate adjustment to the loss? What else is required to facilitate this process?

c. What would happen if the family or a family member received inadequate attention and support to adjust to a loss?

6. Are your views on death traditional or contemporary?

a. To what degree do you practice traditional burial rituals? Explain.

b. To what degree do you have traditional burial rituals? Explain.

c. To what degree does your family maintain traditional roles? Explain.

6. Demographics:

Age:
Marital Status:
Number of Children:
Occupation:
Residence (on or off tribal lands):
Time at this residence:
Family members who live with you:
Number of deaths of those you consider family you have experienced:

Family members with which you are in close or frequent contact:

Degree of participation in tribal activities:

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. This form outlines the purposes of this study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this study are:

1. Identify and explore the role of the Muscogee Creek family in bereavement rituals and in dealing with issues of grief and loss.

2. Provide important insight concerning the grieving processes and bereavement rituals of the Muscogee Creek Nation and to increase awareness of these.

3. Provide the Muscogee Creek Nation with additional literature regarding their traditional family practices.

4. Meet guidelines to fulfill doctoral degree requirements in Family Relations and Child Development.

Doctoral Committee Chair:

David E. Balk, Ph.D.
Oklahoma State University
College of Human Environmental Sciences
Department of Family Relations and Child Development
333 HES
Stillwater, OK 74078
Phone (405) 744-8428

The results will be written in report form, and you may request a draft copy of the report so that you have the opportunity to suggest changes to the researcher. You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the research project and the methods used. Your suggestions and concerns are important. Please contact me at:

Andrea Walker, Doctoral candidate
Oklahoma State University
333 HES
Stillwater, OK 74078
Phone: (405) 744-8362
E-mail: WalkerA77@aol.com

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

1. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection or in the report. You and any other person and place names will be given fictitious names that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports.

2. If you grant permission for audiotaping, audiotapes will be used only for the purpose of this research. The tape will be transcribed for the purpose of accuracy.

3. Your participation in this research project is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point, for any reason, and without any damage or injury to you.

4. Interviews will take approximately 30 minutes and will occur in your home or in an office in the Muscogee Creek nutritional center in your area. This will be according to your preference.

5. The interview protocol includes items about grieving behaviors and bereavement rituals. Some questions ask about personal experience and how you feel about the loss of a family member. This may potentially feel emotional for you. If you do not wish to respond to any of the questions, you are not required to do so.

6. You may request a copy of the completed project.

Do you grant permission to participate in this research project?
Yes_____No_____

Do you grant permission to be audio taped?
Yes_____No_____

Do you grant permission to be quoted directly?
Yes_____No_____

I agree to the terms:

Signature of the
participant_____Date_____

I agree to the terms:

Signature of the
researcher_____Date_____

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY

Appendix D – Transcriber Confidentiality

_____ (name) has been asked by Andrea C. Walker, doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, to transcribe audio tapes collected during interviews.

I (the transcriber) understand the following:

1. The information transcribed will be used as data for Andrea C. Walker's research project.
2. I will not share with any individual the information contained on these audio tapes or transcriptions.
3. I will not make a copy of any of the audio tapes.
4. I will not make a copy of any of the materials I transcribe.
5. I will not place any transcribed material on my hard drive. I understand that all transcribed material will be saved on a disk provided by Andrea C. Walker.
6. All tapes and transcribed materials must be kept in a locked box at all times when they are not being used for transcription purposes.
7. Andrea C. Walker will provide me with this lock box.
8. Upon completion of transcribing the data I will return to Andrea C. Walker all tapes, hard copy of transcriptions, and disks.

I agree to all of the above terms.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX E

CODEBOOK

Codebook

I. Bereavement Rituals

- A. Rituals before burial:
  - 1. Four days before burial
  - 2. Wake service
  - 3. Body never alone
- B. Burial rituals:
  - 1. Personal items/food in casket
  - 2. Hand-digging graves
  - 3. Farewell handshake
  - 4. Cover grave completely
- C. Rituals after burial:
  - 1. Socialized mourning period
  - 2. Medicine/purification
  - 3. Houses over graves

II. Grieving

- A. Individual level:
  - 1. Individual coping / emotional expression
- B. Family level:
  - 1. Family coping techniques
- C. Support systems:
  - 1. Family

2. Church

3. God / spiritual support

4. Friends / community

5. Ceremonial ground / clan / tribe

III. Muscogee Creek Culture

A. Family

1. Definition of family

2. Living arrangement

B. Meaning of death

1. Spiritual views

2. Relationship with deceased

3 Perspective of death

C. Importance of number four

D. Sense of Community

E. Religion

1. History of division

2. Church / Ceremonial ground comparison

3. Religious types

a. Church

b. Ceremonial ground

c. Both

F. Indian Medicine

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 11/27/02

Date: Wednesday, November 28, 2001 IRB Application No HE0222

Proposal Title: THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN MUSCOGEE CREEK GRIEVING PRACTICES AND BEREAVEMENT RITUALS

Principal Investigator(s):

Andrea Walker
908 North Bellis
Stillwater, OK 74075

David Balk
243 HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA 2

Andrea C. Walker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GRIEVING AND BEREAVEMENT RITUALS IN MUSCOGEE CREEK CULTURE

Major Field: Human Environmental Sciences

Area of Specialization: Human Development and Family Science

Biographical:

Education: Attended Jenks Public Schools in Jenks, Oklahoma until 1989. Received Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma in May, 1993. Received Master of Science degree in Management from Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma in December, 1995. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Human Environmental Sciences at Oklahoma State University in August 2002.

Experience: Teaching and research assistant at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2000 to present. First Offender Instructor, Logan County Youth and Family Services, Inc., 2000. School Counselor, Logan County Youth and Family Services, Inc., 1999-2000. Assistant Director, Rogers County Youth Services, Inc., 1998-1999. Outreach Counselor, Rogers County Youth Services, Inc., 1993-1998. ROPES Course Instructor, Rogers State College., 1994-1999.