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All of our eyes focused on him as he silently walked towards us tightly clutching six sticks against his chest, cradling them like an infant, making his way down the aisle. Our conversations came to an abrupt standstill. As he approached us, time slowed down, each moment beating in rhythm with our hearts’ drumming, quickening in pace as our anticipation grew.

With each beat his foot hit the ground.
With each beat he captured more of our attention.
With each beat our confusion mounted.
With each beat we felt more unified.

We clumsily stood up from our seats, struggling to maintain some form of decorum in the church that we had been preparing to rest in for the night. Some of us were already in our pajamas, some had their sleeping bags strewn across the pews, and some were brushing their teeth in the bathroom, but all of us showed respect by standing in his presence. When he stopped before us, the beating paused; he lifted his eyes from the sticks that seemed to beckon such concentration, allowing us to motion for the rest of the group to gather around him. Intimately, we huddled together in absolute silence waiting for Shorty to explain his unexpected visit. He spoke no unnecessary words, but delicately extended his arms, carefully moving as though protecting the sticks from touching the ground. The sticks called for our gaze again; transfixed by such unexpected generosity, we just stood there.

His arms remained outstretched, leaving the sticks vulnerable.

We just stood there.
Everyone’s stare now turned from him to me, expecting me, as their leader, to accept his offer of friendship, but I hesitated; I knew that asking to buy a set of sticks was inappropriate for a woman because only men played with sticks, but I wasn’t sure if accepting the sticks would offend him. We just stood there.
I just stood there.

“I take them. They are yours. Take them.”
As a girl from the group began to reach for them, I put my arms out, palms facing upward, ready to receive the sticks. He passed them off to both of us and we stood there as he looked down at his feet.

“Just promise that you will pass them on to someone who cares; pass on the tradition of the game to someone who appreciates it, understands it.”

I looked down at the sticks which now rested in my arms, unsure as to whether to accept or to decline. “We are speechless; we don’t even know how to respond to such generosity. Thank you. We are completely speechless.” I choked back tears, simultaneously noting that the boy across from me was similarly looking down to hide his glossed eyes, but his hard swallowing betrayed his effort. Everyone had a similar humbling reaction and proceeded to thank Shorty, shake his hand, and even exchange hugs.

Sharing cultures.
Sharing stories.
Sharing lives.
Sharing respect.

By Faith Roncoroni

Inspired by a moving experience at a retreat, this author examines the impacts and implications of gift giving and storytelling in American Indian culture. Framed in a study of anthropological perspectives, this introspective analysis of the characters of James Welch’s Fools Crow reveals how actions within the gift cycle and storytelling simultaneously construct and strengthen the American Indian identity. Going beyond textual analysis, “An Examination of the Gift Cycle” illuminates the cultural dynamics of gift giving, telling stories, and the giving of stories in Fools Crow through Welch’s personal sharing of his history, beliefs, and tribal practices.
The act of giving establishes a social bond between the giver and the recipient, where the recipient becomes obligated to reciprocate in order to demonstrate his own honor, power, and wealth.

gifts—invoking the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate—to establish an account of each party's responsibility while involved within the gift cycle. More specifically, I explore Lewis Hyde's notion of the artist's gift by examining the importance of American Indian story gifts in promoting one's reputation, maintaining one's power, and strengthening one's bonds as portrayed in James Welch's novel Fools Crow.

Fools Crow provides examples of successful and unsuccessful gift exchanges, while simultaneously revealing hopes, expectations, and the account of each party's responsibility while involved within the gift cycle. More specifically, I examine Lewis Hyde's notion of the artist's gift by examining the importance of American Indian story gifts in promoting one's reputation, maintaining one's power, and strengthening one's bonds as portrayed in James Welch's novel Fools Crow.

Part I: The Gift Cycle

Ethnologist Marcel Mauss lays the foundation for theory on gift economies by examining historical examples of gift giving and the rise of reciprocal exchange. After recognizing the patterns of giving, he begins to analyze the relationship between the giver and gift; his goal is to discover why the recipient pays back the gift. Mauss specifically examines the gift exchanges in Maori culture by listening to Maori informants such as Tamati Ranaipiri, an informant from the Auckland district. Sahlins, and Lewis Hyde's accounts on gift giving. In this paper I focus on the functioning of gift economies in American Indian culture and building upon Mauss and Sahlins, who reveals the secrets of the “theological spirit” to him: Now, this taonga that he gives me in the spirit (hau) of the taonga that I had received from you and that I had given to him. The taonga that I received for these taonga (which came from you) must be returned to you. It would not be fair (tika) on my part to keep these taonga for myself, whether they were desirable (takatokowhia) or undesirable (kekena). I must give them to you because they are a hau of the taonga that you gave me. If I kept this other taonga for myself, serious harm might befall me, even death. This is the nature of the hau, the hau of property, the hau of the taonga, the hau of the forest.4

In short, Mauss concludes that the giver personally, and spiritually (hau), invests himself in the gift (taonga), giving away a part of himself in the act. Therefore, the act of giving establishes a social bond between the giver and recipient, where the recipient becomes obligated to reciprocate in order to demonstrate his own honor, power, and wealth.
from seeking out the boulder. Despite their failure to follow the laws of gift giving, Fools Crow and Fast Horse avoid the serious consequences which typically precede such infractions, and even receive a chance to rectify their actions. Why do their actions in the gift cycle fit into a tribal members. They seek unity and the gift cycle as a social method of interaction to show acceptance and respect.

Instead of forcing the gift’s recipient to provide an exchange gift solely out of selfishness, out of fear for the negative consequences of their actions, Welch portrays the American Indians as people who generally care about the well-being of other tribal members.

coming-of-age story about American Indians caught between mainstream white culture and traditional customs?

To summarize, Fool Crow and Fast Horse break the rules of the gift cycle, Welch portrays them as neither understanding the serious consequences of their action, nor knowing how to respond to their gifts. Since they must learn the social laws surrounding gifts, their inappropriate response to receiving gifts functions as a social deterrent of their behavior.

Rites of Institution

In Rites of Institution, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that social rituals divide society into those who experience the powerful vision gifts given to Fools Crow and Fast Horse to live up to the standards of respected, powerful hunters and medicine men within the tribe, learn about their cultural laws of the gift cycle, and maintain a sense of tradition through the tribal gift cycle’s ceremonial role. To summarize, Fools Crow and Fast Horse respond inappropriately because they lack the experiential knowledge of gift giving and must turn to the older members for guidance. By showing how the youths are forced to rely on the older tribal members’ experiential knowledge, Welch sheds a more realistic light on how the youths are forced to rely on the older members of the tribe in order to learn the culturally accepted knowledge of gift giving. Instead of forcing the gift’s recipient to provide an exchange gift solely out of selfishness, out of fear for the negative consequences of their actions, Welch portrays the American Indians as people who generally care about the well-being of other tribal members. They seek unity and the gift cycle as a social method of interaction to show acceptance and respect. Hence, he feels obliged to act within the confines of the identity given to him. For instance, Fools Crow feels obligated to act within the confines of the gift cycle, and as a leader, the tribe expects him to play an integral role in the ceremony.

Fools Crow’s inclusion in these tribal rites and successful completion of these rites also impacts his identity on him, allowing him to become included in more tribal events and ultimately earning him the respect needed to achieve fulﬁlment of the god. In contrast, Fast Horse’s acceptance into the tribal gift cycle is impacted by gift giving. Fools Crow and Fast Horse experience the powerful vision gifts given to Fools Crow and Fast Horse to live up to the standards of respected, powerful hunters and medicine men within the tribe, learn about their cultural laws of the gift cycle, and maintain a sense of tradition through the tribal gift cycle’s ceremonial role. To summarize, Fools Crow and Fast Horse respond inappropriately because they lack the experiential knowledge of gift giving and must turn to the older members for guidance. By showing how the youths are forced to rely on the older tribal members’ experiential knowledge, Welch sheds a more realistic light on how the youths are forced to rely on the older members of the tribe in order to learn the culturally accepted knowledge of gift giving. Instead of forcing the gift’s recipient to provide an exchange gift solely out of selfishness, out of fear for the negative consequences of their actions, Welch portrays the American Indians as people who generally care about the well-being of other tribal members. They seek unity and the gift cycle as a social method of interaction to show acceptance and respect. Hence, he feels obliged to act within the confines of the identity given to him. For instance, Fools Crow feels obligated to act within the confines of the gift cycle, and as a leader, the tribe expects him to play an integral role in the ceremony.

Fools Crow’s inclusion in these tribal rites and successful completion of these rites also impacts his identity on him, allowing him to become included in more tribal events and ultimately earning him the respect needed to achieve fuller inclusion in the tribe. In contrast, Fast Horse’s acceptance into the tribal gift cycle is impacted by gift giving. Fools Crow and Fast Horse experience the powerful vision gifts given to Fools Crow and Fast Horse to live up to the standards of respected, powerful hunters and medicine men within the tribe, learn about their cultural laws of the gift cycle, and maintain a sense of tradition through the tribal gift cycle’s ceremonial role. To summarize, Fools Crow and Fast Horse respond inappropriately because they lack the experiential knowledge of gift giving and must turn to the older members for guidance. By showing how the youths are forced to rely on the older tribal members’ experiential knowledge, Welch sheds a more realistic light on how the youths are forced to rely on the older members of the tribe in order to learn the culturally accepted knowledge of gift giving. Instead of forcing the gift’s recipient to provide an exchange gift solely out of selfishness, out of fear for the negative consequences of their actions, Welch portrays the American Indians as people who generally care about the well-being of other tribal members. They seek unity and the gift cycle as a social method of interaction to show acceptance and respect. Hence, he feels obliged to act within the confines of the identity given to him. For instance, Fools Crow feels obligated to act within the confines of the gift cycle, and as a leader, the tribe expects him to play an integral role in the ceremony.

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The artist must labor over his internal gift until he creates a work of art, which he can give to others, and distributes it; so it can be accepted by others. Once people accept the gift of art—in this case, hear the story they must reciprocate, even if that means simply passing the story onto others.

Part III: The Function of Stories within American Indian Culture
Storytelling plays a crucial role in the survival of the American Indian culture because stories empower the tribe by providing explanations for their misfortunes and eliminating them from responsibility by placing blame on trickster characters. But stories function as more than just coping mechanisms which displace blame and provide comfort. Stories create. Stories define. Stories ascribe identities. Similar to the ways in which Fools Crow and Fast Horse’s adherence to or insubordination of the gift cycle define their identity and role in the story, storytelling further develops and reveals their identity. Stories greatly influence who they are and define others; he earns his first name from his fascination with storytelling and his second name from the stories that the Blackfeet members tell about him. Names distinguish people from others, but the Blackfeet culture views American Indians’ names as narratives about just an “individual designation by which a particular person or thing is known, referred to or inscribed,” 81 and is of the soul. Hence it follows that to make a gift of something to someone is to express oneself through the gift of art through his voice he gives a talent, creation of art occurs when the inner gift and object of the artist’s labor into an outer gift, which Hyde refers to as “a vehicle of culture.” 82 Hyde’s use of the word “vehicle” implies that the artist acts as a medium through which the internal gift gets transmitted, while the artist’s gift becomes a means of expression and communication with others. Reducing the gift and creating artwork provides the artist with a method for sharing his gift with others, but since his life and surroundings influence his gift, he cannot avoid sharing his culture and himself with his audience. The work of art still possesses part of the artist even after the gift leaves his possession because “the legal tie, a tie occurring through things, is one between souls, because the thing itself possesses a soul and is of the soul. Hence it follows that to make a gift of something to someone is to express oneself through the gift of art and to give it to another to express oneself through the gift of art.

Part IV: Stories as Gifts
While Welch portrays storytelling as a gift and social determinant, sharing stories functions as an active process of giving gifts or method used to ascribe identities to members of the tribe. Stories, or any form of art, contain a deeper personal investment than already-existing tangible gifts. While Mauss and Sahlins’s theories on the gift cycle correspond to the Blackfeet tribe, relating to Fools Crow and Fast Horse, the author Lewis Hyde specifically focuses on gifts of art. He sees the creation of art as a foundation as a creative spirit, the artist cannot simply pass the internal gift to others, but neither is he exempt from obligated reciprocity. Instead, the artist’s gift becomes the artist’s gift to others. While the artist’s gift becomes the artist’s gift to others, he neither is exempt from obligated reciprocity. Instead, the artist’s gift becomes the artist’s gift to others. While the artist’s gift becomes

Mainstream culture or those who follow traditional ways. By applying Bourdieu’s theory to this American Indian culture in the novel it becomes apparent that native people further divide themselves according to their adherence to the gift cycle, which determines whether they can be respected and trusted as leaders or even participate in the traditional culture. Specifically, Welch shows how an American Indian’s heritage plays a role in his acceptance and exemplifies Bourdieu’s theory through Fools Crow’s socially-assigned identity. As Fools Crow builds a reputation for adhering to the social laws of the tribe, respecting elders and the tribal members treat him with gift giving, he builds relationships with the tribe. His reputation for adhering to the social laws of the tribe, respecting elders and the tribal members treat him with respect. As Welch shows how an American Indian’s heritage plays a role in his acceptance and exemplifies Bourdieu’s theory through Fools Crow’s socially-assigned identity. As Fools Crow builds a reputation for adhering to the social laws of the tribe, respecting elders and the tribal members treat him with respect.

Fools Crow finds itself rapidly changing and being divided into groups of people who favor ways do storytelling and stories gifts overlap, contrast, or reinforce identity development in Welch’s depiction of an American Indian. How does a story function as a gift? What does it mean when an individual needs to give a part of oneself to fully realize their identity and place in their culture?

Stories greatly influence Fools Crow’s story as a means of expression and communication with others. The artist uses the theories of Mauss and Sahlins to correspond to the Blackfeet tribe. While Welch portrays storytelling as a gift and social determinant, sharing stories functions as an active process of giving gifts or method used to ascribe identities to members of the tribe. Stories, or any form of art, contain a deeper personal investment than already-existing tangible gifts. While Mauss and Sahlins’s theories on the gift cycle correspond to the Blackfeet tribe, relating to Fools Crow and Fast Horse, the author Lewis Hyde specifically focuses on gifts of art. He sees the creation and distribution, acceptance, and exchange of gifts as a means of expression and communication with others. The artist’s gift becomes the artist’s gift to others. While the artist’s gift becomes the artist’s gift to others, he neither is exempt from obligated reciprocity. Instead, the artist’s gift becomes
Indians can experience their traditions and stories actually create a world where American Crow’s maturation and name changing— but storytelling process—as shown through Fools American Indians by the role they play in the and development.”18 American Indians to an individual’s identity construction story was and continues to be essential stories they were told. For Native People, Indians are “inextricable, interwoven in the believes that the identities of American a present-day setting. Similarly, Lee Francis American Indians retain their past culture in descriptions stories as living entities that help Gerald Vizenor does not believe stories can literally reclaim their identity through the world exists in stories,” and that the act of incorporating traditional ancestral beliefs along the purpose. Our oral tradition, which is both ceremonial sacred and ritualized through the storytelling. Contrary to Lucci-Cooper and Francis, another American Indian author university, she comes to the conclusion that trying to discover herself at an American trying to discover herself at an American More specifically, Welch bases the ending of Fools Crow on the historical event ending of the Marias River Massacre in the winter of 1870, where a small group of renegades targeted women and children, killing a total of 173 Blackfeet in hopes of halting the white settler’s raiding. Welch heard about this tragic event through the stories of tribal members, the characters within Welch’s narrative do not generally tell their stories to people outside of the tribe. Instead, the massacre from his father, whose mother survived the event and told her son about it.17 The tales of his tribe’s history were verbally passed down through his family, and he shares these personal, meaningful stories with his audience through the characters and events in Fools Crow. By presenting society with his story of Fools Crow, Welch gives his readers a part of himself through the creative spirit of his writing of the story, but more importantly, his gift invites his readers to experience the personal, heart wrenching past of his tribe that lives in his story.

Conclusion
Looking back on the gift of Fish sticks, I still struggle to understand Shorty’s gift, but I do realize that the tangible gift of sticks pales in comparison to his gift of stories involving the sticks and the cultural practices surrounding the Fish games. Shorty accepted us into his culture, even if it was just for that night, but now we must reciprocate. We must pass his story, our new story, onto others; we must continue the tradition.

We came as just a group of white college kids who hid from one another on campus, nearly touching shoulders as we passed by, too busy texting on our cell phones and listening to our iPods. always looking down as we pass, avoiding conversation, interaction, adopting avoidance out of fear of our differences, even though we all look and act the same, culturally to rush, to ignore.

We left as just some white kids, the same white kids, yet transformed by friendship. we try to understand, we are learning to understand our story, and how our story intertwines with others. we try to understand, we are learning to understand our story, and how our story intertwines with others. others who trust us, open their arms, to understand, are learning to understand our story, and how our story intertwines with others. others who trust us, open their arms, open their culture. we accept hesitantly. in sincerest awkwardness, we honor them, him. the drumming begins again, not calling us home. we are not indian; we are just white kids drumming out the rhythm of our steps, hoping to share our story, give you our story. this was our story.

Use of language, is also living thought.”19 She describes stories as living entities that help American Indians retain their past culture in a present-day setting. Similarly, Lee Francis believes that the identities of American Indians are “inextricable, interspersed in the stories they were told. For Native People, stories play a crucial role in an individual’s identity construction and development.19 American Indians can literally reclaim their identity through storytelling. Contrary to Lucci-Cooper and Francis, another American Indian author Gerald Vizenor does not believe stories merely define a person, but that “the real purpose. Our oral tradition, which is both ceremonial sacred and ritualized through the storytelling. Contrary to Lucci-Cooper and Francis, another American Indian author Gerald Vizenor does not believe stories merely define a person, but that “the real purposes of the Blackfeet in 1870. Since the majority of his audience probably identifies themselves with mainstream culture, Welch shares the past of his people, the Blackfeet, with outsiders. He provides his readers with a detailed description of ceremonial events like the Sun Dance, incorporates elements of trickster discourse through Fools Crow’s interaction with Raven, and examines the painful history of the Blackfeet characterized by war, disease, and infractions within the tribe. More specifically, Welch bases the ending of Fools Crow on the historical event of the Marias River Massacre in the winter of 1870, where a small group of renegades targeted women and children, killing a total of 173 Blackfeet in hopes of halting the white settler’s raiding. Welch heard about this tragic event through the stories of tribal members, but on a more personal level, he learned about

Stories not only define American Indians by the way they play in the storytelling process – as shown through Fools Crow’s maturation and name changing – but stories actually create a world where American Indians can experience their traditions and connect with other tribal members and people outside their tribe.

Welch himself acts as the character who shares a part of himself and his culture with his readers by introducing his audience to the life of a Blackfeet in 1870. Since the majority of his audience probably identifies themselves with mainstream culture, Welch shares the past of his people, the Blackfeet, with outsiders. He provides his readers with a detailed description of ceremonial events like the Sun Dance, incorporates elements of trickster discourse through Fools Crow’s interaction with Raven, and examines the painful history of the Blackfeet characterized by war, disease, and infractions within the tribe. More specifically, Welch bases the ending of Fools Crow on the historical event of the Marias River Massacre in the winter of 1870, where a small group of renegades targeted women and children, killing a total of 173 Blackfeet in hopes of halting the white settler’s raiding. Welch heard about this tragic event through the stories of tribal members, but on a more personal level, he learned about