

**CHERISHED POSSESSIONS: THE MEANING
OF MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE
OKLAHOMA CHEROKEE**

By

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1972

**Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
May, 1993**

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OKLAHOMA CHEROKEE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A sincere thank you and appreciation is expressed to my thesis adviser, Dr. Margaret Weber. Her support and encouragement have helped to guide me through the last few years of my graduate studies. Thank you very much for being there for me, Dr. Weber.

Appreciation is also expressed to Dr. Margaret Weber and Dr. Lynn Sisler for the opportunity of having been appointed as a Graduate Research/ Teaching Assistant. This was a welcomed opportunity that made the last two years less difficult and expanded both by professional and personal growth. Gratitude is expressed to Dr. Sisler for being a supportive friend and the encouragement that she gave to me. A warm thanks to both Dr. Weber and Dr. Sisler.

A special thank you to my other committee members Dr. Sarah Kirby and Dr. Cheryl Farr-Popelka for sharing their experiences, expertise, and patience during the preparation of the final manuscript.

A very warm and sincere thank you to my fellow students and friends in thesis class, especially Connie Catsis and DeVonna Cervantes. They provided much support that was needed to complete this degree.

I want to express my gratitude to my dear friends who have been like my family and have given me a lot of support and help to complete my graduate studies.

And finally, a big thank you to my son Ross Comstock for all of his patience and understanding. He has been there for me and is proud of what I have been able to accomplish. Love and gratitude to you, my son.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Problem	3
Purpose and Objectives	3
Definitions	4
Assumptions	5
Limitations	5
Summary	6
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
Historical Background.....	10
Summary	13
III. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH.....	14
Introduction	14
Chapter Design.....	14
Sample	15
Instrumentation.....	16
Data Collection.....	17
IV. MANUSCRIPT - CULTURAL POSSESSIONS DEFINING ONE'S CULTURE	19
Abstract.....	20
Introduction	21
Statement of the Problem.....	21
Theoretical Background	22
Historical Background.....	24
Research Design	26
Findings and Discussion	27
Conclusions	32
References.....	35
V. CONCLUSIONS	39
Recommendations.....	40

Chapter	Page
REFERENCES	41
APPENDIXES	43
APPENDIX A - OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH	44
APPENDIX B - FINAL INSTRUMENT.....	46

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Categories of Household Possessions that Represent The Cherokee Culture	36
2.	Categories That Cherished Possessions Exemplify of the Cherokee Culture	37
3.	List of Family members that Cherished Possessions Remind Them Of.....	38

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

People keep and care for certain material possessions in special ways, some long after their instrumental value has passed. These "most cherished" possessions are important to maintain as their own for one reason or another; these are things which one would have an aversion to give up; things which would be difficult to replace -- in short -- things to which there has become a strong attachment.

These things may be of little monetary value and lack refinement, yet these possessions make one feel unique, special, connected with others in a culture, and/or a part of tradition of a heritage. People use material possessions as symbols to remind themselves of their past and what they are attempting to become. These possessions are the things that are associated with deep meaning (Wallendorf & Belk, 1987). Material possessions become part of the person because they are attached to aspects of what they are, what they have been, and/or what they are becoming.

The material objects to which one becomes attached are artifacts of certain self-developmental processes. Attachment can be described as a fundamentally social phenomenon, which evolves as part of symbolic interaction-based processes of self-development. Those processes, at a most fundamental level, involve learning to distinguish the self from others (individuation) as well as connecting the self with others (integration). The abilities to connect with others and to separate from others, each as needed,

are fundamental functions of the healthfully developing self (Altman, 1976). Material possessions serve as artifacts of these self-developmental processes.

Material possession attachments also play a self-stabilizing/self-consistency purpose (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Persons use material objects to carry the past into the present, maintain desired aspects of the present, and/or to anticipate the future. Individuation, integration, and temporal stabilization are closely tied with the development of material possession attachments. These concepts are part of maintaining a healthy sense of self.

An anthropological or sociological view might emphasize the group-level processes at work in transmitting cultural meanings or values through material objects (McCracken, 1986). Material goods can play an important and healthy function in the development of the individual selves and the continuity of culture and other shared meanings (Warriner, 1970).

Material goods that represent the essence of an entire group of people may become a cultural representation of that group not only to themselves, but to all those people who are outside the group. These material goods may become cherished possessions of the individuals of the group because they represent their culture. The individual and/or group may become the caretaker of the cherished possession and pass down the meaning of the possession to each generation and what motivation the culture has in regards to the cherished possession.

Native Americans have a different perception of possessing material goods as opposed to the European culture that came to this country about five hundred years ago with the arrival of Columbus. They did not set much value on personal belongings, except that when they had them they could give them away to those in their tribe that did not have them. A person could win the

respect of his fellow people by his generosity, by his giving (Deer, 1972). The desire to possess leads to physical and metaphysical fences. Unfencing possessions, by giving them away, releases the spirit and enables new gifts to come into the space that is left within the person.

Statement of the Problem

Many of the Native American cultures were relocated by the Europeans during the last five hundred years. The people that were relocated to distant lands, lost a sense of identity when they were forced to new lands, usually without most of their possessions (Woodward, 1976). By studying the cherished possessions that were kept, passed down through the generations, and became culturally significant, other people outside the culture can begin to understand the values and ideals of the culture. Instead of one culture being assimilated with another culture, both cultures could exist. The dominant culture might learn important values to incorporate into their system and learn to respect the culture of the Native Americans.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to determine what possessions might have been kept and cherished by the individual and/or the community to symbolize, motivate, and retain the meaning of the heritage of the culture. The Cherokee people were forced from their native land to what is now known as Oklahoma and many of their cherished possessions did not survive the long journey. If it is perceived that cherished possessions give a cultural social stabilization, status, and a sense of belonging, then what possessions are important to the Oklahoma Cherokee that possibly became storehouses of cultural meanings?

Specifically the objectives include:

1. To assess what the Cherokee people in Eastern Oklahoma consider as cherished possessions.
2. To understand the significance of the cherished possession to the heritage and culture of the Cherokee people (the meaning and motivation of the cherished possession).
3. To document the relationship between the cherished possession in regards to the daily life functions (i.e. occupation, religion, household, agriculture, hunting, sports, games, etc.).
4. To classify the types of cherished possessions by meaning, function, and aesthetics.

Definitions

The following definitions clarify the terms used in this study:

Culture - the sum total of the ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another (Urdang, L., 1968).
Culture is the man-made part of the environment (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952).

Society - an organized group of individuals engaging in social interaction and forming a unit bound together by their shared way of life or culture (Friedl & Whiteford, 1988).

Meaning - (as related to possessions)- what the possession represents and wishes to convey. That which is felt to be the inner significance of the possession, as well as the functional value and significance. The use of the material good, the right to control the use, and the acquisition process (Furby, 1978b).

Motivation - (as related to possessions)- the psychological and sociological incentive or inducement of a possession to make possible certain activities, convenience, or enjoyment. The positive affect for the object - something is an especially important possession because the owner really likes it (Furby, 1978b).

Possession - that which is owned as personal property. The control over aspects of one's environment and concept of self (Furby, 1978b).

Assimilation - replacing the first culture with the second culture, resulting in the loss of the first culture (Friedl & Whiteford, 1988).

Assumptions

The following assumptions are included in this study:

- 1. The people interviewed answered truthfully and accurately.**
- 2. The people interviewed are representative of a sample of Oklahoma Cherokee Native Americans.**

Limitations

The limitations affecting the results of this study include:

- 1. The precision of asking subjects to reflect about a culturally important cherished possession.**
- 2. Possible subject fatigue due to a potentially long interview.**
- 3. That the researcher is not a Native American and not a part of that culture, therefore respondents may not feel comfortable answering questions about their culture.**
- 4. The study is qualitative in nature and does not represent all Oklahoma Cherokee.**

Summary

Past research on cherished possessions shows the importance of material objects in a people's lives. By using the past research and applying it to the beliefs of Native Americans, specifically the Cherokee of Oklahoma, it is hoped that a greater understanding of their culture can be gained and that understanding can be used for the betterment of the relationship between two different cultures. When a country, such as the United States, is made up of a diversity of many different cultures, understanding each other for a positive coexistence is necessary in order to continue to be one of the strongest nations in the world.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies have been conducted on the meanings of cherished possessions and how they provide a useful avenue for aspects of experiences that people have of the reality of the self, the environment, the relationships that are most important to them, and the perpetuation of a culture. By tapping the meanings of possessions, people are given indirect access to aspects of a people's experiences of self and the "realities" that are relevant to them (Redfoot & Back, 1988). By understanding the meanings of possessions of a culture by another culture, it might give insight to understanding the culture itself. The ultimate goal, being that the two cultures understand each other, would be that they would be able to co-exist together without one culture totally destroying the heritage of the other culture. More than ever this generation needs to understand that everyone's entire world view is culturally influenced and it determines or influences how people perceive and understand the world.

Possessing material goods is necessary for the full development of all the powers of the individual and it is the most effective stimulus to the growth of character (Beaglehole, 1974). Different interests, different sentiments, different life histories, different cultural patterns all go to determine the nature of the objects which are desired as possessions and the attainment of which confers social distinction within the group to which the individual belongs. The type of goods constituting cherished possessions depends first upon the psychological make-up of man; second, upon the life conditions of the society to which the

individual belongs; and thirdly, upon more general economic factors such as rarity or scarcity of raw materials. In one study, it was found that cherished possessions largely functioned to provide historical continuity, comfort, and a sense of belongingness (Wapner, Demick, & Redondo, 1990). Another study stated the environment influences the degree to which people have private possessions (Furby, 1978a). The nature of cherished possessions is multidimensional for any culture.

People use possessions to remind themselves of parts of their past they wish to maintain or as symbols of what they are attempting to become. These are the things that are associated with deep meaning. Possessions become part of a person because they are attached to aspects of what they are, what they have been, and/or what they are becoming. Possessions become the storehouses of cultural meanings as well as the innovative possibilities for the idiosyncrasy of each person to come forth and be enjoyed, appreciated, and cared for (Schultz, 1989). Possessions serve in the process of social stabilization and individual development. Attachment is reflected in how the person or society thinks about the possession, how one feels about the possession, and how one behaves towards the possession in terms of how the possession is kept, displayed, and cared for. Many possessions are legitimized by cultural codes as defined by a people's view of the cultural environment that they create in their homes (Rochberg-Halton, 1984). Some possessions serve as vehicles for a conception of meaning that is shaped by the cultural system in which individuals have learned to live and function (Littrell, 1990).

Status can be a form of power. It can consist of the respect, consideration, and the envy of others. A person with high status sets the standards and norms by which others will act, and in this way embodies the goals of a culture. A

possession with status also acts as a template embodying these goals because it will cause people who believe in its status to act accordingly toward it and its owner who possesses the status. When a person confronts a thing, they usually do so in a context of cultural meanings that help them interpret the object. When they interpret a possession it acts as a sign, standing for something through creating an interpreting thought or emotion. Therefore it becomes possible to see how interaction with an object results in socialization. To use an object in a culturally appropriate way means to experience the culture directly (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The reasons people give for cherishing their household possessions reveal a picture of the meaning of their life.

To make an object that will become a cherished possession there is a creative process. Both the creative process and the product belong not only to the area of the person, but to at least three kinds of entities or levels of which the person is a part. These entities or levels include the culture, the humanistic organization, and the group or team of people (Magyari-Beck, 1990). A cherished possession created by a craftsman in a certain culture can be a reflection of the culture itself and therefore give insight into the culture to its meanings and motivations. Everything really comes down to the distinction between what a person has and what they are (Marcel, 1965).

The preceding paragraphs state how important one's cherished possessions can be to not only an individual, but to an entire culture. When a culture loses the crafts and the possessions that are important to them, the culture can lose its sense of identity. This can be a very important reason for one dominant culture to totally consume and control another culture. The dominant culture will project its way of life, crafts, ideas, and values on the less dominant culture, until the less dominant culture has been totally assimilated

into the more dominant culture. The resulting process will destroy the way of life, crafts, ideas, and values of the less dominant culture. Only the parts of less dominant culture that will benefit the dominant culture will be retained. Because they perceive them to be a more primitive society, the usual feeling of the more dominant culture is that the less dominant culture is inferior to them.

Historical Background

The Cherokee are one of the many people that are indigenous to the North American Continent. When the first Europeans came to this continent, the different peoples of this country had already established an economic system, trade routes, religious traditions, farming, housing, arts, crafts, necessary weapons, and a way of life. Within the groups, there was a sense of equality, the sharing of most products, social units were the community not just the family, and the environment was not over exploited.

The Cherokee had advanced from a hunting/gathering society to a society that was relatively advanced in a settled agricultural economy, with some of the people operating large plantations with the help of Black slaves, by the time of their removal in 1835. At that time the tribe was divided into two separate groups during the first removal. Major Ridge, his son John Ridge, and his nephew Elias Boudinot, believing that there was no further hope of survival as a nation in the east, signed the Treaty of New Echota and migrated to the lands allotted them west of Arkansas. The Ross party refused to go voluntarily, and in 1837 and 1838 they were forcibly rounded up by the United States army and sent on their way to join the western Cherokee (Washburn, 1988).

The uprooting of the Cherokee from the East and the transporting of them to new homes in the west was a traumatic ordeal. The hardships of the journey

were enormous, and many of the people died on the way. The Cherokee, whose major movement in 1838 was delayed by bad summer weather, were caught by the winter at the end of the journey, and their "Trail of Tears" became a symbol of the harshness of removal policy.

About 2000 people left voluntarily with Major Ridge during the first removal in 1835. There were still 15,000 Cherokees in the Georgia and North Carolina area. In 1838 5000 people were transported to the west to be joined by more of the tribe. General Scott was ordered to round up the Cherokee and detain them in stockades until the march west began. General Scott hoped that the round up would be humane, but there were reports of rape, robbery, and murder. General Scott respected John Ross, who led the Cherokee during the involuntary removal, and allowed Ross to organize the march. General Scott agreed to supply the people with sugar, coffee, and soap, much to the objection of fellow white people. Suffering and mortality ran very high. About 4000 people died in the stockades or en route to their new lands in Indian Territory. The people were moved by force from comfortable homes on their native lands and arrived in the west lacking every convenience and comfort. The fortunate people were those who were able to bring with them some of their cherished possessions. As they moved west, many of the people had to throw away their possessions to make room in their wagons for the sick and dying. Since they arrived in the west destitute and had very little, many were reduced to basic survival instincts for themselves and their children. Many of them had little or no possessions (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991).

Today the Native Americans consider the arrival of Columbus to these shores as an invasion. This seems reasonable considering the history of aggression the European people had in order to take over the lands and natural resources that had been controlled by the different Native American peoples.

The Cherokee People originally lived in the area of North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and parts of Kentucky and Alabama since the time of Columbus. The popular theory traces the prehistoric people back to the hunter/gatherers that came across the Bering Strait about 10,000 B.C. or earlier. Frank G. Speck, 1920, theorized that the Cherokee People might have originated in the Orinoco and Amazon River basins in South America. This theory is based upon the distinctive style of basket made by the Cherokee. This basket is different from the baskets made by the other southern tribes. The characteristic of rimming their baskets with a thin oak loop bound fast with a hickory fiber is one of the same characteristic employed by the people in the two South American basins. Both Cherokees and South Americans use the double-weave and the chain and diagonal pattern (Woodward, 1976).

W. H. Holmes, 1907, had a different theory of the Cherokee origin. He saw a similarity in the pottery of the Cherokee and the people of the Caribbean. The ancient Cherokee used primitive wooden paddles, stamped their pottery while damp with curves and scrolls as did the Caribbean people. He also learned that some of the island kinsmen had a name that resembled the Cherokees. These are two theories that trace the ancestry of the Cherokee through two of their cherished possessions - baskets and pottery (Woodward, 1976).

Pottery shards and preserved pieces of baskets help archaeologists to identify the people who were at a particular site by the motifs or style in which it is created. This also shows the importance of cherished possessions and how distinctive they are to a certain people.

Summary

Resentment by the European peoples built up as they saw other needs for the Cherokee homelands. One of the major needs was the desire for gold that was discovered in Georgia. The white communities turned on their Cherokee neighbors and the U.S. government decided it was time for the Cherokee to leave behind their farms, land, and homes. Those who hid in the mountains of North Carolina or agreed to exchange Cherokee citizenship for U.S. citizenship later emerged as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of Cherokee, North Carolina. The descendants of the survivors of the Trail of Tears (the John Ross group) make up today's Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

Difficult times have continued to follow the Cherokee people since their removal. During the depression of the 1930's the U.S. government enacted a policy to relocate the Cherokee from tribal areas to the urban areas of the United States. Many people found themselves in urban slums with a lack of basic needs. During the 1970's the Cherokees' situation improved because of self rule and economic programs. Today the Cherokee still have a rich tribal heritage. This study will consider what cherished possessions were important enough to the Cherokee people to carefully guard for preservation on a long and difficult journey from 1835 to the present that would have helped maintain the culture and heritage of the people who were forcibly removed from their native lands in the east as well as those who were moved again after they were settled in the west.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

The literature review shows evidence that cherished possessions are important to a society to perpetuate the culture and heritage of the people. This study is a qualitative research study using a Native American culture that has retained their heritage through several removals from their original native lands. The Cherokees have become synonymous with the "Trail of Tears". The people were forced west to the land known as Indian Territory that was given to them by the United States government in exchange for taking their lands in the east. The material possessions that were protected and retained by the people during their long hard journey and subsequently passed down from generation to generation may have helped to continue the heritage of the Cherokee culture that exists today. This study explores cherished possessions of the Cherokee household today. This chapter explains and describes the selection of sample, the development of the instrument, the method of data collection and the data analysis.

Chapter Design

The data gathered in qualitative research are descriptive in nature, because the study seeks oral histories on cherished possessions that have been important to the Cherokee people over a long period of time. The study

utilizes two research designs, historical and field research, and combines both of them to obtain the needed information. The historical method reconstructs the past of the Cherokee people in order to find out what cherished possessions were protected and retained by the people. The field research method is used to explore the current status of possessions from the Cherokee people that are descendants of those who were on the "Trail of Tears" by interviewing them.

Sample

An appropriate sample for field research is a purposive sample, those people that will best understand the idea of the study (Babbie, 1986). For the desired results of this study, the people, near 40 years of age or older and descendants of those who were part of the removal and forced on the "Trail of Tears", were chosen for the interviews. It was perceived that these people would be aware of what possessions were passed down through the generations and cherished by the Cherokee that perpetuated the heritage of their people in the new land.

The size of the sample suggested for a historic field research is a total of 40 participants utilizing six to eight persons in each focus group in the data collection process (Morgan, 1988). A total of 40 participants utilizing five to six focus sessions will compose the sample. Since interviews are more time consuming and inconvenient than other instrumentations, smaller sample size is acceptable and more appropriate for in-depth studies such as in a historical field research (Isaac & Michael, 1987).

The Congress of the United States has never defined Indian and how they are members of certain tribes. This has been left to each of the individual tribal governments and federal bureaucrats. It is an impossibility to develop an all-

purpose administrative definition and many agencies of the federal government, including the census bureau, rely on self-identification to define the Indian population. The Cherokee define their people in the Constitution of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma as "all members of the Cherokee Nation must be citizens as proven by reference to the Dawes Commission Rolls". The Dawes Commission Rolls was a result of legislation in the late nineteenth century. It was to encourage Indians to join the agricultural labor force as a way of hastening their assimilation into the white man's world. Many of the Cherokee did not register because they did not want it to be known that they were Indian. About eight of the people interviewed were not registered on the rolls, but considered themselves Cherokee by blood. Life was very hard on the Indian people and they tried to spare their children of the hard life by downplaying their Indian heritage. At the present time there are 136,530 members of the Cherokee Nation headquartered in Oklahoma and 9,844 members of the Eastern Band headquartered in North Carolina (Cherokee Nation, 1992).

Instrumentation

The information was gathered by means of an unstructured interview which has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order. The interview becomes a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent, who ideally does most of the talking (Babbie, 1986).

Most people would rather talk to a person than respond to an impersonal questionnaire. The interview has the potential to be a sensitive way for obtaining reliable and valid data. The interview is considered an artful process,

one in which an interviewer can make it easier for respondents to use communication to forward the goals of scientific understanding as well as serve as a rewarding process through directed conversation (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1985).

The advantages of the interview are that it permits greater depth, permits probing to obtain more complete data, and makes it possible to establish and maintain rapport with the respondent (Isaac & Michael, 1987). Questions are worded for effective communication between the interviewer and the respondent. The respondent should understand the purpose of each question that the interviewer asks of them. The interview will allow the researcher to access the information needed from the purposive sample to answer the objective of the study.

Data Collection

The data were collected through the use of interviews starting in the fall of 1992. Small focus groups were assembled at several places in the town of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, which is the headquarters for the Cherokee Nation. All the places either had Cherokee people living there, working there or both. They were eldercare homes, the Cherokee Heritage Center, the Cherokee Nation Headquarters, the Cherokee Tribal Court, Tsa-La-Gi Library, and the Cherokee Nation gift shop. These were perceived to be appropriate places to interview the Cherokee people in focus groups about cherished possessions they may have that represent the Cherokee culture.

The data were recorded by the researcher during the interviews. The unstructured interview with the open-ended questions allowed each individual to openly express what information they know. The person is not limited to a

pre-arranged response (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1985). The open-ended question allows for greater depth and more authentic information from the person being interviewed. This technique was good for the stimulation of responses of the people in the focus groups.

During the pretest of Native American students at Oklahoma State University, it was found that people younger than 35 years of age did not know or have knowledge of what possessions might be cherished. The researcher did not collect demographics in order to put the respondents at ease with the interviewer. Though age was not specifically asked of the people, the researcher did choose older people (late 30's and older) to participate in the focus groups.

CHAPTER IV

**CULTURAL POSSESSIONS DEFINING
ONE'S CULTURE**

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MANUSCRIPT FOR PUBLICATION

NORTH AMERICAN CULTURE

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine if the most cherished possessions, the ones maintained and kept in order to pass down to future generations, do relate to the meaning and the motivation of a culture. The Native American people have a diversified background. Some Native Americans were nomadic hunting/gathering societies, while others were settled into a life of farming. The Cherokee people, both today and historically, are farmers and the possessions they cherish reflects a people who established permanent homes and farmed the land they live on.

Data were collected through interviews with individuals of the Cherokee Nation who live in eastern Oklahoma. Most of the items that have been cherished and passed down are important to the home and to their religion. The study did reveal that the items most important to them did help maintain the meaning and the personal identity of their culture.

Introduction

Some people keep and care for certain material possessions, after their useful value has passed. These items are cherished possessions that may have little monetary value, but may make the owner feel unique, connected with a culture, and/or a part of tradition of a heritage. Possessions can remind their owner of their past and what they may be attempting to become.

Anthropologists and sociologists emphasize the group-level processes at work in transmitting cultural meanings or values through material objects (McCracken, 1986). Material goods are all that is left of a prehistoric and some historic cultures to analyze in an archaeological study. Material goods that represent the essence of an entire group of people may become a cultural representation of that group.

Native Americans have a different perception of possessing material goods than the European cultures that arrived in this country about 500 years ago. Personal belongings do not have much value except for what they can do for the group. The native American people give away personal possessions to win the respect of their fellow people by showing generosity (Deer, 1972). The giving away of a possession releases the spirit and enables new gifts to come into the space that is left behind.

Statement of the Problem

Many Native American peoples were moved from their native lands by the European colonists and immigrants over the last 500 years. The people, who were removed from their native lands, lost a sense of identity when they were forced to new lands, usually without most of their material goods or cherished possessions (Woodward, 1976). Research of cherished possessions which are

kept, passed down through the generations and become culturally significant, helps other people outside the culture begin to understand the values and ideals of the culture. Instead of one culture being assimilated within another culture, both cultures could co-exist. The dominant culture might learn important values to incorporate into their system and learn to respect the culture of the Native Americans and Native Americans can in return share some of their heritage and way of life.

Theoretical Background

Previous studies have been conducted on the meaning of cherished possessions that provide insight to the self (Redfoot & Back, 1988), environment (Furby, 1978a), the most important relationships (Beaglehole, 1974), and the culture of a person (Wapner, Demick, & Redondo, 1990). By tapping the meanings of possessions, the people are given indirect access to a person's experiences of self and the "realities" that are relevant to them (Redfoot & Back, 1988). The meaning of possessions, if better understood, may allow two cultures to understand each other better and co-exist together.

The possession of material objects is necessary for the full development of all the powers of the individual and is an effective stimulus for character growth (Beaglehole, 1974). The interests, sentiments, life histories, and cultural patterns determine which objects are desired as possessions that will not only provide growth for the individual, but continue the heritage of the people. Obtaining these items gives a social distinction within their group. In one study, cherished possessions were found to provide historical continuity, comfort, and a sense of belongingness (Wapner, Demick, & Redondo, 1990). In another study, the environment influences the degree to which people have private

possessions. The environment can minimize what possessions are kept and makes them even more special to the culture and personal growth of the individuals. Cherished possessions are multi-dimensional for any culture.

Possessions are associated with deep meaning because they are attached to various aspects of what a person is, has been, or is becoming. They become storehouses of cultural meanings for each person to come forth and be enjoyed, appreciated, and cared for (Schultz, 1989). Many possessions are legitimized by cultural codes and the environment they create in a person's home (Rochberg-Halton, 1984) and they serve as vehicles for a conception of meaning shaped by the cultural system in which an individual has learned to live and function (Littrell, 1990).

A possession can be a form of status for a person and will cause people who believe in its status to act accordingly to it and its owner. An object is usually confronted by a person in a context of cultural meanings to help interpret the object. It then becomes possible to see how interaction with an object results in socialization. To use the object in a culturally appropriate way causes one to experience the culture directly (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The reasons people give for cherishing their household possessions provides insight into how individuals perceive their lives and its meaning.

There is a creative process to transforming an object into a cherished possession. A cherished possession, created by a craftsman in a certain culture, can be a reflection of the culture itself and give insight into the culture to its meanings and motivations. Everything really comes down to the distinction between what a person has and what they are (Marcel, 1965).

As has been stated, cherished possessions are important to the individual and to the entire culture. When a culture loses the crafts and possessions that

are important to them, the individuals within the culture can lose its sense of identity. A dominant culture can consume and control another culture by projecting its way of life, crafts, ideas, and values on the subservient culture. The subservient culture may be assimilated into the other culture and lose their identity because their way of life is considered inferior and is not adopted into the more dominant culture.

Historical Background

The prehistoric people of the Cherokee most likely came across the Bering Strait about 10,000 B.C. or earlier. This is the most accepted theory of origin for the people, some who became the Cherokee, that were the first population of the North American continent. There are two other theories of origin of the Cherokee. Frank G. Speck in 1920 felt the people originated in Orinoco and Amazon River basins of South America. This second theory is based on the technique of both peoples rimming their baskets with a thin oak loop bound fast with a hickory fiber. Both groups use the double-weave and the chain and diagonal pattern (Woodward, 1976).

W.H. Holmes in 1907 had a third theory of origin and thought the Cherokee and the people of the Caribbean came from the same background because of the similarity of the pottery. Both the Cherokee and the Caribbean people use wooden paddles and stamp their pottery while damp with curves and scrolls. Also some of the island kinsmen had names that resembled Cherokee.

The last two theories of origin trace the Cherokee through two categories of cherished possessions, pottery and baskets (Woodward, 1976). Pottery and baskets display design characteristics associated with certain people and their cultures. Design motifs are used by archaeologists to identify the people who

were at a particular site. The cherished possessions of a culture are very important and become an identifying characteristic of the people of the culture.

The Cherokee people are indigenous to the North American continent in the area known today as North Carolina. They progressed from a hunting/gathering society to an advanced agricultural society by the time of their removal in 1835. The discovery of gold within their territory brought about the immediate removal of the Cherokee people from their lands. At this time, the Cherokee were divided into two separate groups. One group was led by Major Ridge, his son John Ridge, and nephew Elias Boudinot. Major Ridge's group signed The Treaty of New Echota because they felt there was no hope of survival in the east on their native lands. About 2000 of people were moved peacefully to land west of Arkansas now known as Oklahoma. The second group known as the Ross party was forcibly rounded up by the United States Army and marched on what is now known as the "Trail of Tears" to lands in the west.

As many as 4000 people, who were of the Ross party, died in the stockades and en route to the new territory, then called Indian Territory now known as Oklahoma. Many people were forced to leave their possessions behind. Those who began the journey with some of their possessions had to throw them out of the wagons to make room for the sick and dying. When the Cherokee arrived in the Indian Territory, they were destitute and had very little and were reduced to survival instincts for themselves and their children (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991).

The Europeans immigrants desired the native lands of the Cherokee. One of the major reasons was the desire for gold. These people and the U.S. government decided to move the Cherokee from their homes. When the Cherokee realized they were to be removed from their native land, the people

split into the two groups, Major Ridge's party and the Ross party. Cherokee who hid in the mountains of North Carolina or agreed later to exchange Cherokee citizenship for U.S. citizenship formed the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians. The descendants of the survivors of the Trail of Tears make up today's Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

The Cherokee have lived through many difficult times. During the depression of the 1930's, the U.S. government enacted a policy to relocate the Cherokee from their tribal lands to the urban areas of the United States. The relocation policy meant that again the Cherokee were removed from their homes and some personal possessions were left behind. Many found themselves in urban slums with a lack of basic life. During the 1970's the Cherokees' situation improved because of self rule and economic programs. Today, the Cherokee have retained a rich tribal heritage.

If it is the perception that cherished possessions give a cultural social stabilization, status, and a sense of belonging, then what possessions are important to the Oklahoma Cherokee that possibly became storehouses of cultural meanings? The purpose of the study is to determine what possessions might have been kept and cherished by the Cherokee individual and/or community to symbolize, motivate, and retain the meaning of the heritage of the culture.

Research Design

Field research was selected for this qualitative study. A purposive sample was utilized for the field research, because these people will best understand the idea of the study (Babbie, 1986). The data was gathered by an unstructured interview with open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted with

small focus groups made up of people from eastern Oklahoma who are Cherokee. Tahlequah, Oklahoma was used as the base because the Cherokee Nation has its tribal government headquarters located here. The focus groups were set up with the permission of the people who were in charge of the eldercare homes and the employees with their superiors at the government agencies and businesses. The focus groups were kept to a small size, ranging from two to six people, in order to keep the discussion more personal for the participants. The size of the sample suggested for a field study is a total of 40 participants when using focus groups (Morgan, 1988).

The data were recorded by the researcher taking notes as the people were interviewed. Tape recorders and cameras were not used because some of the participants did not feel as free to express themselves.

Findings and Discussion

Of the 40 people interviewed, 32 were registered on the Cherokee Register as established by the Dawes Commission Rolls. Eight of the people defined themselves as Cherokee by blood, because their families were never registered on the rolls. Twenty three of the people knew their ancestors had come to Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears". The next question was to find out if there was an ancestor on the "Trail of Tears" in 1835 and if so who was that relative. There were 16 each of great great grandmothers and grandfathers of the people interviewed that were on the forced march to the west. Eleven of the people interviewed were not sure who the relative was that was on the Trail. The research established that most of the ancestors were not able to bring any cherished possessions with them from North Carolina. Fifteen of those interviewed stated that definitely no possessions were brought with them.

Sixteen of the people said that they were not aware of any possessions that were brought on the "Trail of Tears". The few items that were brought by some of the ancestors were mainly household possessions with religious and personal possessions being the next most important cherished possessions that the people were able to carry with them. One woman in her early forties reminisced about a silver necklace inlaid with jade in the shape of a large bird. This necklace is over four generations old and is now kept by her aunt, who only wears it at stomp dances. She is very proud of her family, because her family were former slaves of a Cherokee family in North Carolina. The two families had intermarried and after coming to Oklahoma, the Cherokee family made her family freemen. She stated that Chief Ross Swimmer in recent years had removed the freemen from the tribal roles.

The participants were queried in the focus groups about the household possessions which were of major importance to them that represented their culture. The major household possessions that have been cherished by the forty people breaks down into eighteen categories. Of the categories religious and ceremonial items (both Native American and their adopted Christian religion) was most frequently mentioned with several household categories being the next most mentioned. Even though land and language are not considered household items, they were a very important possession to the people, thus were included.

Insert Table 1 about here

In response to the question, How were the possessions important?, there were "six" categories of responses. Twenty four of the people felt that the most important possessions to them were personal items. Nineteen of the people

listed that household items were the most important items to them. Basket-making is still a tradition with the Cherokee that live in North Carolina, but the Cherokee that live in Oklahoma did not continue the tradition on a large scale. A female respondent, about mid fifties, was very proud of her accomplishment of recently becoming a master of basket making. She has been studying for about 20 years with the elders in her tribe. No one in her family had retained these skills.

Most of the possessions that the people cherished have been inherited from the previous generation. Religious items were identified eleven times as the most cherished possessions. Weapons were identified three times. Thirty-seven people stated that the cherished possessions had been passed down to succeeding generations and were still cherished today. This places an important emphasis on these possessions. Only two said the items were not passed down and one did not know what happened to the item. Three of the respondents were raised not by their parents, but were forced to go to "white man's" schools far from their homes. They felt this destroyed their family traditions and values for them personally. They lost contact with their families for many years and felt they had lost an important part of their heritage.

The most important way the respondents perceived that the possessions exemplified the Cherokee culture was that they promoted traditional values and ways, which was stated by over half of the people. Religion, history, and their homes were other ways that the possessions related back to the Cherokee culture.

Insert Table 2 about here

Cherished possessions have strong memories attached to them and those memories link the individual to their past culture. All 40 of the people felt that the possessions reminded them of past events in their lives.

Thirty eight felt that the possessions reminded them of who they use to be and tied them with a Cherokee past. Two of the people felt that there was not a strong significance between the possession and who they used to be and their Cherokee past. Over half of the people felt the possessions made a statement of who they are now, while the rest felt the possessions made somewhat of a statement, but not a strong statement. Half of the people felt their possessions were unique to just themselves and their family, while the other half of the people felt the possessions were common to the entire group of Cherokee people.

Almost all of the people interviewed said that the possession reminded them of a family member that was important to them. Only one person stated that it did not remind them of a family member. The most mentioned relatives were mother (ten times) and grandfather (nine times). The least mentioned relatives were parents, great great grandmother, great grandparents, great great grandfather and a mid-wife (all mentioned one time by those interviewed). One man, who is in his mid 70's, was very proud to have the medicine book that had been passed down through the male members of his family. This book reminded him of many members of his family because it recorded their births, their deaths and how they died. He had a broad smile on his face as he talked of who died of disease, who was hung, and who was shot. He is proud of his family, not only what they accomplished but also how they died. He now lives in a wheelchair, the same wheelchair his father spent his last years in. He is proud of the wheelchair because it was his father's. The wheelchair is wood

with a wicker seat and back. It has had many years of use, but he will not trade it for a new more comfortable wheelchair.

Insert Table 3 about here

The Cherokee people have used items brought in by the European immigrants to this country even before 1835 when their native lands were still in North Carolina. Their homes also had traditional Cherokee possessions. This is why the most cherished possessions can almost equally have or have little effect on the Cherokee traditions. A little over half of the people felt that the possessions carried on a Cherokee tradition in their family. The rest of the people felt that the possessions did not have too much of an impact on Cherokee tradition in their family. Most of the people interviewed stated that the possessions made them proud of their Cherokee heritage and the Cherokee traditions. Very few of the people did not know how they related to their heritage. One woman (40 years old) was very proud that her son, when possessions were passed down to him, regained his pride in his family and his people.

Inherited cherished possessions that are lost or destroyed can never be replaced by new ones that have the same meanings or feelings to the owner. Most of the people interviewed felt the possessions were important to just the immediate family, while just a few thought the possessions were important to all of the Cherokee people.

Irreplaceable was the word used by half of the people interviewed to describe the impact of losing any of the cherished possessions. "Gone", "Only one left-important", "Would be very sad and would be missed very much", and "A very big loss". were the other remarks mentioned by some of the respondents

about the impact of losing these possessions. Very few of the people interviewed felt that losing the possession would not be any kind of a loss. One elderly woman who did not have the possession anymore stated that she would always have the memories that were tied to the item, but it could never be replaced.

Conclusions

Today as well as in the past, many of the Cherokee people are farmers and like many of the native American people are very family oriented and have a strong religious background. The possessions, named by the 40 people interviewed, that are considered very important to them support the heritage and culture of the Cherokee people. They give insight to how important the religious possessions are, the type of possessions that make up a home, and the importance of their personal possessions.

Understanding what material possessions are important to a group of people, can give insight to the meaning and motivation of a group of people. Knowing what possessions are cherished by one group of people allows another group to better understand each other and to help them to co-exist. Countries are no longer made up of just one culture. Today most of the countries on this earth have several different cultures trying to co-exist with each other. All people need to be interculturally competent and understanding each other is very important for this to be successful.

This research suggests that there is a need for more studies with the various cultures that exist in this country as well as all of the other countries on this planet. Indigenous people to the country as well as the newer arriving cultures to that country could be studied. Recommendations for further study

should include a larger sample of the Cherokee people. Further research completed with the many different cultures in this country and other countries might continue to show that what possessions we save and cherish help an individual relate back to their culture. The findings from the different studies would start building a base of cherished possessions and how they relate to the meaning and personal identity of each of the cultures.

This study supports the research by Redfoot and Back (1988), that personal possessions do provide an insight to one's self. In response to the question, "Do the cherished possessions make a statement of who you are now?", all but four people responded very positively that the possessions did represent who they were now. Beaglehole's research (1974) stated that cherished possessions were a stimulus for character growth. This study supports this, because most of the people interviewed felt that their possessions helped them to carry on a Cherokee tradition of family and home.

The study also supports Wapner, Demick, & Redondo (1990). The historical continuity, comfort, and belongingness are all exemplified through carrying on a Cherokee tradition and the pride of the individual who feels connected to the culture through a cherished possession. Schultz research (1989) stated that cherished possessions become storehouses of cultural meanings. This study also supports this through the strong ties the possessions have to the tradition of the Cherokee culture. The Cherokee are very family oriented and their possessions become a tangible part of their homes to create an atmosphere of Cherokee traditions to help raise the family was one of the concepts found in this study. This supports the research of Rochberg-Halton (1984) by legitimizing the cultural codes, the cultural environment they create in their homes. Littrell's research (1990) dealt with the idea that possessions were a vehicle for a conception of meaning shaped by the cultural system. This study

also supports this because the possessions carried on the traditions by several generations of Cherokee people.

Even though denied most of their possessions when the Cherokee people were removed from North Carolina in 1835 on the "Trail of Tears", they have developed a strong sense of cultural identity. The lack of possessions to a people who once had many possessions made life in Oklahoma very hard. They acquired new possessions that were similar to the one's that were important to them and gave them cultural meanings to be passed down to the next generations. Furby (1978a) found that a settled society acquired many more possessions than a mobile society. The Cherokee in a short period of time went from an affluent settled society with many possessions to a society that lost almost everything. Today the Cherokee have regained their traditions and are a settled society with many cherished possessions in their homes to reflect their traditions.

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TABLE 1

CATEGORIES OF HOUSEHOLD POSSESSIONS THAT REPRESENT
THE CHEROKEE CULTURE

Possessions	Respondents
Ceremonial & Religious Items	11
Bedding, Quilts & Blankets	10
Kitchen, China, & Glass Items	10
Pictures	8
Land	7
Language	5
Furniture Items	5
Jewelry & Clothing	5
Weapons	5
Baskets	3
Spinning Wheel	3
Written Documents	3
Dolls	2
Weaving Loom	1
Farming Implements	1
Animals	1
Carved Figures	1
Wheelchair	1

TABLE 2

**CATEGORIES THAT CHERISHED POSSESSIONS EXEMPLIFY
OF THE CHEROKEE CULTURE**

Exemplification of Culture	Respondents
Traditional Ways & Values	22
Religion	9
History of the People	5
Home	4
Does Not Apply	4
Cherokee Clan	1
Cherokee Motifs	1
Wealth	1

TABLE 3

LIST OF FAMILY MEMBERS THAT CHERISHED
POSSESSIONS REMIND THEM OF

Family Member	Respondents
Mother	10
Grandfather	9
All Members	7
Grandmother	7
Great Grandmother	4
Grandparents	3
Aunts	2
Father	2
Great Grandfather	2
Parents	1
Mid-wife	1
Great Great Grandmother	1
Great Grandparents	1
Great Great Grandfather	1

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This study helps to support the previous research that cherished possessions do help state who we are, identify the culture that we come from, and connect us with the past. The concept of possessions for Native Americans is different from the Anglo-American concept. The value of owning possessions for Native American cultures is the respect they gain by their people when the possessions are given away to others in the tribe. The Anglo-American cultures tend to get their pride by how many possessions they can collect and keep. These are two opposite conceptions of how different cultures perceive their possessions.

It is hoped that by understanding different aspects of what items are collected, cherished and passed down through the generations more insight will be gained into that culture. Anyone outside the culture could study these aspects and learn about the culture. Before they were removed from their native lands in the North Carolina area to Oklahoma, the Cherokee were farmers, family oriented, religious, and had established homes with many possessions. The removal displaced the people, their way of life, and many lost their possessions. Today the Cherokee have rebuilt their heritage and it is very similar to the heritage and values the people always had.

Recommendations

1. Demographic information might be useful for comparison of information. Age would be the most important information to obtain. This might be useful when grouping the cherished possessions.
2. Video taping or audio taping would capture special facial expressions, costumes and actual phrasing of sentences. The researcher does need to make the respondents feel comfortable with the tapings.
3. Studying the cherished possessions of the Cherokee people in North Carolina today and comparing them with the cherished possessions of the Cherokee people in Oklahoma would provide insight as to whether the two sets of people have retained the same values or if they are different.
4. A Native American researcher might be able to ask the same questions and receive answers that are different because he/she would not be considered as an outsider. These possessions might hold deeper meaning to the tribe and the Cherokee people may not want to discuss them with a person outside of their culture.

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APPENDIXES

1. Appendix A: List of participants
2. Appendix B: Interview schedule
3. Appendix C: Interview guide
4. Appendix D: Interview transcript
5. Appendix E: Interview schedule

APPENDIX A

**OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH**

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Proposal Title: POSSESSION RELATED TO MAINTAINING TH MEANING AND
MOTIVATION OF THE CULTURE

Principal Investigator: MARGARET WEBER/ CAROLYN COMSTOCK

Date: 8-27-92 IRB # HE-93-007

 This application has been reviewed by the IRB and

Processed as: Exempt Expedite Full Board Review
 Renewal or Continuation

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):

Approved Deferred for Revision
 Approved with Provision Disapproved

Approval status subject to review by full Institutional Review Board at
 next meeting, 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month.

 Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reason for Deferral or
 Disapproval:

Signature: _____

Maria S. Pilley
 Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

FINAL INSTRUMENT

Cherished Possessions and Their Relation to the Heritage of the Cherokee People Interview.

- 1. Are you listed in the Cherokee Register established by the Dawes Commission Rolls?**
- 2. Was there an ancestor that came to Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears"? If so, how were they related to you?**
- 3. What material possessions, if any, were they able to keep with them when they came to Oklahoma that helped maintain the Cherokee culture?**
- 4. What household possession is of major importance to you which represents your Cherokee culture?**
- 5. How were these important to them, such as religious, household, occupational, personal, or other?**
- 6. Have any of these items been passed down to the succeeding generations and are still cherished today by your family or you?**
- 7. How do these cherished possessions exemplify the Cherokee culture?**
- 8. Do they remind you of past events in your life or in the lives of other family members?**
- 9. Do they remind you of who you used to be and tie in with the memories of the past?**
- 10. Do these cherished possessions make a statement of who you are now?**
- 11. Are they unique and make you feel unique or how common are they to every Cherokee family?**
- 12. Do they remind you of a family member that is important to you and who do they remind you of?**
- 13. Do these cherished possessions help you carry on a Cherokee tradition in your family?**
- 14. How do they make you feel proud of your heritage.**
- 15. Are these cherished possessions important to most of the Cherokee people or just your immediate family?**
- 16. What would be the impact to you, your family, and/or the Cherokee Nation if these items were lost or stolen?**

VITA

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