

Masthead Logo

## The Qualitative Report

Volume 19 | Number 14

Article 2

4-7-2014

# The Kodiak Study: Narratives of Diversity and Acceptance on the American Frontier

Steve Drewry

Capital University, [sdrewry@capital.edu](mailto:sdrewry@capital.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

### Recommended APA Citation

Drewry, S. (2014). The Kodiak Study: Narratives of Diversity and Acceptance on the American Frontier. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(14), 1-23. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss14/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

# The Kodiak Study: Narratives of Diversity and Acceptance on the American Frontier

## Abstract

This article describes a qualitative study of diversity and acceptance on the American frontier comprised of interview data and ethnographic observations gleaned from a sample of residents on Kodiak Island, Alaska. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to select the study population, after which individual interviews with people who are members of various cultural groups were completed by the researcher. Also included in the study are elements of anthropological investigation, historical context and thick description. The data were analyzed using (primarily) narrative and thematic analysis placed in the cultural context of life on Kodiak Island. Findings suggest that multiple cultures can peacefully co-exist, and in fact co-create, a social milieu that is greater than the sum of its parts while maintaining independent cultural integrity.

## Keywords

Alaska, Kodiak Island, Cultural Diversity, Oral History, Ethnography, Thematic Analysis

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to offer his abundant thanks to Mr. Jerry Bongen, of Kodiak Island, Alaska, for his great assistance in conducting this study. He's the best wingman a researcher ever had. Thanks also to the Gerhold Foundation, for a grant award that helped make this research possible. Finally, many thanks to Dan Wulff for his expert editorial assistance in helping to make this work stronger and fit for human consumption.

## The Kodiak Study: Narratives of Diversity and Acceptance on the American Frontier

Steve Drewry  
Capital University, Columbus, Ohio USA

---

*This article describes a qualitative study of diversity and acceptance on the American frontier comprised of interview data and ethnographic observations gleaned from a sample of residents on Kodiak Island, Alaska. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to select the study population, after which individual interviews with people who are members of various cultural groups were completed by the researcher. Also included in the study are elements of anthropological investigation, historical context and thick description. The data were analyzed using (primarily) narrative and thematic analysis placed in the cultural context of life on Kodiak Island. Findings suggest that multiple cultures can peacefully co-exist, and in fact co-create, a social milieu that is greater than the sum of its parts while maintaining independent cultural integrity. Keywords: Alaska, Kodiak Island, Cultural Diversity, Oral History, Ethnography, Thematic Analysis*

---

This study began as a result of my observation that, on Kodiak Island, Alaska, there exists a variety of cultural influences, each disparate but out of which grows an island culture that works. That is, Kodiak Islanders appear to have found a way to make room for and respect individual cultures while simultaneously creating a larger society which integrates aspects of each culture into something that exceeds the sum of its parts. Such a synergy may have important implications for diversity studies in the lower forty-eight states of the contiguous United States (and perhaps other places in the world), especially in an age of near instantaneous global communication wherein, ironically, poor communication is rampant.

Because I have elected to tell this research narrative in an organic and unfolding, almost story-like fashion, I think it necessary to preface it with a clear initial statement of purpose to facilitate the reader's easy understanding. While perhaps unorthodox, this tactic may help me tell this story as it actually happened.

My research question was a simple one: How can diverse peoples, having come together in a small, somewhat isolated place, manage to not only get along, but maintain specific cultural identities and, indeed, co-create a unique society that fosters growth and adaptation (Buckley, 1967)? The scholarly literature is replete with studies of abstract cultural diversity, the struggles modern societies have in tightrope-walking between "salad bowl" viewpoints of cultural integration, wherein the separate elements come together to create something new, and traditional melting pot theories (Healey, 2014; Schaefer, 2014; Sue & Sue, 2008). The problem for researchers may be that such an either/or construction of the issue obscures both/and solutions that satisfy the cultural needs of diverse populations while simultaneously feeding the integrative needs of a larger, expansive society which requires the fresh air and ideas of open systems (von Bertalanffy, 1950, 1971). It may be that at least a partial resolution of this problem resides on a little island in the north Pacific...

*Forty-five minutes south by southwest from Anchorage by air, just past the Valley of 10,000 Smokes, you know you are coming into Kodiak when the dull gray fog outside the plane window suddenly turns spruce green. It's a good thing, too, that as soon as you touch down, the pilot lays on the brakes so hard it pitches you forward in your seat, because at the end of a snub-nosed runway barely the length of an aircraft carrier sits Barometer Mountain, waiting for him to make a mistake that will cost you your life.*

*It's happened before, several years back, and there's a crashed F-15 scar halfway up the mountainside to prove it.*

*The plane slows and the props stop spinning. That's it. You're down. The mountain doesn't eat today. But already you know that in Alaska, the margin for error is slim.*

It wasn't my first trip to Alaska, or to Kodiak Island for that matter. I'd been here before about three years ago to fish king salmon and halibut and visit a couple of friends. That time, I'd noticed there were people from all over the Pacific basin living and working on Kodiak, from the Philippines, Mexico, El Salvador, various Pacific Islands, plus several Alaskan Native tribes and of course North American immigrants from all over the lower forty-eight.

That time I'd gotten so caught up in the beauty, the wilderness and the fishing that I was simply awash and agog in the experience of it. After all, Alaska is nothing if not spectacular, and Kodiak is an alluring gem of an island in the north Pacific that has a way of either driving you off or making you fall in love (Sturgulewski, 2002). Alas, the love bug bit me, and now I was returning like a wayward fool seeking forgiveness and redemption for not giving myself over to her fully and completely when I first had the chance.

Kodiak Island has been accepting strangers for over eight thousand years (Clifford, 2004; Crowell, Steffian, & Pullar, 2001). First came the people known as Konyags, then Aleuts, followed by the Russians, then more Aleuts after the Russians had done their best to kill off the Konyags (it seems the Konyags were less than enthusiastic about Russia's civilizing influence), eventually Americans from down below, and in the rush of modern times, people from all over the greater Pacific Rim (Chaffin, Krieger, & Rostad, 1983; Langdon, 2002). Now, Kodiak and the surrounding islands of the Kodiak Archipelago are home to the Alutiiqs (modern Konyags), and a hodgepodge of immigrants with seemingly two things in common: a love of fishing and the need for a fresh start (Mason, 1996; Pullar, 1992; Shennen, 2009).

### **The Natural Habitat**

Kodiak Island sits in the Gulf of Alaska, hard to ignore, since it is the largest island in a state full of islands. In fact, Kodiak is the second largest island in the United States (Department of Commerce, State of Alaska, 2010). The climate and terrain are curious: the upper third of the island is temperate rain forest, much like America's Pacific Northwest, with a relatively narrow bandwidth of temperatures. Never too hot in summer, nor frigid in winter, northern Kodiak can be windy, foggy and wet. And very green, with a mountainous, rocky coastline whose fjords jut into the Pacific like arthritic fingers from a stretched out hand.

Kodiak's rain forests are covered with Sitka spruce trees; no other conifer has migrated from the mainland. Great globs of moss hang from the branches of the Sitka spruce

in the forests of northern Kodiak, which give the woods a ghostly and ancient feel. Deep in the woods and away from the settlements, around each bend of the trail you expect to see velociraptors clopping through the ferns and devil's club that cover the forest's floor. It is primeval.

As you travel south into the National Wildlife Refuge that encompasses most of the island and is home to the famous bears of Kodiak, the land spreads out into scrub and low lying plant life, salmon-filled rivers and streams crisscrossing its vastness like veins on the back of your hand. This part of the island has few if any roads, and can be reached only by boat or float plane. It is stark and wild, even by Alaskan standards, and very few people live here. Those that do are typically Alutiiqs, living in isolated settlements that have little regular contact with the northern part of the island, and are anchored on spots that have been Alutiiq towns for centuries if not millennia (Kraus & Buffler, 1979). Subsistence living is not a lifestyle choice here, but a necessity. You hunt, you fish, or you starve (Crowell et al., 2001; Feldman, 2009; Langdon, 2002; Palinkas, 1987).

### **Kodiak City**

Kodiak city is the largest town on the island, containing about one half of the island's total population of 13,346 people (United States Census Bureau, 2010). It is also the largest American fishing port on the Pacific, its shore clustered with canneries, and possessing two harbors, St. Paul's and St. Herman's. Mountains above the city surround and cuddle the harbors, protecting them from arctic winds and weather extremes.

The city of Kodiak bustles relative to the rest of the island. There is a stop light that most residents ignore, a McDonalds, and a Wal-Mart. The McDonalds is just like every McDonalds everywhere, no whale burgers but plenty of Big Macs and Filet o' Fish sandwiches. It is different only in its incongruity with life on Kodiak.

Before the Wal-Mart came, island residents mail ordered such things as street clothes and shoes for the kids, waiting weeks for delivery by boat from Homer or Seattle, or they flew to Anchorage for a few days of heavy shopping, compounding the expense with plane tickets and hefty shipping charges. Such trips did not occur often and typically had to be planned around the fishing seasons.

Unlike most towns of six thousand in the continental United States, in Kodiak there is great diversity. More like that found in world capitals. In the main grocery store you find Alutiiqs, Filipinos, El Salvadorans, Mexicans, immigrant North Americans, the occasional Inuit (Pacific Eskimo), Japanese, Pacific Islanders, Anglo natives of Kodiak, and "coasties," those people stationed at the U.S. Coast Guard base on the island, which is the largest in the nation. The food in Kodiak reflects this variety, in the grocery stock as well as in the cookery of local restaurants and the mobile food vendors that dot the town.

Walter Buckley (1967) once wrote that systems, as they grow in size and expand in function, also become more diverse and complex, and that such adaptation generates further growth and complexity. In thriving communities, growth, complexity and adaptation produce a balanced friction which promotes further strengthening of the system. One sees this process in Kodiak life, most obviously in the evolution of the food, but also in the fusion of different cultural influences (Feldman, 2009; Kluckhohn, 1944; Lyons, Manion, & Carlsen, 2006). Each culture, like each cuisine, is distinct and can stand alone, yet blends with others to create something perhaps better than either by itself. One example is the community celebrations that occur in Kodiak city: the annual Memorial Day Crab Festival is replete with all things King Crab related, of course, but is also an occasion for Hispanic, Latino, Filipino and Alutiiq island communities to express their respective rituals and festivities.

To most Kodiak residents, the town is just right: it has most of the amenities of modern life, without the crowding, pollution, distortion of values and dehumanization found in the lower forty-eight. Moreover, the amenities appear to have been carefully chosen to improve the quality of Kodiak life, rather than simply piled on, willy nilly, with little regard for genuine utility and possible consequence.

But through the eyes of non-Alaskans, Kodiak is clearly still on the American frontier. Perhaps it is the selectivity with which residents have seined the addition of modern “improvements,” or the thoughtful care that islanders have used to break the tsunami of mainstream American culture. Or maybe it is simply that Kodiak is a town positioned on a relatively isolated island. But there is just a feeling, a sense that one is in a land of new possibilities, where lives can be remade and ideals somehow refashioned and realized. A place of fresh starts.

### **The Research Question**

A place even for a laboratory. Say what you will about island life, but everybody knows that on land surrounded by miles and miles of water, often something unique occurs, and it is singular to that place. Think Darwin and the Galapagos. Other times, an island population has self-selected to the point that it is in few if any ways a microcosm of a larger society, but highly adapted to its own particular situation (Clifford, 2004; Shennen, 2009).

Yet Kodiak seemed familiar enough to me that it was recognizable, and the island traditions, having grown out of Kodiak’s distinctive culture, were not especially foreign. But they were clearly different, and in some ineffable way, intriguing. Since my first trip to Kodiak, I had been pondering the cultural differences I had witnessed there as compared to my experience in the Midwestern town in which I lived. On Kodiak, it seemed that people blended socially in a distinctive way. Further, during travels in the lower forty-eight I had noticed that ethnic and social groups tended to “stick to their own kind,” rather than commingle with people who were different from themselves. So my essential research question was, “How in the world do all these disparate people get along in such a small place?”

### **Review of the Literature**

I intentionally elected to review only the literature pertinent to general island life, human subjects protection and special protections associated with the study of Arctic peoples (Alaskan Native Knowledge Network, 1993a, 2000; Arctic Studies Center, 2000a, b; Chaffin et al., 1983; Department of Commerce, State of Alaska, 2010; Drewry, 2004, 2005; Gordon & Prentice, 2002; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, 1999; Social Science Task Force, 1993). This approach to the literature review in qualitative research is intended to reduce the potential bias of the researcher such that data gleaned during research is relatively free of intention or theoretical analysis until well after the data has been collected and analyzed. In other words, data analysis is induced from experience rather than fit into an already existing theoretical model. More simply still, it aids in the protection of “beginner’s mind” in the researcher (Birks & Mills, 2011; Dey, 1993; Fisch, Weakland, & Segal, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Neuman, 2003; Silverman, 2011; Singleton & Straits, 2005).

Yet given my affection for Kodiak, and for the people I met there while conducting the research study, I was alert to the all too human tendency to shape raw experience to preconceived ideas and emotions. Hence the importance of maintaining beginner’s mind, a

concept drawn from Zen Buddhism used to interact with experience, and the focused, active listening skills acquired during my many years as a psychotherapist. Lastly, I hoped that using a feedback loop with respondents in my data collection methods would neutralize any residual bias in my observations.

## Methodology

I knew very early on that only a thick description of Kodiak culture could lay the foundation for finding the answers I sought (Geertz, 1973; Kluckhohn, 1944). In order to address my research question, I would first have to define the place in which I hoped the answer lay (Angrosino, 2007), and hope that the previous sections offer a modest picture of the setting in which the Kodiak study would be conducted.

Secondly, I anticipated that personal narratives, preferably carried out in personal face-to-face interviews, would yield qualitative data rich in ethnographic detail that might give me a set of stories from which I might extract repetitive or common themes (King & Horrocks, 2010) and perhaps, at some future date, cultivate a grounded theory to enrich my understanding of this research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1965). To wit, are these dissimilar people, pulled to Kodiak *via* seemingly quite diverse journeys, able to not only secure a place for themselves and hold on to precious traditions of their own cultures, but also peacefully co-exist in a small place with other people from quite different cultures (Clifford, 2004; Palinkas, 1987; Pullar, 1992)?

Moreover, given that there ordinarily are a limited number of roles and social functions, to say nothing of jobs, on an island the size of Kodiak, what influence might economic forces play in the assimilation of one cultural group into the larger mosaic of Kodiak society (Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, 2006; Langdon, 2002)?

## Study Sample

After securing the go ahead from Capital University's Institutional Review Board in spring, 2011, I was ready to begin the study. The biggest concern was potential interviewees. Who was I going to talk with to record stories? With two exceptions, I knew no one who lived on Kodiak Island, and anticipated that just showing up and asking complete strangers to tell me their very personal stories would not be a productive research strategy. I had three weeks on the island. How might I gain sufficient trust and confidence to elicit meaningful interview data in such a short period of time?

The answer resided in Jerry Bongen (Fishing Vessel {F/V} *Jenoh*, F/V *Pacific Venture*), and his wife, Betty, old friends with whom I'd grown up in Indiana. When I approached Jerry, he was surprisingly intrigued by the study and the opportunity it provided to participate in research. He had his own opinion, I'm sure, about the likely answer to my research question, but did not offer it. Rather, he organized and orchestrated the creation of my study sample.

Using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling techniques, together we assembled a workable sample frame of largely representative island residents willing to participate in the study (Alaskan Native Knowledge Network, 1993b, 2000; Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Greatly facilitating this process was Jerry's reputation as a long time Kodiak resident. He is widely regarded as an honest person worthy of respect, and just as importantly, has the credibility that attends his status as a master fisherman. As this story unfolds, the value of his reputation will become evident.

In snowball sampling, wherein a researcher gains entry into a study sample by virtue of vetting by a member of the prospective sample, this is crucial. Routinely, during the

interview and data collection phases of the study, I was told by interviewees that Jerry Bongen's word that I was "OK" was sufficient to put members of the sample at ease. His vetting also greatly aided the initial consenting of participants and in my view enriched the reliability and validity of interview data collected while reducing the reactivity of the study population (Sangasubana, 2011). Having a partner in the research also helped me manage potential bias and increase the rigor of the study, as I had a resident expert on Kodiak culture available to me to answer questions, clarify possible misconceptions and provide me with "deep background" that enriched my understanding while inhibiting any attribution of meaning borne of my own experience rather than clear-eyed observation. Still, the group of interviewees we ended up with remained a convenience sample, with such a sample's limitations, and clear-eyed observation is commonly seen through the eyes of the beholder.

### Final Sample of Interviewees

The following table shows the 2009 United States census figures for Kodiak Island, Alaska, that are pertinent to this study (United States Census Bureau; 2010):

Race	Percent of Kodiak Island Population
White persons	61.3 %
Black persons	1.7 %
American Indian and Alaska Native Persons	14.1 %
Asian Persons	17.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1.0 %
Persons reporting two or more races	4.5 %
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	8.8%
Foreign born Persons	16.7 %
Language other than English spoken in home	24.5%

Naturally, it was desirable for the study sample to mirror Kodiak's general population so that my portrait of life there was as rich and varied as possible. Here is the composition of the final study sample. I have taken the protective liberty of changing names of participants, but all demographic and biographic information is truthful and accurate:

- Cesar was born and raised in El Salvador and in 1994 came to Kodiak as a late adolescent.
- Annie is a 28-year-old woman born and raised in the city of Kodiak. She is of mixed Indo-European descent.
- Glenn is a 52-year-old Sun'aq Alutiiq born and raised on Kodiak Island.
- Siobhan is a 61-year-old Indo-European American immigrant to Kodiak, and has lived on the island since 1982.
- Paden is 26 years old, Indo-European and single, who has lived only a short time on Kodiak.
- Edgar is a 61-year-old semi-retired fisherman who came to Kodiak from Oregon in the early 1980s.
- Hector is a 57-year-old immigrant originally from Mexico. He's married with two children, a girl and a boy.



- Carolyn is 54. She is part Koniag (Alutiiq) and part Indo-European. Born and raised on Kodiak, Carolyn has lived here her entire life.
- Lily is a tribal administrator for one of the Native villages on an outlying island of the Kodiak Archipelago.
- Luis is 64, of Filipino, Mexican and North American descent. He describes himself, though, as a “cocoanut.”

### Data Collection

With the sole exception of Lily, who was physically unavailable during my research trip to Kodiak (and thus participated in the interview process *via* a sequence of e-mail conversations prior to my visit), each interview was conducted face-to-face at a time and place of the interviewee’s choosing. I elected to use this method to help in putting the interviewee at ease, and I wanted to see the interviewee in a self-selected, natural context (LeBlanc, 2010; Manley, 2010; Rabionet, 2011).

Mr. Bongen had provided each interviewee with a copy of the likely interview questions (see below), and had informally sought and secured verbal informed consent. Upon meeting each interviewee, I formally consented each prospective participant using the preamble consent method, reviewed the interview questions, and asked for and answered any questions as required by the general tenets of research ethics and my home university’s Institutional Review Board. I used the same method with Lily, except in an e-mail format, with the preamble consent in the body of the e-mail to her, and the interview questions included as an attachment.

While in any meaningful and naturally occurring interview, a good interviewer must follow the lead set by the interviewee, I thought it best to begin with a set of predetermined questions and then let the interview grow organically from there. These are the original interview questions which I was prepared to use as necessary to structure my interviews, although it bears noting that in none of the interviews did I use all the questions:

1. How long have you and your family lived on Kodiak Island?
2. How do you make your living?
3. Where does your family originally come from, prior to coming to Kodiak?
4. Do you still maintain cultural and family traditions from your place of origin?
5. If so, what are some of them?
6. If not, why not?
7. Have you been accepted as an equal member of Kodiak society?
8. Could you describe what that has been like?
9. What cultural and family traditions have you shared with other people on Kodiak Island?

10. Do you believe these traditions are respected and valued by others?
11. Are there traditions that you believe are not respected by others?
12. If so, what are they, and why don't you think they are respected?
13. Do the various different peoples of Kodiak generally get along with one another?
14. If so, how does that happen?
15. If not, what gets in the way?
16. Does anything tie the people of Kodiak Island together?
17. If so, how does that work?

I intentionally did not take notes during the interviews, unless I needed to record a specific date or other piece of concrete information (e.g., spelling of Sun'aq, formal title of a law). I have found, through many years as a psychotherapist and researcher, that frequent note taking can inhibit a person's free expression, create needless concern or skew an interviewee's perception of the potential importance of a given piece of commentary.

To ensure accuracy in my transcription, immediately after the interview, I wrote up extensive notes, with quotes as appropriate, and later submitted them to each interviewee in narrative format for clarification, correction and amendment as necessary to make sure I had "gotten it right." This process also built in a natural feedback loop to add additional rigor to my research methodology (King & Horrocks, 2010; Rabionet, 2011; Singleton & Straits, 2005).

I conducted all of the interviews, except Lily's, during a three week period in late June—mid-July, 2011, on Kodiak Island, Alaska. Mr. Bongen had arranged the interview times and locations prior to my arrival, such that they were comfortable and convenient for the study participants.

While my primary purpose as a researcher was to attempt to answer my fundamental research question, I was also keen to see if there emerged from the interviews any repetitive patterns or themes which might inform my study (Dey, 1993; King & Horrocks, 2010) or enrich the thick description I was seeking (Geertz, 1973; Kluckhohn, 1944). Here are the stories my interviewees told me:

- I first met Cesar on the shipping platform above the docks of Kodiak's main channel, where the fishing boats and tenders pull up to download their catches after coming in from Dutch Harbor and the Bering Sea. Cesar was a bull of a man, only several inches above five feet, but stocky, solid and formidable. Underneath his yellow hard hat, his eyes were brown slits, but he smiled broadly when I introduced myself and shook my hand like he meant it. Cesar was born and raised in El Salvador. I asked him where, and he said, "It doesn't matter; you've never heard of it. A tiny place, and nothing ever happens there." In 1994, Cesar came to Kodiak as a young man. He began his work career in Kodiak as a dockworker, but is now a foreman and supervisor at one of Kodiak's largest fish processors. In 1997, Cesar brought his wife and children to Kodiak and considers Kodiak his home. Cesar's wife,

Consuelo, runs a mobile food truck with her sister, making Mexican and Salvadoran food. I ate there several times while on Kodiak; everything is homemade and the *chalupas* are outstanding.

- Annie is a 28-year-old woman born and raised in Kodiak city. She is of mixed Indo-European descent (Hungarian, Norwegian, Italian and Swedish) and attended Kodiak schools until she went to the lower forty-eight for college about ten years ago. Annie is tall, thin and striking, with straight dark brown hair and wide green eyes that look right at you even through sunglasses. We talked one day inside the cabin of a fishing boat, taking breaks from the wind and the halibut fishing. Clearly, this was not Annie's first fishing trip, as she moved about the boat with ease and handled the tackle like it was second nature. She knows how to bring in a thirty pound halibut, too. Annie currently resides in the upper Midwest with her husband, hundreds of miles from a body of water you can't see across. She returns to Kodiak regularly to fish and see old friends, although her parents now live in Seattle.

Annie attended one of the elementary schools on Kodiak that is populated with children of varied ancestry and culture. This was the norm for her, and she grew up with difference, not knowing it was different. To Annie, having friends from diverse backgrounds, with varying incomes and cultural traditions, did not seem unusual to her. But having friends that were only "one kind of people" did.

"Who would want all their friends to be alike, looking the same, dressing the same, eating the same food, thinking the same way? Wouldn't that be boring?"

- Glenn is a 52-year-old Sun'aq Alutiiq born and raised on Kodiak Island. He is a small engine mechanic, and I met him in his machine shop, surrounded by mowers, chain saws, generators and other engines in need of repair. Glenn's shop is one of those places that, to a stranger, looks like chaos reigns, but really is highly organized to the man who navigates it ten hours a day.

There was a quiet, gentle *gravitas* to Glenn that belied my initial impression of him as a physically frail person. (He started our conversation, in fact, with a litany of his ailments, serious stuff that likely would have incapacitated most.) Glenn's hands, though, had seen a lot of work. They were mechanic's hands, delicate in a sense, with long fingers trained to reach into awkward places where no sensible person would ever have placed a valve or a screw. And his hands were clean, with well-tended cuticles and trimmed fingernails. When I asked him about this, he replied, "these are the tools of my trade, and it pays to keep your tools in good shape."

Except for two years spent in Seattle attending trade school, Glenn has lived his entire life on the island. He describes himself as a "window" Alutiiq, a member of the baby boom generation of Alutiiqs who sought to assimilate into mainstream American culture and lost track of traditional native ways.

Glenn was excited to participate in our interview, and he knew his island and Alutiiq history. He told me about the Russians massacring the original Kodiak Islanders, the Koniags (some Alutiiqs prefer the spelling Konyag), and transporting outer island Aleuts to replace them as slaves, and also told me about when the great Filipino migration to Kodiak took place in the 1980's. "This was a real problem, because those cannery jobs belonged to the Alutiiqs, especially the women and the teenagers who worked in the canneries during

summer vacations from school. It didn't help matters that Alutiiqs and Filipinos look alike to strangers, so we were mistaken one for the other, and that made both groups mad."

Glenn told me a story of a Filipino family that moved in near his family home. One day, Glenn noticed that the Filipino neighbors appeared to be killing a goat in their backyard. Apparently, this was a Filipino holiday, and the ritual killing and eating of a goat was part of the holiday festivities. Not knowing this, Glenn told his mother what the neighbors were doing, at which point she ran into her back yard, yelling at her Filipino neighbors, "why don't you buy your meat at Safeway, like everybody else!"

- Siobhan is a 61-year-old Indo-European American immigrant to Kodiak, and has lived on the island since 1982. There is something ethereal about Siobhan, very Celtic, like her name. She spent many years in public health service to the native population under the auspices of the KANA (Kodiak Area Native American) organization, which came about as a result of the 1971 Claims Settlement Act (financial reparations to Native Americans in Alaska). Siobhan's husband is a fisherman. She was trained as a dental hygienist, which is how she came to be employed by KANA. Initially, she told me, she was viewed with suspicion by the Native population, as were other Whites in the public health service, but in time, as the positive results of public health services to the Natives became evident, she met with a measure of acceptance from her patients.

Siobhan was quite pointed, though, about her view of KANA and the predominantly Alutiiq population it serves. She sees traditional Alutiiq culture, and that of KANA, as paternalistic, insular and suspicious of Whites. Siobhan also states that most Alutiiqs living in the towns and villages that dot the island live in enclaves, separated from mainstream and diverse Kodiak. According to Siobhan, this is not so much a situation forced upon village Alutiiqs as chosen. From her perspective, the Native Alutiiq population co-exists with people from other cultures on a self-serving basis, integrating to achieve a purpose, but otherwise maintaining a separate cultural *persona*. She also stated that she believes she has been prejudiced against because she is White rather than Native Alutiiq, and that such bias may have cost her a job several years ago.

- Paden is 26 years-old, Indo-European and single, who has lived only a short time on Kodiak. He is a dockworker for one of the large seafood corporations that process and market the catch from Kodiak's sizeable fishing industry. He grew up in Arizona, migrated to Kodiak in search of work, and hopes to eventually secure work on a fishing boat.

In some respects, Paden is among Kodiak Islanders, but not of them. He resides there, but is not yet established, and may never be. Paden is a bit like the "coasties," United States Coast Guard personnel and their families, stationed at the Kodiak base for a few years, but anchored in a different culture than that in which they currently find themselves. Coasties, I was repeatedly told, come in two varieties: those who come and can't wait to leave, and those who come and fall in love with the place. In the time I have spent on Kodiak, I have met a few former coasties who, after having been stationed on the island, later retired and moved back to Kodiak permanently. Similarly, civilians like Paden come in two groups as well: those who drift to

Kodiak seeking work and adventure, and those who settle there and make it a new home.

- Edgar is a 61-year-old semi-retired fisherman who came to Kodiak from Oregon in the early 1980s. Ed was raised in the Midwest, moved west in the 1970s, and eventually ended up on Kodiak in search of a new start and lucrative employment on a fishing boat. His home is now Kodiak, and he is a successful fisherman and boat owner.

There is an almost Lincolnesque quality to Edgar. He is tall and lanky, with a dark beard and dark hair. You have the feeling when looking at Edgar that he probably wears the same size blue jeans now as he did when he was in high school.

Edgar arrived on Kodiak about the same time as the large Filipino migration to the island that Glenn told me about. He witnessed “fairly routine” discrimination and cultural friction between the Alutiiqs and Filipinos. In Edgar’s view, it was due to the economic impact of the migration on the Natives rather than a purely racial clash. Unlike some others, who don’t hold coasties and “short-timers” (like Paden, one supposes) in high esteem, Edgar sees them as a positive influence upon Kodiak life. They tend to buffer the isolation and insularity of Kodiak life, he says, as well as loosen the enclave social grouping pattern that Kodiak’s various subcultures sometimes fall into. Additionally, Edgar thinks the transient population may help dilute potential discrimination among groups of island residents.

Edgar also brought up an interesting point about the impact of media on island life. There is one island newspaper, the *Kodiak Daily Mirror*, and no local television station. The fishing life tends to focus one’s attention on local events and the here and now, especially the weather. He is sometimes amazed, when he travels to the mainland, how influential media are, how much media events are discussed by people he meets, and how media affect people-to-people relationships. “Sometimes, I think people in the lower forty-eight are more concerned with what happens on TV than with their ‘real lives.’ Up here, people make up their own minds about things, without so much media spin and interpretation. It makes for fewer arguments.”

- Hector is a 57-year-old immigrant originally from Mexico. He’s married with two children, a girl and a boy, both now in their midtwenties. Hector has worked in the fishing industry for nearly thirty years, and is a dock foreman for one of the seafood companies. His son owns a salmon boat that fishes out of Kodiak, and Hector is very proud of him. But times were not always so good for Hector. When I first met him, it was on the same shipping platform where I had met Cesar a few days before. Hector took me into an office where we could sit down over a cup of coffee and talk.

Hector is tall and thin, a bit like Edgar but filled out, with short straight hair that is the color and texture of steel wire. He has animated gray eyes, an easy smile, and talks with his hands, like me. We get along great. Like Glenn, Hector is excited to be interviewed, and he’s a natural storyteller.

“I first came to this country in 1977, crossing at Tijuana in the trunk of an old Cadillac with six other Mexicans, all illegals of course, and rode all the way like that to an address I’d been given in the east barrio in Los Angeles. The coyote (slang sometimes used to describe a person who clandestinely transports illegal immigrants from Mexico into the United States) dropped me

off and left with my trunk mates and that was the last I saw of any of them. Cost me \$50.00 American. A lot of money in those days, especially to a poor farm boy like me.” Hector met his connection in LA, who helped him get a farm job in California’s central valley, but he’d been told about the fishing life up in Alaska, and longed to give it a try. He migrated to Kodiak in 1980 under an assumed name, because he’d heard from his brother that immigration authorities had been looking for him in his village in Mexico and in the barrio in Los Angeles. For five years, one immigration official had been tracking him, like Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables*, and finally caught up with him in Kodiak.

Hector was taken back to California, tried, and convicted of illegal immigration to the United States. He served six months in prison in California, and was released in 1986 as a result of President Ronald Reagan’s Immigration Reform and Amnesty Act of 1986. Hector was then issued a green card, moved back to Kodiak, and became a naturalized American citizen shortly thereafter. In spite of his bad experience with immigration authorities, Hector believes in the American Dream: “Look around. It is everywhere here. If you work hard, be good and fair to people, live right and obey the laws, you can succeed in America. I am proof. My son is proof, too.”

- If you are looking for a walking and talking history lesson of Kodiak, you need to talk to Carolyn. She is part Koniag (Alutiiq) and part Indo-European, with Dutch, Italian and Scotch ancestry. Born and raised on Kodiak, Carolyn has lived here for the entirety of her 54 years. Like Siobhan, Carolyn is married to a fisherman, also born and raised on Kodiak.

She makes a point that she considers herself “Native,” rather than “Indian.” Carolyn is very knowledgeable about her Koniag heritage and the history of Koniag peoples on Kodiak. According to Carolyn, Koniag is the traditional name for her Native Alaskan ancestry, and that Alutiiq is a relatively new term that has come into usage in modern times, particularly since the Alaskan Native cultural awareness movement gained resurgence in recent years.

Koniags, the original Native Alaskans in the upper Kodiak Archipelago, were great warriors, and upon invasion by Russians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, warred with the Russians for control over their land and homes. Many Russians were killed by Koniag warriors, and in retaliation, Russians waged a war of genocide against the Koniags. (Recall that Glenn told me this story as well.) The Koniags were eventually killed or enslaved, and the Russians transplanted Aleuts, Native Alaskans from the lower Kodiak Archipelago and the Aleutian chain of islands, onto what is now Kodiak Island and the Upper Archipelago.

In the early 1980’s, Carolyn noted a social and cultural difference occurring in Kodiak city and on Kodiak Island. She attributes this to the influx of Filipino immigrants who came to Kodiak seeking work in the canneries. This displaced many Koniag people, especially adolescents and women, and created both cultural and economic friction between the two groups. Her story of this Filipino diaspora and its consequences echoes what Edgar and Glenn told me.

While Carolyn is generally supportive of Native Alaskan efforts to bring Koniag culture back to life, so to speak, and bequeath it to Koniag youth, she acknowledges suspicion on her part regarding some of the activities of Native Corporations whose charge it is to oversee Native Alaskan monies associated with the 1971 Claims Settlement Act. She is particularly troubled by the

investment of these monies in logging and clear cutting forested tribal lands, and investment of tribal money in the lower forty-eight.

Carolyn also criticizes some leaders of the Native Corporations as using their positions to further tribal status and personal ambition, rather than simply managing assets. Likewise, she sometimes views so-called “heritage restoration” of Koniag culture as having too much in common with “special interest politics” and status-seeking than with a true devotion to maintaining Native Alaskan traditions and culture.

- Lily is a tribal administrator for one of the Native villages on an outlying island of the Kodiak Archipelago. She is actively engaged in maintaining traditional Alutiiq culture, and her family lives what Lily calls, “a subsistence lifestyle,” living off the land as much as possible and retaining the Alutiiq land sustainability practices of respecting the land and protecting it. Lily is of the generation of Alutiiqs actively engaged in rediscovering and fostering Native Alaskan ways.

Lily is also affiliated with Kodiak’s public school system. I asked her how the various peoples of Kodiak got along, particularly in the elementary and secondary schools.

“You know, I’m not entirely sure what it is about the younger population, but they seem to carry more prejudice than the adults in some cases. My theory is that it is socially based, peer pressure and all. Our school system in Kodiak is quite interesting and I believe it is a contributing factor. We have four elementary schools. One is near the coast guard base and the primary population is transient military families. It is predominantly White. Another school is in midtown Kodiak near low income housing, and is mainly comprised of Hispanics and Filipinos. The other two grade schools are outside the city limits and their student populations are much more representative of the spectrum of Kodiak’s population. (Annie attended one of these elementary schools.)

“In sixth grade, all four schools converge in the middle school. That’s when you begin to see the discrimination and friction. Students from the coastie school, and the school near the low income housing, seem to have a rougher time getting along with students from other ethnic and socioeconomic groups than do those from the two grade schools whose students have always been around one another.

So maybe the answer is catching kids at a young age and exposing them to difference early, when there is little peer pressure, and the kids get to know one another first as people, then Alutiiqs or Hispanics or whatever.”

- Luis is 64, of Filipino, Mexican and North American descent. He describes himself, though, as a “cocoanut.” “I’m brown on the outside, but white on the inside.” He clarified that by stating that he considers himself American. Luis was born in California, served in the Vietnam War, and came to Kodiak in 1974. He is now a shift supervisor for one of the big seafood corporations in Kodiak. He reports that when Filipinos came in large numbers to Kodiak during the early 1980s, they were not particularly welcomed, especially by the native population. Luis says it was because of two things: Filipinos took jobs in the island canneries that had traditionally been filled by Alutiiqs, and that the two groups bore a strong physical resemblance to one another that confused members of other groups on the island.

Now, Luis says, “Filipinos are the backbone of the workforce, especially in the canneries. Compared to life in the Philippines, the money on Kodiak is very good, and the work is much easier than growing rice or working as a laborer in California.”

Insofar as culture clash in the present day, Luis comments, “long work hours prevent too much of it. It is a Filipino tradition to be very family-focused. Most Filipino families are close knit, and Filipino culture on Kodiak is also close-knit. But the quality of your work ethic determines the level of respect you earn, regardless of your color. A strong work ethic is the path to success.”

### **Data Analysis**

During and after collecting my interview data, I noted repetitions of certain words, phrases and ideas in the transcriptions of my conversations with the research subjects. In a sense, there were parallel stories, running next to one another like train tracks off into the distance. I had to find out where they converged. As silly as it may sound, I laid out each transcription adjacent to the next, and using a yellow highlighter, went through each narrative and underscored repetitive words, synonyms and phrase patterns. I also noted possible contradictions. Themes started to come to light from the repetitions, and the patterns in the stories I’d heard grew into congruent and then analogous personal tales.

Among the narrative threads that emerged in these interviews was the notion that island life produces a pressure to learn to live together. As Lily said in the course of our interview, “it takes a unique type of person to live on an island.” This perspective was echoed in the majority of other interviews, essentially stating that one is either cut out for island living or not. Cesar mentioned that “on an island, people tend to respect your privacy,” and that this regard for personal and cultural boundaries seems to encourage a pragmatic respect for difference. Glenn reiterated this, maintaining that “island life requires that people try to get along.”

Interestingly, Edgar believes that for many immigrants to Kodiak, “they have no history to drag them down, and for the town (Kodiak) to work, people have to get along.” He adds that “people come to Kodiak for new opportunity, to start a new life.” This sense of a new beginning permeates the interviews I conducted. Cesar initially came to Kodiak, alone in 1994, to “take a chance on a better life for my family” and, once he had established himself, brought his wife and children from El Salvador to Kodiak to stay and make their permanent home. This story was commonplace among the interviewees. Both Hector and Luis came from Mexican and Filipino ancestry, respectively, via California, for just these reasons. Hector came in 1980 and his family followed a few years later. Luis arrived on Kodiak Island in 1974, and was working on the docks during the influx of Filipinos in the early 1980’s. Each has risen in his employment status, each makes more money than was remotely possible in his homeland, and each has put down a taproot in America. Luis is a Native American citizen and Hector is a naturalized citizen; Cesar is working toward full citizenship. Theirs are stories of immigration that have resonated in the American experience for centuries.

Edgar and Siobhan came to Kodiak in the early 1980’s as well, but from the American Midwest. Still, they came to the island for essentially the same reasons as did Cesar, Hector and Luis: to begin a new life and secure a fresh start. In his own way, Paden, though he has been in Kodiak only a short time, reports the same thing. Whether Kodiak is the right spot for Paden to begin again is as yet uncertain. For now, Paden is a member of Kodiak’s “transient” population, defined on the island as people who are either stationed here as coasties or have come to explore Kodiak’s possibilities for them.



Each of the interviewees who immigrated to Kodiak describes parallel stories of discrimination and eventual acceptance. Luis talked about the conflicts, sometimes violent, between immigrant Filipinos and Alutiiqs in the early 1980's, when Filipinos began to take cannery jobs from the native population. Glenn, an Alutiiq himself, told me much the same story, but from a very different viewpoint. Both recounted a similar ending, wherein the interface of cultures was superseded by the interaction of individuals. Othering and prejudice don't appear to be a match for getting to know the person underneath the skin.

As I came to understand it, personal character emerges as the defining feature of an individual. I-Thou relationships grow out of the superficialities of I-It associations, and it seems cultural variables recede, and the character and work ethic of the persons constructing the social contract become the defining traits of the relationship (Buber, 1958). Thus, while life on an island appears to position individuals for unavoidable multiple interactions with others, in the fullness of time, it is the elevation of I-It relationships to I-Thou that generates successful cooperative bonds.

Hector and Cesar, it seems, may have had something of an easier time with coming to Kodiak than many of the Filipinos. There was no grand influx of El Salvadorans or Mexicans, and as an examination of the census table above shows, these peoples do not constitute nearly as large a percentage of immigrants as do those from the Philippines.

Neither Hector, nor Cesar or Luis, indicate that they have experienced any abiding discrimination based upon their nationality or culture. In fact, each strongly feels that, as Hector puts it, "you earn respect for how hard you work, how you treat others, and if you live right," rather than where you come from or what you look like. Edgar, though he is Indo-European, also endorses these sentiments, underscoring the importance of hard work and treating people with respect as the primary routes to acceptance in Kodiak society.

Annie recounts being a lifelong resident of Kodiak, and she is of Indo-European descent. Throughout her school years, Annie says she did not experience or witness discrimination. Quite the contrary. She notes that she really liked having friends of different cultures, and particularly enjoyed savoring the foods and traditions of her Filipino, Mexican and Alutiiq friends. Rather than creating a sense of cultural confusion or complexity, Annie says, having a diversity of cultures and life ways helped her learn to appreciate differences among people. Ultimately, though, she reports that such exposure facilitated seeing through the cultural differences to the authentic person underneath.

Annie's experience, though, differs from the experience and observations of others. Lily relates how she sees an appreciable difference in cultural tolerance among school children depending upon which of the four elementary schools the children attend. Lily believes that, as students from the four schools converge in middle and high schools, that cultural acceptance is predicted to a significant degree by which school a given child attends. Children from more diverse schools seem to be more accepting of difference than those from culturally homogenous schools. Equally predictable, according to Lily, children from culturally diverse schools appear to have a greater diversity of friendships. Might this phenomenon shed light on the research question at hand? Could it be that early exposure to difference fashions an environment wherein comfort with those who are different from oneself actually creates a growth medium for acceptance, nurturing curiosity rather than breeding fear? This would seem to have been Annie's experience, growing up in Kodiak and attending elementary and secondary schools there.

Siobhan related an absorbing story to me. As mentioned above, she is Indo-European and immigrated to Kodiak about thirty years ago. She is a professionally trained public health worker, and spent many years working for the Kodiak Area Native American (KANA) Association. KANA is funded by monies from the 1971 Claims Settlement Act, and is

charged with providing an array of services to the Native Alaskan population. It is largely administered by Native Alaskans.

According to Siobhan, she had a relatively long and successful career working in public health for KANA, but in her view, experienced reverse discrimination when an Alutiiq worker was hired to replace her. Siobhan sees this as Alutiiqs “taking care of their own” at the expense of others with strong work records. She also indicates that, again in her view, Alutiiqs on Kodiak integrate with other island immigrant cultures when it suits them, but stick together when it does not. In some respects, Siobhan’s story contradicts the stories of other interviewees, but upon further analysis, it may be that Siobhan’s experience of alleged Alutiiq discrimination is remarkable because of its singularity. It is also possible that Siobhan’s experience was an unintended consequence of a resurgence in Alutiiq self-awareness and cultural pride.

Glenn subtly reinforced this notion in his description of growing up on Kodiak and living there most of his life. He told me that his generation of Alutiiqs, a “window” generation (comprised largely of baby boomers), did not nurture traditional Native ways, but rather assimilated into the larger mainstream American culture. Glenn thinks this was at least in part due to a sense of Alutiiq ways “dying out” from cultural neglect. Now, according to Glenn, a new generation is cultivating “Alutiiq Pride” as a way to bring back to life an awareness of cultural identity, but he also senses an underlying hubris and “specialness” in these endeavors. It makes Glenn suspicious, he says, when he sees good people displaced by Native Alaskans “just because they’re Native Alaskans.” Still, given the history of Alutiiq experience with what is now in most respects the dominant White macroculture, it is understandable that Native Alaskans are protective of their traditions and peoples in ways that may seem exclusionary to some (Crowell et al., 2001).

Carolyn is a walking encyclopedia of Kodiak’s Native Alaskan history, and a very practical-minded woman. Part Koniag (Alutiiq) and part Indo-European, Carolyn is clearly proud of her varied ancestry as well as her personal history as a lifelong Kodiak resident. She relates that in the early 1980’s a cultural and social shift occurred on Kodiak, especially in Kodiak city. This coincides with the migration of large numbers of Filipinos to Kodiak, and the conflicts that arose as Filipinos challenged Native Alaskans for cannery jobs.

Carolyn believes this friction had an economic source rather than a racial or cultural one, however. Still, she holds, the sheer size of the Filipino diaspora was disruptive to the larger Kodiak society, if only because of the substantial population increase and heightened demand on local resources. Carolyn posits, though, that over time, as the community has adapted and grown to assimilate the larger number of residents, such friction has largely diminished. This may be attributable to Lily’s and Edgar’s beliefs, that living on an island requires people to get along or maybe because Kodiak’s era of bloody conquest has simply passed.

And like Buckley (1967), Carolyn has witnessed the contribution that disparate cultures have brought to Kodiak life, adding variety to island society and pushing the larger community to broaden its economic and cultural base to accommodate population growth and cultural variation. It is also quite possible that the converse is true as well: that the growth of the fishing and canning industries has required population expansion to accommodate such growth.

To be sure, this adaptation has not been without its fits and starts, its conflicts and adjustments, and it has not always been smooth. But in the broader perspective, the result thus far suggests that the varied life on Kodiak Island has generated something larger than simply the sum of its parts. Kodiak culture is not simply the collective aggregate of its various subcultures. Rather, its synergy has fostered the maturation of a new entity, as each cultural integration has impelled adaptive changes until a robust Kodiak identity has

emerged. In one sense, it is similar to the story of America, wherein a polyglot of cultures has come together under a common set of beliefs and purpose to create something special.

It is also likely that, as Edgar noted, the absence of widespread media distractions and the accompanying exacerbation of ideological and cultural conflicts, while possibly isolating Kodiak residents from mainstream American culture, has a sheltering, salutary effect on the peacefully co-existent living characteristic of life on this island.

## Results and Discussion

The stories I was told on Kodiak varied greatly in narrative style and content, as any individual's story will differ from another's. Still, within each story's "nature" there emerged a tale of either coming to a new place or coping with the arrival of new peoples. As dissimilar as each interviewee's personal account seemed when I first heard it, as I listened to more, two broader narratives emerged, full of recurring themes that ultimately helped define life on Kodiak Island for me and provided a workable answer to my original research question.

The first narrative that surfaced was that of the immigrant. I suspect that this story came to me first serendipitously, as my first interviewees had come to Kodiak from other, faraway lands. Those tales carried a common thread of seeking a new life, forgetting the troubles and failures of the past, making a new and better home for the immigrants' families, chasing a hazy dream on a new frontier where history didn't matter and was still to be written.

Kodiak provided a fresh new place, where you could start again, let the past reduce to ashes, and be judged by how hard you worked and how you lived, how you treated others, and what you contributed to a new life in an out-of-the-way Eden. Such dreams provided a new culture, spun from remnant strands of one's background, plus the demands of livelihood and prosperity in a rugged landscape of stubborn land and treacherous sea. It has not been without growing pains, initial suspicions of and about foreign peoples, nor the resentments and frictions inherent in introducing new people to old and established residents. And of course growth in a tightly defined space, like an island, presents competition for resources that seem unvarying. Examples of such friction can be seen in the struggle that arose between Filipinos and Alutiiqs over cannery jobs during the influx of Filipino immigration in the 1980s, and the shifting of KANA jobs from some Indo-Europeans to Alutiiqs that came about with the resurgence of Alutiiq cultural awareness during the 1990s.

The second narrative is that of the Native Alaskans, struggling to hold on to their world built over the course of eight thousand years on Kodiak Island. The Alutiiq themselves had been transplants from the further Aleutian Islands, fending off Russian fur traders, then American immigrants from the continental United States, and finally newcomers from all over the Pacific Rim. With the waves of migration to the island, succeeding generations of Native Alaskans retreated to the Kodiak settlements, tiny townships in remote parts of the Kodiak Archipelago far from the influences and corruptions of these new people, where the integrity of historic traditions might yet survive and be resurrected (Chaffin et al., 1983; Crowell et al., 2001; Langdon, 2002).

In modern times, there has arisen a restored Alutiiq integrity, fed to a large degree by the monies granted in the 1971 Claims Settlement Act. Under the aegis of the Native Corporations, Alutiiq culture and respect for the antiquities of Native Alaskan life have been resurrected (Clifford, 2004; Pullar, 1992), although not without criticism and a measure of internal tribal and cultural conflict (Feldman, 2009; Mason, 1996).

But coursing through both of these narratives regarding cultural interaction on Kodiak are recurrent themes that help account for the relative peace that characterizes the routine

dealings of the strikingly varied peoples living in this diminutive land. The first and most commonly mentioned notion is that of island life. Again and again, interviewees commented that living on an island requires a measure of tolerance, cooperation and regard for privacy. Living in a small space necessitates flexibility and granting others room to move. Paradoxically, the geographic constraints of island life seem to generate regard for the other person's space, and recognition of the importance to "live and let live." Impulsive and harsh judgments about people and their backgrounds are uncommon on Kodiak, as if too many questions about the history of another might prompt unwelcome inquiry into one's own. Likewise, making room for seemingly strange cultural practices (like killing a goat for the holidays) might alleviate the need to explain or justify alternative ways of living that appear more acceptable simply by virtue of familiarity.

A second notion, also brought up by a number of interviewees, is perhaps a bit more complex but nonetheless important: proximity and exposure. Residents of Kodiak, particularly Kodiak city, find it difficult to avoid one another. While privacy may be cherished, and understandably so, the activities of daily commerce bring people together in a wealth of different ways. You see the people you work with at the grocery, in restaurants, at the hardware and marine supply stores, at churches and schools, during holiday celebrations and recreation activities. And since the diverse populations of Kodiak interact so commonly, and share a mutual reliance on one another for help a times of need, it is nigh impossible to simply "stick with one's own kind." The enclave lifestyle, so prevalent in the lower forty-eight, just won't work here; it is too isolating, and the social and economic foundations of island life are too interwoven for a high degree of cultural tribalism. Living on an island is sufficiently remote as it is. There is little need for residents to add to it.

What emerges from such varieties of contact is an erosion of stereotyping. In rather short order, the Filipino you routinely see at the cannery becomes Luis. The Mexican who offloads your fishing catch becomes Hector, the Alutiiq you deal with three times a week at the harbormaster's station becomes Glenn, and the North American woman who gives your children their flu shots becomes Siobhan. There is no stopping it: bridging cultural differences sooner or later shifts to a process of understanding difference one person at a time. To paraphrase Martin Buber (1958), eventually the I-It interaction required for effective stereotyping evolves into the I-Thou relationship that produces personal understanding and cultural respect.

Yet this is not to say that the sundry cultures that people bring to Kodiak blend entirely into a gumbo of traditions like a food court at your local mall. Rather, those who have chosen Kodiak as their new home have maintained the traditions of their respective upbringings. Most immigrants speak their native tongues in their homes and with their countrypersons. Their children learn the language of their ancestors from parents, and English in the schools. Bilingualism is commonplace, as are the dual celebrations of American and culturally traditional holidays. In addition, there are holidays and festivals unique to Kodiak, like the Kodiak Crab Festival.

Immigrant and Native Alaskans on Kodiak, then, appear to have struck a balance between creating a workable mainstream Kodiak culture while holding on to their own historic traditions. Where many people might construct the inherently conflictual "either/or" social contract, Kodiak Islanders appear to have opted for the more harmonious "both/and" agreement. When Annie talks about savoring the Filipino food served at her friend's home, this is what she is referring to, interspersing the familiar with the foreign to create something delicious that she'd never tasted before, but that nevertheless retains its integrity and congruence.

Still another theme emerging in these interviews is that of making a fresh start, leaving the past behind, or as Edgar put it, people on Kodiak "have no history to drag them

down.” That is not to imply that those who come to Kodiak do not bring the lessons of the past with them, nor some of the same bad social habits, but rather experience the liberation of wiping old slates clean and securing a new chance. New chances don’t necessarily produce new interactional behavior, but virtually every immigrant interviewee, regardless of where he or she originally came from, alluded to having an opportunity to reinvent a life, and doing it your own right way this time. Because this theme is so widespread, it is entirely possible that ceding the same right to others is a latent social norm.

This dovetails into the last major immigrant theme that surfaced during this study: earning respect for who you are as a person and for what you do, how you behave and what you contribute to the larger purpose of life on Kodiak. Again, Martin Buber’s I-Thou concept comes to mind. Initially of course, new immigrants to Kodiak were in fact judged by where they came from and the broad economic impact their arrival may have caused. But eventually, due in large part to proximity and exposure, the color of your skin, the food you eat, how you talk and what traditions you celebrate recede into the past and the quality of the individual emerges. And with this emergence, a new relationship ensues...I-Thou.

In one sense, the story of the Alutiiq differs from that of the immigrant Alaskans. Alutiiq peoples immigrated to Kodiak so long ago that they have become Native Alaskans. Systematically disenfranchised from their homelands since the arrival of the Russians hundreds of years ago, the Alutiiq, along with other Native Alaskan tribes, have struggled to maintain their lands, their natural wealth and their culture. With the advent of the monies secured under the 1971 Claims Settlement Act, the Alutiiqs have finally acquired the power to restore their traditional way of life. Ironically, it is *via* the currency of American power: dollars.

While there is disagreement among Alutiiqs as to how these dollars are spent, and the degree to which Alutiiq organizations take care of their own at the expense of others, and even if Alutiiq is the proper word to describe these oldest of Kodiak residents, I witnessed little if any discord about the importance of resurrecting Alutiiq pride and cultural awareness. Alutiiq culture and antiquity are magnificently rich in religious traditions, creative arts and what one might call the art of living. In the final analysis, it is the lifestyle of the Alutiiq that undergirds Kodiak society and provides it with the customs and practices that sustain survival in this lovely emerald land (Sturgulewski, 2002).

Adopting a somewhat wider lens to add broader context to this discussion, several researchers have noted that in Alaska generally, cultural co-existence sometimes defies the norms traditionally found in the United States (Sue & Sue, 2008). For instance, Feldman has proffered that cultural co-existence in Anchorage somewhat mirrors that found on Kodiak Island, albeit on a much larger scale of population (Feldman, 2009). Feldman and others also note that some of what we might term the cultural integrity of various ethnic groups on Kodiak Island has been diluted by exposure of these groups to the larger size and population of Anchorage, as well as its proximity (*via* mass media, largely) to mainstream American society (Clifford, 2004; Crowell et al., 2001). Moreover, it is quite likely that the outcomes produced by the Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, as discussed in detail in Feldman (2009), wherein Native Americans gained substantial control over land use by corporations, as well as abundant fiscal empowerment through rental of those lands, have positioned Native Americans to secure their own destinies to a degree unknown in the past (Feldman, 2009; Mason, 1996). This issue has been addressed in greater detail earlier in this narrative.

To this I would add that the history of Kodiak’s population has created a climate in which a succession of ethnic groups and cultures has grown accustomed to living together in tolerant and often respectful ways for hundreds if not thousands of years (Chaffin et al., 1983; Kraus & Buffler, 1979; Langdon, 2002). In this expanse of time, such Kodiak norms and

practices have become part of the cultural fabric of the island (Mason, 1996; Palinkas, 1987; Pullar, 1992).

### **Conclusion**

This study of life on Kodiak as it relates to diversity and acceptance is clearly not without its limitations. In fact, the very act of researching this topic and doing so using the personal interview method in some sense pollutes the data. Getting people to talk freely and openly about their lives is a natural, unfolding process, wherein the essence of a person's experience is peeled back over time as trust and familiarity build the intimacy that produces candor. The limits of time and opportunity create barriers to such natural evolution of a relationship.

It can also be argued that the reputation of Jerry Bongen, which helped remove so many potential obstacles from my path in acquiring a research sample, may have skewed some of the interview responses. Also, the very tenderness of such a research topic might have prompted some respondents to downplay some "politically incorrect" aspects of their experience on Kodiak. Finally, the obvious affection I feel for Kodiak, and its people, may have colored my perception. For that, though, I offer no apologies, only an acknowledgement that there is ultimately no removing the researcher from the research study.

That said, the narratives and themes of this study carry a ubiquity that is hard to dismiss. The interviewees are not deceptive people, nor do they strike me as the sort to polish up an opinion, particularly for an outsider like myself whose viewpoint means virtually nothing to them. Time and again, I was struck by their candor and refreshing lack of varnish in their remarks. They are proud of their stories, and this study is full of reasons why they should be.

My research question, "How in the world do all these disparate people get along in such a small place?" was answered, convincingly if not fully. The very thing that might prompt an outsider like me to suspect social friction in fact had, in important ways, diminished it. The confines of island life have produced more demand for cooperation and collegiality than fissure, and proximity and exposure have generated more "I-Thou" relationships than "Othering."

To be sure, some of this has occurred on a bedrock of shared purpose. The hardships of the fishing life provide a unifying force that is immediate and obvious, but the foundation that seems to be unshakable lies in the story of the American frontier. Coming to a new place for a fresh start, without the undertow of personal history. The seeking of better opportunity for one's family, and the finding of respect and stature in how hard one works, what one contributes of value, and the mettle of the person. These, then, become the currency of acceptance in places like Kodiak. Unlike one's birth culture, native tongue or skin pigmentation, these facets of the human experience are solely under one's control. And true freedom resides there with them.

In our settled and civilized lower forty-eight, where we often herd ourselves into cultural enclaves of our own creation, then complain about the encroachment of Others, I ask myself: "Can what we learn about life in one small spot be generalized to a larger society?" Based upon my findings, I think so, if individuals embrace the different with curiosity rather than fear, and seek what inexorably binds us together instead of that which superficially separates us. But then again, perhaps the margin for error down here is slimmer than it is even in Alaska.

## References

- Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. (2006). *Alaska Air Medical Escort Training Manual* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 247-266). Anchorage, AK: Division of Public Health.
- Alaskan Native Knowledge Network. (1993a). *Alaska Federation of Natives guidelines for research*. Retrieved from <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/afnguide.html>
- Alaskan Native Knowledge Network. (1993b). *Cultural and intellectual property rights*. Retrieved from <http://ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/rights.html>
- Alaskan Native Knowledge Network. (2000). *Guidelines for respecting cultural knowledge*. Retrieved from <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Publications/knowledge.html>
- Angrosino, M. (2007). *Doing ethnographic and observational research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Arctic Studies Center. (2000a). *New dynamics of cultural research and representation in Alaska*. Retrieved from [http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/Alaska\\_dynamics.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/Alaska_dynamics.html)
- Arctic Studies Center. (2000b). *Research of northern peoples and environments*. Retrieved from <http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/research.html>
- Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2011). *Grounded theory: A practical guide*. London, UK: Sage.
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and thou*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Buckley, W. (1967). *Sociology and modern systems theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Chaffin, Y., Krieger, T., & Rostad, M. (1983). *Alaska's Konyag country*. Anchorage, AK: Pratt Press.
- Clifford, J. (2004). Looking several ways: Anthropology and native heritage in Alaska. *Current Anthropology*, 45(1), 5-30.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Crowell, A., Steffian, A., & Pullar, G. (Eds.) (2001). *Looking both ways: Heritage and identity of the Alutiiq people*. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press.
- Department of Commerce, State of Alaska. (2010). *Alaska community database community information summaries (CIS): Kodiak*. Retrieved from [http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm?Comm\\_Boro name=Kodiak](http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CIS.cfm?Comm_Boro name=Kodiak)
- Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: A user-friendly guide for social scientists*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Drewry, S. (2004). The ethics of human subjects protection in research. *The Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work* 10(1), 105-117.
- Drewry, S. (2005). A modern *dance macabre*: Science, ethics and the protection of human subjects in research. In G. Fabian (Ed.), *Scientific review of the health college faculty of the University of Debrecen* (Vol. III, pp. 277-290). Nyiregyhaza, Hungary: University of Debrecen Press.
- Feldman, K. (2009). Applied cultural anthropology in Alaska: New directions. *Alaska Journal of Anthropology*, 7(1), 1-19.
- Fisch, R., Weakland, J., & Segal, L. (1982). *The tactics of change: Doing therapy briefly*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1965). Discovery of substantive theory: A basic strategy underlying qualitative research. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 8, 5-12.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

- Gordon, B., & Prentice, E. (2002). Protection of human subjects in the United States: A short history. *Journal of Public Health Management & Practice*, 6(6), 1-9.
- Healey, J. (2014). *Diversity and society: Race, ethnicity, and gender* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. London, UK: Sage.
- Hesse-Biber, S., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- King, N. & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. London, UK: Sage.
- Kluckhohn, C. (1944). *Mirror for man: Understanding the definition of culture*. New York, NY: Fawcett.
- Kraus, R., & Buffler, P. (1979). Sociocultural stress and the American native in Alaska: An analysis of changing patterns of psychiatric illness and alcohol abuse among Alaska natives. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 3(2), 111-151.
- Langdon, S. (2002). *The native people of Alaska: Traditional living in a northern land*. Anchorage, AK: Greatland Graphics.
- LeBlanc, P. (2010). A practical approach to qualitative interviews. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(6), 1621-1623. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-6/leblanc.pdf>
- Lyons, K., Manion, K., & Carlsen, M. (2006). *International perspectives on social work: Global conditions and local practice*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Manley, M. (2010). Understanding self: An essential tool of field research. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(6), 1594-1596. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-6/reinharz.pdf>
- Mason, A. (1996). *In a strange turn of events: How Alutiiq cultural pride became a commodity*. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (1999). *National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics for the Ethical Conduct of Research*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). *The Belmont Report*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Health.
- Neuman, W. (2003). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Palinkas, L. (1987). Points of stress and modes of adjustment in Southwest Alaska. *Human Organization*, 46(4), 292-304.
- Pullar, G. (1992). Ethnic identity, cultural pride, and generations of baggage: A personal experience. *Arctic Anthropology*, 29(2), 182-191.
- Rabionet, S. (2011). How I learned to design and conduct semi-structured interviews: An ongoing and continuous journey. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(2), 563-566. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR16-2/rabionet.pdf>
- Sangasubana, N. (2011). How to conduct ethnographic research. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(1), 567-573. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR16-2/sangasubana.pdf>
- Schaefer, R. (2014). *Racial and ethnic diversity in the USA* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Shennen, S. (Ed.) (2009). *Pattern and process in cultural evolution*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Silverman, D. (Ed.) (2011). *Qualitative research: Issues of theory, method and practice* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- Singleton, R., & Straits, B. (2005). *Approaches to social research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) New York, NY: Oxford University Press.



- Social Science Task Force. (1993). *Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic*, (Social Science Task Force of the U.S. Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee). Retrieved from <http://ankn.uaf.edu/IKS/rights.html>
- Sturgulewski, C. (2002). *Kodiak, Alaska's emerald isle*. Anchorage, AK: Greatland Graphics.
- Sue, D., & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- United States Census Bureau. (2010). *Kodiak Island borough quick facts from the U.S. Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/02150.html>
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1950). An outline of general systems theory. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 1, 139-164.
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1971). Cultures as systems: Toward a critique of historical reason. *Bucknell Review*, 22, 151-161.

### Author Note

Steve Drewry, Ph.D., is Associate Professor, Social Work Program, Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, USA. Inquiries should be directed to: Steve Drewry, Capital University, One College and Main, Columbus, Ohio, USA 43209; E-mail: [sdrewry@capital.edu](mailto:sdrewry@capital.edu)

The author would like to offer his abundant thanks to Mr. Jerry Bongen, of Kodiak Island, Alaska, for his great assistance in conducting this study. He's the best wingman a researcher ever had. Thanks also to the Gerhold Foundation, for a grant award that helped make this research possible. Finally, many thanks to Dan Wulff for his expert editorial assistance in helping to make this work stronger and fit for human consumption.

Copyright 2014: Steve Drewry and Nova Southeastern University.

### Article Citation

Drewry, S. (2014). The Kodiak study: Narratives of diversity and acceptance on the American frontier. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(28), 1-23. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/drewry28.pdf>

---