SOUTH AFRICAN UBUNTU THEORY IN CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION

Angela R. Crist

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2009

Committee:
Dr. Jane Rosser, Advisor
Dr. Lynda Dixon
ABSTRACT

As researchers and development workers frequently work in communities that are not their own, it becomes necessary to prepare for doing cross cultural work. Even communities that are in close physical proximity can require a cross cultural approach to doing work that is meaningful for the practitioner and the community. Ubuntu theory can help guide transitions into cross cultural work and help practitioners assess themselves in order to avoid behaviors and attitudes that, knowingly or not, reestablish systems of privilege and hierarchy. This is an exploration of autoethnographic writing, using personal experiences with cross cultural community development in Cape Town, South Africa.
For my grandmother, Alice Borgelt,

who never stopped learning.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work may never have been painfully completed, were it not for the guidance and mentorship of Dr. Jane Rosser, my advisor, colleague, and friend. Her dedication to my learning and development kept me from giving up this work, on numerous occasions. For that, and for her generosity of time and though, I am extremely grateful.

Second to none, my dear husband, Dave Crosser, also deserves a standing ovation for his behind-the-scenes work in supporting this project. This work was meant to create and analyze uncertainty. In it, I have gained an unshakable certainty for nothing, except the love and deep appreciation and gratitude I have for my spouse. For every silent extra load of laundry and run to the grocery store, in addition to his constant encouragement and coaching, this project, and I, are deeply indebted to him.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

| CHAPTER I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION | ................................................................. | 1 |
| Methodology | ................................................................. | 6 |
| My Method | ................................................................. | 9 |
| Introduction to the Chapters | ................................................................. | 16 |
| CHAPTER II. SOUTH AFRICA 2004 | ................................................................. | 18 |
| Runway – 2004 Journals | ................................................................. | 19 |
| Touching Down | ................................................................. | 25 |
| Putting Feet on the Ground | ................................................................. | 28 |
| Collecting my Baggage – First Writing | ................................................................. | 33 |
| Unpacking – Critical Analysis | ................................................................. | 37 |
| Ubuntu, Revisited | ................................................................. | 39 |
| Privilege. Visited. | ................................................................. | 43 |
| Identity Construction | ................................................................. | 47 |
| Guilt | ................................................................. | 52 |
| Conclusions | ................................................................. | 56 |
| CHAPTER III. SOUTH AFRICA 2006 | ................................................................. | 59 |
| Reentry | ................................................................. | 59 |
| On the Move | ................................................................. | 63 |
| On Money | ................................................................. | 66 |
| Women for Change | ................................................................. | 71 |
| First Writing | ................................................................. | 80 |
Critical Analysis ....................................................................................................... 84
Worldview Exploration ............................................................................................ 87
Worldviews at Work .............................................................................................. 90
My Adult and Activist Identities ........................................................................... 91
Sustaining Our Idealism ....................................................................................... 98
CHAPTER IV. AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION ............................................ 102
Embrace Ubuntu .................................................................................................... 104
   In Application .................................................................................................... 107
Implement Horizontal Learning ............................................................................. 109
   In Application .................................................................................................... 112
Reflect on Your Identity ......................................................................................... 114
   In Application .................................................................................................... 119
Consider the Identity of Those You Need on Your Team ..................................... 126
   In Application .................................................................................................... 128
Be at Peace with Slow and Messy ......................................................................... 132
POSTSCRIPT ............................................................................................................ 136
REFERENCES ........................................................................................................... 137
CHAPTER I

Project Description

I’m going to South Africa next month.

Why?

I’m not sure, but I’m positive I’ll find out.

This thesis is a step in the process of finding out what learning came from two personal cross cultural experiences in South Africa. The process of writing, using an autoethnographic method, was to derive possibly hidden meaning, questions, and learning from each individual experience, the first in June of 2004, and the second in June and July of 2006. I experimented with autoethnography to force myself to answer questions that persisted well after each experience, about what I really learned and how it was applicable to my professional work in community development in the United States. From this process, I also looked to derive meaning for other practitioners who do cross cultural work every day, while working at community development in communities not their own. So while the purpose of the process was to critically analyze my personal experiences being in another culture, the final goal is to draw further meaning from that learning to answer how I, and other community development workers, can use cross cultural learning to enrich our work. I explore the question of how do we prepare ourselves to do community development work in communities that are not necessarily our own? In order to get to this question, I utilized autoethnographic methods to first ask myself what I learned in my cross cultural immersion experiences.

The background for this project stems directly from two periods of travel I experienced in my early and mid twenties. After traveling to South Africa in 2004, I was determined to return and guided my academic work on my Master’s degree toward that end. I returned to the same
region in South Africa in 2006, prepared to gather some ethnographic data from a women’s organization there. Through a variety of circumstances, this did not happen as I had hoped. I returned to the United States still needing to complete a Master’s thesis, and with very different data than I had planned to have.

I was encouraged to “just get something written” using whatever little data I had been able to collect, but this was unsettling to me. I had a deep need to write something that I felt was both meaningful and thoughtful. I had no interest in writing for writing’s sake, or to just get it done. When I spoke about my times in South Africa, an exciting kind of energy came out of me, and I knew there was something to those experiences that I needed to explore. This was despite the fact that I thought I had derived all I thought I was going to derive from both periods. Two and four years after each travel period, I still had a significant energy about using what I had learned during those times in my work in community development in the United States. I knew there was a way to connect what I felt I had learned from my South African encounters to my work. I felt I had collected some good knowledge on a few key topics from each experience, and that, over time, I’d be able to apply some of that knowledge to community development practices, or my personal philosophy about it in the United States.

While trying to figure out what I would do about my thesis project that I disappointedly felt had no real data, it was suggested to me that I explore my learning a little further to see if there was more to know. It was also suggested that I could share my explorations with others interested in cross cultural work or community development. Since I was still fueled by a lot of curiosity about South Africa and my experiences there, I turned to my personal journals as a source for data and documentation of my learning experience in a cross cultural situation. I began to reshape what I was willing to see as data, and saw that my personal writings from
during and after each experience were more than the musing of a random traveler. They were full of implicit and explicit remarks about many larger issues and concerns. When I really looked, I had collected data; it was just in a slightly different shape that I had originally thought.

It came naturally for me to journal my thoughts and make notes about each day’s events while traveling. Journaling still is something I do to calm myself and organize my thoughts. But until I began working with some autoethnographic approaches, I had never seen my journals as anything much more than some personal scribbling, and documentation of my stream of consciousness from specific periods of time. After a few preliminary readings on autoethnography, I began to redefine my voice as a source of information that I could analyze using autoethnography. Unconventional, sure, but I was drawn in by the method that would allow me to simultaneously write something of meaning, and use data to which I had immediate access.

_Ubuntu_, by simple definition is best captured by Mbiti (1970) as ‘I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.’ This Nguni expression from South Africa, “addresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and the responsibility to each other that flows from our connection” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 21). The term recognizes the humanity in all individuals and thus calls us to treat and communicate with one another in a spirit of kindness and respect that, in some ways, takes The Golden Rule of “do unto others…” a step further. Not only do we want to be kind to another because we would hope that another would do the same to us, but with _ubuntu_, I am kind to another because the other is me and my humanity is tied to hers.

Through all of my traveling and time afterward, one thing that always felt deeply significant was this idea of _ubuntu_. _Ubuntu_ was what framed my 2004 experience, and it stuck in my mind as something that held meaning from that time, but also seemed like something that
would help us communicate across the many cultures in my community. Before beginning this project, I hadn’t figured out what using *ubuntu* outside of a South African context would look like, but it seemed like a good philosophy and something that I could borrow from in my work. I saw it as a missing piece in cross cultural work and community development, which, to me, often are the same things. Very often, the work I do in community development occurs within groups or among individuals who do not share the same values or customs as I, despite the fact that we often have lived in the same geographic community. *Ubuntu* seemed to be able to serve as a guiding principle for crossing these cultural borders, in much the same way that it guided my entry into a different culture in a country thousands of miles from my home. I saw that, in many ways, trying to engage in communicating and learning in a different country, was very similar to me working in a local culture that differed from my own. Absent a focused treatment of this idea, I thought I’d eventually just work it into my life in pieces.

Beginning and through this project, I still saw *ubuntu* as a key area of learning. What changed was the depth to which I understood its potential for application. During the exploration with autoethnography, it became apparent that there is much more to applying *ubuntu*, than I had originally thought. Further, it seems that the unexamined use of *ubuntu* has potential to be more detrimental than helpful. I also explore the need to critically examine oneself in the use of *ubuntu*, and despite the potential drawbacks, the *ubuntu* philosophy remains a fascinating topic for me and one that continues to spiral my curiosity about how we can be better human neighbors.

My relationship with this term began in preparation for my 2004 immersion and, upon return to the United States, I realized that it was more than just a theme for my first African travel adventure. For the purpose of this project, *ubuntu* is, in part, the nature of the
methodology of autoethnography, and is deeply rooted in the topics that became points of learning through experimenting with the method. If I am honest about the learning I had from these experiences, that is also somehow tied to you, the reader, and your potential learning. This is why I have chosen to share what I think I have learned from my two cross cultural immersions in the middle two chapters of this work. Ubuntu is also embedded in the overall thesis of this work, of how we prepare ourselves to do community development work in communities that are not our own. We can do this work in ways that expand or diminish our fellow humans. At the conclusion of this work, I explore ways to use ubuntu to expand our fellow humans, and thus, ourselves, while doing community development work.

The method I use in this project is an exploration of autoethnographic techniques. The use of these methods is partially derived from a somewhat failed attempt at doing a more conventional ethnographic project. In 2006, my purpose for returning to South Africa was to collect stories and information from a woman’s organization whose work aligned with my area of interest. My plans for obtaining this information did not work out, and as such, I was left with personal reflections and notes from the experience, but not much in the way of what might be considered traditional data. My 2006 reflections were similar to what I had returned to the United States with in 2004. Upon regrouping my research project back in the United States, I did a survey of my personal journals and decided that applying autoethnographic techniques to them would help me make sense of my experiences and their relevance for a community development worker.

The other reason this methodology was chosen, was because of my interest in doing critical writing, or writing that seeks to be reflective and scratch for deeper meaning. It is important for me to see that there is a “so what?” in my writing that is practical to my or others’
work. The autoethnographic method grounded my inquisition as a critical analysis.

Autoethnography is, by nature, critical analysis. Further, as I was consulting with academic advisors about the nature of my data and my desire to do critical writing, I was encouraged to consider autoethnographic techniques as a way to accomplish my goals using my existing data. I misunderstood the logical connection between my journal data and autoethnographic techniques to mean that this type of research would, itself, be easy. Despite getting into the research and realizing that I was wrong about this, I was still willing to try a different kind of approach, one that was even a little unconventional in the academic world.

The bottom line for my using autoethnography is that it allowed me to do what I really wanted to do, which was answer the question of what I really learned in each of my cross-cultural immersions, and how that learning could be used to help prepare ourselves to do community development work in communities that are not necessarily our own. Using this method forced me back to my notes and memories about both experiences, with a more objective and critical eye. In the four, and two years, since each experience, I had not fully done this, which makes it unlikely that I would have done so on my own otherwise. Choosing autoethnography was a decision that meant that I could finally drive myself to question, and derive meaning from the experiences which resonated with seemingly hidden meaning, several years after the fact.

Methodology

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that “replaces the question ‘how is this true?’ with the question ‘how is this useful?’” (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p. 22). The goal of using autoethnography is to take an imaginative first-person account to “convert data into experiences readers can use” (p. 28). Autoethnographies are “autobiographies that self-consciously explore
the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 742). It is an attempt to critically observe ourselves in a certain context as a way of “collecting ourselves, of seeking order and meaning” (Neuman, 1996, p. 174), and making sense of our selves and our context to “come to terms with sustaining questions of self and culture (p. 193). “In this sense, autoethnography is an attempt to interpret the public and private dimensions of cultural experience and seek a critical distance and perspective on each” (p. 192).

Because it is personal and imaginative, and sometimes risky, autoethnography, is, by nature, messy. “What autoethnography may be able to do is to open up the realm of the interior and the personal, and to articulate that which, in the practices of everyday life, lies below any conscious articulation” (Fiske, 1990, p. 90). This is often uncomfortable for writers and readers, because the practice “may change them, and the direction of change can’t be predicted perfectly” (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p. 23). The nature of autoethnography to be deeply questioning everyday things makes it an “amazingly difficult” process to undertake. “It’s certainly not something that most people can do well…[many researchers are] not sufficiently introspective about their feelings or motives, or the contradictions they experience. Ironically, many aren’t observant enough of the world around them” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 737). As autoethnographers navigate their research back and forth between the outer, cultural realm and the inner, personal, the “distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition” (p. 739). This means that there is always some “slippage, inexactness, indeterminacy” (p. 747) in autoethnography, which is not problematic when the purpose of the writing is to discover the human connection, which is itself always
imperfect. While this is a significant frustration for many researchers, Ellis and Bochner see that as progress:

That’s what learning is. We lose our innocence and our lost innocence validates some good values. We gain tolerance and humility. Sometimes we’re ashamed of how much we’ve excluded from our experience, tried not to see, hidden from. And we should be. We don’t need to run from the fear or anxiety we feel. We need to learn from it (p. 748).

Perhaps the reason it is so difficult to perform autoethnography is because it has many critics, rooted in traditional academic research styles that do not include what they may see to be overly sentimental, self-indulgent romanticism (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). “Conventions militate against personal and passionate writing” and academic writers “have been shaped by the prevailing norms of scholarly discourse…[where] the anonymous essay became the norm, then the personal, autobiographical story became a delinquent form of expression” (p. 737). Further, critics wage frustrations with autoethnography for its seeming inability to be reliable and based in truth and even “unworthy of being classified as part of social science” (p. 745). Ellis and Bochner (2000) counter these critics by pointing out that human knowledge is never separate from the human mind, and is therefore always somewhat dependent on the context of the knower. “So why not observe the observer, focus on turning our observation back on ourselves?...The question is whether we should express our vulnerability and subjectivity openly in the texts or hide them behind social analysis” (p. 747).

To communicate these critical observations and meaning-finding questions, autoethnographers are encouraged “to open their imaginations and take risks” (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p. 28). This may take the form of “short stories, poetry, fiction, novels...” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 739) through which the author is revealed “through action, feeling,
thought, and language” (p. 739). Autoethnographers look back and forth between “an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by…cultural interpretation” (p. 739). This puts the autoethnographer in conversation with the self as well as with the readers. These conversations with the self reveal “uncertainties, our mixed emotions, and the multiple layers of our experience” (p. 748) and make the demands of revealing and questioning these things extremely difficult. “There’s the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you’ve written or having any control over how readers interpret it” (p. 737). The process often begins with the writer’s personal life, with special attention paid to feelings, emotions, thoughts, and memories, written as a story or other form of expression. Those emotions, thoughts and memories are then examined in a larger, cultural context and back to the personal. It is not a process that is ever truly completed or completely right, but it is “human and believable…The text…an agent of self-understanding and ethical discussion” (p. 748). This is the process I have engaged in as the core of this project.

My Method

The floors all creak in The Book Loft, an eclectic bookstore in Columbus, Ohio. That’s where, in the spring of 2004, I discovered the Paper Blanks journal books I would bond with for the next 4 years. Paper and writing utensils are very important to me, especially those that I know I will be using for quite some time. I do not like writing in anything that has a ring binder or that pops closed every time you try to lay it flat. I dislike paper that is rough or dissolves at the hint of moisture. I get aggravated with pens that do not ink consistently or that smear easily. So the journal selection process for my first trip to South Africa was a little intense. A friend took me to the massive maze of books as part of my quest to find a place to record what I already
had the feeling would be a pivotal six weeks of my life. I could see a personal turning point coming and I already treasured the insights, joy, turmoil, and frustrations I would inevitably encounter. I needed to find a place to keep these feelings that matched the depth to which I already knew they would grow.

When we left the squeaky floors of The Book Loft, I had held, paged through, and felt the covers of every journal in the store. My friend purchased for me what would be the first of three Paper Blanks journals that I would eventually have, all full of thoughts of one African country three times the size of Texas. The allure of these books is part function, part form. The covers are smooth but sturdy, and are hand bound through 128 pages of ivory smooth lined paper. Each book has a “memento pouch” in the back, the final selling point for me. The book we took home that day had printed on the front and back covers renderings of textiles designed by William Morris, a nineteenth century British designer. I was smitten with the texture and beauty of the product, and completely drawn in by the smooth blank pages waiting for my entry.

The first entry in relation to South Africa came May 30, 2004 with the 2004 Journals coming to a close on June 28 in a second journal book. I made it my goal to write something every day and usually succeeded. I repeated this goal in 2006 when I began writing on July 25 and completed 2006 Journals on August 20, 2006. Through both sets of journals, I recorded the events of the day and my thoughts and reflections on those events. I deliberately tried to diminish a specific structure to my writing, and instead worked on allowing whatever thoughts came up to make it to the pages. Sometimes there were sketches. Sometimes doodles. Sometimes even emptiness.

Examining these experiences for an autoethnography exercise, I saw that the primary tools for investigating my field experiences were 2004 Journals and 2006 Journals. As such, I
set out to transition those journals for use as research materials, while still preserving their physical integrity as artifacts of my field experiences. My first step in preparing to use my journals as texts was to photocopy each of the three books. Each page of the books were opened and laid flat on the photocopier and printed on 11x17” paper. This way, the 7x9” sheets were centered on a larger sheet, leaving wide margins for my reading, coding notes and highlighting. Then I separated the copies for each journal book and bound the pages together for the individual book, and used an extra large binder clip to keep the copies from all three books together. The original books were packed into large sealable plastic bags and stored in the freezer in my home, as I was told this was a safe way to protect the originals.

After printing copies of each book, I assigned each a volume number and page numbers. 2004 Journals were divided between two books, so I have named the first book Volume 1 as the main journal book used in 2004, which is supplemented by Volume 2, a sketch book about half full of drawings, sketches and notes that could not fit into Volume 1. 2006 Journals are contained entirely in one book.

Beyond my bound field notes and my current journal, I have printed and organized email correspondence sent between myself and family and friends during both the 2004 and 2006 field experiences. In some cases these notes are even more valuable in resource, because I sometimes spent more time detailing a particular thought or event to someone outside the experience than I would write in my journal.

Using a framework of the Grounded Theory approach for the “development of [my] early analytic schemes” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514), I began with 2004 Journals and performed an initial reading, highlighting and coding sections of text that arose as themes using a line-by-line technique. This technique is used to “offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding
Themes of humanness, home or sense of place, guilt, cultural amnesia, communication and language, mobility, power, and consumption dominated the texts and images. I then reread 2004 Journals specifically looking through the lenses of humanness and power as they were the most dominant themes coming through the initial reading. Through this coding exercise, I “start[ed] to define and categorize [the] data” (p. 515). Consistent with the theory that “coding starts the chain of theory development” (p. 515), this exercise was meant to reshape my original scope on the coded areas and draw new attention to areas that may have initially been overlooked. The second reading drew out more points of entry for each of the themes.

I summarized the 2004 Journals and crafted a First Writing, another layer of autoethnographic writing, containing some initial reactions to the text. First Writing of 2004 Journals is found in the first part of Chapter 2. After writing the First Writing of Chapter 2, I then used it as an additional text for writing Critical Analysis of my 2004 experience. I largely left First Writing of Chapter 2 in tact, while writing Critical Analysis, and revisited my original 2004 Journals twice more to locate additional references to the *ubuntu* and privilege, which became themes of the chapter.

I used the same procedure for reading 2006 Journals. An initial reading and coding of 2006 Journals showed some familiar themes from 2004 Journals: home or sense of place, communication and language, mobility, power, and guilt. Major themes that surfaced from 2006 Journals, that were not present in 2004, were money and finances, empowerment, domestic violence, community development, organic intelligence, horizontal transfer of knowledge, and fear. I chose to reread 2006 Journals using horizontal learning and community development as the lenses, as they were the most dominant themes. Again, rereading with these topics in mind
sharpened my perception on them throughout the text, and brought a fresh perspective on some larger sections of 2006 Journals that I had glanced over in initial reading.

Following the First Writing phase for 2006 Journals, I again used the First Writing as another layer of data in the construction of Critical Analysis for 2006 Journals. In Critical Analysis of both 2004 and 2006 Journals, I used each First Writing as a second layer of information in construction of an answer to my question about what I really learned in each experience. Critical Analysis took the original journals, my memories of those experiences, and the First Writing, and sifted out information that helped define each experience. Chapter 4 of this work emerged from the Critical Analysis sections in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Where each Critical Analysis is the “so what?” of it’s chapter, Chapter 4 is the “so what?” of the entire work. Given learning in both 2004 and 2006, what can I now do with it to help prepare myself and others to do community development work in communities that are not my own? Chapter 4 uses the learning in Chapters 2 and 3 to suggest methods for doing cross cultural community development work, using learning from my cross cultural immersion experiences.

I should also note that the four key themes that came out of these initial processes (ubuntu, privilege, horizontal learning and community development), were selected partially because they were the major themes in each volume. They were also partially selected because they were themes that matter most to me. When I think over each of those experiences, ubuntu, or humanness dominates what I hold in my heart from 2004, and horizontal learning is what I learned most about and carry with me today from 2006. Privilege and community development were the top of the list of topics I discussed in my field notes from each respective year, and also have significance in my reflections since each year. When I think of either year in South Africa, these topics, more than the others, were what have shaped my life since then. They have altered
my life as a consequence of having spent that time in South Africa, which I intend to show in this autoethnographic exercise.

Part of what guided this decision to edit what will be discussed in this work is my reading of Ribbens (1998) and her work on situating voice. The retelling of the stories held within those 2004 Journals and 2006 Journals asked me to question where my personal voice comes from, and where it can be situated. Just as the use of autoethnography requires a bit of risk and vulnerability, “paying attention to my feeling voice may thus give me a sense of greater empowerment … on the other hand, by implication, it also feels as though some of my own voices are more concerned with pleasing other people, or particular audiences” (Ribbens, 1998, p. 31). Understanding this phenomena helps me make sense of how a given voice or memory from a point in time, is shaped when it is retold at another time. Some of the stories that will be retold and interrogated in my writing are a few years old by this point, and I am certain to want to allow my embarrassment at my past thoughts to dictate what gets told. Ribbens (1998) indicates that there is no “true” voice, because one is always skewed by any number of internal and external voices. Like Ribbens (1998), I have attempted to “pay attention to the ‘internal’ processes of voice, while also recognizing their fundamentally cultural construction...I am not seeking to hear an ‘authentic voice’ in myself…but to shift the balance of power away from a moral self-monitoring” (p. 36-37). I sought to be vulnerable and keep in mind that my stories do not always show the best version of myself, but that this is okay.

Knowing that I have had significant time to reflect on each experience, it is completely likely that my initial reading was colored by these themes and that may be, in part, why they quickly sifted to the top of the list of themes. I’m okay with that. There is significant discussion of these four themes in each volume, regardless of whether or not they are truly the most
discussed. There are many themes that I have identified (and probably some that I have not) that will not be discussed, because the scope of this project simply will not allow it. Much as any research is colored by the personal leanings of the researcher, I will be clear from the beginning that the themes discussed in this work were chosen based on their significance to my worldview.

After writing each Critical Analysis, I put my personal writing aside for a while and begin exploring what other authors have to say about the four major themes I identified in my texts. Using information from the larger context of research, I then fleshed out each Critical Analysis informed by work from other theorists. This last step was done in an effort to draw on both my experience, and the work of others, to make sense of it, and begin to connect them in ways that would be useful to other practitioners.

As “grounded theory methods specify analytic strategies, not data collection” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514), grounded theory dominated my approach to this project, but autoethnography is what defines it. This is consistent with the idea that “grounded theory studies typically lie between traditional research methodology and the recent postmodernist turn” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522). Grounded theory enabled me to begin having the autoethnographic conversation with myself, and begin telling the stories of 2004 Journals and 2006 Journals. Interacting with 2004 Journals and 2006 Journals, four and six years after writing each created a conversation between my 2004 and 2006 selves, and my identity several years later. Rewriting portions of each Journal as story helped me to engage with my memory of each experience in order to draw on “emotional recall to try to understand an experience I’ve lived through” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 737). Both First Writings and Critical Analysis phases ended in further “self-discovery and self-creation” (p. 746) which will hopefully resonate with the reader as well. The purpose is
to discover useful information from my 2004 and 2006 experiences, relating to my overriding questions of how to prepare ourselves to do cross cultural community development work.

Introduction to the Chapters

Chapter 2 contains First Writing and Critical Analysis of 2004 Journals. The chapter begins with a retelling of a few key stories from 2004 that help describe why ubuntu became such a poignant piece of learning for me. The Critical Analysis of these stories led me to begin understanding where ubuntu, for all I believe it to have deeply constructed my worldview, had left gaps in my understanding of myself both within the South African context and my work at home. Critical Analysis of 2004 Journals led me to a deeper look at my identity as a white woman of privilege, working in a poor black township in South Africa. The discoveries within this chapter lead to a further discussion in Chapter 4, about how to frame our experiences in different cultures to be both open and kind, but avoid naiveté.

Chapter 3 contains First Writing and Critical Analysis of 2006 Journals. Like Chapter 2, this chapter begins with a few key stories from my travels that help describe what I felt were the main points of learning in the First Writing of 2006 Journals. Initially, the horizontal learning model, with continued connection to ubuntu, was the main theme of 2006 Journals in First Writing. Similar to Chapter 2, in Critical Analysis, I found that my theme stayed the same, but at a much deeper level than I first imagined. Critical Analysis in Chapter 3 examines how my ability to employ a horizontal learning model in my own work is, once again, skewed by my personal identity. In this section, I explore how my changing identities as a an activist and an emerging adult created dissonance in my ability to be involved in a community that felt increasingly not my own. This also leads into my discussion in Chapter 4, and a practical
application of the horizontal learning or community assets model, to help build community in places that are not our own.

Chapter 4 contains a practical view on the learning from Chapters 2 and 3. This includes suggested uses for *ubuntu* in preparing for, and engaging in, cross cultural work, and the use of a community assets model of doing development work. Chapter 4 is the space where I formulate the answer to my questions of how to prepare ourselves to do community development work in communities that may not be our own. These experiences could often be considered cross cultural, even if they occur in geographical proximity to our home communities.
CHAPTER II

Introduction

In this chapter, I begin with a narrative review of some of the defining moments from my initial experience in South Africa during May and June, 2004. The narrative includes the story of how I found myself in South Africa and the storyline of the experience. In order to detail the narrative, I explore the main texts for this project, my journals from 2004, which I will refer to as 2004 Journals. Mixed within this narrative are some of my initial reactions and reflections, which I will refer to as First Writing. Critical Analysis follows with a second look at 2004 Journals, and the text I created in writing First Writing. In Critical Analysis, I analyze my narrative for deeper understanding of my learning from my 2004 experience in South Africa.

In First Writing, I draw ubuntu as the key defining topic of 2004 Journals. Prior to, and during 2004 Journals, the small group with whom I was traveling used ubuntu as an entry point for doing the least harm to a community that we did not fully understand, when we also did not yet fully understand our privileged statuses. Ubuntu gave us a framework of equity, kindness, empathy, and compassion while our white, educated, American statuses embodied exploitation and colonization. Reexamining 2004 Journals, with the additional text of First Writing, I now propose in Critical Analysis that there are deeper connections as to why ubuntu felt like such an important part of the experience. In Critical Analysis, I explore my status as a white, educated, and relatively wealthy American as it relates to doing cross-cultural learning.

Confronting my privileged statuses was, and is, a confusing endeavor. In Critical Analysis, I attempt to make sense of the dynamics of privilege that affected my understanding in First Writing, and use it to begin a framework for how that helps us understand the role of privilege in community development work. I use the theme of ubuntu, and begin to unpack its
use in terms of addressing my status as a privileged individual. Analyzing First Writing in Critical Analysis, I begin to answer the question of how a white woman of privilege, was able to do work in a community that was not my own, a community almost devoid of privilege. Ubuntu gives us a way to enter a community. It is a useful framework for beginning cross cultural learning, but it cannot disguise the underpinning issues of privilege. Chapter 2 explores my use of ubuntu as an entry point in 2004, and suggests ways in which to begin understanding privilege. This analysis will provide a foundation for practical application in community development work in Chapter 4.

**Runway – 2004 Journals**

I am sitting on a low rock, eating a lunch of canned tuna on Ritz crackers in the damp Daniel Boone National Forest on a weekend backpacking retreat for college students. We had hiked into the forest the evening prior, and had trekked far enough that the only other people we would see were other overnight backpackers. The relics of everyday chaos are locked safely in the 15 passenger van that had brought us to Kentucky from Columbus, Ohio. No laptops, cell phones, or iPods. Nobody but myself and my student leader even carry a watch. Our purpose of going into the woods for reflection and listening to things that become clouded by the daily grind, is unfolding without the use of any technology beyond a small propane cook stove. I am talking to a group of 12 students from the university where I was working at the time, who volunteered to trek through the forest for a weekend to build community amongst themselves, take a break from regular life, and seek a connection to something bigger than ourselves. Sitting by a small stream where we paused to eat and refill our water bottles, we begin talking about water and currents and how life currents affect us. I tell a story about when I was a college student and watched some of my friends catch the currents that took them to places I now envied
them for having gone. Guatemala, Cameroon, Haiti, India…places full of pain and joy and learning, and places where I could have experienced life that was only a curiosity to me as I sit on the soggy leaf covered ground. I speak of self-imposed restraints and fears, some rational, others fictional, that kept me from jumping into the water. I point out that I have had many more opportunities that I can count, but I also speak of regrets for not jumping in to some opportunities with both feet. I used a song by Norah Jones to illustrate the point. “Toes” from Alexander and Jones, recorded by Norah Jones (2004).

The current is strong from what I’ve heard
It’ll whisk you down the stream
So my toes just touch the water
So my toes just touch the water

Daydreamed on the bank again
I was swimming with the fish
And I thought this time that it might be true
But my toes just touched the water
But my toes just touched the water
But my toes just touched the water

Walked a mile just to find the edge
Some place low enough to step right in
Now I’m here and I can begin to move
Walked a mile just to find the edge
Some place low enough to step right in
Now I’m here and I can begin to move

That spoiled sun up over there
Always has to have its way
And I know that the river’s there to shelter me
But my toes just touch the water
But my toes just touch the water
But my toes just touch the water

A week later, sitting in a Steak and Shake restaurant, no doubt eating chili cheese fries, one of the students from the retreat is detailing to me how he is planning on traveling to South Africa in the spring, but may not be able to go because the trip advisor and some students have backed out at the last minute. Having always been interested in travel, I say something like “Wow! I would love to go to South Africa!” and it does not cross my mind that I have just overlooked another opportunity. That is, until another student tells me to wake up and take the chance to go along. He recalls my conversation on our retreat from the weekend before, and when I balk, he even verbally draws the metaphor of me standing with my toes just on the edge of the water. Once again. I was terrified.

A month later, in the last days of May, 2004, I found myself on a sleek British Airways plane heading over the Atlantic to a stopover in London before an 11 hour flight to Cape Town,
South Africa. My head full of discussions, videos, books, and articles that described the history of South Africa and the current socioeconomic conditions. After making the commitment to chaperone the student emersion trip to Cape Town, I joined the group in preparing for our four week stay in a country just ten years into democracy. Our host organization held weekly education sessions to familiarize us with the complicated and confusing history and transformation of a country trying to redefine itself in a post apartheid world.

Much of the information from the educational sessions was new to me. I knew the dictionary definition of apartheid, but had no idea why or how it had begun, or of the deep implications of its many years in formal existence. I could recall seeing national news coverage images of the long lines for voting in the first democratic elections in 1994; I had been thirteen years old at the time. Until our preparation sessions, I had not understood that 1994 had been the first time that all but twenty percent of South Africa’s population had a voice in its government. Concerning current conditions, I learned that economic and class separation had somewhat replaced racial divides, but, what that actually looked like was still fuzzy to me. With swirling notions of retribution turned back for reconciliation, and war for a peaceful transition to democracy, I dragged one giant red backpack 36 hours across the globe.

In that backpack, I had placed a few pieces of literature that had most affected me in our pre-departure research. *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Tutu, 1999), *Country of My Skull* (Krog, 1999), *Kaffir Boy* (Mathabane, 1987), and *History of South Africa* (Thompson, 2000) all made the trip. Throughout our preparation, and before ever touching down onto South African soil, I became fascinated with the complicated and unjust history, and contemporary results of years under the apartheid system. It was in our research, especially in reading and discussing *Country of My Skull* and *No Future Without Forgiveness* that I began to explore the idea of
Ubuntu – the idea that I am more human only when you are more human – as it was used as a framework for peacefully transitioning from apartheid to democracy. Tutu (2004) explains Ubuntu as a concept commonly accepted among the native cultures in South Africa as a way of understanding our interconnections as human beings:

Ubuntu is the essence of being a person. It means that we are people through other people. We cannot be fully human alone. We are made for interdependence, we are made for family. When you have ubuntu, you embrace others. You are generous, compassionate. If the world had more ubuntu, we would not have war. We would not have this huge gap between the rich and the poor. You are rich so that you can make up what is lacking for others. You are powerful so that you can help the weak, just as a mother or father helps their children. This is God's dream (Desmond Tutu’s Recipe for Peace, para 18).

Ubuntu is a communal value and it asks individuals to live within the good for a particular community, because it is within that community that an individual identity is made (Nkondo, 2007). The individual is still an individual but is “absorbed into the collective…Hence, I am because you are, and you are because we are” (Khoza, 2006, p. 16). It was foundational in the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and it was championed as the way to reconstruct South Africa as a nation.

2004 was a notable year in South Africa. Celebrations of 10 years since the first democratic elections had been all over American news media, with the country overwhelmingly painted as being past the years of apartheid. As I prepared to experience South Africa first hand, I recall being fascinated with what I perceived to be a beautiful story of peace and forgiveness, in a world that felt terribly chaotic, with the US war in Iraq just over a year old at the time. Naïve
as it seems now, I thought we would find people in a constant celebratory frame of mind, still
euphoric for all the progress brought by liberation. I had read accounts from the Truth and
Reconciliation Commission, and thought the process seemed raw and horrific, but incredibly
powerful, and I wrongly assumed it was completed and that people were pretty much over it.
Everybody go home now! We’re done being angry with each other!

The obliviousness of my assumptions from those days is embarrassing today. It is not as
if I believed at the time that the United State’s race story was finished. So I am not sure where I
got the idea that in just 10 short years South Africa had risen above and repaired all the injustices
from decades of a racially segregated government. My naïveté is even better highlighted as I
write this analysis in 2008, with the U.S. story of race all over mainstream media covering
Barack Obama’s presidency. During his run, media outlets and individuals seriously questioned
if America was ready for a black president almost 45 years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act. I
expected South Africans to openly speak about the changes going on in their country in 2004,
and yet I am aware that many Americans are still unable to vocalize their real feelings about how
race affects them.

I knew that divisions in the country still existed, remnants of so many years of forced
separation and the mental conditioning that it required, but I was unaware to what extent these
artifacts daily affected individual lives across the country. Overly optimistic or just plain
oblivious, it did not occur to me, prior to landing in South Africa, that people would still be years
from escaping homelessness, poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. As if the idea of
democracy was enough to magically fix all the social problems associated with South Africa’s
history, I thought that even though people might still be poor, they would have moved passed the
oppression and be living peacefully and happily.
2004 Journals begin with my thoughts upon leaving the US, sitting in Heathrow Airport about 14 hours from touchdown on the African continent. My overwhelming need was “to feel as comfortable, clean and human as possible” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 1) after 12 hours of trekking around London on a tourist whirlwind. It turned out this would be the theme of 2004 Journals, though I would have no way of guessing that on May 30, 2004. For all I understood at the time, I was sitting in London on my way to Africa mostly to facilitate the experience for some college students, and second, because I had been encouraged to hop on the plane during a late night snack at Steak and Shake. I had no idea that I was about to begin a journey of questioning what it means to be human. I had no idea that this need to feel human, and the ways I would discover to accomplish feeling human, would deeply affect me for the four weeks we lived in South Africa and for years beyond. Unknown to me, the major focus of my thoughts and feelings for that trip all began with stale sweat in Heathrow on Memorial Day in 2004.

At around 8:30 AM on May 31, 2004, our program facilitators from our host organization, a South African non-governmental organization, met us at the Cape Town airport and helped us load our bulging backpacks and tired bodies into a rented car. They shuttled us to their guesthouse residence, and we were able to shower and reorganize ourselves after a day and a half of travel. “[We] got picked up and got to take a shower! … Went to Table Mountain and had our initial [orientation]” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 7). We rode the cable car to the top of Table Mountain, where we could view much of the cape, and begin orienting ourselves to life on South African soil. By evening, our facilitators shuttled us to Khayelitsha, our hometown for the following month.
After the Group Areas Act of 1950 assigned living areas by racial groups, blacks were prohibited from living in cities in South Africa. Unless they were given work permits by white employers, they were forcibly moved to Homelands in the rural portions of the country. Those that were permitted to stay in urban areas were moved to townships outside of the urban center. They were required to carry passes to be in white areas until 1987. At that time, many blacks moved to cities in search of work, and swelled the black populations in the already cramped townships surrounding the cities. From this growth, settlements like Khayelitsha were born (Thompson, 2000). Khayelitsha means “our new home” in Xhosa, the dominant language in the area (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 30). Compared to other black townships surrounding Cape Town, Khayelitsha is a relatively new place, established in 1985 (Thompson, 2000). It is an hour by train from the city center, and the last and furthest stop on the Cape Flats commuter rail that shuttles workers to the city in the morning and home at night. Khayelitsha is rumored to house nearly 1 million people, though it is difficult to calculate how many truly call it home. Though some areas have been developed through housing initiatives and government housing assistance, many parts of the township are still comprised of informal squatter camps that appear almost overnight.

We arrived in the Harare district of Khayelitsha shortly before evening meal time. When we pulled up to the first house, I remember looking at the student in the car with me and we both shrugged our shoulders at who would stay at this home, and which one of us would go on to stay at the house that would be our next stop. After a few blank stares and a few more shrugged shoulders, I hopped out, grabbed my giant backpack and went home.

Home for the next four weeks had been built with government housing subsidies less than a year prior to my arrival. “I am in a cinder block and tin roof house. 3 bedrooms, 1 bathroom
(not yet working), kitchen, sitting area” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 8). The exterior was unfinished, still showing the mortar between the gray blocks, but the interior sides of those blocks had been puttied, smoothed and painted in warm, soft yellows, blues and greens. Like many houses in the immediate area, there was an outdoor flush toilet and water spigot just outside the back door of the home, but it had been built to eventually accommodate an inside bathroom. So far, no water lines had been run into the home. The living room had an old TV, a second hand sofa, and two large chairs. Each bedroom had a bed, table, lamp, and a small rug covering part of the cement floor. The floors were partially finished. Some had newly laid tile and other parts were covered with plastic sheeting printed with a tile print. The ceiling was yet unfinished so sitting anywhere in the house, one could see through the rafters to the tin roof (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 8-9).

The students and I were paired with host families who voluntarily opened their doors to us strange young Americans, promptly gave us Xhosa names, and urged us to eat. “I was worried about eating and using too much [food], water, and energy. My host mom wants so badly for me to eat, eat, eat, and feel welcome. So I guess I shouldn’t have worried” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 8). I was given the name Tandeka. “My Xhosa name means ‘lovely,’ but I forget how to say it right now” (p. 9). Though I had memorized how to pronounce the vowels correctly (Tawn-DEE-kuh), within a few days, no one ever called me it directly. Rather, it was used to refer to me. The Xhosa name was perhaps more of a symbolic gesture of welcome into the community, as English names were how we were known in the community.

The fact that I could not eat enormous portions of food, multiple times a day, was a source of much discussion throughout our stay. We would be urged to eat various chicken and rice dishes, as well as foods reserved for special occasions, like goat with the delicate portions of
eye and brain reserved for prominent or important individuals offered to us. A couple of hours later we would be urged to eat again. In a community where many individuals came either from urban poverty or subsistence farming in the countryside, the key survival and comfort activity of eating was prevalent. In reflection, I believe that our host community saw food as a way to welcome us and make us feel safe.

I was also given a key to my host’s home as we came and went sometimes during the days while she was at work. I do not believe this was commonly done as everything was kept locked up in Khayelitsha and the key, to me, signaled a distinct level of welcome and openness to her home. None of the rest of our group was given such access, and I remember feeling like I had been given something special. On the day we left, “I tried to give her back her house key and she told me to keep it. That way, ‘when I come back, I could let myself in’ and presumably make myself some tea” (2004 Journals, Vol. 2, p. 41). With their open arms, my name, the food, and the key, I felt welcomed into my host home and the community.

Putting Feet on the Ground

Every day when we both were home for the evening, my host mother would start a pot of tea, set out a tray of biscuits, or cookies to my American eye, and we would talk about the day we had. It was not always something I looked forward to and was, at times, awkward, since I might have seen things during my day that I was embarrassed to share because I often worried about emphasizing my privilege to her relative poorness. “And here I am gallivanting around Cape Town and she asks me if it is a beautiful city?!? Her home – she only sees the township and what is around the train tracks! I am constantly feeling awfully white, awfully rich and terribly spoiled” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 27). Regardless of my hesitation, we had a ritual and it was a time for us to connect as two simple human beings every day. Most every day, except
when our group of Americans was traveling outside of Cape Town, we would eat an evening meal together as well. Occasionally, I would arrive home after her, and other neighbors or friends would have already collected in her “lounge,” or living room, to chat and commiserate at the end of the day. For that short time I was given the same privileges as adult members in the community. I felt like I was part of something unique and relished feeling cared for (p. 43).

I do not know if this welcoming spirit and connection had roots in anything beyond customary hospitality. But it does seem to be exemplary of an *ubuntu* way of living. When learning the term *ubuntu* prior to arriving in South Africa, we primarily discussed it on a macro level from a peace and reconciliation standpoint. The spirit I personally witnessed was not about unpacking crimes against humanity or reorganizing the government. It did feel like being welcomed as a human being into a community. The sense of connection forced me to consider the reality of the community where I stayed, and it caught me a few times when my selfish and ever-consuming self wanted to place my wants above those that had embraced me. There were moments when I felt guilt and embarrassment at my freedom to trot all over the South Africa and purchase whatever caught my eye, only to have to return to Khayelitsha and be reminded about the hurt and pain still persistent there. On our way back to Khayelitsha from a short trip to Durban, I reflected in the airport, “I felt like I was somehow betraying [my host mother] or at least the relationship we’ve formed by flitting across her country to places she’s never been and probably never will go” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 65). The embrace of Khayelitsha reshaped what I was willing to be proud of, from diverse experiences and personal possessions, to simple connecting over sugary tea. It forced me to acknowledge my choices and actions in terms of the power they had to negatively or positively affect the community. Despite that my Western culture of independence might have suggested otherwise, the rituals of situating myself in the
community made me feel more at peace and happy with myself than I could recall having felt before.

This feeling of peace and happiness is prevalent in 2004 Journals. I frequently commented about feeling more alive and more at home in South Africa than I had in the U.S. On June 3, “I feel so real here. They tell us ‘we are not into watching our figures here’ and we toast our teacups filled with cream to that (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 36). The next evening, I wrote:

Here I am real.
I think clearer.
Eat worse.
Worry none.
Speak smarter.
Listen more.
Observe intently.
Relax abundantly.
Breathe rhythmically.
Pulse.
Smile.
Am swallowed.


After traveling outside of Khayelitsha for a day, I reflected on being “not just a learner or a participant or a guest, but at home, and peace and graciously so” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 73).
Through the daily rituals, I came to feel more connected to my host family and more aware of myself within the community. I liked the person I became while being cared for in *ubuntu* spirit.

At the same time, even then, I attributed my easy connection to Khayelitsha at least partly to the fact that I had basically been homeless for several years. Early on, it occurred to me that I was so at peace “maybe because where I am now is the closest thing I’ve had to a home in a long time” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 73). While struggling with how to leave South Africa, I thought “it goes back to this being the closest thing to home I’ve had in a while (sigh). Home is definitely not at my parents’ house, it’s not in Columbus, for sure, and I don’t have anywhere else” (2004 Journals, Vol. 2, p. 12). I had friends and family who cared about me and to whom I talked regularly, but by the time of our trip, they were scattered all over the globe, including myself. There was no pattern or reliability to how often, when or where I would get an opportunity to connect with anyone, partly because of my own go-go-go mentality, and partly because everyone else I knew shared that same sense. Consequently, I had lost any connection to a physical community and was clinging to the emotional connections of friends living in all kinds of time zones. Less a little attachment to my students and colleagues at work, I was pretty lonely, and my home in South Africa filled the void.

The daily ritual of chatting over milk tea and biscuits was foreign to me and was completely natural to my host mother and her neighbors. Yet it temporarily cured my loneliness and replaced it with a small connection every day. I had no idea how much I craved that type of ritual. By sitting in the same physical space with someone day after day, it is difficult to not honor their humanness, and in that way I was able to feel more human myself.

Despite how often I reflected in 2004 Journals about feeling at peace and at home, there were a few incidents that managed to dislodge my feelings of balanced equality in my host
One event in particular triggered my thoughts about the subtle notions of power that I lived, but was unaware of. Jarring as it felt at the time, in reality it only involved a pair of inexpensive denim jeans and some heavy thread.

About a week into my stay, I shared about a few small sewing projects that I had been working on at home in the U.S. My definition of sewing includes a machine, a bobbin winder, and a special tool to help me tear out all the seams when I mess the whole thing up, but I failed to mention all of this at the time. At my suggestion that I could sew, my host mother lit up and slipped out of the room. She came back with a pair of jeans and a large spool of wool thread, the kind that I would normally associate with knitting something with a very fine gauge. She said her pants were too long and asked if I would hem them for her. My host mother “asked me if I’d hem her jeans for her tonight and I of course said yes, but did not expect the humbling experience it gave me. I can’t imagine wearing the hem I put in those pants, but she seemed just glad she didn’t have to do it” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 28). I got on my knees to pin her hem and hand stitched the seam, but even now this idea toys with my sense of identity in that particular space.

My confusion was on many levels. First, that I would be asked to hand sew anything, let alone something that should have a straight seam and that would be worn in public. Second, that I was asked to do this little project as a houseguest. Third, that the person asking me to do the sewing was a domestic worker by trade. I was not, and am not proud of my reactions to this task. And I admit that there were likely some cultural cues misfiring between the two of us regarding the role of host and houseguest. It was not that I felt degraded to do the task. I wanted to do things to rearrange the privilege hierarchy that I perceived to be going on in the community, with us white Americans (paying no small sum to stay with families while clearly
not having any paying jobs to support our adventures) living amongst several families struggling to find work for any person in the household. I was not concerned with whether or not I should, but with whether or not I could, do the project in a way that I thought would not degrade the wearer. I also worried about how much she may have spent on the jeans and whether or not I was about to mutilate them. I was also humbled by the task that made me appreciate her daily work in the white neighborhoods. “I worry about her working so hard with no real rest. She seems to appreciate the concern” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 78). The brief exchange about the pants reconfirmed in me the need for humility, and a sense of servant hood, necessary at times in a functioning community using ubuntu principles.

Collecting My Baggage – First Writing

Reflecting on 2004 Journals, what stays with me the most from that period of time is the notion and spirit of ubuntu. Ubuntu is what comes to mind when I think of 2004, and it is the framework that I have used to inform my work as a community development worker since then. In the beginning of this project, I thought that I would go back into 2004 Journals and see glaring examples of when this occurred. This was incorrect. What I find, rather, are nuances, small behaviors that contributed to an overall sense of being alive and being connected. Mostly, what I find is my own personal exploration of what it means to be human. Specifically, what made me feel human, alive, and real. Where, during the time we were in the country, I made a shift from a macro view of ubuntu to an extremely personal view, I now find myself having shifted my thoughts back to a macro perspective. 2004 Journals show a personal learning, but, I more frequently notice ubuntu in application to my broader work. Now, I believe that my learning about community on the personal level, is what allows me to understand what ubuntu means on a broad scale in my community work.
When I went to 2004 Journals looking for examples of when I saw *ubuntu* occurring, in addition to personal accounts of understanding humanness, what came through clearly were examples of when the opposite had occurred. During our month in South Africa, we visited monuments, museums, and organizations to gain more understanding of the country in a post-apartheid state. We were asked, by our host organization, to explore the country with *ubuntu* in mind. In 2004 Journals, I find notes of reflections on historical occurrences where everyone, black, white and colored was diminished in an attempt to negate the humanity of another. From a visit to a Dutch Reformed Church in downtown Cape Town, the church seemed “not very spiritual even though they claim to not be political. It felt more about…the white people who ‘belong’ there, even if they *say* all are welcome” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 12). In our travels around the country, there were several experiences that gave us a picture of times when *ubuntu* spirit was not so present in South Africa. One of those experiences was at The National Gallery featuring an exhibit of art pieces that had been banned during apartheid.

Immediately to our left upon entering the museum sat *The Butcher Boys* by Jane Alexander (1985). It stands out in my memory as having affected me in ways that I am still somewhat uncomfortable with. *The Butcher Boys* is a sculpture of three human-like beings with deformed and animal-like features. Their mouths, noses, genitalia have been plugged or closed, and their ears are only holes in their heads. They sit upright and blankly stare, but have a gaping crevasse where their spines should be. They are growing goat or ram horns from their heads. They are most definitely male and at least partly human based on their torsos, legs, arms, hands and eyes. They are both enough human, and also enough animal, that it is gross to see the combination (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 25).
The title *The Butcher Boys* is a play on the term used to name the security police who were responsible for the torture and death of many South Africans involved in the resistance. My first reaction was belief that the gross behaviors of these men as assassins and torturers was the reason why they are depicted so horribly deformed, like monsters. Some kind of karmic retribution.

Upon closer inspection and reflection, it appeared that their mouths had been forced shut by something external. Their spines, forcibly removed. Their androgyny and anonymity applied to them, maybe without their full knowledge, as they appeared to still be on the lookout, still working. It became apparent to me, that the way that they have grown so disfigured was not entirely by choice. By choice or not, they had changed in ways that made them nearly unrecognizable as human beings. “Being charged to do horrific acts somehow makes you less human inside” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 25).

According to apartheid rhetoric, the security police were higher humans charged with keeping lesser people in line. The irony is that by attempting to deny the humanity of an entire population, these men only succeeded in diminishing themselves and the humanity of their cause. The effects may have been police officers going insane or being unable to sleep, or withdrawing from their families due to what they were asked to do at work (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2004). The apartheid system, which sought to diminish and destroy entire populations of people, inflicted its purpose also onto the supposed superior race. It also diminished them into antagonistic and brutal animals. By denying the humanity of another, they ultimately denied their own.

Further, lest it become too easy to casually recall South Africa’s past and cluck in shame at what has happened, the sculptured beings project South Africa’s past directly onto the
personal lives of each viewer. The eyes of each being are made of glossy black stone. If one gets very close to one of the beings, the stone will reflect the observer from its eyes. It was incredibly startling for me to see myself in the eyes of something I had just spent several minutes detesting. It was a reminder that we are all guilty of diminishing and dehumanizing behaviors, much as we want to deny or ignore it. “I could see myself in [the] eye’s reflection and do not want to see myself in the eyes of something so ugly and evil. But I can be seen there” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1 p. 25).

It was experiences like these that emphasized to me what happens when ubuntu is not part of the framework governing community life. Systems like apartheid were clearly designed to strip a sense of humanity from one group, in an attempt to increase the perceived superiority of another. However, as The Butcher Boys represents, the apartheid system was no more kind to whites, than it was to colored or black people. Economic and political status aside, there were no social or emotional winners in the system.

Examples of diminishing humanity were experienced alongside several personal experiences with the same issues. Experiences with the negative parts of South Africa’s history, also brought reflection about when I fail to honor the humanity of others in my community. “I diminish others when I judge. Thoughts, timing, appearance, placement, experience. And often it’s me judging myself because I know that’s where I come from and I recognize a former self and react very negatively to it. Put it down out of embarrassment, frustration, current pride” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 21). At other times, I ranted in my writing about students who could not be more sensitive to each other, their surroundings, and nuances about the culture where I was still adjusting. “I am tired of…Not knowing where in the hell I am! Of VW bus taxis with crazy drivers and horrible smells! Dirty hands. Of people trying to rip us off. Of people trying
to warn us about people trying to rip us off...Of being odd-looking and something to stare at” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 60-61). It is difficult to read some of these passages seeing now that I was committing the same crimes which I was accusing them of. When ubuntu goes away from our way of being, it is not just the victim who is diminished, but the perpetrator. The Butcher Boys and me.

As someone who frequently spoke about the value of community, and taught students to think about what they believed it meant to be human, I thought that I understood these things myself. I thought of myself as a compassionate person who was interested in dignifying all walks of life. Living in Khayelitsha showed me how much I had to learn about understanding community and humanness. I am certain that I would never have begun to understand these things, or the ubuntu spirit that pervades these ideals, had we not stayed in the homes of host families.

Ubuntu helps us create community and feel more human, to alleviate the effects of when we inevitably do the opposite. When we take the time to know another as a human being, and build connections as a community, we become more human ourselves. No person is immune from forgetting this, and acting in ways that diminish other people. In some cases, we may not even know we are diminishing another. Using ubuntu principles to guide our intentional actions in community, help us deal with the times when we are less constructive in our communities.

Unpacking – Critical Analysis

My experiences feeling more comfortable and real, and feeling like we were applying ubuntu to our lives with our host families, led me to believe that the whole experience could be summed up in knowing and living ubuntu principles. Looking again at 2004 Journals, and First Writing, I find that my first impressions do not seem to cover everything that was of importance
in the experience. Critical Analysis will be a space for me to further explore what I think I have learned from the experience of writing this portion of my autoethnography, without significantly altering my original reactions. I will first address my initial reaction to *ubuntu* as a theme for this research, and then briefly discuss its continued relevance to this work. Further application of *ubuntu* will appear in Chapter 4. The majority of Critical Analysis will begin a closer look at my understanding of my relative privilege while in South Africa, and an initial look at why it is important for me, and other students and practitioners, to examine ourselves as people of privilege trying to do work with less privileged communities. Chapter 4 will take this analysis forward in discussion of community development methods.

My first readings of 2004 Journals, colored heavily by what I have carried in my heart for the four years since that experience, led me to *ubuntu* as a major theme. A more critical reading of First Writing, has led me to another major theme that I believe has to be uncovered from *ubuntu*. After rereading First Writing and 2004 Journals, I see that I was intensely focused on humanness, and mostly just the constructive and comfortable side of it. I glossed over experiences with the friction of privilege as a relatively wealthy, white, educated, English speaking, mobile young woman in a poor, black community. There are a few moments when, in First Writing, I began to interface with that friction, though in my first writing, I did not attempt to address them. There were times, such as my reflections at *The Butcher Boys*, the pants hemming incident, or traveling outside Khayelitsha, when my privileged status became something that took me out of my comfort zone of trying to view South Africa through rosy lenses. Now, I believe I had established the use of *ubuntu* principles as a way to ignore or, at the very least, suppress the moments where I became uncomfortable with my privilege. I believe that I used *ubuntu* as a scapegoat from really facing the deeper issues. In 2004 Journals and First
Writing, as much as I tried to answer every question with reminders of how we were all equal and could support each other despite our different backgrounds, there were times when these answers were not enough. There were times when the only answer to my confusion, was dealing with my privilege, and at the time, I was not willing or able to do so.

I still believe that *ubuntu* was a significant entry for learning, though I now have a different understanding of why it was, and is significant, which I begin to explore below. I also use this section to begin uncovering my privileged identity, where I hid it behind *ubuntu* before. Here, I explore three incidents where I experienced my privileged identity in 2004, and what significant learning this holds for me as a community development worker.

*Ubuntu, Revisited*

In First Writing, *ubuntu* was key learning, but I now see that it was complicated with the issue of privilege, which I chose to not cover initially. In First Writing, I did not want to pick out privilege as a theme. It was a conscious decision; I’ll admit it. I did not want to reflect on my status as a privileged individual. Even four years since this cross cultural experience took place, I was still only comfortable framing my experience with *ubuntu*. I knew that privilege was an issue, but I was afraid going into it would be too complicated for me to make sense of. In this analysis, I see that I was exercising my privilege in choosing to ignore it. One of the luxuries that I enjoy as a person with several privileged identities is “the illusion that issues of justice do not impact [me, and I can therefore] choose to ignore them” (Turpin, 2008, p. 145). I was not interested in exploring what I wrote off as my twenty three year old self not thinking deeply enough and acting naïvely, but I was also not yet willing to begin exploring the deeper issues of power. As I reread First Writing, I cannot deny the many times I encountered my position as a white, educated, mobile, American in contrast to the people with whom I spent most of my time.
My community at the time was mostly black, underpaid, marginally educated, and with limited mobility. We were very different in many ways, and the community and I both knew it. Now I see that, rather than attempt to unpack all of those privilege dynamics, I took the shortcut through *ubuntu*, which meant I could write off the awkwardness as times when I needed to be less judgmental, kinder, or patient, and ignore that I had just interrupted my naïve notion of equality. I wanted to see myself as someone who was educated on issues of status and power, but discovering this conflict in my perception has created a need to reorganize my definition of self. This is never fun, and usually not welcomed, even by someone who is supposedly educated on these things.

In an attempt to learn from the community, and not have it be significantly altered by my presence, I attempted to assimilate and stay away from discussions or actions that drew attention to my difference, as my differences were mostly indications of privilege. “We looked at all of my photos tonight with [my host mother and some neighbors] and I felt bad in a lot of ways. Places in their own city that they will never see, shown to them on a digital camera that they would have a hard time purchasing” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 116). We were trying to understand and embrace one another, so dwelling on privilege did not seem important at the time or in my initial readings. “Why don’t I want [my host family] to know how much money I spend? Because [they] host me, yet money still equals power, and it’s a weird dynamic of guest/host? Sort of. Anyway, had a really nice conversation…” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 120). By focusing on *ubuntu*, both at the time and during my initial writing, I was able to gloss over the issues of privilege where I was most uncomfortable. Instead of dwelling on how my access to money made me uncomfortable around my host family, I could hedge “sort of” and move my thinking back to a nice conversation.
I also find it to be poignant, that in many places where I see myself struggling with notions of privilege in 2004 Journals, the questions are often left unanswered and followed by an abrupt shift to something unrelated. When writing about the pants hemming incident, I questioned “Am I too good to wear my own work – work that she [does herself]?” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 28). This was followed closely by a quip about what we had watched on television that evening. “‘Codpiece’ was an answer on Weakest Link tonight – ha!” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 28). The questions I posed to myself after the pants hemming were real struggles with my varied identities at the time. “[What about how] she works too hard to do [this kind of domestic work] but has not enough to have [paid] someone else to do it” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 28)? But, I never attempted to answer these questions at all in 2004 Journals. Not only did I not try to answer them, I would quickly change the subject on myself, usually to something lighthearted, or something that reminded me of how connected I felt to the family or community.

I see this now as a way to blanket unwanted emotions and feelings with altruistic intentions. Even though I had good intentions, it gave me an excuse to look away from my confusion over privileged statuses, and substitute feelings that were heartwarming and happy. If I could focus on the humanity of my hosts, and how well we bonded as friends, it could help me overlook that my privileged status was somehow tied to their underprivileged status. If I could focus on history, and the enormous strides South Africa had made, I could forget that my status had likely diminished my host community’s at some point. Now I must acknowledge that ubuntu theory may have resonated so deeply, partly because it answered questions that I held about community development, but more, because it was an immediate answer to my personal struggle of being a wealthy white woman in a poor black community. I could walk away from
real struggles of privilege, such as questioning why I was embarrassed to show our relative
wealth, by focusing on having a really nice conversation and bonding as individuals. This is a
danger in using *ubuntu* blindly, and not treating it as the building block for systemic change that
it is.

Our experience, as guided by our host organization, was framed by trying to negate our
privileged status. Pre-departure activities included thinking about ways to lessen our impact, and
in a few places in 2004 Journals, I wrote about “being careful about being too concerned with
sharing my own culture when I’m really here to learn about this one” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p.
79). Personal reflection was part of our guided experience, but the focus of our time in the
country was to soak up as much South African culture as possible. Most of our energy was
focused on seeing and acknowledging the humanity and autonomy in the people and cultures we
were meeting, with less emphasis on our intrinsic impact of our statuses. Occasionally we
dabbled with privilege, mostly when trying to focus on diminishing the effects of it. My
reflection of, “I diminish another when I judge. Thoughts, timing, appearance, placement,
experience…” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 21), says nothing of ways that we did this without
knowing or without trying. My only reflection on diminishment says nothing of intrinsic ways
of diminishing another. The reflection is about trying to be a kind and compassionate
community member, with no indication that we might have diminishing capacity beyond our
choices and actions.

In order to be able to focus our learning on the culture at hand, we did all we could to
communicate that we were not privileged individuals. Initially, I believed that this was all there
was to learning from another culture. If I denied that I had privilege, everyone would believe me
and we could all get along. However, most everyone who saw me or heard me speak, would
have assumed me into privileged status, whether it was because I was white, American, educated, or because they thought we were wealthy. No matter how hard we tried to pretend that we could see everyone as equal human beings, there were dimensions of privilege working that we could not always see, let alone control.

Beginning to see *ubuntu* as a cover, helps me to understand that, while it is a valid way of understanding community, it cannot be used to deny those things that derail community building. This is also not to say that I think we were ill-advised to use *ubuntu* as a framework for entering Khayelitsha. Actually, I think it was an ideal mechanism for engaging students in a cross cultural experience where *ubuntu* is an important aspect. *Ubuntu*, or any way of understanding a community, would not have been able to help us understand all of the discrepancies, confusions or miscues we experienced. No framework could do that much, especially where individual identity construction is concerned. Despite that, I now see privilege as an area that I tried to overlook in 2004 Journals. I believe that *ubuntu* gave us a valid point of entry for beginning to understand South African culture. In Chapter 4, I will explore the practical ways in which I believe *ubuntu* can be an effective framework for doing cross cultural learning, despite where I now see gaps in my own learning and application.

*Privilege. Visited.*

“Racial identity development theory concerns the psychological implications of racial group membership, that is belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership” (Helms, 1990, p. 3). White identity, part of my identity, is complicated by two key factors: nobody wants to learn that they are a “bad guy” and, for many individuals, what is white is just normal, with no other identity needed.
Janet Helms provides an introductory framework from which to understand the many angles from which a White person might view his or her identity. Her structure is summarized into six stages: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo Independent, Immersion, and Autonomy (Helms, 1990). Using these stages as a foundation, I explore what I was feeling and thinking as a white, middle-class woman in a poor, black community in 2004.

Many White individuals have little or no recognition that such a thing called “whiteness” exists. For many, the dominant culture is simply normal. “If they have lived, worked, or gone to school in predominantly white settings, they may simply think of themselves as like the majority of those around them” (Tatum, 1994, para 8). This understanding of society and culture is what Helms calls the Contact Stage where individuals likely take their “normalness” for granted and give no conscious consideration to any advantages they may have for being white (Helms, 1990, Tatum, 1994).

The next stage comes directly from having a sense of being normal being somehow disrupted. Often, this may be because the individual has somehow been made to feel like an Other (Aveling, 2004). The individual is used to feeling normal, and suddenly feels alone or in a minority population. The individual becomes aware of his or her whiteness in this, the Disintegration Stage (Helms, 1990). He or she may start to sense some guilt over how one’s own privilege may have disadvantaged another. The person may want to do something to fix the perceived problem (Tatum, 1994). Turpin says, “One of the expressions of privilege is the assumption that one has the power to ‘fix’ injustice” (2008, p. 146). The experience of discovering that one’s identity is implicated in oppression and one cannot simply fix it, “may be marked by loss, particularly as those at the socially constructed ‘center’ who feel comfortable in public discourse because it is dominated by their language and cultural context begin to
experience themselves as members of a dominant ethnic group rather than just ‘normal’” (p. 141). This stage is similar to me thinking I could focus on kindness in order to disqualify the inequality between myself and my host family.

Helms sees the next stage, Reintegration, as a period of time when White individuals may blame “Black people’s inferior social, moral, and intellectual qualities” (Tatum, 1994, para 25), in order to release the guilt or responsibility one may feel after encountering whiteness. This may also be what Turpin (2008) calls the “temptation of defensive anger” (p. 142). In this stage, individuals “want to protect the narrative self-understanding that their life achievements (or those of their ancestors or nation) are the result of virtue and hard work rather than the result of privilege generated by unjust power structures” (Turpin, 2008, p. 145). Given the trauma that an individual may feel in beginning to understand White privilege, it becomes clearer why more White people ignore issues of race as not of their concern. “These feelings are uncomfortable and can lead white [individuals] to resist learning about race and racism. And who can blame them? If learning about racism means seeing oneself as an ‘oppressor,’ one of the ‘bad guys’…few people would actively embrace such a self-definition” (Tatum, 1994, para 5).

It is at this point, or at others, that some individuals may “race to innocence” (Razack and Fellows in Magnet, 2006, p. 738), where one retreats to self identity of most oppression to avoid addressing the areas where one is implicated in being dominant:

You ask me: ‘When did you know you were White?’

I tell you: ‘I’m not White, I’m Jewish.”

Truly? A cop out.

More comfortable for me to talk about my position as a victim than as a person of privilege…
Easier for me to say ‘That’s anti-Semitic’ and watch that slow red flush that I have earned” (p. 738).

Whether because the individual is overcome with despair, begins victim blaming, or repositioning the self as a victim, this is a stage where it is easy to become stuck. “Unlike persons who are more directly impacted by structures of injustice, more privileged [individuals] can ‘afford’ to stop at the point of despair” (Turpin, 2008, p. 146). However, if a person stays at this stage, he or she may never move beyond “white ignorance, white denial, white fear, white apathy, white lies, white power” (Brand in Magnet, 2006, p. 147) to “think through the ways in which we are privileged [and need] to do the hard work of casting aside our own internalized ‘isms’” (Magnet, 2006, p. 147).

Tatum (1994) and Turpin (2008) see a need to continue dialogue and support of the fears and tendencies at this stage in order to move individuals to Helms’ Pseudo-Independent State, where there begins a “commitment to unlearn one’s own racism [and]…creating a positive definition of whiteness” (Tatum, 1994, para 28). An individual might seek out others with antiracist thinking or friendships with people of color (Tatum, 1994). The person may be trying to locate him or herself within the history of struggle, which for many white people is something that one must give up in order to be White. “One of the things that inhibits [White people] from connecting immediately with oppressed persons, is the disconnect they have with their own history of struggle” (Turpin, 2008, p. 148). By seeking out a community of like-minded individuals, individuals may begin to define their own whiteness.

In the Immersion Stage, individuals can become more self-reflexive as a way to work across difference. Not in an “easy Muzak-harmony but rather a polyrhythmic staging of a full-throated counterpoint where tension are left unresolved” (Shohat, 2006, p. 2). “It is at this stage
that the feelings of guilt and shame are replaced with feelings of pride and excitement” (Tatum, 1994, para 35). “The person in this stage is searching for the answers to the questions ‘Who am I racially?’ and ‘Who do I want to be?’…These positive feelings not only help to buttress the newly developing White identity, but provide the fuel by which the person can truly begin to tackle racism and oppression in its various forms” (Helms, 1990, p. 62).

Similarly, individuals may move into Helms’ Autonomy Stage, which “represents a culmination of the previous stages,” and is a nurtured form of them all as “the newly defined view of one’s whiteness is internalized, and incorporated as part of one’s own personal self-definition” (Tatum, 1994, para 39). Whether in the form of groups of individuals holding similar thinking, or the form of white role models or allies, this stage and the next require reflexivity on the part of the individual. Autonomy Stage involves the person adding learning from other cultural groups, and becoming more aware of other “isms” and oppressions.

Looking back on 2004 Journals and First Writing along side this identity model, I can begin to situate my awareness of privilege in 2004 while in South Africa for the first time. Looking at it now, I place my 2004 self in Helms’ Pseudo-Independent Stage, though I am inclined to believe that I would have placed myself into Immersion Stage at the time of 2004 Journals. I believe I thought I had a high level of understanding about my identity as a privileged individual, even though my tendency to gloss over blatant confusion over this issue in 2004 Journals indicates otherwise.

**Identity Construction**

All of my progression through Helms’ first few stages took place in my late teens and early twenties, while I was a university student. At the time of 2004 Journals, I had already experienced the transition from “normalness” to Disintegration Stage through experiences where
I was “othered” or forced to recognize my role in, and inability to fix, the system of privilege. I also had moved through Reintegration with some pressure from family and friends to stop at despair and anger and thus, not disrupt too much of my dominant culture definition of whiteness. I also recall a period of time when there was some temptation, among other privileged white college students, to celebrate our despair and anger. As Turpin describes, we “[felt] satisfied by [our] understanding of the enormous complexity of the problem, feel guilty about [our] history of relative privilege in relationship to other social groups, and [felt] superior to [our] colleagues who ‘just don’t get it’” (2008, p. 146). We flaunted our frustration as a way to show how aware and evolved we had become, as we saw many of our peers still unaware of their relative privilege. By the time I graduated from college in 2003, much of my anger and despair had turned into curiosity about the people I saw, and knew to be aware of issues of oppression and injustice, but who did not mope through life. I was curious about how I could be both aware of my place in the privilege hierarchy, and not really angry about it. I wanted to find “nonoppressive ways of being white” (Tatum, 1994, para 34). After having spent a year attempting to help students learn about their places in the system of hierarchy, I likely thought that I had moved on to Helms’ Immersion Stage. As Helms’ model “is not a static or linear one…there may be back-and-forth-movement, revisiting earlier stages and then moving forward again” (para 41), I may have moved into Autonomy and then moved back during the time of 2004 Journals. Based on the high frequency of feelings of guilt in 2004 Journals, and my apparent inability to define my whiteness in the face of several challenges to my notion of privilege, I believe I had not yet grown into this stage by 2004.

An example of where much of my conflict with my identity as a person of privilege in a less privileged community, is the pants hemming incident that I began to deconstruct in First
Writing. The pants hemming incident was incredibly confusing at the time, and still during First Writing. In both 2004 Journals and First Writing, I wrote the experience off, as something that I overcomplicated or read wrong. Still focusing on *ubuntu* as the only course of thinking, I used the experience to signal a need for humility and servanthood in community. While these qualities are certainly valuable in a community setting, I find it more important, now, as a person who continues to work through confusing notions of privilege, to take a look at what caused me to be so conflicted about the pants.

In First Writing, I identified several points of confusion involved in the incident: my definition of what is acceptable to wear, my status as a guest, worker, and friend, degradation to me, degradation to my host mother as a worker and as a wearer of the jeans, potential cost to my host mother, fear of being rude, and my guilt at questioning the request. I identified in First Writing that I believed we had, at that point, only interacted as equals, though now I question whether or not I truly ever saw us as equals.

From First Writing, and somewhat from 2004 Journals, I see that I felt guilt at questioning her request, which I believe occurred because it struck down my status and I knew it. At the same time, I felt badly once I realized that I saw us as unequal. This applied to both my outward status as a houseguest, and the inner status I held as a person who does not do physical work. Perhaps my host mother really did see me as an equal, but I was uncomfortable there. I was uncomfortable when I was asked to act as an equal, instead of just talking about it. I had been enjoying “the moral high ground of feeling bad about these situations, even verbally condemning them, while still internally feeling conflicted about my own privilege and failing to act to transform structures of power (Turpin, 2008, p. 146).
We were so wrapped up in *ubuntu* thinking that I had convinced myself that I had undone all the notions of privilege that had been programmed into me since birth. With the pants incident, I was back in Helms’ Disintegration Stage; I became re-aware of my privileged status and felt guilt that I was unable to fix it with my *ubuntu* mindset. Wanting to “fix” it, yet another expression of my privilege (Turpin, 2008). I had been operating in a privileged role, and did not become aware of it until this incident, which both embarrassed me because I thought I knew about my privilege, and made me feel guilty knowing that I had that status at all. I was well aware of my host community’s relative lack of status, and being forced to acknowledge that I was not in the same category, implicated me in their lack.

Another time I was forced to acknowledge my implication was while reflecting on *The Butcher Boys* (Alexander, 1985). The metaphor for my reflection in the eyes of the disfigured beings is that I am part of the problem, no matter how badly I want to smooth it over with good conversation or distractions of my own victimhood. And even while I engage in activities that would suggest that I want to learn, I still try to turn away from the truth in my white identity.

*The Butcher Boys* sits in a museum in Cape Town. Everything about visiting the museum suggested privilege. The grand architecture. It’s location near other important buildings. It’s distance from public transportation. The cost to enter. The hidden rules of behavior in an art museum. The hours it is open, compared to when people might be at work. Surrounded by all that privilege, it took a really close look to be reminded that I am not so innocent in the cycle of oppression. Even though I was a person searching to create equality in the way I live, Freire (1987) is still speaking about me. “The so-called non-poor don’t necessarily have the dream of changing, of being transformed…people among the non-poor do not customarily want to be transformed or to give up the privileges which they have enjoyed and they’re not ready to accept
or engage in the kind of education which involves the giving up of those privileges” (p. 221). I had to be almost ensconced in privilege in the National Gallery to see it. My reluctance “to see myself in the eyes of something so ugly and evil” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 25) and my continued reluctance to put a critical eye on my privileged statuses, points again to my back-and-forth navigation through Helms’ model.

I have continued to do community work with, and without this identity construction model. Using an ubuntu framework, I can approach a community that is not my own with an open heart and willing hands, but the trouble is that “dissolving into unrelenting social critique without taking our own power and capacity for institutional creativity seriously indicates a failure of intellect, of creativity, and of solidarity” (Turpin, 2008, p. 147). Failing to face my own identity is hypocritical and it does nothing to “transform the process of transforming the comprehension of the world into a process of transforming the world” (Freire, 1987, p. 220). A change in attitude is one thing, a good thing, but action is better. If I am to ask for change in communities, I must also put myself into the action of change (Turpin, 2008), else I simply continue to serve the oppressive system by failing to address the privilege I am able to recognize. “To participate in this struggle with integrity and the ability to listen, we must think about our place within it” (Magnet, 2006, p. 747). Part of this self-transformation is being aware of when I am experiencing privilege. It is especially important to continue to revisiting our privileged identities as those who are committed to community development and cross cultural work. As my experience has shown, slippage does happen, which must be evaluated and considered in relationship to ourselves and our work. For me, a good place to start reevaluating my identity is by noting when I feel guilt, as it is a good indication of when privilege is surfacing in ways with which I am uncomfortable.
Throughout 2004 Journals, I wrote a lot about “stuff” – material items that I had either brought with me, or acquired during out stay. I was frustrated with my “stuff” because I felt that it identified my purchasing power and my reliance on material items; neither of which were things I wanted to expose to my host family. “Then there is the whole thing about staying here and bringing in all kinds of stuff… it is embarrassing” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 120). I felt guilty for having the things in the first place, and guilty later for feeling like I needed those things. Books. Extra clothing. A camera. A jar of Jiff peanut butter. “I need this guilt. I really do. No wonder we think we need all the crap we have. We never wrestle with guilt or at least consumer embarrassment. I must remember” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 65). I was glad that I could hide my stuff in the room I had to myself in the house, because I felt guilty for having so much stuff, signaling an ability to acquire it. “I want to leave some [stuff] here but feel weird about leaving nice but still useless, unnecessary or just unwanted stuff as if its no longer good enough [for me]” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 122). The stuff also made me feel guilty, because I felt like I needed some of it when my host community clearly did not.

Other things that identified my purchasing power could not be so easily hidden. My acquisition of material goods, an airplane flight, and access to time and resources, seemed to flaunt our relative wealth and redraw the line of difference between us and our host families. When I felt like we were getting close to getting past my privileged statuses, our group would do something like fly across the country or go on a wine tasting trip. When the privileged status could not be hidden from my host family or me, the privilege elicited guilt.

It did not take me long to figure out that I did not want to talk about some things with my host family, even though I felt emotionally connected to them. I felt like talking about our
experiences outside of Khayelitsha was flaunting our status as people who could move about and do whatever we wanted, so I wanted to hide those experiences from the family. Guilt. Other activities that I did not want to share were those that dealt specifically with the racial history of South Africa. Guilt. My reluctance to share experiences that explored South African history was based somewhat on my host mother’s consistent lack of response when those topics came up. I never was able to determine exactly why she would not respond. Whether it was because of her discomfort with talking about her history with a wealthy, white American, a history of not sharing such things, despair at the lack of progress since democratization, or that she had unresolved feelings about the past herself; guilt, guilt, guilt for me. My privileged identity was tied to any of the possibilities. Traveling by boat to Robben Island, the site of the prison where Nelson Mandela and other resistance prisoners were held, was doubly difficult to discuss. Traveling to Durban by plane and taking a mini safari was clearly an effect of economic privilege, and it left her feeling lonely. “She said [the first night we were gone to Durban] she couldn’t eat (?!?) because she felt like she’d lost something…can’t believe how much she seemed to miss me too” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 77). Guilt and guilt. Even taking a day when everyone else would be working to visit the art museum was somewhat problematic, let alone an entire month to pal around another country, as it signaled a luxury that was beyond understanding for my host family. “How do I explain not working for a month to a woman who can’t seem to work enough” (2004 Journals, Vol. 2, p. 20)?

To contrast all the subjects that elicited guilt, and made me want to avoid talking about them with my host family, there were other topics that never felt strange. Times that it did not feel strange, were when we saw people or did things that my host family would also have been able to do. People doing their business in the streets around our neighborhood. A train ride
somewhere. Hitting a pedestrian while riding in the taxi bus. Noting a random herd of cattle, brought to the township from the countryside, lazily munching trash and grass a few blocks away. Basically anything that happened in the township or on public transport. When our activities reached outside the main train station in Cape Town and beyond public transport outside of Khayelitsha, my comfort with sharing those activities diminished. Basically, the harder it was to get to where we went, the more I wanted to keep it to myself. In a country that had been physically laid out to limit the crossing of racial boundaries, transportation signaled an indication of privilege.

Tatum (1994) informs my conflict with guilt. “White students, in particular, often struggle with strong feelings of guilt when they become aware of the pervasiveness of racism in our society. Even when they feel their own behavior has been nondiscriminatory, they often experience ‘guilt by association’” (para 5). 2004 Journals were not the first time I had become aware of racism, but I believe it was the first time that I connected to it. Even doing my best to be nondiscriminatory, my behaviors and connections still elicited guilt, because of the privilege I felt in them. I attribute at least part of my reluctance to address this guilt to our dedication to ubuntu. Turpin (2008) describes my reluctance and my guilt as a challenge “to relinquish self-understandings, historical understandings...national context [with] inadequate...formation shared by dominant narratives that ignore social realities of oppression” (p. 141). Where I experience guilt, I have inadequate preparation to deal with my privilege, and in the case of 2004 Journals, I defaulted to defining and reaffirming my connection to the community.

Now, reflecting further, I believe that the privilege and guilt are part of why I had such a difficult time leaving South Africa in 2004. All along, it was difficult to explain that our lives did not resemble the Cosby Show or Days of Our Lives, or any American television show, for
that matter. I am sure part of their confusion came from the fact that we clearly had money to travel and take time away from working. They assumed that we would return home to a life that was better or more luxurious than theirs, as evidenced by the several marriage proposals and pleas to take them home with us that I received. “[A neighbor] said he’s going to marry me. I guess he always wants to marry the [Americans]” (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 43). About halfway through our stay, another male neighbor, who I had become friends with, brought up marriage to me as well:

Today was marriage proposal number two…I can’t get over the reasoning [he had] for it, or the power that it associates with me…these guys would give up everything – girlfriends, mothers, jobs, families, heritage to move to the U.S. and a way to do that is to marry a rich, white American girl. [He] says that is what he wishes for (2004 Journals, Vol. 1, p. 86).

They thought we had some kind of fabulous life, and we would stay with them, and then go on back to our great life. When I got back to the United States, I called my host family to say I had arrived home, and they told me that they knew I cared about them because I had called. “She said she knows ‘m’baby loves me’ since I called” (2004 Journals, Vol. 2, p. 46). I did not just cut ties and never look back, and that was deeply meaningful to them. They thought I would only care about them as long as I needed their house, and it was important that I cared even once I was back home.

While writing Critical Analysis, I admit that I was aware, in First Writing, of privilege being an issue in 2004 Journals. “Experiencing oneself as guilty is an uncomfortable state of being” (Tatum, 1994, para 45), and despite years of trying to ask difficult questions of myself and others, the question of my own privileged identity was still one that I did not want to answer.
To some extent, I would point to guilt, which has, at times, been immobilizing for me, tying me to despair. At other times, I would have to identify myself as “racing to innocence” as a way to cope with my inability to define my whiteness. Still as I write this, if I am asked to define myself, I wait as long as possible to identify myself as white. But, like Magnet (2006), I have come “to acknowledge that claiming a minority identity and failing to acknowledge a majority identity…leaves in place the structure of domination that is made up of interlocking hierarchies (p. 737). By beginning to address my stages of racial identity, and areas where I can identify need for introspection, it is my hope to also begin “transforming the comprehension of the world into a process of transforming the world” as Freire also hoped we would (1987, p. 220). There is more work that can be done on the topic of ally work, which I will hold for future use.

Conclusions

Like my tentativeness to jump into opportunities in college, with my toes on the edge of the water, in First Writing, I was still afraid to really unravel my whole identity. Even as someone who was aware of issues of injustice and, at some level, my own implication in injustice, I still struggled with being willing to tackle issues of privilege. As if Norah Jones was more prophetic than I originally thought, I had been given “some place low enough to step right in, now I’m here and I can’t begin to move” (Anderson & Jones, 2004). I was mired in the safe perspective of ubuntu. Much as it is safer, and itself an exercise in privilege, to stay stuck in despair, I was choosing to ignore the deeper look at my privileged status. I was hoping to focus on how I could fix the cross cultural divide using ubuntu.

This is not to say that the use of ubuntu principles was a waste. As ubuntu helped transition South Africa, it also helped transition me. It is hard work being in the kind of environment where we placed ourselves during 2004 Journals. The work is to try and make
sense of all that is going on at the present time, place it within one’s cultural and historical understanding of the place, and also keep selfish or reactionary actions in check. We do this juggle in order to learn and, at some point, there is only so much that one can take in. I say that ubuntu helped to transition me, because even though I now feel that I used it as a disguise, it was a way of thinking that allowed me to participate in the community without feeling overwhelmed by the juggle. When it was all I could do to not have a mental breakdown from frustration at the taxi system and unfamiliar food, I could fall back on my understanding of the need to be kind and just. When there was too much to understand at the time, ubuntu gave me grounding in compassion and peace.

When I started this chapter, I thought it was to be all about humanness. I still believe it has been about humanness, but not in the way that I originally thought. I thought it was in the happy way that led me to feeling more comfortable and connected. The comfort was the transition. The real learning has been about my identity as a person of privilege. My privileged status is wrapped up in my humanness. And while it is a scary truth to confront the ugly sides of my own humanity, it is necessary to do the work I do. The story remains about my humanity and how it is connected to that of others, but not in the harmonious way in which I had originally hoped to see it.

This is exemplified by how I was mildly surprised that our South African hosts were not at peace with the transition to democracy. They were not wholly content or eternally happy. The fact that this was a bit of a surprise to me points to how I did not fully understand privilege yet. My identity as a person of privilege is tied to the very reasons that people have less privilege. Democratic elections and the end of overt oppression, though good, do not
automatically eliminate the notions of privilege that upheld apartheid. Only a person of privilege could imagine it that way.

Much as I would deny my implication in the act of diminishing others, I can be seen there. The theme of *The Butcher Boys* holds true, in that regardless as to what I chose to focus my attention upon, my relative privilege will still be at work. Acknowledging this helps me to do better community development work, especially when the community in development is not necessarily my own. *Ubuntu* is a useful tool for entering a community with an open heart, but it cannot forever disguise the underpinning issues of privilege. Accepting this is a first step in doing cross cultural learning for the purposes of community development. Further steps will be discussed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER III

At first glance at 2006 journals, one might think they were from the exact same period of time when 2004 Journals were written. 2006 Journals are in the same style of books, use the same kind of pen, and make mention of many of the same places, historical events, and cultural nuances. In my first reading of these journals, I drew out the horizontal learning model used by the organization where I volunteered in 2006 as one theme, and personal finances as a second. I am using the same format of analysis in this chapter, as in Chapter 2. I went back and used my First Writing as a second text through which to examine my time in South Africa in 2006. Critical Analysis in this chapter confirmed these two points as important themes, particularly horizontal learning. Its’ use with the community assets model will become the focus of Chapter 4. Personal finance also remained an issue to be discussed, but from a slightly different perspective than I originally imagined. Critical Analysis revealed that my brief experience with being broke, and my conflicting relationship with living with the poor, was part of my ongoing personal definition of what it means to be an adult and an activist in contemporary American culture. In the critical analysis section of this chapter, I explore how we currently define adulthood and what that means for my ability to also define myself as an activist. Under this light, I also briefly explore how this helps us prepare for, and do cross cultural community development work.

Reentry

Approaching the airport on July 26, 2006, I was filled with a calm complacency that bordered on dread. Familiar geography was illuminated by a late morning sun, and ships were buzzing around the shoreline. I tried to change my focus from the city's morning activities, in the midst of which we would momentarily land, to the actions I needed to take as soon as I
deplaned. Find a baggage cart. Hope that my giant red backpackers pack had followed me through a marathon layover in Paris, and a sprint stop in Johannesburg. Get through Customs. Find a restroom. Hope that my ride remembered to pick me up, and that we would be able to locate each other amid all the other international travelers coming into Cape Town that morning.

Almost exactly two years prior to that day, I had been in Cape Town International Airport reassuring myself that I would return to South Africa sometime soon. It was the only way I could make sense of leaving at the end of my first experience there. It broke my heart to leave the friends I had made, and a place that I had come to consider home. For two years since leaving, I had spent countless hours mentally unpacking that month in 2004, that had fundamentally altered my worldview and shaped how I functioned in my own community in Ohio.

In the time since my last South African passport stamp, I had quit my university job, moved to a different city, gotten engaged and married, bought a house, completed two years of graduate classes, and most recently taken a job as a community educator. During all of this, I had approached my graduate work as a means to my goal of returning to Cape Town. I hung around in religion, philosophy, communications, gender, and ethnic studies departments to attempt to make sense of the abiding impressions I had from my stay on the Cape. I developed a few pieces of writing, relating mostly to liberation theology and postcolonialism, because it was within those topics that I felt I could rummage through my experiences with ubuntu. When it finally came time to return to South Africa, I trusted that during another month abroad, sprinkled with a few intentional explorations of key locations, I would kill two important birds with one stone. First, I would have more than a thesis worth of research material. Second, I had an
excuse to revisit a place, that still had a deep grip on my thoughts about how communities work and grow.

Upon arriving I sensed a problem, however. Somewhere in the midst of my plotting and researching, I lost the drive, or possibly the courage, to do the fieldwork that sat ahead of me. A day into my stay, I wrote:

I don’t know when I stopped being excited about being here but I’m still not. I know that even this spring I was excited because I remember talking to [a friend] about it…but then I got even more excited about my regular life and the cost of leaving it exceeded the excitement [of being here now] (2006 Journals, p. 12-13).

These unenthusiastic feelings also happened to come served with sides of guilt and fear that I had made a big mistake. I felt guilty for ditching my job and my home for four weeks, and I feared that I had no idea what I was doing, and that I could not accomplish what I had planned to do. It was while considering these feelings, and the odd sense of returning to a space that was both familiar but threatening, that my airport transportation contact found me, and my giant red backpack in the arrivals lounge in Cape Town International Airport.

Unfortunately, the fear and guilt tagged along on my ride from the airport and, in fact, continued to infiltrate most of my reflections on that month in 2006. I had reached a point where I loved the security and stability of having a job, and a spouse and a home. Being back in Cape Town thrust my thoughts back to a time when I feared a job, and a spouse, and a home, and relished in being a free-spirited world explorer. I was forced to notice the change in myself, that left me wondering if I still had the ability to be uninhibited by material comforts. I was simultaneously afraid of roughing it, and afraid that I had lost the ability to rough it.
A short car ride from the airport would deliver me back to the doorstep of the house I had stayed in for a month in 2004. I had stayed in periodic contact with my host family via phone and email, for most of the two years since my stay, and it wracked me with guilt that I had somehow managed to become too soft to walk a few steps in their shoes again. I was ashamed, having lost my flippant perspective on creature comforts. Despite feeling like I had somehow abandoned the perspective they had taught me only two years prior, my chest and throat constricted in anticipation of arriving to the modest house that would be my home for the next four weeks.

Prior to arriving, I had thought about what it would be like to live in Khayelitsha again. Most of my reflections were centered around the people I knew, and with whom I would reconnect. During my planning phase, it was easy to talk about living without indoor plumbing, and taking bucket baths with kettle heated water. It was easy to talk about navigating the public transport system. But as I was deposited back in Khayelitsha, I immediately began to doubt whether I could actually do those things. I was aware that I was not nearly as interested in shaking up my worldview about living in poverty now, a goal that had driven me into, and through, many uncomfortable situations in my past travels. Now I was afraid of living marginally uncomfortable, and I was incredibly annoyed at myself for being afraid. I had always prided myself in being able to walk away from material things and western comforts, even as I had begun to acquire them in my regular life. Now I was shocked to discover that I felt I needed things like a familiar bed, under a roof that I could count on to not drip on me in the night. I loathed the slips in my mind that I somehow had a higher level of need. More, I had always prided myself in being able to face these types of challenges head on. I arrived back at my host
home with a twisted smile, and a heart heavy with self doubt. This self doubt would eventually morph fully into fear, and would stick with me until the day I left Khayelitsha.

On the Move

I had brought with me travelers checks for the amount that I would pay to my host family to stay with them for the month, as we had done in 2004. Upon arrival in Cape Town, I cashed the checks into South African rand, and on the second day gave the agreed upon per diem, multiplied by 30 nights, to my host family. It was a moment of stubbornness, and an attempt to force myself to acknowledge that I was going to be staying in Khayelitsha for a month, that I paid for the entire month, in one envelope passed from my hands to those of my host mother. I was still conflicted between my fears and my stubborn appeal to sticking it out. Only one day later, I had given up on staying in Khayelitsha, and had booked a room at an international traveler guesthouse for the rest of my stay. “I finally blurted out tonight that I’m moving to the city. I feel much better right now! … [My host family] took it about as well as I expected (not well) and said we’d talk about the money tomorrow” (2006 Journals, p. 24). I repacked all of my things, only three days after unpacking them, and at the last minute before I was to leave, I forced the issue of the money I had paid them. My host family returned slightly less than one quarter of the funds I had transferred to them, and alternating between seething at myself for being naïve, with money, and for the family for having kept so much of it, I caught a taxi bus into the city to catch the last available train to my new residence.

Writing this over two years later, I am still torn about my decision to move, but at the time, I believed I had no other real option. The bottom line for my move was transportation. It was also a component to my original plans that I had not thoroughly reconsidered when organizing my return to South Africa. Other issues were, that I never quite shook the fear and
guilt that came with living in the township, feelings that were only fueled by negative experiences that I could not have anticipated. This could refer back to my 2004 experience, which I had not fully begun to understand in terms of privilege in 2006. The day before I decided to move, I wrote, "Oddly though, wanting to stay here again is part of what pushed me to this research; now it feels a little inhibiting...I am wishing I was staying in town and visiting Khayelitsha, not the other way around" (2006 Journals, p. 15).

I have always agreed with an idea that was espoused to me during all of the immersion experiences I had in college; to understand the poor, one must be with them. As such, I thought that experiencing public transportation the way the million people who live in the townships experience it, would add to my learning. In 2004, we used public transportation about half of the time, and relied on our program hosts the rest of the time. The significance of “we” to “I” and “I” being white, relatively young, and female must be emphasized. Though I would have torn into anyone who would have dared suggest that I should not do something because of my age or gender, I really had not considered this fully. Another factor was that I am from the United States, and was living in an increasingly anti-American international community. I quickly put away the habits, clothing, or expressions that immediately identified me as American to my fellow travelers, and was often mistaken for German or Australian. Even though, always being a part of a group had been a source of some frustration for me in 2004, I now realized that being a part of that group had always “guaranteed that I was not the only white person on a train or in a taxi” (2006 Journals, p. 6). Now I struggled with “pestering old men and glaring women” (p. 18), but, I had to admit that it made sense that I would get these looks and advances, and it was not as if we did not get similar treatment when traveling in a group. It just seemed more threatening being alone.
The stress of the public transportation system weighed heavily on me every day, and it is not surprising to me that my final decision to leave Khayelitsha came while riding a train. I stopped being willing to experience the frustrations and curiosities of public transport, when I realized that I was fighting my instincts in order to stay safe in a public transportation system that was riddled with robberies, gang activities, and occasionally, violence. Since I wanted to avoid stares and glares, I usually sought out isolated train cars, and would wave on crowded taxi buses. I thought that being more secluded would help me melt into the background and be less of a curiosity on the trains. This was a correct assumption, but I forgot that melting into the background is not the best way to stay safe.

On the afternoon of my second day, I was feeling insecure, but trying to summon the courage to battle the train system, when I had found what I thought would be a nice, quiet and safe train car. I took a seat against the front wall on the long benches that ran the length of the train car, and took out a book to read for the remaining hour of my journey back out to Khayelitsha. A few stops down the tracks, the door opened and three young men boarded the train. I did not much notice them until one of them immediately headed my way, sat nearby, and started badgering me with questions. This was not too much out of the ordinary, and usually proceeded innocently. The difference with this man was that as his questions continued, he began interjecting sexually loaded comments, and gradually inched closer on the bench seat. His questions became more personal, and he became more physical until I finally got off the train at the next exit. "I still don't know that he had bad intentions but I realize that I was just being dumb even putting myself in that position" (2006 Journals, p. 22). I was told later by several South Africans that I was lucky to have never been robbed on the Khayelitsha train, which was
notorious for violent occurrences. “[A friend at the NGO] confirmed that I should not have been riding the Khayelitsha train. Sounds like I’m lucky I wasn’t robbed” (p. 45)!

Living in Khayelitsha was already a struggle for me both mentally and physically, but that train experience was the only time I had ever felt fear for my safety. Since Khayelitsha (and all the other black townships), was created as a way to keep black people separated from colored or white people, transportation in and out of the township was intentionally limited, to make it difficult for people to travel in or out. There are limited roads, and a single train station for the estimated half million people living there. Because of the archaic transportation infrastructure, traveling to my host organization’s office each day would involve almost two hours of one way travel in two trains and two taxi buses. I had known the ridiculous transportation system, as a fact of life for the thousands of people who live in Khayelitsha and work elsewhere (there are few jobs actually in the township). After my experience with the man on the train, the long commute became less about the inconvenience, and turned into opportunities to be put in dangerous and awkward situations. Cue more guilt, but I decided to move to another part of the Cape.

On Money

Both times I traveled to South Africa, I experienced trouble with money. I consider myself to be a spokesperson for never relying completely on ATMs and credit cards while traveling abroad. My fight with available funds began only three days after arriving in Cape Town and being transported to Khayelitsha, when I realized that neither of my American bank ATM cards was working to retrieve money from South African machines. It was a problem I believed I could work around, until I resorted to Housing Plan B. The move meant that I would be paying daily rent at the guesthouse, on top of what was left with my Khayelitsha family,
blowing my accommodations budget for the trip out of the water. I was not happy about losing a
good chunk of my funds this way, but given my flustered mental state and the decision to move,
I eventually resigned myself to it. Having left three quarters of my budgeted funds in
Khayelitsha and, up to that point, not having been able to access additional cash from an ATM, I
had only enough remaining money to pay the first few nights at the guesthouse. “On the ride in
[to town], I cooled down about [the amount my host family had kept] a bit. But I can’t get money
from our ATM card either! So I have [very limited funds] to get me through until who knows
when!” (2006 Journals, p. 30). I was fully aware that the money situation could become a
problem, but was so relieved to be out of Khayelitsha, that it did not bother me much at first.

When I arrived at the guesthouse, I paid for as many days as I could, and set out the next
several days to find a way to pull together enough cash to keep me off the streets until August
21, the day of my scheduled return flight. Since I had only brought travelers checks for slightly
more than the amount I had expected to pay for housing, the problem with my ATM cards was a
pretty serious one, unless I could find another way to acquire some cash. I quickly made friends
with the guesthouse manager, but knew that charm would only buy me a little time, if I did not
come up with a way to pay for my stay.

I began trying to unravel my situation by talking to officials at the large banks with
branches in the tourist areas of downtown Cape Town. They kindly told me that it appeared that
they should have been able to do a withdrawal transaction, but for some reason could not. After
standing in several long bank lines and walking away empty handed, my next step was to contact
the airlines and try to shorten my trip in order to save on accommodation costs. Doing some
quick math, “I believe[d] that if I stay[ed] 17 days or less, even with an assumed [flight] itinerary
change fee, I [would] be okay” (2006 Journals, p. 34). When the airline desks at the Cape Town
and Johannesburg airports said they could not change my flights, but did not know why they
could not, I found a local travel agent. The only thing I found at the travel agent was a few more
people scratching their heads at all of my mysterious bad luck. They couldn’t do anything to
change my flight, and they also could not figure out why they could not change the flight. That
day of no solutions, led me into another day of waiting in lines and begging for help on what I
later called the most “pointless and frustrating day ever” (p. 46).

“And I thought my favorite black sweater, clean jeans and the first sunshine I’ve seen in
several days was a good sign…long story short, still no money and no change in flight plans.
Grand” (2006 Journals, p. 46). On August 2, I spent many minutes and dollars on international
phone calls to the American offices of my airlines. They could not help me. Then I called the
website where I had purchased my return ticket and finally got an answer. In my quest to find
low cost airfare, I had chosen a nonrefundable ticket, which could not be changed. By itself, this
was only mildly upsetting news, because I felt that I still had a few remaining options for
obtaining cash to fund the length of my now definitely full length stay. After I hung up with the
website helpline, I made international calls to both of my banks in the U.S. only to have them tell
me that “there is nothing wrong with my card. It must be the ATMs” (p. 48). By the end of my
call to the second bank, I wanted to shout into the phone that I had “transaction declined”
receipts from every single type of ATM machine in city of Cape Town, and that it was
impossible for them all to be out of order.

Getting more desperate as I noted my disappearing options, and my number of prepaid
days at the guesthouse quickly vanishing off the calendar, I found myself in a money
changing/cash advance place where they happily accepted my request to obtain a cash advance
on my American Express card. I gulped but tried to smile when they told me the astronomical
fee that would be charged to my card for the transaction. I avoided doing the mental math to figure the total cost of the fee, and the daily interest rate the card would charge for a cash advance, and asked them to process the request. It turned out that it did not matter anyway. Like some kind of bad joke, the customer service representative returned to my window empty handed, with a garbled explanation about only being able to advance Visa or MasterCard credit cards. She explained that if I hurried, I might catch the people at the American Express office before they closed for the day. I whispered curses to the punk who had stolen our MasterCard number via PayPal two weeks prior, which had left me without a backup credit card until a replacement could be issued and mailed. It had arrived at our home in Ohio one day after I had departed for South Africa. I couldn’t believe the combination of circumstances, but I was confident that American Express, and its large, high-tech looking building with the fancy lobby furniture would be able to fix my problem. Once again, I was wrong. The fancy furniture and two story plate glass windows couldn’t even help me. And I will never forget the look on the American Express representative’s face, when I melted into a mess of tears when she informed me that "I have a charge card and they can only do cash advances on a credit card" (2006 Journals, p. 49). Once I collected myself, I made one more international phone call to the U.S. to ask my husband if he would please look into wiring funds from our account to me. “I’m so tired of trying to sort this out myself. So I’m resigning to be a ‘Help Me!’ tourist. Intrepid explorer, I am not” (p. 42).

The next day I nervously went back to the same money change/cash advance office to sign for the funds my husband had wired the night before. That evening, cash in hand, I reflected, “I can’t believe the stress I must have been feeling, knowingly or not, about the money. I woke up tense, my bed all chaos…I feel remarkably [more calm] now and…I can be at peace
with being here because at least I know I can afford to sleep every night” (2006 Journals, p. 54).

It was true that I had been completely frazzled by how many of my avenues had been cut off when trying to sort out my finances. When it was all finished, I had spent almost three full days traipsing around to every office I could think of, to try and figure out what I could do, and feel like I had some kind of control over what was happening.

During those few days of not knowing how I was going to pay for a bed or food, I got very little else accomplished. I met with my host organization a couple of times, but most of our plans were put on hold until I got settled. I didn’t sleep well. I picked at my fingernails. I pouted. I couldn’t let go of how cheated I felt, rational or not, by my host family in Khayelitsha. I focused a lot on how I could get out of South Africa and go home. This is consistent with behaviors that might be associated with individuals living in situational poverty (Payne, 2005), and are important to see from their root stimulus when beginning to understand cultures that must do without basic human needs. For example, all the time I spent dealing with crisis put my project in jeopardy, which might be similar to a person in poverty losing a job and income because of chaos in the family. After I knew I’d be able to meet at least my basic needs, I calmed down and began thinking with less emotion. I was able to see the situation from the perspective of the host family:

I’m coming to terms with the [money] thing. [My host mother] didn’t look at that cash as a per/night basis like I did so how could she have known to save some back? And I’m sure she doesn’t usually have a few thousand extra rand lying around to repay the fund when I needed it back (p. 38).

I could think about the project at hand more, instead of always focusing on home. I had never before been in a situation that could have ended in me being homeless, and finding a way out of
that situation took over every thought and action I had. Now that my finances were shored up, I could finally get to work.

*Women for Change*

Through some local networking, I had obtained the contact information for the director of a nonprofit organization where my research interests had led to a possible connection. My plan was to work along side the Community Resource Organization (CRO) for the month, to help out with some of their projects and simultaneously fill in some gaps for my research. What I was able to learn about CRO from conversations and research, I understood it to be a domestic violence prevention organization that had some ties to Catholic Social Services. Upon meeting with the organization, and beginning to settle myself into the South African culture, I realized that many of my original research goals were likely not going to be accomplished but, oddly, some of CRO's objectives were startlingly similar to my work in community development using financial literacy and stability in the U.S., a connection I had not anticipated at all. I saw that CRO was doing similar work, but with the end goal of self-reliance and empowerment of women and ultimately, community development. This was far beyond the possible effects I had ever considered for my work. Yet, it made so much sense, that I was surprised that I'd never heard of anyone else doing it. It was immediately apparent that I had landed in a position that would help me strengthen my work programs in ways that I had never imagined.

I arrived in Observatory, a few train stops down the Cape from Cape Town, and called the director to say I had managed to find my way to the suburb where the CRO office was housed. He came and picked me up in his Subaru, and immediately began explaining to me what CRO does, where it came from, and where it hoped to go. I was caught off guard when I thought I was going to be hearing about a domestic violence project, and instead started hearing about
teaching basic financial concepts such as saving. He started using the terms that I frequently use.

“I can’t believe [they] talk about ‘savers’ and a school program to work on the ‘savings culture’” (2006 Journals, p. 19). On the surface we were speaking the same language, talking about personal and group savings rates, numbers of individual savers, and amounts of money being saved, and the social, political and economic implications of having (or not having) these types of programs. As I spoke with CRO's director that first day, I believe we were both fully intrigued at our odd ability to speak and understand each other’s jargon. Further, we shared a passion for savings programs, and their abilities to make systemic change in the communities we care about. But what made us different, was the fact that CRO looked at saving behaviors as a means, where we see it as an end. This was fascinating to me. It had not yet occurred to me that my work at home could come so close to the community development issues that I most value.

At its core, CRO is an organization that helps poverty stricken women and communities access tools to use their inherent abilities to manage their own development (Executive Summary, 2006). CRO, first called 5-in-6, started as a domestic violence program, with the focus on mentoring men away from violence in the home. Later, the focus shifted from men to women, based on reflection on why women stay in abusive relationships.

The organization noted that there were “core issues at the heart of domestic violence namely, financial dependency on abusive spouses and a perception by poor women with similar challenges [that] they were not able to support each other” (A Conceptual Reflection on Our Journey So Far, 2006). Often, the financial situation of a woman's children would also be compromised, if she were to leave her husband, there was no other nearby family member to help care for the children. Beyond not having access to money of her own, a woman was likely to have been repeatedly told that she had a diminished capacity to manage money, and often she
would believe that to be true. Lack of personal assets, responsibility for care of children, and
doubt about personal abilities all compound to create a situation where a woman would see no
other choice but to stay in a relationship, regardless of her safety. Small savings groups, the key
tool in helping women and communities establish self reliance for community development, help
women create a safe environment for women to support one another financially and
emotionally. Through these efforts, the effects and occurrences of domestic violence had begun
to diminish and women are creating solutions to personal and community needs (*A Conceptual
Reflection on Our Journey So Far*, 2006).

The program model used by CRO has a series of steps that provide key learning to the
women, and thus allow them to move first from self empowerment on to large community
development projects. The first step is for women to form small savings communities where they
practice a daily savings ritual. The groups are typically formed by word of mouth, and organized
by those who have an interest in taking part. The women gather routinely, usually weekly, and
deposit a set amount of money into the group fund. The deposits often amount to what would be
equivalent to pennies a day. In the future, an individual woman might borrow from these funds
to purchase something for her family that is being neglected by her husband or that he deems
unnecessary. Examples might be blankets, a bus ride to a clinic or hospital, or shoes for a
growing child who would have to quit going to school without the uniform shoes (*Creating an
Enabling Environment for Self-Reliance*, 2008).

The groups help women access funds to meet physical needs for themselves, and gain
self confidence and leadership skills. Groups also create financial reserves that would be nearly
impossible for individuals to recreate, and that helps guarantee that a woman will be able to
borrow for her family’s needs regardless of the husband’s spending priorities. Second, the group
model gets a woman out of her home and into a supportive network of other women. It is not uncommon for women to live physically or emotionally separated from other women. All too often, other women have their hands full with their own abusive relationships. The savings groups give the participants an additional network to draw on for emotional or physical support in a harsh living environment. Once the women realize that they are not the only woman who feels cheated by the system, the individual is validated in her feelings. Third, and possibly most important, is the creation of voice and empowerment that the women cite after having been a part of their groups. Realizing that they are not alone, and have a valid perspective, can help the women seek leadership in making changes in the situations that make them feel alone and invalidated (Creating an Enabling Environment for Self-Reliance, 2008).

When a savings group is created, the leadership and organization is done completely by the women in the group, possibly with some coaching by a few others from other groups helping to get the new group get started. The women decide who will be the group leadership including someone responsible for making sure all the funds are collected. The group must collectively decide what amount they would like to individually save each day, and what to do with the funds once they are collected. Having this type of power is foreign to many of the women when they first begin with the savings group. A woman may believe that she is incapable of making decisions, especially regarding finances. To have a say, a voice, in how business is conducted is an important step toward building confidence in the group and in her own home. Often the women cite realizing that they are not alone in feeling cheated by the financial decision making in their homes. In this way, the individual is validated in her feelings and may gain confidence to demand change in her home (Creating an Enabling Environment for Self-Reliance, 2008).
The next step the groups often take, is to establish a habit of saving and lending. Through regular saving, lending, and repaying activities, the group begins to act as its own microlending institution. As they continue their daily savings activities, the ability to fund loans to the group increases. As the women become more practiced in saving, lending, borrowing and repaying, they also practice their decision making and leadership skills. Often, the projects for which they borrow funds grow larger and encompass more than basic daily necessities. Groups may also begin using their accumulated funds to do small community projects that change the life of one or two people or the entire community.

Eventually, the women might see that there is a need in the community that cannot be fixed or addressed with just the small savings they themselves are able to accumulate. After creating a stable and supportive group, they might consider collectively acquiring a loan or grant from an outside source to support a large scale project. In the beginning, CRO worked to acquire grant funds from donors across the world, to create available funds for the women to obtain. However, in an increasing effort for the women to have full latitude over the course of their projects, they are being trained and taking over the role of also soliciting the funds (T. Florence, personal communication, May 4, 2007). The types and kinds of projects that the women choose to do are often simple solutions to the problems that they, as those who have the most intelligence about their communities, see every day. In this way, they make significant change in their communities.

Another example of how the effects of the savings groups make changes beyond simple savings resources is in the form of “horizontal exchanges.” Individuals from savings groups are given opportunities to “share experiences, ideas and learnings [sic] with each other. They are literally put onto a bus and taken to visit with other poor people who have ideas and experiences
to share” (Executive Summary, 2006). CRO helps facilitate these exchanges in order to help individuals gain further confidence in their expertise and bring valuable ideas to their home groups. They build intelligence about community development, while doing in within their own communities, and then teach others who may be in similar situations.

CRO has assembled several case studies that exemplify this activity. One study describes a woman in Khayelitsha who wanted to join a savings group but her husband refused to give her money to save. “Despite the women explaining that she could save as little as 1 cent a day, her husband said that he was the breadwinner, he would decide when and how the money would be spent” (Gubu Street, 2006). With the help of some of the women in the group, the woman began saving small portions of the money her husband gave to her to purchase groceries. Homes, especially in the townships, are poorly insulated around the Cape, as it is a Mediterranean climate with damp cool weather arriving only about two or three months out of every year. The evenings can be extremely cold, especially throughout the winter months, even indoors. The woman applied for, and was granted, a loan from her savings group and she purchased three thick winter blankets for herself and her children. When the woman’s husband saw the blankets, he demanded that he be allowed to use one. She denied him, saying that they blankets were hers, because she had bought them with the loan she was repaying to her savings group. After this incident, the husband was reported to see the benefit of the savings group and even begin saving himself (Gubu Street, 2006).

Another example, is one I saw on a morning when I traveled to Khayelitsha with CRO staff and visitors from and an organization that had donated to support the program. We traveled by car to Khayelitsha and picked our way around the narrow streets. We finally parked inside a gate that wrapped around one of the larger shacks, which also boasted a small yard area. Inside,
we were greeted by a dozen women who had assembled for their weekly meeting. Having spent significant time in many houses and shacks in Khayelitsha, I was instantly curious about the space in which we were all gathered. Next to the large room where we sat on small chairs and stools was a second, smaller room separated from the large space by a door. There was no furniture in the room except for the small seats in the large room and a single large mattress on the floor of the smaller room. Of all the homes I had visited in Khayelitsha, they were never decadent, but I had never seen one so sparse. I couldn’t figure out if the women had somehow managed to secure an empty home to be used as their meeting space, or if someone had only recently moved into the shack. After the meeting, I was told that the space had recently been acquired by the group we had been visiting. They were beginning to use the space as a safe house or domestic violence shelter, where women could flee when violence flared up at home. The yard was to be used as a community garden where food could be grown and shared among group members and the community. I was stunned and simultaneously filled with joy at the simple yet meaningful solution the women had found to their own community problem (2006 Journals, p. 81-82).

The most significant learning about the CRO groups was that there are large scale implications of financial education and increased awareness of the factors that influence reception to the education. CRO and its Indian model, the Grameen Bank, acknowledge that there are cultural barriers to providing financial education (Yunus, 1999). This is especially true when the population has been marginalized for many generations as women, especially black women have been. As microsaving and microlending programs have gained momentum across the globe, the traditional target has been women in poverty cultures, though CRO does not exclude men. In the black communities where CRO has the most savings groups (Executive
Summary, 2006), social norms dictate who is supposed to control money, what roles women play, and what roles they do not play. These norms have roots in the tribal communities where many of the individuals in the townships come from, and the norms remain strong within the townships. Traditional male control of finances is not the only cultural hurdle. These norms have been deeply imbedded in many women as well. A self image of dependence only compounds the difficulty in getting the women to participate in the daily savings programs. Not only is she likely to face pressure from her husband but she may also face grave resistance from her mother or sisters, for they too hold the image of women as dependents (Yunus, 1999).

Aside from the cultural shift women make when becoming a part of a savings group, they may also experience a series of other personal development benefits. Highest among these is an increased self worth. Many of the women cite a realization that their lower position in their families and communities is no longer tolerable. Since almost all of the women they have ever known have systematically submitted to the system, it did not seem unreasonable to do the same, even if the system often demanded unfair treatment of women. The savings group might help a woman realize that she is not worthless as her husband may have told her or made her feel (Creating an Enabling Environment for Self-Reliance, 2008).

Following an increased self worth, they might begin to demand recognition of self worth from others. One of the most remarkable places for this self worth to be demanded is at home. Given that many women are marginalized at home, this is major progress. Many women cite having received resistance from their husbands toward either the savings groups in general, or toward the newfound attitudes that the groups tend to produce. Because of the emotional support provided by the savings groups, women are less likely to bend in the face of such resistance. What ultimately happens for many of the women is a more balanced home environment. This is
not to say that they demand major gender role reversals, but more to be respected and treated with dignity for what they do (Creating an Enabling Environment for Self-Reliance, 2008).

Additionally, a woman may begin to ask for people in her community to recognize her worth. A woman may begin to naturally take leadership within her savings group, and develop leadership skills useful in the greater community. Though it may seem oversimplified to western standards, being able to identify and vocalize a problem is a significant step for many women. Part of this ability seems to come from having a safe space to explore that voice. What is most incredible for these groups is the number and scale of community projects that have occurred as a direct result of savings groups. What begins as a community of women supporting one another’s personal struggles, becomes a community that sees the struggles of its individuals as directly connected to the struggles of the larger community. In short, the women are close to the social problems in their communities, and after experiencing a place to use her voice, the women are often moved to take action to do something about those social problems.

The ultimate goal for financial education for CRO is that it can be directly tied with small and large community development projects. The CRO staff and I discussed several hypothetical and real situations where an outside agency has entered a poor community with wonderful intentions. Often the outside agency has its idea as to what will solve the problems in the poor neighborhood; and often these ideas are based on someone else’s ideas of community development needs.

One example of this was an outside organization approaching one of the savings groups saying that they had money to build a community center building in the neighborhood. The notion of a community center was not one that the women were familiar with but even after explanation, the plan left much to be desired. Who would be trained to staff the center? Where
would they receive the training? Who would pay for it? What about equipment and other materials needed to keep it running? Who would pay for those items? Security and other safety concerns were also at issue. What the women expressed as a real need for their community was a large truckload of sand. The women saw that their children often played outside and would wander to and in a low area in the neighborhood where water would collect. In addition to water, the space also tended to collect trash and diseases. The women wanted to fill in the low area so that the children could play there but not get sick from playing in trash and filthy water. Unfortunately, the outside agency could not help with this idea; they only had money for a community center. Once the women realized that they not only could easily identify the needs of the community, but also many possible solutions, they began to look for ways they could address those needs. They did not need to be informed by an outside organization about the needs of their own community. They themselves knew best what the community needed. With the leadership skills and empowerment gained from the savings group communities, they could seek out their own solutions to own needs (Executive Summary, 2006).

First Writing

Seeing CRO at work made me begin to reconsider the structure and activities of my financial education program where I had previously been unsatisfied, but unclear of what to do about it. Typically, in my organization, we looked at financial education as having one main effect - increased financial stability. Often people will cite having a more peaceful home life or marriage, lower stress or a generally more positive outlook, but the power of financial education becomes much stronger when pulled from the context of what I witnessed in the small savings groups just outside Cape Town. CRO gives credit to these groups for combating domestic
violence and advancing some of the poorest communities. I saw that I had much to learn about the possible effects of community based financial education.

I also briefly saw that I have much to learn about what it is really like to live not knowing how the next day’s food will come. Many of the women I spoke with, had lived experiences of not knowing how they would survive another day. They know all too well the stress that I felt when my money options began to run out. This reality is also true for many of the individuals with whom I work in the U.S. I cannot think of another time when I was as desperate for help and money, than I was those few days, when I did not know if I would be able to get enough cash to keep me sleeping under a roof for the month. I will not pretend that my few days of scrambling are anything compared to what these women and my clients go through on a regular basis, but it was a taste of life on slim means. It did not strike me until writing this, that my brief struggle with money was at all relevant to the work I was doing with CRO. Looking back, I think it strengthened my sympathy, and helped me understand what kind of sacrifice and courage it takes for the women to join the savings groups.

I was impressed by how the women’s groups were making such substantial change in their communities and in individual lives. I saw a huge emphasis placed on the horizontal exchange of knowledge and the drawing out of knowledge that already resided within the community. Several times while I was working at CRO, an office staff person would be preparing a woman for her first plane trip, or helping her make phone calls to a community she was about to visit. The day I left Cape Town, I shared a ride to the airport with a woman who was traveling to another region of South Africa to share information about the AIDS clinic she had helped build in her township. It appeared to me that those two things, community
development and the horizontal exchange of information, were inextricably combined in this model that was creating far more positive community change than I had seen in a very long time.

It pains me to think about how many times organizations with altruistic motives end up bulldozing the ideas of those who really know what will best develop a community. I know that my own organization has done it, and will probably continue to do it. I struggle with why we, as community organizations, go on bulldozing and playing the part of the know-it-all big brother. Why, in an attempt to help people, do we systematically take their legs out from underneath them by reinforcing their perceived powerlessness? “[Non Governmental Organizations] traditionally have the reputation of taking over for the sake of their quantifiable delivery, and sustainable development, more often than not, goes out the window (Executive Summary, 2006). An organization so often assumes that good intentions are equivalent to right actions when attempting “to ‘teach’ poor people how to survive and prosper, this undermines their own abilities” (Executive Summary, 2006).

As I explored the many different ways of using a model that validates and empowers the ideas of poor people, I became more and more aware of the many ways that my organization, and others with which I work in my home community, was falling short at validating our own populations. Further, I saw how important the horizontal exchange of information is to creating real change. This is not to say that good and valuable information does not travel in the typical vertical exchange, but rather that the horizontal is often disregarded in favor of information from the top.

In my organization we often talk about being “research based,” and pride ourselves in passing on information that is scientifically backed. Working with CRO forces me to question who’s research we validate and who’s we dismiss. And while I am tied to an institution of
higher education that has a directive to distribute new learning to the populations that most need it, I question how available we allow learning to be. I know that I take for granted the multiple university ID cards that I carry, that allow me to access more information than I could ever use at the click of a few computer screens. How quickly and easily I can be cut off from that information, and its power, should I no longer possess the right ID cards was, ironically, displayed as I was writing this very paragraph. When I attempted to use a desktop computer at a library of a local private institution of higher learning, I was startled to find that I could not access the information I needed. When I asked the reference librarian where I could obtain access, she directed me to a computer lab on campus. The computer lab requires a university ID that I do not have. The message was clear. If we have not bestowed the appropriate (and very expensive) credentials upon you, do not expect to obtain information here. To be fair, I understand that universities must make money and protect their assets. But it is striking to me, after having witnessed the superior community development results had by CRO through open horizontal exchanges of information, that we are so narrow and restricted with our information.

I also cannot help but see ubuntu in this incomplete picture. If I truly want a community that values all of its members, I must first value them all. Dismissing or avoiding the knowledge of some groups, does not send the message that I value them equally. What we say we seek is a community that allows every person to thrive, but, what we often enact is a community that validates only a few and ultimately brings down the whole. Learning from ubuntu, we could be helped to understand that it is only in honoring the humanity of every person that we can ourselves become more human.

This reminds me of a meeting I attended about a year after returning from South Africa. The meeting included several individuals from community organizations and had been called to
discuss possible solutions to the growing issue of poverty in our area. Much discussion was
given to who, in addition to those present, should be asked to join the group. Names of
organization directors, State officials, and business leaders were thrown around the table by
people with connections to various sectors. A suggestion that we invite people who live in
poverty to join, was met with mostly confused or blank stares that were quickly followed by a
myriad of excuses as to why that would not work. At one point, I was told that some of the
members had grown up poor and, therefore, knew what it was like to live in poverty. It’s an
excuse I hear frequently, and one with which I wholeheartedly disagree, but it does shed some
light onto why decision makers and programs have yet to resolve the growing issue of poverty in
our community.

A few weeks later, the same group met and continued to discuss what should be done to
help “those people,” and what was wrong with “these people,” that our programs did not seem to
make lasting change. As we discussed these things, I watched at least half a dozen young
mothers pass by the open meeting room door on their way to or from the W. I. C. office. Not
once did anyone suggest we ask one of the women to share her opinion on our ideas. Again, the
opportunity to explore knowledge from those who would best know the solutions we sought was
ignored. No horizontal learning here.

Critical Analysis

My initial reading of 2006 Journals led me to horizontal learning and personal finance as
themes for the experience. I still see validity in both of these themes, for their usefulness in my
understanding this experience, and in helping instruct on ways to prepare others for similar work.
Using both my original texts from 2006, and my First Writing as texts, I can now also point to
slightly different learning from those themes. While the horizontal learning model continues to
come out in an important way, I have also added some reflection on why I spent a significant time questioning my motives and responses to the experience. With closer reading, I now align my experience with research on emerging adulthood, and why it is important to consider this process among individuals who do cross cultural work.

CRO, and its use of what they called a horizontal learning model, has been an enormous help in how I view my work as a community development worker. Where knowledge originates, who controls its flow, and who decides what to do with it, are all questions that have troubled me since moving into my role as a community development worker. In the next chapter, I will explore some of these questions and their practical use in my community through the community assets model.

Of central importance to this autoethnography is the question of how an identity affects the experience of doing work in different cultures. For me, this specifically means my identities as a young, white woman, committed to social justice and finding myself in disjointed circumstances. Within my identity as a social justice worker and activist, which I questioned constantly while in South Africa in 2006, it also became apparent that my identity as an adult (or not) was in conflict. Research into my status as an emerging adult (Arnett 1997, 2000a, 2000b) hints at how these two forms of identity, adult and activist, might have been creating confusion.

For the purpose of this discussion, I will look specifically at identity development of individuals within the category known as emerging adults. Of course, individuals do cross cultural work during all periods of life. However, those that might be engaging in this kind of work for the first time, or who may have a higher likelihood of traveling to other cultures, are likely to be from this group of individuals. Though it is not automatic that people doing cross cultural work are emerging adults, the possibilities that emerging adults are doing cross cultural
work are high. Absent firm commitments, emerging adults are likely to experiment and explore with different kinds of work and educational experiences, that often involve limited time traveling to different places (Arnett, 2000a). This age period will also be the focus of this literature study, due to the fact that I was in this age category during all of the travel, and most of the reflective periods represented in this autoethnography.

Purely from an age perspective, I was ripe to be conflicted about my status as an adult. Emerging adulthood is a period of time between the approximate ages of 18 and 25 where individuals, most commonly from industrial or postindustrial cultures, consider themselves to be no longer adolescents, but not yet adults. Arnett (2000a) defines emerging adults as “having left the dependence of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, [they] often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 469). Possibilities are numerous while emerging adults seek self-sufficiency (Arnett, 1997). By the late twenties, more individuals begin to feel they have achieved more adult status (Arnett, 2000a).

Emerging adulthood has emerged as a life period, in large part, because the demands on the time of adolescents have changed. In American culture, transitions to adulthood might have historically been conferred upon an individual upon completion of markers such as “finishing education, entering the labor force, marriage and parenthood” (Arnett, 1997, p. 16). However, looking at my demographic group of white, middle class, young adults, education will last longer for us than it has for any previous generation. Also, the average age of marriage and parenthood has risen into and past the mid-twenties. These indicators have been replaced by more intrinsic and individualistic measures, just as often reached prior to any of the more traditional life markers (Arnett 1997, 2000a, 2000b). Instead of a definitive moment that moves a young person
Identity development, including exploration of love, work, and worldviews, takes place mostly during emerging adulthood when explorations “are in part explorations for their own sake, obtaining a broad range of life experiences before taking on enduring – and limiting – adult responsibilities” (Arnett, 2000a, p. 474). While there were certainly issues of love and work at play in my own experience, for the purposes of exploring how to train individuals to do cross-cultural work, I will focus here on the exploration of worldviews.

**Worldview Exploration**

Emerging adulthood, for many white, middle class individuals in Western, industrial cultures, is often a time to explore worldviews other than those in which an emerging adult was raised (Nelson & Barry, 2005). By the time individuals complete college, they have begun committing themselves to worldviews different from those they arrived at college with, but with openness to further formation of those worldviews (Arnett, 2000a). This process is, in many ways, what defines the emergence of feelings of adulthood in emerging adults. The main indicators of adulthood for emerging adults are “decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences” and “establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult” (Arnett, 1997, p. 11). “They consider it important during emerging adulthood to reexamine the beliefs they have learned in their families and to form a set of beliefs that is the product of their own independent reflections” (Arnett, 2000a, p. 474). The need to create worldviews independently is so important that that familiar worldviews may be rejected without anything to replace them (Arnett, 2000a).
The reexamination of worldviews is part of defining identity into adulthood, similar to an individual’s racial identity creation through the study of whiteness. The process of identity development is multifaceted as multiple forms of identity interact in a complex way. The process of moving from a shared viewpoint with those identified as adults, such as parents, to a more relativist perspective is similar to Helms’ (1990) stages of understanding whiteness. Perry (1999) follows emerging adults through similar processes as Helms. Much like Helms, Perry sees internalization or commitment to a worldview as the root of personal growth. “Commitment refers to an act, or ongoing activity relating a person as agent and chooser to aspects of his life in which he invests his energies, his care, and his identity” (Perry, 1999, p. 150). An individual uses commitments to define identity, regardless of context. Through exploration and individual meaning making, worldviews are constructed and used to crystallize an emerging adult identity.

This gives rise to the question as to how worldviews are formed in emerging adulthood. For some generations, it has been easier to identify where political or worldview identities are formed because of the presence of high social movements or discontent. The Great Depression, World War II, or the 1960s, are examples of occurrences that shaped generations of worldviews because of the tumultuous world climate created by these events (Stewart & Healy, 1989). Other generations may not be marked by events that capture the attention and action of the world, but this does not preclude them from creating self-sufficient worldviews. They key for any change in worldview is integration into the personal identity where issues would otherwise remain irrelevant. An individual finds an issue or movement that somehow captures the attention or imagination, and it builds on personal meaning for the individuals. How that meaning is made is a discussion for another time, but the key for building a worldview is that some issue or idea
does find personal meaning for the individual. As such, only some values and attitudes will crystallize into a worldview that will direct life decision. Those that do take hold are developed through experimentation and exploration (Stewart & Healy, 1986), often during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000a).

Arnett’s interviews with emerging adults in 2000 reveal that emerging adults have an awareness of societal problems, some owing it to extensive media coverage of events such as crime and environmental destruction (Arnett, 2000b). Other research puts further perspective on this, by pointing to the involvement of young people in political activities as a way to assert their adulthood. Emerging adults are likely to seek out a political identity in order to begin forming viewpoints based on self discovery outside of what was prescribed by parents. They are more likely to express their worldviews to those they view as adults than to their peers, in order to claim access to the adult identity as being committed to personal worldviews of one’s own (Scherrer, 2001). However, Scherrer goes further to indicate that asserting this political identity is not meant to diminish their youth identities, which will be asserted in order to remain unattached to the constraints normally placed on adults in society. They want it to “be compulsory to see farther than the end on one’s nose…[and to] take an active part in society and, above all, not content [themselves] with acting like most other people do” (Scherrer, 2001, p. 233). Even as they dabble with ideals that are held to mean transitioning into adulthood, emerging adults may simultaneously present themselves in ways that will “resist the possibility of being symbolically excluded from the social category of youth in general” (Scherrer, 2001, p. 234).
Worldviews at Work

Individuals are more likely to commit to worldviews where they find personal meaning. In many cases, this begins with a “politicized collective identity” such as being a woman, black, or gay (Duncan & Stewart, 2007, p. 146). Internalization of these worldviews manifests in political topics being personally relevant, such that those who feel committed to certain causes will feel compelled to create a personal response, where the injustice in that cause is highlighted (Duncan & Stewart, 2007). In some cases, though, individuals attach meaning based on perceived injustices, and in an effort to be an ally to those who suffer “based on their analysis of the damage done by that social structure, and their rejection of the privileges association with their position in it” (p. 147). The more involved in politically charged thinking an individual is, the more likely they are to encounter and internalize the collective identity of other groups (Duncan & Stewart, 2007).

Knowing what entices individuals from different cultures, (here, I focused on my own white, middle class, young adult culture) to engage worldviews that promote respect and dignity across cultures is important in knowing how to train them to do cross cultural work. Within the emerging adult category, the draw for individuals to worldviews that are consistent with cross cultural work is creating personal connections within the context of the work. These connections can be made through typical exploration and seeking of personally defined worldviews, which are common activities among emerging adults.

Personal connection in integration is integral but does have risks, primarily, the reinforcement of inequalities through commitment and involvement. Any worldview activity is “complicated by issues of power and inequality and even by issues of geography” (Blackstone, 2009, p. 89). If these power dynamics are left out of the worldview, it is possible to
unintentionally reinforce them. Strong personal commitments by certain individuals may, by the nature of their day to day norms of interaction, “prevent them from taking a more critical look at the social problems being addressed by the movements in which they are involved” (Blackstone, 2009, p. 112) and “run the risk that only those particular individuals will be constructed as good people” who do good acts (p. 112).

*My Adult and Activist Identities*

Obtaining a identity that is committed to issues of social justice is difficult and even more difficult to maintain in the conflict with other identities. Individuals obtain an identity of compassion and commitment though experimentation and internalization of issues, sometimes by being part of a marginalized group identity, sometimes by committing to stand against injustice that may privilege the individual (Duncan & Stewart, 2007). My commitment to social justice did not involve my own group identity until well after I had committed to other issues, almost all of which positioned me in the dominant and privileged group. Through a series of experiences during my emerging adulthood, I was able to find commitment in what Duncan & Stewart might say was “based on [my] analysis of the damage done by [a] social structure, and [my] rejection of the privileges associated with [my] position in it” (p. 147). Much later than my internalization of issues of race and class, I did see my positionality as a woman. My path is counter to the idea that many people will first come to issues of justice through their marginalized group status, which proves that it can be done. The question for this section is how does a person remain committed, regardless of how they arrived. This is especially pertinent when there is a pull to assume a position of aloof or less engaged adulthood.

Two days after returning to the United States in 2004, my husband and I became engaged. In the two years between then and my return to South Africa in 2006, we planned a
wedding, moved in together, got married, and purchased our first home. During most of this time, I was in graduate school, and for financial and other reasons, was feeling increasingly ready to be done being a student and start “real life.” I was 25 years old, married for eight months, six weeks into my first “real job,” and sixty days from signing my first mortgage papers when I landed back in Cape Town. Upon current reflection, and reading of Arnett’s definitions of emerging adulthood, I feel that I was almost the picture of one who was moving from emerging adulthood into a real feeling of being an adult.

In many ways, I believe that having had this experience with conflicting identities is what kept me committed to issues of justice. A close second, is my professional life and a basic understanding of how my work interrupts cycles of injustice, in small ways. Third, is a continued support network that is also committed to staying engaged in cultures that are outside of our own. For now, I will work on how coming to face my conflicting identities helped solidify my commitment, acknowledging that the later two points deserve further exploration at a later date.

During and throughout college, the vast majority of my peer group, including myself, fell into what Scherrer (2001) describes as individuals who negotiate between “youth’s passion and activist responsibility” (p. 238). The activist sides of us made us feel committed to adult issues outside the consideration of our less engaged youth peers. We were equally committed to spontaneous road trips, playing Frisbee, and finding ways to travel to the most remote places of the world, and enjoyed the privilege of having these choices. For many of us, we did not know or care what we would be doing after graduating from college, except that we would passionately commit to doing work that was thoughtfully engaged in making the world a better place. We even signed a pledge, which I still carry with me every day. It states, “I pledge to explore and
take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organization for which I work.” I believed it and I still believe it. But, I probably believe it a little less fervently than I did in 2003, when I graduated from college. As I have entered my late twenties, I wonder if my idea of what those phrases means has relaxed, or if I simply understand more of what it can mean to be committed to these things.

Since I was still in graduate school and spending a lot of time discussing these things, and newly engaged in a line of work that I saw as moderately connected to my pledge, I thought that I was still the same activist identity going into South Africa in 2006. This was highlighted by my surprise about being uncomfortable with my former identity. “Maybe I’m lost because this really was HOME for me and now I really have a HOME at home [in the United States]…so being here suddenly doesn’t fit” (2006 Journals, p. 8). “But so much of this town, this house, etc. are familiar that I’m surprised at my fear. Again, I think I fear myself and my lack of confidence to get through the next month more than anything” (p. 4). Being thrown back into an environment where my activist identity had thrived, and feeling constrained and frightened by it, put my understanding of what I stood for in turmoil.

To that point, being committed to social justice had meant being able to live with the poor in ways that were very different from my lifestyle in the United States. It had meant doing things that helped me understand struggle at a very basic level that could not be easily understood from simple observation. “But then again, what am I doing [in Khayelitsha] but sticking out – disrupting, etc.? I’m not really doing anything but ‘being’. I am just now [reminded] by how important ‘being’ with the poor is” (2006 Journals, p. 27). “Am I giving in to the lazy mind syndrome that I feared would crop back up someday” (p. 26)? Sure, I could know in my heart that not having indoor plumbing would be difficult, but experiencing bathing
in a basin and peeing in a bucket pushed that knowledge much further. “[I forgot how] peeing in the bucket is LOUD. So now …I’m embarrassed [because everyone in the house was still awake to hear it]. And of course I had the longest pee ever” (p. 10).

Until 2006, I believed one had to go that far to really understand. And maybe, for me, that was true. But, going back in 2006, I was no longer comfortable with this level of immersion. I was aware that my flight to the city emphasized my status, something I had tried vehemently to hide in 2004, but this time, it wasn’t enough to keep me in Khayelitsha. “Why was I able to buy my way out of an uncomfortable lifestyle? I know it is not wrong to do it, but why does it make me feel guilty all the same? I had beef risotto for dinner for God sake! How many people on the Cape alone could afford that” (2006 Journals, p. 45)? I felt childish and constrained. “I could not tolerate being treated like a child, which, I might add, was much more rampant than I remember from before. I mean, a text message to remind me to eat? Give me a break! …I know [my host mother] was just trying to protect me but I really had such a hard time tolerating it” (p. 67). There was a certain level of guilt, but not enough to override my need to flee to the independent and less rugged mode of living in the city. I knew that I felt more adult because of the many life decisions I had made in the two years prior, and the consequent feelings of independence and self-sufficiency they elicited:

It’s raining tonight. In fact, it started raining on my way to Cape Town, which felt very symbolic and cleansing. But what was I feeling cleansed from? Although I was definitely still angry, I could feel myself getting less tense as I got further from Khayelitsha. OH! How opposite from before! Is this really bad? Have I now officially failed at [staying committed to social justice]? Even if I have, I am relaxed, and warm and dry (except for my very clean hair) and comfortable (2006 Journals, p. 33).
What I did not expect was my need for clean hair and beef risotto would conflict so broadly with my identity as an activist.

Central to this internal conflict was my decision to move out of the black township and into a more urban center, closer to the creature comforts which I had become accustomed and easier to access with public transportation. Where I had felt comfort and safety in 2004, I then felt smothered and irritated. I felt like I was being treated like a child, when more than two years prior, I actually did not mind being treated as such. “Should I have just told her I could not tolerate being treated like a child” (2006 Journals, p. 67)? The importance of my newly established home and family had clearly been internalized, and I was frustrated by what I perceived as a lack of recognition of my adulthood or independence. “Oddly, though, wanting to stay here again is part of what pushed me to this research, now it feels a little inhibiting” (2006 Journals, p. 15). In a culture that still prioritized marriage as a rite of passage into adulthood, I was surprised by the continued treatment as a child. Why this was the case is not as important as the issue of how my experience with it ultimately shook and altered my identity as a person committed to social justice learning and action.

It is apparent that my identity as a social justice worker was changing along with my identity as an adult. I expressed a feeling of conflict between the two identities when reflecting on my move out of the township. Where I would have been skeptical of fear or creature comforts in 2004, now I was seeking them, and even feeling like I needed them to survive. I wanted to listen to my fears on the train. I felt that I needed to have a cell phone to connect with home:

The train ride back from town today was nothing short of overwhelming…Really, I wanted to hide in a 1st class booth and seat and read my flighty book. When I’m trying to
hide, I know something is wrong. I’m not looking forward to the out and back tomorrow either (2006 Journals, p. 7).

And the desires for creature comforts haunted me throughout. “So I am excited to get a phone, hopefully tomorrow, which I would have completely looked down on a few years ago” (p. 5). “Who am I with a cell phone AND hair products” (p. 11)? I was not interested in being immersed in a different culture as I was in 2004 and before then. “It’s not that I don’t want to be here – I do. But just not here here. It’s been too long since I was really pushed, I’m sure…I’m am also weaker than I was even 2 years ago” (p. 5). These feelings persisted and never stopped conflicting with what I would have thought and felt two years prior:

I find myself with less interest in what’s happening on the micro level in the township. I am still interested but maybe not this close, and not for this long (and by myself). I’m such a brat. It would have killed me to go stay in a white ‘burb two years ago and now I can’t wait to get there! With purpose of being here the same, would it have mattered if I wasn’t alone? … (p. 28).

In short, I was more interested in eating in restaurants, taking surfing lessons and hanging out in bookshops. The challenges of staying in Khayelitsha had no hope of competing with the challenges that were in the ocean waves. “I feel like I’m fulfilling a long held dream of traveling solo, being bohemian and free-spirited” (p. 39). Halfway through my stay, I:

ate brunch at Gaslight Café and mused about how myself and the white family at the next table probably see Muizenberg and all the (mostly white) surfers so differently than the black and colored folks who live/work here...And then I’m taking surfing lessons tomorrow (yay!) for R250 and am excited about how cheap it is…that’s like 50 loaves of bread. And realizing that about makes me sick (p. 59).
All of these activities were on my list of things that “tourists” would do while traveling, and unrepresentative of “real culture;” they were things I would never do. They were the things that “real adults” and all of the curmudgeon and narrow-minded people I grew up with would do. Not me. And then here I was, doing them. And not just doing them, enjoying them! “Yep. I’m turning back into my dad. (gag)” (2006 Journals, p. 27). I wanted to simultaneously have clean sheets and feel adventurous and cultured and like a risk-taker. I did not want to be “old” and “boring.” But, alas, I had started to enjoy the things that I felt defined me as “old” and “boring.” I had gotten to a point where I even resented my own guilt for wanting these things. I wanted to maintain my worldview, but not the activities that had given me those worldviews. I felt content to have someone else tell me about their experiences, but was fearful that this attitude had turned me into exactly the kind of person that I most feared. Thoughtless. Mundane. Brainwashed. Boring. Uninteresting. A sheep.

I wrote an informal essay in 2006 Journals to myself shortly after moving to the city that I titled “So, Does this Make me a Republican?.” 2006 Journals hold the beginnings of why I needed to have this conversation with myself:

I say it (in my mind) only partially tongue and cheek because I’m aware of things that have gone through my mind in the last several months that I am completely embarrassed to admit – about race, class, crime, etc. I have guessed it to be a combination of my own lack in new information and motivation and the constant [bigoted] messages I get without any alternative form of support. I only hear it one way most of the time, and I’m afraid I’m losing the battle by myself. But where to turn (p. 26)?

To be fair, I used Republican to define the people I considered to be insensitive and apathetic, even though I knew many people who would have politically identified themselves as
Republican while being engaged in a number of social issues. The “So Does this Make me a Republican?” thoughts ended up materializing into a long email that I sent to some friends who shared the same passions for justice.

_Sustaining Our Idealism_

After college, a few friends and I had created a small email project we called Sustaining Our Idealism or SOI for short. We pronounced it “soy” (as in the plant based protein) and liked the play on words that aligned us with a food that we most associated with alternative lifestyles. We each wrote weekly reflections on self-determined topics as a way to continue asking ourselves difficult questions about issues about which we felt passionate. Sometimes the topics were curiosities and sometimes they were loaded with heavy questions of justice or ethics. We would write email responses to one another supporting our questions with our individual shared experiences or build alternative viewpoints. This mini essay served as my only SOI contribution for the entire time I was in South Africa in 2006. It was all that occupied my mind from a self-reflective point of view. The essay details my conflict of wanting to live with risks and also wanting to live comfortably:

I am worried that this lowered tolerance for living with the poor means I have regressed to a fearful, judging, and spoiled brat. Is the Republican/unquestioning mind I grew up with creeping back in without my notice? Has the academic mind placed itself high in the ivory towers of theory and models and forgotten the importance of the organic intellect? Though I can remember what it was to live with the poor (for a few weeks at a time here or there), do I maintain the humility to actually do it myself? Though I study the effects of racial and gender inequalities in our society, can I really give up my privileged white status and live in a world that doesn’t privilege it? (2006 Journals, p. 25)
Did the conflict of being more adult and feeling less engaged mark a period where I had not yet organized a way to negotiate these identities together? Analyzing this today, I see that activism was an important adult assertion, until there were other adult characteristics that could also assert my adulthood, and even compete with my original ideas of it.

One of the reasons my friends and I had created our SOI group, was because we did not want to become the lazy minds that we knew we had been coming into college, or those that we saw in people a few years after they graduated. Most of the adults we knew, outside of our campus, were not committed to issues of social justice, and would gasp in astonishment when we described the places we had visited and the accommodations in which we had stayed. This was a point of pride for us, possibly defining us as more committed, more investing, more adult than those we recognized as adults. We talked at length about why people lost their passion after graduation, and we sensed that it was partly due to having to leave the college bubble, where there were always hoards of others who would support your explorations and ideas. The real world did not seem to recognize or celebrate the characteristics of activists. We understood that we would likely have to temper our commitments, but we sought a safe place to continue expressing them. So we created a virtual space through email and blog communication.

I am not sure if I would have ever realized how my activist identity was changing as I saw myself reaching adulthood, had I not been faced with the experiences of South Africa in 2006. I consider it a privilege to have been able to have any of these experiences in the first place, so I want to look underneath them to see what allows us to create a balance between entering adulthood and maintaining an activist identity. From this experience, I see that I needed to continue to be confronted with that identity, where I had mostly just been talking about it for a couple of years. So, I needed to stay physically connected to issues of justice. I also needed
reassurance from others with similar intentions. I needed to reconfirm for myself that I did want to have both identities, and ask myself what I intended to do about the identity conflict. In this experience, that meant using my time with CRO to create more big-picture thinking into my work as a community developer. I had started to feel like I was just doing good to do good, without considering the implications on the social justice scale.

In writing this, I am comfortable with how my identities as an adult and an activist have come together, though I still check myself to make sure they are both there. Facing my original idea of activism is what forced me to critically decide how the combination would look. The experience forced me to reconsider my notions of activism, and define them in a way that allowed my identity as an adult and as an activist to coexist. It is possible that my activist identity, the less dominant of the two in 2006, would have begun to disappear without my knowing, had I not been forced to redefine it. I do not know that there is a prescribed way to address how to maintain these two identities. For me, it has meant accepting that any identity comes with effort. In my mind, once an activist does not an activist make. If I am to maintain that kind of identity, I must continue to learn and act accordingly.

From a demographic standpoint, it is likely that an individual doing cross cultural work may fall into the emerging adulthood category. This category is largely self-defined and encompasses several considerations that are also a part of defining an identity as an activist, namely solidifying worldviews as defined by varying experiences. However, even assuming that an individual continues to identify as activist, this does not mean that the inputs or supported needed to maintain that identity will continue. Much as my friends and I relied on the SOI group in our first few years outside of college, other commitments have taken its place to the point that the group connects very rarely in this way anymore. I still struggle with worldview questions,
but my options for continuing to prepare myself for doing cross cultural community development work have changed and diminished. Despite having several internalized worldview commitments, I still continue to worry about what happens when I wake up one day and realize I’ve stopped questioning myself. A few suggestions for how to address these questions in order to prepare myself to do community development work in communities that are not necessarily my own are what follows in the final chapter.
CHAPTER IV

Introduction

In Chapters 2 and 3, I examined two personal experiences in cross cultural situations in 2004 and 2006. I spent several weeks as a young, white, American woman in a predominantly black, South African culture. I came back to my home culture inspired and motivated to continue doing cross cultural work. This experience with autoethnography has been an attempt to discover learning from those experiences, that I may not have understood at the time. Through this study, I have uncovered several things about my identities and my experiences. Here, I will explore what this learning has to do with what I do each day in my work in community development. I look at some ideas for ways to prepare ourselves to do cross cultural community development work with examples of how they relate to my current role. This learning may be relevant for preparing others who are interested in doing work, development, research, or otherwise, in communities that are not their own.

During and until the conclusion of this study, I have worked as a community educator with our local extension service. My work involves creating and producing activities that promote positive financial behaviors, such as saving and reducing reliance on consumer debt. The overall goal of these financial education programs is to help members of our community learn how to manage money effectively, such that we have fewer people facing bankruptcy, foreclosure, and other major financial problems. I teach in area schools, conduct adult workshops, and facilitate a board of volunteers who organize events and campaigns meant to encourage the public to learn about, and engage in, behaviors that lead to financial stability.

Many of the individuals who take advantage of our services are referrals from other agencies in the community. We collaborate with several organizations in the area to compliment
the services they provide. For example, individuals who receive financial assistance from Job
and Family Services may be required to attend a budgeting class in order to obtain assistance a
second time. Or, potential Habitat for Humanity families may be required to take a homebuyer
education class in order to help demonstrate commitment and prepare for life as a new
homeowner. Also, some individuals seek our services on their own. As economic stress has
increased for many families, this has become more common.

Like the Community Resource Organization (CRO), our activities are aimed at promoting
stable financial lives for the families in our community. I began my current work 6 weeks prior
to visiting South Africa in 2006. That experience has impacted my approach to my work since
then. Prior to my cross cultural experience, I viewed my work in promoting financial literacy as
many others see it now. It is primarily seen as a much needed service that helps people who
need to learn skills in handling money in order to increase financial stability. The more soft-
spoken goal is that better financial stability will also reduce reliance on, and a need for, social
services. This was a key difference between my programs and those of CRO. The end goals for
mine are to get people to budget and save. The goals of CRO included these, but took them a
step further. CRO uses increased financial skills to promote asset based community
development. I continue to do much of the same work that was set in place for my programs
prior to my arrival, but seeing their approach shifted where I saw the real value in my work.
While additional knowledge and skills are good, what we allow people to do with them, is what
matters the most to our community. It is my goal to see my programs take on similar goals to
CRO in the promotion of community assets through financial stability.

Many difficulties have emerged from trying to integrate the learning from South Africa
and this experience with autoethnography. Based on my writing and analysis, I have explored
the connection between my explorations in South African in 2004 and 2006, and my struggles to interface this learning into my current work. The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to investigating 5 points that I believe can help in moving my learning to application, and which might have relevance to others struggling with how to do effective community development work in communities other than their own. Each point is based in a question that stems from a struggle I have had while trying to integrate what I have learned:

1. Embrace *ubuntu*.
2. Implement horizontal learning models.
3. Reflect on your identity.
4. Consider the identity of those who you need on your team.
5. Find peace with slow and messy.

*Embrace Ubuntu*

I propose that the answer to the question of how to do cross cultural community development work begins and ends with *ubuntu*. It begins with using *ubuntu* to educate participants about how to enter a community in a respectful and open way. It ends with participants considering personal identities within the social hierarchy, and continuing to relearn these principles based on new roles, contexts, and information. *Ubuntu* is most succinctly defined by Mbiti (1969) as “I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.” This idea is commonly accepted as a summary of the meaning of *ubuntu*, but it may sound like hollow altruism to white, American, middle class, Westerners, who typically ascribe to a more individualistic mode of being. While it may be true that Westerners find it difficult to understand *ubuntu* as a way of organizing an entire community or nation, deeper understanding of the core actions of living *ubuntu* principles may still guide a cross cultural experience.
Characteristics such as generosity, kindness, sharing, and respect can be found in Western understanding, and can serve as the starting point for entering a community that may have experienced the opposite from individuals resembling their visitors. However, kindness can be easily misconstrued as condescension or pity, and may further invoke the rules that have governed the community’s domination by other cultures. This is where ubuntu thinking can take the traveler beyond being kind and respectful, to opening doors of understanding about his or her implication in the community’s struggle.

Ubuntu principles ask individuals to consider the humanness of the rest of the individuals in the world. This means not only being kind and respectful, but honoring the culture and appearance of another as equally meaningful and valid in the global landscape. Further, it asks the participant to look beyond his or her ideas of race, class, economics, or culture, and acknowledge that every person is unique, but also part of the whole:

[Ubuntu] is an acknowledgement of the human status of another person. You and I are members of one of the same race, namely, the human race. The essence of man lies in the recognition of [person] as [person], before financial, political, and social factors are taken into consideration. Man is an end in himself and not a means (Teffo, 1996, pg. 105).

We must be conscious about stepping back from our cultural norms and our ways of approaching situations, and be willing to be taught and learn through observation. As a practitioner, attempting to practice ubuntu, we may need to make specific efforts to not offer up our own cultural solutions to other cultural questions, where we are used to seeing ourselves as bearers of knowledge. We must make space where, because of unconscious roles and privileges, we are accustomed to filling space. Why? Because we are used to inserting ourselves and being
welcomed for it. Our role should not be that of the educator, reinforcing notions of status. Rather, it should strive to be that of the student or collaborator, gaining learning that is not usually able to be shared in a landscape dominated by our voices and ways of doing. By stepping back, we make space to realize that there are multiple ways of problem solving and multiple ways of communicating and multiple ways of navigating the many spaces we encounter.

The struggle, then, may be in how to balance the sharing of individual ideas and talents. Mbiti (1969) again gives us the framework for understanding this balance. In *ubuntu*, “what is discouraged is the view that the individual should take precedence over the community” (p. 108). It is not that we would completely eliminate the voice and ideas of the practitioner. But by suspending our tendencies to compete for time for our ideas, a practitioner may learn that hearing from the community first may end up enriching the self in an unexpected way. As Battle (1997) suggests, “the problem in human community is not so much that some lack knowledge of how to behave in company with others, but that they put themselves forward in ways meant to exhibit their superiority, rather than their distinctiveness” (p. 15). This is all too easily done with community development roles that have historically placed the worker on the upper end of the community hierarchy.

By acknowledging the validity of the community by doing *ubuntu*-like activities, we may find that we gain more than we could have given. If the individual is, because the we is, the individual must acknowledge the voice and humanity of the we. “Thus sharing is promoted as it affirms the importance of social connectedness and therefore self-centeredness and individual greed are being frowned upon (Venter, 2004, p. 151).

What this thinking, used as an entry point, does not do, is explicitly ask the participant to consider his or her own identity as one who may have been othered. For white participants,
entering a non-white community may be an initial realization that there is real meaning to phrases such as “all people are created equal”. Having never been face to face with individuals who face many prejudices, it may finally be understood that as white people of privilege, there are many circumstances that they simply never have to navigate. It could be expected that an individual begin to question his or her identity as a person of privilege, but it is impossible that he or she will gain full understanding of the implications of privilege prior to or even during a cross cultural experience. Instead of building total self understanding, our aim may be to create solidarity. As the individual begins to, perhaps for the first time, see his or herself as a person of privilege, “solidarity is created through self-awareness, and like in the path to critical consciousness (Freire), through an awareness of self in relation to others” (Blankenberg, 1999, p. 48).

In Application

In my work, I am frequently told what people need to know. “Tell people to quit buying so much junk food!” “People just need to shut off their cell phones and cable.” “Everybody can find some money to save, if they’d just try!” “Tell my kids they shouldn’t be spending on their money.” “Make sure people know that credit cards are evil!” Not a week goes by that I don’t get badgered by someone who knows what other people need to do, despite the myriad circumstantial factors that could go into every single one of these decisions. Many times, the assertion is not intended for people that the individual would associate with themselves, but for “those people” who “just need someone to give them a kick in the pants!” When these outspoken individuals find out about the kind of work I do, they seem to think of me as a potential mouthpiece for their values. Unfortunately, for those who are only interested in
inserting their values on other groups, a project guided with an *ubuntu* spirit is unlikely to do any such thing. But, my use of *ubuntu* will not make much of an impact if I am the only one using it.

*How do we change hearts and minds to get more people to ascribe to ubuntu principles?*

It is much easier to point to specific habits that need correcting in the Other, than it is to try and understand the Other as another human being. And, if I am unwilling to see the Other as another fellow human being, then I am only left with defining the Other by his or her actions. Additionally, if I am to see the Other as another equal human being, that may put me at risk for having to honestly face my implication in them being othered. Nothing about shifting to an *ubuntu* mentality, changing hearts and minds to see communities of equals, is easy. And, to be perfectly honest, I have no idea how it can happen other than for individuals who believe in it to model the behavior and attitude. My heart and mind was changed by seeing and experiencing another possibility, *ubuntu*, for myself. But not every person can see and experience these things. So I talk openly, and passionately about my experiences, and risk being called a fool and a sap, while explaining how I use *ubuntu* in my work.

Beyond just talking about how I use it, I try to model the attitude when working with those who would prefer to assert their values onto others. I remind myself that I, like everyone else, did not want to see myself in the eyes of *The Butcher Boys*, and work as hard to show *ubuntu* to these individuals. When I am told to “tell people to get rid of their cell phones!,” I try to engage that individual, whenever possible, in a discussion about why this assertion is not always a realistic solution. I acknowledge what the individual may have seen that leads them to believe this, and then try to work alternative scenarios for the cell phone into the conversation. I might remark that it is possible, though extremely difficult, to obtain employment without a reliable phone number. I may also comment about the number of clients I see who have very
limited cell phone plans, that are used almost exclusively for making inevitably long calls to doctors for a child’s special medical condition. I try to always reconfirm that I have heard the person’s assertion, but admit that the decision is difficult and ultimately lies in the hands of individuals, just like all the difficult choices we, ourselves, make every day.

It is my hope that this type of approach helps, bit by bit, with opening the hearts and minds of those I encounter. Without being able to have every person in our community experience another culture first hand, I position myself with a duty to try and model the behavior I have seen to be useful in community development. The trick, for me, is to do the same with our nay-sayers as I am hoping they will do with the underserved in our community. In this way, they help me learn about myself, much as I hope they will also learn about themselves.

*Implement Horizontal Learning*

With their community assets model, Kretzmann & McKnight (1993) can help us take examples of what I witnessed with the Community Resource Organization (CRO), and the use of *ubuntu* principles, and put them into a working model for use in communities that may not be our own. The community assets model positions the community development worker as a resource among many, within the community, in sometimes unexpected ways. The main focus of this model is to honor what already exists within the community, similar to the burgeoning leaders in the women’s groups with CRO.

Community assets are the individuals, associations, and institutions within a community that already exist and are already (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) doing development before any community development worker arrived (Reeler, 2005). Basing development on assets is a shift from the typical mode of development, where we tend to look at the deficiencies or needs in a
community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The difference is significant here because it reassigns the role of the development worker consistent with a spirit of ubuntu.

Community assets models create real development in communities where needs-based models run the risk of reinforcing dependencies. Often, needs-based assessments are driven by external forces, such as funding sources which require demonstrations of deficiency in order to provide funds (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Asset-based models “by necessity [, are] internally focused…[concentrating] first of all upon the agenda building and problem-solving capacities of local residents, local associations and local institutions” (p. 9). The internal focus is fundamental to a community asset model because historically, “significant development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort” (p. 5).

Of primary importance are the associations or relationships within a community. These are often undervalued because they are also often hidden (Reeler, 2005). Once these resources are more visible, the process of development may shift to one of growth. “[The community] may or may not be developing healthily or in ways they like or even are conscious of, they may be inhibited to a point of stuckness in some places, but they have been developing long before development workers came into their lives and will continue to do so long after they have left” (p. 3). Again, since development only happens when individuals invest in their own community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), it becomes the role of the development worker to assist the community in revealing their assets instead of the typical role of distributor of resources.

Perhaps the most important thing that the community development worker can do is to assist in building and rebuilding relationships “between and among local residents, local associations and local institutions” (Kretzmann McKnight, 1993, p. 9). As the CRO example
illustrated, the relationships within and around a community are what can create meaningful development, despite an apparent lack of physical resources. Along with assisting in relationship building, development workers may help individuals learn from their own experiences and “in doing so, people can build themselves, their community’s or their organizations’ ability to act in…ways that are less dependent on outside knowledge or expertise” (Reeler, 2005, p. 5). This also helps individuals deal with or unlearn fears that are consequential of years of deprivation or oppression (p. 4). In doing so, we are “helping people to consciously reveal, appreciate and strengthen their innate capacities and resources of learning. This is the foundation of real independence, inner confidence and sustainability” (p. 5).

As may be guessed, there are no definitive approaches and protocols for doing this work. This is coupled with the fact that in an asset approach, development workers may begin to feel that their roles have become unimportant or unnecessary. If our thinking remains the same, then the role of the development worker in another community does become less important. The key, then, is to know when to bring assistance and how (Reeler, 2005). There is no prescribed set of actions for doing this, but like ubuntu approaches to cross cultural experiences, it begins with “appropriate humility and sensitivity to the politics of place and identity” and, if done well, ends with “a new politics of knowledge production [that] will emerge with it new subject [being] created – including new development professionals” (Underhill-Sem & Lewis, 2008, p. 315). The outcome that we seek is a more confident and competent community, with fewer needs for outside resources (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 5). This freedom for a community is also freeing for the development worker (Reeler, 2005).
In Application

The use of a community assets model is one that I have struggled with, professionally. In my current work, I have one rather unimportant voice, in the scheme of all the voices in our community, that help to make decisions about how services are determined and positioned. I am an advocate for approaching development from a horizontal and *ubuntu* mindset, but have found that “the way we’ve always done it” is a very strong argument, in the minds of those on the go-to list, and those with the deep funding pockets. For this, I remain an advocate, but still struggle with how to move the vision of community assets into practice.

In my own work, I have been able to somewhat embrace a horizontal learning in my programs within the larger community development scheme. I teach a twice monthly budgeting class that draws voluntary and referral participants from many backgrounds. While it is my job to deliver the best practices of financial goal setting, debt management and budgeting to participants, I have found that some of the best resources for these tasks are already within many participants. Because of this, when possible, I deliver the curriculum in a way that provides space for participants to share their own ideas, tips, methods and theories with other participants. Often, I am the only person in the room from a middle class cultural background, and while my ideas may sound good, I easily miss the nuances of life in the culture of poverty where the participants must try to apply my points. Individuals may volunteer information to one another about ways to purchase items more cheaply, make things last longer, or even how best to hide accumulated cash savings from family and neighbors. I try to be open and encouraging to classes about the skills and information they already possess, and we discuss how they can continue to use those skills even better to increase their financial stability. I remind myself that
my role is to help individuals validate their own resources, skills and knowledge, and help them access others that they can then add as their own.

While this is just one small way that I can implement a horizontal method in my program, there are several other ways that I think we could do better to support a spirit of *ubuntu* and encourage more effective horizontal learning about finances. First, I would like to see a few of our clients added as members of our advisory committees, or possibly our Board of Directors. The struggle with has been, so far, an inability to convince current volunteers, who are mostly professionals in the financial services industry, of the validity of this idea enough to warrant changing the times and ways meetings are handled, in order to accommodate other types of schedules. The potential benefit is immeasurable in terms of the reach of the program and making the message of the organization much more effective. I would also like to see our program encourage small savings communities, similar to CRO groups. Constraints on this idea have been the extremely private way most Americans view family finances, and the time needed to spread the word. The later part of this constraint could be assisted by having clients as volunteers, and the former is probably becoming easier to address, with the onset of an economy where it has become more acceptable to admit to having debt and needing to manage money better.

*Why, when we seek to do development in certain kinds of communities, is it so difficult to suggest that members of those communities be part of the visioning?* A whole host of other ideas might stem, particularly, from the first suggested point of benefiting from those who we serve, providing support to the program. The main reason why this would be helpful is that we, as workers and volunteers, often do not belong to the community or culture which we intend to
serve. If we do not first realize this to be true, we may never realize that we are, more or less, speaking another language to many of the people we hope to serve.

Like my 2006 South Africa experience, if I could work with the community instead of for it, I would actually have to work with their input. Having clients work alongside other decision makers shifts the worldview that many of our current members take for granted – that they know what is best for those we serve. Making this transition might highlight that we, as practitioners, may not have all the answers. Further, it would require me, as a board member, to use ubuntu to see clients as equal human beings, which as discussed, above, has a whole host of complications associated with it. Chiefly, it might require that we do and see things differently. This is a challenge for many individuals who are comfortable in their roles of telling others what to do and how to do it. This makes it all the more important for us, as practitioners, to know who we are as individuals within the community.

Reflect on Your Identity

In some ways, my 2006 trip to South Africa picked up where 2004 left off. What remained to be explored after 2004 was my internalization and further understanding of myself, after coming into contact with cross cultural confusion. Critical reading of 2006 revealed that much of that experience was about identity development, specifically identity as a white American adult and activist. My definition of either identity was in flux due to a variety of circumstances, not the least of which was unexpected frustrations in a cross cultural situation. Whether it is my identity as a white woman of privilege, or an activist or something else, using the knowledge gained from this experience hinges on my basic understanding of my place in a community and the assumptions that go with those identities.
It was clear from analysis of 2006 Journals, that how I define myself affects how I am willing to relate to and work within my community. In 2004, I was thrilled about being taken care of by the people of Khayelitsha, where I was threatened and frustrated with it in 2006. The significant change was that I had begun to change my definition of myself as an adult by 2006. I likely would still not have considered myself fully adult then, but I was much closer to it than in 2004. This transition had largely gone unnoticed by me, until I was thrust back into an environment that I had treasured, and in which I had welcomed the care given to me in the past. In addition to my change in adult identity, was my change in perception of my activist identity, and the conflict I felt between them both.

I had prided myself in being a devoutly committed activist, which held a fairly specific definition in my mind. That definition included educating oneself on matters of social justice, being engaged in community service activity, and being willing to consistently make consumer and lifestyle decisions that may be counter to average American culture. 2006 shows that I was no longer willing or able to fulfill my own criteria in ways that left me comfortable with defining myself as an activist. Much of what created this separation were the things that I required as an adult. I had never fully reconciled this contradiction, other than to decide that I could still be committed to social justice activism, but probably never again in the same ways that I was in my early 20s. Exploring this further is something I hope to do in the future.

Even though I have not completely reconciled these seemingly contradictory identities, I still find it useful to explore them for the purpose of continued service and engagement in my community. I still consider myself to be some kind of activist in my community, though definitely not the same kind that I was in 2004 or 2006. As this identity evolves, so does my understanding of what my role may be in developing my community. Because of my constant
identity as a person of privilege (somewhat differently defined back in the United States than in South Africa), I continue to engage in cross cultural experiences for community development. The majority of my time as a community development worker is done in connection with cultures and communities that reside in relative proximity to my home, but are still not my own. There is significance in realizing this, and keeping this awareness on my radar. For me, as a person from a relatively privileged background, most of the work I do will be in communities where I am an outsider, whether or not I believe that I can relate and understand.

This recognition is of utmost importance when applying *ubuntu* and horizontal learning. Referring back to *ubuntu*, knowing our own identities becomes extremely useful in cross cultural settings when we realize that our positions of relative power are not the only ways to enter a community. In this way we begin with an open hand of kindness, compassion and mutual respect rather than the all-knowing problem solvers that individuals from dominant cultures are sometimes taught to be. This, then, allows us to see problems and opportunities in ways that our dominant culture lenses may not normally allow. We can see them from the viewpoint of those who live and work and consume in their own culture and community. Over time, we certainly begin to understand the nuances of a culture, even if it is not our own, but we must be careful about assuming expert status in a community that is not our own.

Realizing that we are often working with a totally or slightly different culture, is key to understanding our role in community development. Chiefly because it takes us off our dominant culture high horse, and forces us to listen and let the community tell us rather than us telling it. It can also help us see where community power has been stripped away and replaced by systems of dependence, working counter to development. It may also help us, as dominant culture
participants, be freed from systems of dominance, as we see through *ubuntu* that all are oppressed when any are.

In my community, the dominant culture is a middle class culture that values hard work and achievement. When our communities do not demonstrate these qualities, as defined by the dominant middle class, they are deemed unintelligent and lazy. This attitude is consistent with observations by Payne (2005), whose work encourages middle class practitioners to understand that there are different motivations for the different cultures within our communities.

Where middle class individuals are typically motivated by achievement, relationships override all activities in the culture of poverty. Since much of our development efforts are channeled into communities that are culture of poverty dominant, it is imperative to understand the different motivations, else our efforts will be meaningless. “The bottom line in generational poverty is entertainment and relationships. In middle class, the criteria against which most decisions are made relate to work and achievement” (Payne, 2005, p. 41). It is our tendency to tell people that they need to become more like us. Not only is this insulting and diminishing of those who we say we serve, it forces our solutions into a culture where they are not likely to work. Middle class solutions are not likely to solve problems in communities where the middle class is not dominant. Relationships of mutual respect, as the key motivation for the culture of poverty, are the one proven way to develop poorer communities (Payne, 2005). This is similar to the message of *ubuntu*.

The deeper point of this research is more clearly demonstrated from Sen (1999), and further implicates an *ubuntu* framework for successful community development. Drawing back on *The Butcher Boys* (Alexander, 1985), we know that oppression does not only affect the oppressed, but those in the dominant group as well. The purpose of this work is not to assign
blame for oppression, but rather, to draw on a sense of mutual respect and responsibility to develop equitable communities, for the benefit of all. The shift in perceiving our work as being “for” another, to “with” another, is not only more likely to be received and be successful, but also grants our entire community more freedom. “Seeing development in terms of the substantive freedoms of people…[involves] removing the unfreedoms from which the members of the society may suffer…While this is not by any means unrelated to the process of economic growth and accumulation of physical and human capital, its reach and coverage go much beyond these variables” (Sen, 1999, p. 33). The underlying basis is that development comes from the unleashing of freedoms, both economic (where we typically look in development) and democratic (political and civil rights, for example). I want to view my clients, not as dependents on the system, but as currently less free, human beings. I want to work with them to build their freedoms, which, in turn, makes me and the rest of our communities more free. This could mean we are more free from systems of dependence, or it could also mean more free to see one another in relationships of mutual respect.

I can imagine, as one who has read a lot of theory about community development, only to walk away from the research completely paralyzed at how to apply it in my community, that this application of ubuntu sounds wonderful, but has no concrete application. To begin bridging this gap, I will refer back to my experience with the Community Resource Organization, and its model of development, which contains several application points of the above discussion. I follow this description with a discussion of the community assets model as a way to use this theory and examples as entry points into our own community development work.
In Application

In 2007, about a year after beginning my position with the extension service, I found myself teaching a class that still remains as the most difficult group I have ever tried to instruct. More difficult than a classroom full of boisterous seventh grade boys, this class was made up of 6 individuals from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. It included:

- a woman, a Job and Family Services referral, who quickly and openly discussed several ideas and actions that would commonly identify her as someone from the culture of poverty
- a man who was seemed to be experiencing situational (or temporary) poverty due to a job loss
- a woman who stated that she was attending in order to help instruct “those in need” at her church, and who, based on her stated values, mostly likely came from a middle class culture
- a man, a Job and Family Services referral, who was legally blind and had been living, according to him, comfortably on disability checks for many years
- a woman and her middle school aged daughter from one of the very small rural communities in our area, who were attending to gain information for the daughter’s 4-H project, and who most likely also identified with middle class values

The range of cultures, even within the two represented cultures, poverty and middle class, presented a need for what proved to be an extremely complicated communication style. The experience provided me with a perfect example of how important it is, when trying to do development work, to know who we are as individual workers. This particular situation brings up several questions within the point of considering our own identities.
How do we know who we serve and how to communicate with them? Not long after I began my current job, I attended the first of a couple trainings on the culture of poverty. Without using the words ubuntu, horizontal learning, or community assets models, the training, based on the work of Payne (2005) delivered a very similar message. Both times I have attended a culture of poverty training, I have left being reminded of how much I really don’t know, and how much I assume about other cultures, even being full of good intentions. These trainings, and others like them, were meant to help us, as primarily middle class workers, better see ourselves in order to better serve our clients, who primarily are from the culture of poverty.

Once I began to better understand my middle class background and culture, I also started to better understand how I could more effectively communicate with other socioeconomic cultures. Behind much of Payne’s (2005) work are the underlying assumptions that each of the three core Western industrial socioeconomic cultures, poverty, middle class, and wealth, have hidden rules that guide interaction within each. The hidden rules govern how a person communicates, what is valued, how things are used, and what drives people into the future. Money, and how it is managed, is also part of the hidden rules. “One of the biggest difficulties in getting out of poverty is managing money and just the general information base around money. How can you manage something you’ve never had” (p. 44)? Most striking for me, regardless of my willingness to use ubuntu to be respectful of differences, was my oversight of the values placed on money in the different cultures. “The notion of using money for security,” which is a primary point in my classes, “is truly grounded in the middle and wealthy classes” (p. 44). My communicating about money from middle class perspective was never going to convey the message to individuals in poverty, as I hoped.
What I need to understand is what motivates and drives the individuals in my classes, and never define their values by my identity. Instead of talking about saving for the future to a culture that primarily values surviving the current moment, I try to have individuals in the class discuss times when having a few extra dollars hidden away helped them survive a difficult situation. Instead of talking about managing money to a culture that primarily values money as a something to be spent, I try to have individuals in the class discuss ways that they have found to make their spending more productive. Using this approach, I try to help individuals see their own resources as valuable, but still convey additional tools that may be helpful in their efforts to find more peace in their financial life. We’re often still talking about managing money, but how it is talked about becomes key to whether or not the messages are received. It was not until I better understood my own identity, that I could see that what was simply normal for me, was merely a manifestation of the dominant culture, and distinctly foreign to many of my clients. I must find ways to see myself as my clients see me, to suspend my perceptions, in order to do development work in their communities.

And yet, as this project has continuously highlighted, in considering my identity, once is not enough. Our identities and the communities where we are trying to work continually change, and our roles and relationships must be continually redefined. In many ways, the suggestions from both horizontal learning and *ubuntu* remind me of the basic Action Research routine of “look, think, act” (Stringer, 1996, p. 16). But, I still struggle with how, despite using these methods to ask our participants to be reflective, we, as practitioners must also do the same with our practice. The act, we have down pretty well. As we begin to implement the models, the look, or evaluation often follows easily. The think, is the difficult piece. Not that community developers are not thinkers, but that it is the difficult step to remember to do. It is also
sometimes difficult, outside of formal training structures, to know how to challenge ourselves, or in what areas. As we get more in tune with the complications of our identities in communities that are not our own, we must still continue to push beyond believing we have figured it all out.

One way to do this is to reflect on what we do, as individual practitioners, to dodge this. When we are uncomfortable, we might have tendencies toward certain feelings or emotions that, having reflected upon our identities, can serve as triggers to remember to look deeper. During the course of my traveling in South Africa in 2004 and 2006 and throughout this autoethnographic exploration, I have discovered a range of emotions that I now know as indicators of something lying below my radar. For me, these are guilt, discomfort, shame, not wanting to share information, wanting to leave, and anger. I know now that feeling these cues might indicate that it is time to pause and reflect. Incorporating the autoethnographic practice of this work has helped me to be more aware of myself in my community development work. Being reflective about my work has helped me to see where I typically avoid uncomfortable, but meaningful, understanding about myself.

Below are a few questions that have arisen for me as I have begun doing some basic approaches to incorporating the use of horizontal learning and ubuntu after beginning to also consider my identities within the context of doing cross cultural community development work.

How do we know, as practitioners, if we have shared values within the communities where we work? This was the most difficult question for me, as I began trying to frame my work from an assets model. Without stereotyping any class or culture, I frequently find myself having to quickly gauge what is the motivating factor for any given individual or group. This is especially challenging when my classes are often comprised of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. As in the example above, in a room of 6 people, I might find one person who most
identifies as middle class culture, one as generational poverty, a couple in situational poverty, a young student, and a person who is completely against being a participant at all. I might share values with a few people in the room, but it is unlikely that I will share much with all of them.

My approach to finding out what I do share with every participant is, first of all, making an effort to let them know that I really see them as another human being in the room. This approach, guided by *ubuntu*, might begin to establish a trust that, despite our differences, I am open to and respectful of the individual as a unique person. In many cases, it becomes apparent where many of our differences lie as soon as we open our mouths, based on our language style and frame of references within the context of our speech. As long as we can maintain a respectful discourse, we can continue discovering our similarities and differences. I might share examples of how I perform a task or think about a process and then immediately ask if others in the group have different ways to approach the same issues. This absolutely means that I must check my middle class culture at the door, and always keep in mind that every person with whom I interact is another human being, who will make good and bad choices, just as I do. I constantly seek to redefine my role as change enabler, not instructor. My “role is not to impose but to stimulate people to change. This is done by addressing issues that concern them now” (Stringer, 1996, p. 23).

How do we avoid falling into complacency and thinking we know all there is to know about doing cross cultural development work? Similar to my college friends and I trying to sustain our idealism after graduation, my answer to this question is to find ways to be reflective about our work. Just as we begin to encourage our communities to participate horizontally, we might need to be more conscious about looking horizontally for our own education and renewal. This might mean a coworker, a colleague from another organization, or an author that speaks
directly to the type of work one is doing. For me, this has meant directly seeking out mentors and groups of practitioners who both share and disagree with my professional approaches. I believe that when I stop questioning myself, I begin to lose the big picture purpose of why I do the work I do. When I forget to question whether or not I am upholding an ubuntu spirit in my work, I begin to look at it like just another community program, with so-so meaningful results. It is immensely important, then, for me to stay connected with other professionals in development, and continually debrief what I am doing, what they are doing, and how we can all do better.

What does debriefing look like in the professional context? In my current professional context, finding a time and place for debriefing is no doubt difficult. At times, I feel like the only moments I truly consider the approaches and ramifications of my work is when I have a grant report due. It is one thing to find time to sit and reflect on my own work when programs must be planned and grants must be written and clients must be consulted. It is even more difficult to find mutual time with other practitioners who experience similar constraints on their time. Though I do not see debriefing as something that requires specific structure, in many cases, the time for reflection and debriefing seems to happen during structured training times. I will often attend workshops or training sessions more to interact with other community development professionals than to learn the topic to be presented. I find myself seeking out the cracks between workshop sessions, and the few minutes after a meeting, to consult with others about reflections or questions I have about my practice. I believe that without this small debriefing sessions, we become disconnected with an ubuntu spirit that guided many community development professionals to the work in the first place. The struggle always continues to be creating the time and place needed to reflect and debrief with one another.
Back to my most difficult class of 6. Even though I identify as middle class, I have learned some cues and ideas from the many culture of poverty individuals with whom I have worked. I spent the three hours of instruction constructing examples and references from as many cultures as I could. Even a discussion point as simple as what to do with a few extra dollars at the end of the month became complicated. Would a person from poverty be thinking about saving accounts after months of barely scraping by? Would a person from middle class be thinking about using an extra $20 to help get the water turned back on in their apartment? Knowing that there were so many different kinds of people and so many frames of reference, it exhausted my thinking to try and communicate to them all simultaneously. I am certain that some of what I communicated was always missing at least part of the group, but it became my goal to try and communicate some to all of them. It is much easier to gauge the group and run the class with a single course, but it was both exciting and exhausting to run one with about four different courses.

Interestingly, I ran into the woman wanting to help people from her church a couple of weeks after the class. While she said she enjoyed the class, she was clearly disconcerted with my approach to the individuals expressing culture of poverty values. She demanded that I be harder on “those people” and wanted me to tell them what they should do, such as the ubiquitous suggestion of getting rid of cable. She was polite, as our shared middle class values would dictate, but was unable to understand my use of the same tone of with everyone in the group. I try hard to express respect for each of my clients, regardless of their values, where we often see individuals in poverty being treated like unruly children. My positioning everyone in the class as equals was troubling to this woman. Additionally, I use a portion of each of my class sessions to allow participants to share their own cost saving ideas and practices with one another. Often, our
participants from poverty have far more practical ideas than other participants, likely out of necessity. Essentially, my attempt to integrate *ubuntu* and suggesting a possibility of horizontal learning was extremely difficult for her to make sense of.

I will admit that my initial reaction to this woman was to tell her to get a clue, and ask her how she expected to communicate with the “people in need” at her church with that attitude. But, for once in my life, a cooler head prevailed and I moved into the use of my next suggested point for this analysis.

*Consider the Identity of Those You Need on Your Team*

Not only have I struggled with how to communicate cross culturally to my clients, I also struggle with how to communicate with some of my colleagues who have do not share a similar approach to development. There have been numerous occasions when, in the middle of a discussion about a development project, I look around the room and realize I have completely lost my audience. Worse, I have been confronted about being out of touch or impractical in my approaches that differ from traditional top-down service distribution models. My specific challenge in continuing to work in development, is to find a way to communicate with my peers and also learn from them at the same time.

Every time one of these miscommunications happens, I am tempted to jump ship on *ubuntu*, community assets, and horizontal learning. Examples of success in using these methods, like CRO, remind me that they are worth the extra time and effort. I carry this belief with me because I have seen them work. However, there are plenty of people in my community who have not seen *ubuntu*, or an assets based model, work to create lasting community development. Further, there are individuals in my community who have begun to understand their identities, and others who have not. Trying to use *ubuntu* or assets models requires us to critically view our
roles and implications in community development, as discussed earlier. Even if we have done this ourselves, there is no guarantee that those with whom we must work have done the same. This is one of the biggest struggles I have encountered in attempting to integrate my learning into my work.

There are two main ways that the identity development of my colleagues affects the work I would like to do in development. I encountered both in the committee to discuss poverty, which I briefly discussed in Chapter 3. The group included mostly professionals from social services organizations, with some minor representation from local business and government. From an experience perspective, there were individuals, such as myself, who had been in community development for less than 5 years, up to individuals who had been around this arena for close to 30. As we began talking about the problems we hoped to see solved in the community, and possible approaches to solving them, it started to become clear that, despite our professed sameness of purpose, we were coming from very different places. Some of the group were not processing the discussion in terms of their privileged identities at all. This led to extremely confused or extremely insulted group members when the discussion suggested that we, as practitioners, might need to reconsider ourselves and our roles in the process of development. Others might have, at some point, considered their privileged statuses, but felt there was nothing more to learn. They understood that there were significant differences between themselves and their clients, but that is where the discussion stopped. In many ways, the later group is exactly where I would have placed my own development prior to South Africa in 2006.

The community assets model asserts that all community members have value, relationships, skills, and a role in developing our community. Ubuntu and horizontal learning
models suggest that we can and should learn from all of our neighbors and colleagues, tearing down ideas that privilege certain groups over others. The leap for many practitioners is to patiently wait for those we seek to help to do the development. Many times, in my work, the leap is to remember that these 2 groups of practitioners, with little to no critical identity analysis, also have value to add. It is my challenge to find ways to draw these groups to assets based models, even before they have a chance to critically analyze their identities as people of privilege, whether for race, class, education or something else.

In Application

*How do we obtain buy in from colleagues who do not understand their own identities as people of privilege or power?* In many ways, I find the answers to this question in the same way I practice trying to communicate with individuals who come from cultures not my own. Even though many of the colleagues about whom I speak also come from a middle class culture, on this subject, we speak very different languages. So, I must find ways to communicate ideas of restoration and equity, where retribution and hierarchy are what commonly dominate decision making. It comes down to asking myself what motivates the person with whom I am trying to communicate, sometimes in contrast to what motivates myself. In many ways, this strategy forces me to think through my idea from many perspectives, and often strengthens the entire project.

A white person in Helms’ (1990) Contact stage, is not going to respond to a question of how to rebuild a neighborhood that primarily houses poor people of color, the same way that someone even in Disintegration or Reintegration might. For my purpose, many of the individuals I must collaborate with fall into these three stages. As I currently identify
somewhere between Psuedo Independent and Immersion stages, it is important for me to not characterize my communication by what is interesting or appealing to me.

If the project in question requires a person to draw on an unexamined identity, I sometimes have to explore the motivations in other identities held by the individuals I am trying to obtain support from. If the question invokes racial identity development, and the individual appears to be in Disintegration stage, I might look to appeal to another identity that might be more accepting of collaborating, such as an activist identity or a faith based identity. Where a white person in Disintegration stage might be reluctant to work on a project that develops a poor neighborhood among people of color, that same person might feel a religious obligation to serve the poor. It is my hope, that if we can find the hook that communicates meaning to someone who has otherwise blocked reflection on certain identities, further interaction within those contexts will help develop less prejudiced identities. Of course, stereotypes can also be reinforced in these circumstances, which makes using *ubuntu*, and constantly emphasizing and celebrating horizontal learning that much more important, to try and cut off the possibility of negative interactions. In an ideal world, this builds an entire community that has begun to examine its racial identity. It also implies a recommendation that community development workers learn about their own identities to expand their tools of understanding diverse cultures. But, this somewhat more appealing status might also come with complications.

_How do we obtain buy in from colleagues who think they do understand their identities?_  

As I demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, it is fairly easy to misjudge our own identity development. Having not been specifically pressed on certain issues, it was easy for me to think I had it all figured out. Then I encountered situations where I was unprepared for how to answer the difficult questions that came up. For a while I ignored the contradictions, feeling more safe
in reassuring myself that I had the whole race question sewed up in my understanding. So how
do we get individuals, such as I was in early 2006, to collaborate on asset based models, which
may push their self understanding, much like the group in earlier identity development stages?
In some ways, this group is more difficult, as they may be more aware of when they are being
pushed, and having had more experience with self analysis, might be better at knowing when to
block. Knowing that there is always more to learn in order to continue building community
assets, how do we keep this kind of individual from stagnating?

The one approach that has worked for me in this category, once again, goes back to
ubuntu and horizontal learning. Mutual respect and an equal flow of information allows both
parties to continue learning and avoid stagnation. I find that when I reach out to individuals who
have, at some point, begun to consider their racial identity, they will often reach back. It serves
as a place for my own continued questioning and the ongoing support of another who could
continue questioning. However, it may not always work this way. Sometimes, individuals are
just stagnate in their development. In which case, I have to, once again, go back to the question
of motivation for where that person is in his or her development at the time.

For our poverty group involving a cross section of community developers, business and
government people, applying this meant thinking about why business or government officials
would care about a growing population of people living in poverty in our community. Personal
identity development aside, even as community development workers, we are motivated by
different accomplishments than many in other sectors. So we began to reframe our project from
helping our clients build stability, to how it would benefit employers to understand the culture of
poverty. Where a social worker values the financial and mental stability of his client, a business
person values the financial stability of her business. She may not want to see her neighbors in
financial or mental turmoil, but that is not her main concern. Though it seemed difficult, it was possible for our group to communicate the value of understanding poverty to a few business people. Key among these were helping business owners understanding what motivates people in poverty, and what causes might underlie some of their frustrations with hiring people in poverty, chiefly the perception of unreliability.

Some members of the group recently attended a cultural simulation activity that was meant to stimulate frustrations with stereotypes and communicating across cultures. I received one response that said that the activity was fun, but that she already knew all of the feelings associated with crossing cultures, and therefore the activity was meaningless for her. This is where individuals who may have begun considering their identities might be more difficult to draw in on new projects. The simulation was meant to challenge group members, and forge new thinking about a project that needs some new life. So far, the best way I have found to encourage the individual who blocked this activity, has been to ask others in the group to share what they learned from it. It is possible that the “know it all” felt that she was supposed to get it, like I did in 2006, and felt foolish admitting that she did not, despite that we were open about all of us needing to continue learning about ourselves and doing cross cultural work. It is my hope that, as a group, we continue to be open about what we each learn over time, through that helping one another to avoid feeling the need to “know it all.”

None of this is easy, quick or linear in nature. But committing to *ubuntu* and horizontal learning is not to do things quickly, but to do them with a tremendous amount of care and continued learning. For this reason, it is important to be able to also commit to a long, usually complicated process toward community development.
Be at Peace with Slow and Messy

This is probably the one area that I would emphasize for myself, were I to do my South African cross cultural learning over again. I have found it to be extremely difficult, at times, and just ordinarily difficult, at others, to find ways to continue pushing myself to consider my identities, their consequences, and a more relevant personal application. Even more difficult is educating those with whom I work and collaborate, to bring new awareness to development in our communities. Like the changes that the women of CRO had to make in order to make the leap into savings groups, we also have to see ourselves and one another differently in order to make this type of approach to development work.

But, for every time I come across an example like CRO, where the models work, I am inspired to keep learning and looking for more ways to draw on those examples for application in my programs and in my community. Just as I thought using autoethnographic tools for this project would be easy, I have often thought that adopting little aspects of successful programs would also be easy. It is usually not easy.

However, I understand that, as a community development worker, I have not chosen an easy profession. It’s often messy, and has very few decisive processes upon which to draw. Further, having chosen to adopt models that make an attempt to negate any privilege assigned to me as the worker, and thus challenge the traditional models, I have chosen to make my already messy work, even more problematic. I have to live with the mess in order to remain committed to this work. I must take longer and sometimes more complicated routes to solutions where my colleagues might argue for quick fixes. I might have to wait for an entire community to wrap its mind around its possibilities before it can create change, but I also have to believe it will be worth it.
I often draw back on my time with CRO to maintain a level of hope within the sometimes chaotic processes of my work. It often takes years for a women’s group to organize and function smoothly. It might take a couple more years before the group is confident enough to suggest projects for development within its community. And then, the projects may still fail. One thing that never seemed to be lost on the CRO, however, was the intrinsic and future value of the process that each group goes through. From the very tangible value of the group savings to the intangible value of developing female leadership skills within the community, the process is dripping with added resources that may not be outwardly noticed for years. At its core, the process is doing *ubuntu*, advancing the humanity of some who have been marginalized, with the ultimate goal of advancing the whole community. They trust that doing the right thing will yield good things.

Sometimes, in my work, it is difficult to know what the next right thing may be. A sad question that I get at least once a month epitomizes this struggle. I frequently have families as clients who are receiving one or more supports through financial resources – food stamps, subsidized rent, etc. Each of these resources is based on income relative to family size. Almost every family with which I work is desperate to be self-sufficient, and no longer in need of these financial resources. Unfortunately, many of them eventually find themselves facing a difficult question of how to become self-sufficient when a small hourly raise for the family breadwinner will effectively cut off all of their financial assistance, even though the raise will amount to far less than the accumulated resources. Even a $.25/hour raise, amounting to $40 additional income a month, can be enough to strip a family of several hundred dollars in assistance and put them further behind than they had been on a lower income. Add to this the fact that individuals receiving assistance are capped on the amount of money they are allowed to save. The family
feels disincentivized to take the raise, or save, or doing basically anything to advance their financial stability. What is the next right answer?

In the many cases like this one that I work with every month, I have to go back to ubuntu and decide what makes the client most human. I have yet to find an answer that applies to more than one individual or family. Each one is different, and each one requires a messy, timely process to find a solution. But I trust the process, even when it is chaotic. And I feel the growth, when I know they are I have become more human because of it.

*Even though this process has been messy, what have I really learned from South Africa and this writing experience that helps us do cross cultural community development work?* The 5 key points illustrated in this chapter, are what I believe can help us do cross cultural community development work. Doing this work requires an open hand of kindness and compassion, found in ubuntu theory, and applicable both to those who we serve, and those with whom we work. Seeing one another as equals will hopefully lead us to an openness to horizontal learning structures, of which the community assets model for development is an example. Within this work, we and our communities are forever changing, forcing us to constantly reconsider how we might be perceived and the nuances of power that come along with our identities. This should also lead us to consider the identities of our colleagues, and ourselves, as we all struggle to find ways to develop our neighborhoods. Through it all, we depend on a system of change and growth that is nonlinear and difficult to process. The process of changing hearts and minds, and building community through an end goal of equity and justice is messy and sometimes tumultuous. I have learned that I will have to learn to live with this as part of the process, much as I had to learn to deal with the nonlinear, sometimes murky process of creating an autoethnography.
Understanding that my personal identity definitions are constantly in flux, only further emphasizes the need to continually debrief and reflect on my work as a community development worker. In order to prepare myself for every day at work, where I cross into other cultures that are not my own, I constantly draw back to *ubuntu*. Each day, while in South Africa, I had to travel and cross into other cultures to be able to write this reflective piece. My everyday travel today does not have the same difficult physical barriers, such as a dangerous train or inadequate roads, to make me immediately aware of my crossing into another culture. But I do cross into other cultures, almost every day, even though they may look similar in appearance. Absent the physical signals, it is that much more important that I continue exploring my experiences in community development, using autoethnographic techniques of critical reflection.

From this perspective, I can see more clearly the need to encourage practices of development that produce empowerment and freedom for our clients. If I position myself as one who encourages change, rather than dole it out, this can create opportunities for communities to see the possibilities already within their context. Their assets and their abilities to use them already exist, despite what other outsiders who emphasize deficiencies may have already told them. At the point when communities are empowered to use their own assets to spur their own change, we all benefit. As I, as a development work, see myself as just another asset among many, so can the individuals within the community. As they grow, so do I.
POSTSCRIPT

I didn’t want to tell you that I left Khayelitsha after only 3 days in 2006. Because I was supposed to be a traveling warrior.

I didn’t want to tell you that it took me almost 3 years to be able to read my journals from 2006 again. Because I never reconciled it like I would have liked. And you might have thought I would have handled that better.

I didn’t want to tell you that I didn’t and still don’t understand my whiteness. Because I’m supposed to be the person who has dealt with those things.

I didn’t want to tell you that I was ever surprised, embarrassed, nervous. Because I was supposed to remain calm and in control.

I didn’t want to tell you that I experienced the struggle to become an adult. Because I was supposed to be level and mature.

I didn’t want to tell you that I ran out of money, and had a meltdown in the American Express. Because I teach this stuff, and should know better.

I didn’t want to tell you that my work isn’t perfect. Because I’m afraid of failing. And I didn’t want to tell you that either.

I didn’t want to tell you that this writing was hard, and painful, and much more difficult than I imagined. Or, that it made me cry on more than one occasion. I didn’t want to tell you how long it took me to be brave enough to look at myself critically. I didn’t want to tell you that I still don’t know any of the answers.

I didn’t want to.

Was I really supposed to know?

I’m glad I told you.

Or I never would have known.

And maybe you wouldn’t have, either.
REFERENCES


A Conceptual Reflection on Our Journey So Far. (n.d.). Available from the Community Resource Organization, P.O. Box 13008, Mowbray 7705, Cape Town, South Africa


**Executive Summary.** (n.d.). Available from the Community Resource Organization, P.O. Box 13008, Mowbray 7705, Cape Town, South Africa.


**Gubu Street.** (n.d.). Available from the Community Resource Organization, P.O. Box 13008, Mowbray 7705, Cape Town, South Africa.


Kretzmann, J. P. and J. L. McNight. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community’s assets*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.


