

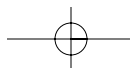
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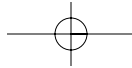
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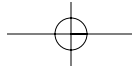
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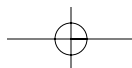
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Chapter 10

Making Sense of the Acadian-American Stories

THE STORIES THE ACADIAN-AMERICAN MEMBERS SHARED about working, family life, church, motivated people, and vacation and leisure time provided situated encounters of people living in episodes of interaction and conversations. Pearce (1989) described these interactions as taking place in a “recurring and reflexive process where resources are expressed in practices and in which practices (re)construct resources” (page 23). It is within these conversations that the behavior of the Acadian Americans can be understood by recognizing the meanings that inform their interactions. The communication people shared in the interviews was critical to understanding what working means to them and how they live their lives. The stories provided answers to the research questions posed earlier in this work. The interviews contained stories about working hard, what it means to work hard, and how working contributes to living a life. CMM regards the stories people tell and the stories they live as important aspects of understanding their lives. The stories here are not seen as simple accounts of the lives of Acadian Americans. They reveal and organize the social practices and beliefs of this group. Each group has its stories of how to act as a successful member of that group, and members must be enmeshed in those stories and act according to the practices of the group. While there are no universal stories about living a life, there are a number of stories here that people generally called upon. These stories showed how they live in the world and are active participants in creating its structure. The study demonstrated that these people living in action constructed their own stories, which made up their social realities. The content of the stories provided infor-



mation that was consistent and meaningful within this community. The stories of Acadian Americans, like those of all people, are held together in a non-linear hierarchy. The hierarchy of stories illustrated a way of working that effects what it is to be a person, and how work is a central aspect of selfhood. The findings do not suggest or attempt to discover a logical order to these stories. Instead, the data indicate that within this culture there are connections among members between the stories, and there are ways the stories fit together in living as an Acadian American. Work is featured prominently in living a life and the data revealed coherent features within these stories about working and how working contributes to living a life to members of this group. Within the data there are some slight variations between professionals and nonprofessionals, and differences between women's and men's work roles, but there are consistent logical forces, and grammars of meaning that run through all of these stories.

Within these stories being an individual is seen as a personal accomplishment, but this is achieved through actions that are extended through social institutions, emotions, coherent social practices, and moral orders that make up Acadian-American culture. What may appear as a conflict between individuality and social life begins to make sense when the analysis reveals the recursive features of action between the individual and the culture. Dewey provided clarity on this issue when he explained that "individuality cannot be opposed to association. It is through association that man has acquired his individuality and it is through association that he exercises it" (1967). For Dewey, individuality did not mean separation from others. He saw selfhood as only possible within the community. The concept of self and community are not opposing positions, and in fact the data here show that selfhood is made possible by a strong and inseparable affiliation with the community. Within the Acadian American community successful enactment is found in how hard you work, and the ways you work. This enactment can be seen by others, and is experienced on a personal level through work. The interviews showed the inextricable links between self, family, culture, religion, and work which are presented in this chapter. These stories were recollections of episodes of working which represent levels of understanding about working. This understanding shapes the meaning of the episodes for the participants. The stories that are shared and recounted reinforce coherent ways of acting to the members of this community. CMM contends that communication and meaning arise in the process of action with others. This analysis looked at these situated encounters of action and episodes that are part of the world of these people, and found that the living and telling of stories served to constitute and reaffirm the actions and grammar of working. Evidence of this was seen in the interactions where people extended stories of another speaker, and showed strong relation to the content of what was being discussed.

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