

## Culture Change and the American Cowboy

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### I. THE COWBOY CONTRADICTION

"Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys."

—Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings

The modern American cowboy is an anachronism, or, in the words to a song by Kris Kristofferson, "a walking contradiction, partly truth and partly fiction." On the rodeo circuit, you can find bull-riders from Brooklyn; on the range are ranchers riding herd on Honda motorcycles or surveying their spread from the cockpit of a Cessna. The striking thing about this blend of past and present is that it does not seem unusual at all, particularly to those who are doing it.

This theme, the cowboy as a product of the past yet living in the modern world, has been a popular one in movies and literature. Such movies as The Electric Horseman, Junior Bonner, or JW Coop come to mind, along with novels such as Edward Abbey's The Brave Cowboy or Jack Shaefter's Monte Walsh.

Following Max Weber's suggestion that studies of social behavior should attempt to explain such paradoxes, this paper will focus on this "cowboy contradiction." The cowboys seem particularly suited as a case study of contradictions because, unlike other professions, their goals and attitudes are steeped in a system of values (cf. Smith 1971).

While this paper is an attempt to assess the contradiction in cowboys'

behavior, it is also an exploratory study of change among cowboys. More generally, it examines the methodology of change studies and should have wider implications for the topic of culture change. First, a theoretical background will be discussed, extending some concepts of ethnic identity from the work of Fredrik Barth. Next, the ecological model of biotic succession will be used as a framework to discuss historical change of cowboys. Third, the concept of identity will be related to this process. Finally, the ideas presented will be considered as they apply to the study of culture change. I hope to show the importance of group identity as a key for interpreting what seem to be contradictions in behavior, and, moreover, how the concept of group identity can be of importance in the study of change.

#### Theoretical Background

In his important essay on ethnic boundaries (1969), Fredrik Barth made three rather abstract, but very important, claims regarding ethnicity. First, ethnic groups organize people socially. Second, there is not a one-to-one correlation between ethnic units and cultural similarities. Third, ethnic boundaries are the critical focus for the study of ethnic groups.

Barth's statements make an important distinction between the internal and external processes which define ethnic identity. He can assert that cultural similarities do not define ethnic units because of this internal/external distinction. He argues that culture traits are susceptible to external influences from other cultures and the physical environment. This means that culture traits are diverse, vary regionally, and are ever-changing. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is a characteristic of the ideologies and symbols of the ethnic group itself. These symbols and ideologies are internally established and, according to Barth, define the boundary of the ethnic unit.

This distinction has important implications for the study of ethnic groups and ethnic identity. "The critical focus," writes Barth, "becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (p. 15). He argues that we should use the internally established boundaries (the ethnic group's own symbols and ideologies) as the defining attributes of ethnic identity, not the cultural traits which can exhibit great variation due to external influences.

Barth's distinction between traits and boundaries and his assertion that the boundaries define the identity of an ethnic group have implications for the present study. I agree with Barth that culture traits exhibit variation due to external influences and that ethnic boundaries are the important factor in defining identity. What I would propose is that this static model be taken as a foundation upon which a more dynamic model of change can be built. The point I will argue is that cultural traits, precisely because of their susceptibility to change and their wide variation, can influence change in the internally defined boundaries of identity. In this way, culture traits cannot be ignored if we are to

study change, for variation itself may be the impetus for change.

While not claiming that cowboys are an ethnic group (although it seems that such a claim could be made), I want to use the cowboy as a case study to show that change affects, and is in turn reflected by, identity boundaries. I would further propose that an understanding of the "cowboy identity" is the key to understanding the contradictions cited earlier, and I suggest that these ideas have some important implications for change studies in general.

It is instructive at this point to give a brief example of other interpretations of what we have called the "cowboy contradiction." Arthur Henry Smith looked at modern Arizona cattle ranchers and tried to explain why they operate their small, private ranches when it is no longer economically rational to do so (Smith 1971). Most Arizona ranches, he showed, produce little or no return to the rancher beyond subsistence needs. Yet many, even most, ranchers choose to stay in ranching.

Smith based his interpretation on the ideas of economist H.A. Simon. Simon (1957) coined the term "satisficing" to describe the tendency to remain in an economic role, even though it does not maximize returns, so long as it meets minimum needs. It is a kind of occupational inertia. Smith built on this concept and argued that ranchers will retain their ranches as long as they can meet minimum expenses because they receive "psychic rewards" which compensate for the meager monetary returns. In Smith's words, "Ranchers are attempting to maximize goals other than just profits" (p. 18).

Smith's study fails, however, to explain adequately the rancher's quest for goals "other than just profits" and how this relates to changing conditions in ranching.

Taking Smith's basic question — why would anyone violate rational behavior and be a cowboy (or in this

case, a rancher)? — Barth's concept of identity can help to assess such behavior.

## II. HISTORY AND THE CHANGING COWBOY

"My heroes have always been cowboys,  
and they still are it seems.  
Sadly in search of, and one step in back of,  
themselves and their slow movin' dreams."

Willie Nelson

### The Succession Model

No analysis of cowboys is complete without a look at where they came from. As Frederick Jackson Turner admonished, we must "look to the frontier" in order to explain the American character; and certainly no group has better personified the national character, at least the mythical one, than the American Cowboy. By looking at the history of the cowboy his spiritual as well as professional origins are illuminated. It is then possible to focus on how the cowboy has changed — and how he has remained the same.

Rather than take a purely descriptive ethno-historical approach, I will borrow the biological model of ecological succession as a framework to study change. Recognizing the limitations and implications of such a framework, I use it rather quantitatively here for its illustrative and heuristic value. Ecological succession may be defined in terms of the following three parameters:

a) it is an orderly process of community change,

b) which results from a modification of the physical environment by the community itself, and

c) culminates in the establishment of as stable an ecosystem as is biologically possible (Odum 1963).

An important point to remember here is that succession is an ongoing process of change. First, variation exists. Second, the various forms or species compete for limited resources. Third, the environment confers adaptive advantage on one form or species. Fourth, one species may come to dominate the system, thus modifying the physical environment, and the process starts over again. A classic example from plant ecology is the succession of floral species after a forest fire. First, annual plants appear, they are replaced by perennial grasses, then brush, then conifers, then deciduous forest. An important consideration is that while one form or species may dominate at any given time along the path of succession, all the past forms still exist, but are no longer dominant (De Santo 1978). Returning to the plant example, the deciduous forest still has conifers, brush, grasses, and annuals, but they are no longer the dominant species.

I would like to take this concept of ecological succession and extend it into a framework of social succession. First, using the three defining parameters of succession, I would propose that social succession is an orderly process of community changes which result from the community's modification of its own environment, and results in the establishment of successively diverse and stable systems. Further, a suc-

cession of dominant forms occurs, but all past forms continue to exist in the system, hence its increasing diversity.

Applied to the study of cowboys, this framework, which not only considers change but is based on it, provides a model which incorporates where cowboys came from and how they have changed -- through a process of succession -- over the years. The proposal here is that successive adaptive strategies, as responses to environmental changes, have occurred among American cowboys.

### Succession among the Cowboys

We must begin in the mid-1800s in Texas, where the frontier brought together a unique combination of resources which begat the cowboy. Wild in the Texas brush ran feral longhorn cattle, descended from those brought by the early Spaniards. From the south came a technology, talent, and vocabulary of the Mexican Vaqueros who had long experience dealing with cattle. Abundant labor arrived from the Carolinas and the Lowland South in the form of displaced soldiers after the Civil War. These new Texans quickly learned the skills of the Mexican Vaqueros and borrowed their tools -- the lariat, the Spanish saddle, pointed-toed boots, and wide-brimmed hats. They began to harvest the wild longhorns, principally for leather and tallow.

In 1866, an event occurred which changed Texas and the American West. Having won the Civil War, the Union renewed its expansion efforts westward. A tremendous demand for beef was created when the railroads began pushing further away from the eastern cities. Some enterprising Texans, using the backwoods "cow-boys" who had experience with handling cattle, took herds of cattle north from central Texas to St. Louis. The American cowboy was born. By 1871,

the railroad extended to Abeline, Kansas; by 1886, to Dodge City. These railroad towns became the intermediate zones between civilization and the wild frontier -- and the focal point of cowboy existence.

It is important to note that these Texas cowboys, for the most part, did not raise cattle; they simply gathered an abundant natural resource and drove it up the trail. A few enterprising men did drive cattle north and then graze them on the open plains of Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana. These "outfits" in the Northern Plains were often owned by absentee landlords -- British and Scottish aristocrats. They were not enclosed ranches, however. They were local operations which allowed the cattle to wander the open plains. The calves were then gathered in the spring and summer and herded to markets.

These few short years, the years of the trail drives, were, as McCracken writes, "the molding ground for the American cowboy" (1973:86). From 1867 until 1890, over 6 million longhorn cattle and one million ponies came up the trails from Texas to the railroad towns (Bowden 1980:699). At its peak, over 700,000 cattle went through Abilene annually. What is amazing is that in this 23 year era of the cattle drives, what is probably the quintessential American mythological character was born, and it has survived ever since. Echoing Turner again, the frontier was indeed a key.

So, during this period, the dominant roles were those of the cowboy, trail hand, drover, etc. There were some small ranches in Texas, mostly homesteads, but these were few and played minor roles.

As the railroads continued westward, they inevitably came into the cattle country. This, of course, eliminated the need for cattle

drives. The railroad also brought civilization — settlers, towns, and churches. Homesteads, many of them land grants to Union soldiers, sectioned off much of the open plain. The celebrated taming of the west was at hand. The barbed-wire fence was introduced. New "short-horn" Durham cattle, with much higher beef yields, were brought into the homesteads. The open ranges were closed off, often not without blood-shed. The Johnson County War in Wyoming and the Lincoln County War in New Mexico both ended with the small ranchers as the victors. McCracken writes of these changes:

It turned the tide in favor of the homesteader and marked the closing period of the big, free-roaming herds on the free grass of the open range; and ushered in the advance of little ranches cuddled within the patchwork patterns of barbed-wire fences (1973:185).

The greatest irony of cowboy history is that they brought about their own demise. They tamed the wilderness and made it a place to live -- allowing civilization to follow. As this era of the true cowboy ends, so begins the "cowboy contradiction."

The new environment of the West, characterized by enclosed pastures and deeded land, conferred the adaptive advantage on a new group. From Bowden (1980:700):

The old cowboy yielded to the new fenced-in ranch-hand who took on three or four roundups of selected stock each year, along with onerous manual tasks: haymaking, winter feeding, ditch-digging, making and repairing fences, and wind-mill-fixing.

As the small ranch became the dominant life-style for cattlemen, the ranch also became more capital intensive and the rancher had to own his

land and his cattle as well as manage them. Some old cowboys still drifted from ranch to ranch looking for seasonal work herding cattle. A few large ranches, such as the XIT Ranch in north central Texas or the King Ranch in south Texas, stayed intact and employed a large number of these cowboys as "hands" during roundups.

This era of the small-ranchers continued into the early 1900s. But the key to successful ranching on a small scale was readily available, inexpensive land, and that commodity eventually ran out. At least by 1930, most of the available grazing land was being used — the limits of the land supply had been reached. With the outbreak of World War II, the land shortage became an even more important factor. The demand for beef was intensified, and the supply of land (and thus of cattle which could be raised) was limited. As prices rose, investment and speculation flooded the cattle market. Because the cattle business could not expand, it became more efficient. Feedlots began to be used extensively for fattening range cattle. Supplemental range feeding was introduced. New breeds of cattle were developed. With an almost excessive supply of credit available, the ranching industry went through a boom period of industrialization.

These changes were often devastating to the small ranchers. Land prices rose sharply. The high profits went to those ranches which were modernized and efficient — and most of all, large. As one rancher/economist has remarked:

These benefits [of modernized ranching] have accrued in only a limited way to the small ranches, and as a result there has been a considerable consolidation of such ranches (Saunderson 1973:7).

The trend since World War II has continued to favor the "economies of

scale" to such an extent that ranch land now costs much more than it will ever yield in cattle production. The cost of ranch land in the west is around \$1200 per cow (Saunderson 1973). In order to make a profit from cattle production alone, the cost would need to be about \$60 per cow (Saunderson 1973:7). Martin and Jeffries (1966) have noted that the cost of land is 3 to 4 times its value for cattle production. One Arizona rancher has summarized the situation nicely -- "I don't think anybody would buy land for beef production nowadays."

Obviously, then, the rational strategy to employ in ranching is to make cattle production as efficient and intensive as possible, and to utilize land for investment and development as well as for ranching. This seems to be the course which is being taken. Small ranches persist, but the numbers are declining. The independent cowboy, the "drifter", is still around as well, but again, in decreasing numbers. He survives on a few of the old style ranches, and in the rodeo circuits.

We can now use the ecological model of succession to examine this cowboy history. Stage one -- "the cowboy" -- was from roughly 1860 to 1890. This period was characterized by the exploitation of a natural resource -- free-roaming cattle. Land was abundant and open; cattle drives were the dominant strategy of the cattle industry. The cowboys then brought about a change in their environment, what is called "the taming of the West". The railroad came west, homesteads closed off the open range. This brought in the second stage -- "the small ranches" -- from 1890 to 1940. In this stage, the rancher owned his land as well as his cattle and performed generalized tasks of cattle care, farming, homesteading, etc.. With the second World War, a second "taming of the west" occurred. As demand for cattle

rose, and supply of land reached its limit, prices, then profits, then investment in the cattle industry rose. A third phase -- "modernized ranching" -- began and has increasingly dominated up to this time.

The model does seem to substantiate the hypotheses generated by the model of succession. First, successive adaptive strategies have been selected for as the cowboy community has modified its own environment. In addition, as successive forms have dominated, all of the past forms have continued to exist.

As noted previously, the goal of this paper is not to describe cowboy history but to examine change; specifically, to explain why things change, and also why things seem to stay the same. If we were willing to settle for a simple functionalistic approach to change, we could argue that cowboys have changed in response to changing environmental and economic conditions. Using our succession model, we could show, empirically if desired, that ranching became more adaptive and profitable than riding the range after the railroads came further west and the homesteads closed off the open range. Likewise, we could show that modernization and intensification of ranching techniques became advantageous when potential profits from beef production rose so high during World War II. Further, we could show, from records of cattle sales and land sales, just when ranch land became more valuable than the cattle upon it and, consequently, when selling a ranch was more profitable than raising cattle on it.

This simple functionalist explanation of change has some serious shortcomings, however. First, it explains why things change, but not why some things do not change. For example, Smith (1971:119) writes that 50% of Arizona's ranchers expect to sellout their ranch to developers,

investors, or large cattle businesses rather than pass it on to their children. This would be consistent with the functionalist perspective. We also need to explain the 50% that do expect to pass their family ranch on to their children. Second, the functionalist approach to change explains only rational, empirical change. It reveals that trying to maintain a small ranch these days is rather "deep play" (cf. Geertz 1973) — the costs far outweigh the potential returns. Yet ranchers do it!

Any reasonable discussion of cowboys and change must, then, explain why cowboys have, to some degree, adapted and accommodated to environmental and economic pressures, while they cling tenaciously to the past and resist other changes. This question is what was initially called "the cowboy contradiction". An explanation must consider bull-riders from Brooklyn and cowhands on Hondas, and try to understand why ranchers cling to their land though it is economically irrational to do so.

A key, I believe, to understanding change among the American cowboys is found buried in McCracken's historical sketch of the closing of the west. He makes the point that as the open range was closed off, the old trail-driving cowboys did not, for the most part, become ranchers. The cowboys continued to work cattle as long as they could. The new breed of small ranchers, mostly homesteaders, did not come from the ranks of the cowboys. This point echoes back to our discussion on succession — the forms along the process of succession do not change; their relative dominance changes. To be specific, the cowboys did not become ranchers; rather, the ranchers became cowboys.

Lest that point seem a mere play on words, some time will be spent explaining it, for it is central to the concept on which this paper is focused. In one sense, "cowboy" labels a profession, a role in the ecosystem or economy. The profession is identified by traits — cowboys work with cows, ride horses, etc. This profession is clearly a functional adaptation to the environment. On the other hand, "cowboy" is also an identity, a heritage of ideas and beliefs. Now, the point can be restated: cowboys (members of a profession) did not become ranchers (another profession); rather, ranchers became cowboys (an identity).

The profession of cowboy, as it was originally applied to trail-hands, is, aside from scattered exceptions, virtually non-existent today. As our ecological model of history has shown, the old cowboy has been out-competed by other professions. What has happened, though, is that the identity of "cowboy" has, as a process of change, expanded and now includes the forms which have succeeded the original cowboy. While there are very few people left who make a living off punching cows, there are many who identify themselves as cowboys.

This obviously becomes a question of taxonomy, and usefully so. From our discussion, we could make a "phylogeny" of cowboy change from its roots in the Texas frontier. Historically, we could show how branching has occurred. By economic analysis, we can even explain why the branching occurred. An adequate study of change (or of this taxonomy) must explain how and why cowboys differ professionally yet are still similar in their identification.

### III. DISCUSSION

"...being a cowboy is having a blood bond to the profession"  
 "It's [ranching] gone to hell because people think it's romantic."

- two Arizona Ranchers quoted by Smith (1971)

Before this discussion of cowboy as a profession and cowboy as an identity, taxonomies, etc. gets too abstract, two important points need to be made. First, the profession and identity distinction, though it is clear on paper, is not so distinguishable in real life. Second, the distinction, though abstract, has real-world, on-the-ground consequences. An example based on my own field work should clarify both points.

The first example is the life of a prominent rancher in northeastern Arizona. He was born in Texas in the late 1800s, on a small homestead. Rather than accept an offer to apprentice as a banker in a nearby town, he chose to leave home in his early teens to start a ranch in central Arizona with two of his brothers. While the older brothers worked the ranch, this young man went on to California to work in the mines; he would send the money back to the ranch to provide cash for the mortgage payments. After finally establishing a successful ranch with his brothers, he went into the ranching business with a friend. During the World War II boom years, the two managed to control five large ranches in northeast Arizona, as well as a successful feed-lot in Phoenix. After the war, he went on his own again, buying one of the ranches while his partner kept the feed-lot.

This is, I admit, an abbreviated history, but it makes some important points. First, this man worked, at one time or another, as a ranch-hand, miner, small-time rancher, modernized-rancher and agribusinessman, and

then again as a small-time rancher. He did, however, through all the professional variation, always identify himself as a cowboy. Second, his identity as a "cowboy" had real consequences for his life. On one occasion he opted for ranch life as opposed to banking. After the World War, he opted for returning to a small ranch rather than continuing with the large landholdings. Whether romance, identity, or just personal preference, something other than just economic rationale must be accounted for.

A second example is fictitious, but none-the-less instructive. Imagine a conversation as follows:

A: "Why is Slim doin' so poorly?"

B: "Well, Slim is a cowboy, and cowboys - they is dyin' off."

It is probably impossible, and even unnecessary, to know whether "cowboy" is used here as a profession or an identity, because the real-world consequences of the two are inseparable.

The real consequences of one's identity, the group, community, ethnic heritage, or organization, are very important for individual behavior. The group with which one identifies seems to reduce the whole world to a manageable unit -- it reduces the world to our world. Another analogy from the natural sciences as used by Barth and others can be instructive -- that of the niche. The niche serves as a mediator which fits the individual into the ecosystem as a whole. In Barth's words, "Sectors of activity where popula-



tions...articulate may be thought of a niches to which the group is adapted" (1964:19). So an individual needs, primarily, to relate only to his own niche, not to the whole world. Barth analogizes the niche to an ethnic group, but it seems the principle is valid for other identity groups as well. An important point is that the members of an identity group (or niche) define their own borders, but must do so in relation to the entire ecosystem. This argues, in essence, an ecology of cultures in which identity groups constantly redefine and adjust their boundaries in order to accommodate to change in the system as a whole.

In essence, then, a constant balance is being struck between a group's adjustment to the world and the maintenance of its own identity. Now we can return to the "cowboy contradiction" cited earlier. How can a cowboy herd steers on a Honda? How can a bull-rider hail from Brooklyn? These situations are the result of a dynamic process which has balanced the pragmatism of adjusting to the real world with the romance of the "good ol' days". Hence, the two quotes at the beginning of this section are not inconsistent at all -- to ranch is to have a "blood bond" to the past -- but hopefully, not too "romantic" a bond. An old cowboy used to say, "Romance is what will kill off the ranchers; they won't be able to change." Not by accident, this is the same rancher mentioned earlier who got out of a lucrative partnership in order to return to ranching with his family.

What we have been alluding to since early in the paper, is taking Barth's ideas of ethnic boundaries and identities and extending them in some important ways. First, extending Barth's original assertion that we should focus on boundaries rather than on culture traits, I would argue that we must focus on how boundaries have been changed or realigned as a

part of the process of social change. A case in point: culture traits can become symbols of identity, and thus, boundaries. Take the cowboy hat as an example. The cowboy hat was, originally, a functional variation of the Mexican sombrero. Its utility is legend: the wide brim provided shade, the curled sides channeled rain clear of the shirt collar in back, the felt or leather material was durable. This early hat was a trait, an item of material cowboy culture, and as such evidenced regional variations and outside influences. In the south, the brims were wider and flatter to provide more shade; in the eastern plains the crowns were lower and the brims not so wide, an apparent influence of the stylish eastern dress hats. The important point is that what was once a trait, came to be recognized as a symbol. The cowboy hat is now used much more to distinguish a "cowboy" than it is to provide any utilitarian service. The same can be said for the cowboy's boots. The functionally pointed toe and high heel for riding are now stylistic symbols of identity. I remember an old cowboy who, in later years, would wear an ankle high slip-on style boot. Functionally, these boots were no more adapted to riding than an ordinary loafer, but symbolically, they had the toe and heel which identified them as "cowboy".

This brings up a second point in extending Barth's ideas on boundaries. Symbols are definable on different levels. Returning to the boots and hats example, many people who may not identify themselves as cowboys wear cowboy boots and hats. These items are part of a western style which seems to come into fashion periodically. One might argue that boots and hats, then, cannot be a symbol of cowboy identity because many non-cowboys use them. However, as outsiders begin to use a trait formerly unique to an identity group, the item may still be an

identity symbol, but the characteristics of the symbol will be refined. For example, most working cowboys would never wear a pair of Dingo, Acme, or Frye boots. Rather, they have certain other brands as well as styles which they associate as being "cowboy" (i.e., Justin, Tony Lama) -- the rest are just "western". In essence, then, within an identity group, there is variation, and this variation is anything but random or meaningless. What may seem like a mere pair of cowboy boots may identify a cowboy from a stylish dresser, and more importantly, may refine the cowboy distinction. Cowboys who ride wear higher heels. Working boots, those not for riding, have lower heels and rounded toes. Cowboys who rodeo wear low topped boots. The ranch owner may wear a dress boot distinctly different from both the boots of working cowboys or those of rodeo cowboys.

Thus, variations in culture traits should not be ignored simply because they are subject to influences from outside cultures or from the environment; quite the contrary, in fact. Since variation is the result of external influences, it can serve as fuel for the process of change. Since external influences and environmental constraints influence cultural traits, the boundaries of an identity group and the ideologies and symbols which define that boundary must be adjusted.

I would like to propose that a concept from Keith Basso's study of the language of the Western Apache be used as a conceptual scheme to interpret change in terms of identity boundaries. In his article "Semantic Aspects of Linguistic Acculturation" (1967), Basso discusses the Apache's use of anatomical terms to label automobile parts. On the surface, it would appear that the Apache have simply labeled the automobile with the same terms they used to label the item it replaced -- the horse.

Basso's argument is that something much more interesting and profound is occurring. He argues that the automobile shares a significant feature with the horse -- the ability to move itself. The new object, when it was introduced, was fit into an existing cultural and linguistic category -- the category of things that move themselves -- and the lexical set used to describe members of that category was extended to label the new item. As Basso remarks, this is "the extension of a system of cognitive categories and their structural relationships."

This concept of extending a set has great implications for the present study, for it seems that a similar process has occurred and is occurring. The identity of "cowboy" is malleable enough to accommodate new forms which share significant, critical similarities which define the identity group. Two cases should exemplify the point. The early range wars between the cowhands and the first homesteaders/ranchers are legendary. Several famous range wars were fought over the question of whether the range should remain open or be closed off for small ranches. As has been discussed earlier, the outcome of the range wars as well as several significant changes in the environment and the economy gave the small-rancher the adaptive advantage necessary to displace the cowhand as the dominant form in the cattle production economy of the West. It is important here to recall McCracken's statement that cowboys did not become ranchers, rather than ranchers displaced cowboys. What is fascinating, looking back, is that now most people would consider these small-ranchers cowboys. And I think that most working ranchers would consider themselves cowboys. So, an initially "foreign" item (the rancher and the ranch) was introduced into the domain of the cowboy, and over time, the cowboy identity was able to encompass this new form, presumably (following

Basso's reasoning) because the new form shared critical and significant factors with the cowboy identity. To restate a phrase used earlier, the ranchers became cowboys. Whether the modern rancher can achieve such an inclusion is still an open question.

A second example is on a symbolic level. Few things are more "cowboy" than the pick-up. Almost every cowboy, whether he needs one or not, owns one. The pick-up, contrary to what some cowboys seem to believe, was neither invented by cowboys nor especially for cowboys. It has, however, somehow, come to be both a utilitarian culture trait and even an identity symbol of cowboys. A nice pick-up, in fact, is often referred to as a "cowboy Cadillac". Again, what seems to have happened is that the pick-up was fit into a culture system. Thus, again, the interaction of internally established identity boundaries and externally influenced traits is a critical part of the process of change.

### Summary

Using cowboys as a case study, this paper has been an attempt to add a dimension of dynamism to Barth's static model of identity boundaries as a framework to study change. I have argued that a functionalist study of change is important in that it reveals contradictions between what should, rationally, be happening and what really is happening. Also, I feel that Barth's distinction between boundaries and traits is instructive in that it explains contradictions by distinguishing identity from structural role — one being internally defined and the other being externally influenced. Finally, using a variation of Basso's concept of set extension, I tried to bring the functionalist approach to change together with Barth's ideas, arguing that functional constraints influence identity boundaries so that

internally defined boundaries must continually be redefined in terms of these constraints.

In conclusion, I believe that these concepts have some important implications for change studies in general. Obviously, functional approaches to change have their place, but only within limits. In many situations of change, one must look outside for the impetus to change, but still look within the group itself to see how it has changed. Barth claimed that study should not focus on traits to define a group, but it would seem that change studies must focus on traits precisely because they are the medium which evidences a group's relationship to other groups and to the environment. Ultimately, however, study must return to the ideologies and symbols an identity group uses to define its own self. This is the final unit of change.

A final comment should be made. What I have tried to do is explore an avenue for the study of social change. Implicit in the argument — that sets are extended or adjusted in terms of new items being introduced — is the notion that critical attributes define a cultural category. If that is true, only extensive fieldwork could bring one to the point where it might be possible to interpret why one item is accepted while another is rejected. Given the ongoing transition from small ranches to large ranching/investment/land-development conglomerates, it will be interesting to see whether the cowboy identity can be extended enough to ever include these new "ranchers". Or, whether the new ranchers will try to take upon themselves the symbols of cowboy identity. This new style of ranching is surely no more foreign to the cowboys than were the homesteads of the late 1800s. Should this change occur, surely new refinement will be made within the realm of cowboy

identity. By focusing on symbols of identity, this potential transition may be a fascinating case for study

— much more than an economic transition may be taking place on the cowboy scene.

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