Ethnographic Introduction of Coping in a Timber-Dependent Community

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Abstract

The effects of socioeconomic change on individuals is a central theme of sociology. In order to understand how society functions the impacts of social change on individuals must be examined. In extreme cases, where a community's economy is dependent on a single resource, change can hit hard and fast. Most research on these communities is quantitative and has been successful in identifying social problems associated with resource dependence, but people react in the context of local history and value systems. Most studies have been limited in their examination of this context. This has been recognized by researchers who have argued that "coping strategies" need to be studied in order to determine how social change can impact individuals, communities, regions and nations (Force and Machalis 2000; Christensen and Donoghue 2001). This study uses ethnomethodology to describe how some citizens of Kamiah (KAM-ee-eye), Idaho are coping after the community's largest sawmill, Three Rivers Timber, Inc., ceased operations in the fall of 2008. Those with whom I spoke told me of events taking place after 90 well-paid mill workers lost their jobs and benefits.

Literature Review

"[An] isolated rural community, dependent upon mill, mine, or farm for livelihood, its stability as a social system a function of its resource production and localized economy" (Machlis, Force and Balice 1990:225) as the "classic view" of a resource-dependent community has been refuted. Recent research describes rural communities as struggling to compete and survive in a capitalist society in where the vulnerable local market is at the mercy of an ever-growing, resourceful, and exploitative global economy (Bonanno and Constance 2003; England and Brown 2003; Flora and Flora 2003; Luloff and Bridger 2003; Lyson and Tolbert 2003). In essence, "the quality of life of many rural peoples and their respective communities depends less and less on nation-based policies [and more] on socioeconomic events taking place at the global level" (Bonanno and Constance 2003:241).

The phrase "resource dependence" refers to the extent which a community's economy relies on the healthy supply of a resource to fuel the industries built around it. An "industry-resource town" is one whose "economic base is dominated by the extraction and primary processing of (nonagricultural) natural resources" (Hayter 2002:2). Timber-dependence, specifically, describes the economic circumstances of a community where extracted and processed timber resources provide the most jobs. These jobs pay well and provide benefits such as health insurance and paid vacation.

In *The Engines of Change in Resource-Dependent Communities* (Force, Machlis, and Zhang 2000) most resource-dependent communities are rural places and have been described as "communities at risk" ([1984] 2000:410), "corporate satellites" ([1990] 2000:410), and "addictive communities" ([1992] 2000:410). Kamiah is a timber-dependent community and, unlike agriculture communities, timber-dependent communities share a characteristic that is not present in other communities: "[These communities rely] on biological processes that are technologically modifiable...but not totally controllable" ([1982] Force et al. 2003:727). In other words, resource dependence describes a community's dilemma when its labor force is heavily employed and highly paid by resource industries.

> While providing high incomes when that sector is economically healthy, such dependence may result in a host of negative outcomes based on the vulnerability to fluctuations in that dominant sector. Sudden changes in demand can lead to job losses in the leading sector and in sectors that depend on expenditures from that sector. (Stedman et al. 2007:629)

Communities whose economy is resource dependent have been shown to be hot spots for the development and reproduction of social problems including high poverty rates (McGranahan 2003; Jensen, McLaughlin and Slack 2003), low educational attainment (Beaulieu, Israel and Wimberley 2003), and exploitation of workers, land and community (Foster 1993; Cohen 2001; England and Brown 2003). These are just a few of the reasons studies concerning social change and sustainability of resource-dependent communities have become an increasingly serious line of inquiry in the social sciences.

Caudill's classic ethnographic study, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (1962), describes isolated rural areas as extremely connected to the history of their localities. It is shown that many of the actions individuals and communities take in everyday life have been deeply affected by family history and personal experiences that come with the incorporation of and exposure to a particular community's values, norms, beliefs, customs, and economy. Today, however, rural places are much less isolated because of the modern capitalist economy and twenty-first century technology.

But what exactly is community? "Community" is an ambiguous term that can be described by geography, social and cultural groups, structural organizations, "economic regions," and so forth (Machlis and Force 1988). Be that as it may, there is one theme that is present in any accepted definition of community, which is that "human interaction is the foundation of all communities" (Flora and Flora 2003:214). Identifying particular communities must incorporate the population's history, culture, social and economic practices, institutions, social structures, values, norms and personal interpretations (Flora and Flora 2003; Luloff and Bridger 2003; Lyson and Tolbert 2003; Machlis and Force 1988; Stedman et al. 2007).

Luloff and Bridger (2003) summarize Wilkinson's (1991:16) theory of community as "the fact that one naturally is connected to other people." Community is said to be "natural" because:

> People . . . engage in social relationships with others on a continuing basis and . . . derive their social being and identities from social interaction. . . . [A]ll people engage in it all most all of the time, whether or not they recognize that fact. . . . Community, therefore, is a natural disposition among people who interact with one another on matters that comprise a common life. ([1991] 2003:210)

Researchers have studied correlations between resource production and social change in communities and concluded that these two are interrelated (Machlis and Force 1988; Machlis et al. 1990; Force and Machlis 1993; Force and Machlis 2000). But results of such studies have their limits when it comes to describing social change. For example, if a timber company invests in new technology where it is possible to harvest just as much timber with twenty fewer people, then measuring resource production cannot account for the social change that may occur as a result. Of course, Force and Machlis did understand this limit and have suggested that research is needed to "[identify] the range of coping strategies employed by the community, groups, and individual members to mitigate the influence of production systems upon the social order" (Machlis et al. 1990:421).

Coping is "a response aimed at diminishing the physical, emotional, and psychological burden that is linked to stressful life events" (Cheavens and Dreer 2009:1). The ways in which people react are seen as appendages of their values, beliefs, psychological conditions, and personal relationships; coping strategies can depict the actual social environment in which an individual is engulfed.

The research that exists on coping strategies developed by communities has been explored by various disciplines (Rennie, 2006). Within the range of studies, a few underlying themes are present. For example, one's ability to cope with a given situation is in part a function of access to social capital – education or technical skills are other variables when it comes to coping. In essence, "coping consists of constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised to be taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Cheavens and Dreer 2009:1).

In ethnomethodology, "the intelligible features of a society are locally produced by members themselves for one another, with methods that are reflexively embedded in concrete social situations" ([2003] Rennie 2006:33). By exploring what "a normal" social life is comprised of at a given point in time according to the people who experience that life, we can begin to indicate a "population's capacity to react and adapt to change" (Rennie 2006:33). Anxiety, grief, total change in occupation, and the like can help explain the society in which individuals live.

Methodology

I spent one month living in Kamiah conducting field work: reading local history, talking with residents on and off the record, jotting down observation notes of daily life, and taking photographs. Twelve qualitative interviews with fifteen members of the community, and four separate e-mail interviews were conducted (17 research participants in all), representing municipal and business leaders, members of the Nez Perce tribe, former timber industry workers, teachers, and health care providers. Each interview was at a location of the participant's choosing, and each received, read, and signed the full informed consent forms before the interview began. Participants who were photographed followed the same procedures. The Kamiah Library and the Clearwater Progress provided all the historical materials needed for this study.

Ethnomethodology and quantitative interviews

Ethnography is a type of cultural description that relies on the behaviors and conversations of people within a culture. In order to remain coherent during my interviews, I conducted an historical overview of the Kamiah community. *Pioneer Profile* (Brown 1974), *Treaties, Nez Perce Perspective* (Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho 2003), *The History of Kamiah, Idaho in Pictures* (Spicer 2007), and *With the Nez Perces: Alice Fletcher in the field, 1889-92* (Gay, Hoxie, and Mark 1981) were the main sources used. In addition, the local newspaper, *The Clearwater Progress*, was used to confirm details and get a feel for what life was like for citizens.

For the interviews, [A] digital recording device was used to record the conversations, which were soon thereafter transcribed personally (190 pages total). A wide spectrum of questions was asked to embrace interests and expertise of people within the community. My interviews were conducted according to standards of ethnographic methodology—they were not directed, questionnaire-driven interviews, but were open-ended. My subjects told me what is important to them, which is critical to better understand how individual people themselves deal with socioeconomic change. Human beings shape their lives through personal experience and those experiences are encased in their stories.

Examples of questions asked: Can you tell me what happened after Three Rivers Mill closed down? How have things changed for you (your family/your job/your friends/etc.) since the timber mill closed? Can you tell me more about (what happened after you lost your job/how you were able to make extra money)? Do you think the (mill closure/alcohol abuse/etc.) affected (your life/the community/your children/etc.) in any way?

Ethnographic analysis

First, interviews were transcribed as soon as it was possible after each was completed. Transcribing is the process of writing a detailed log by dividing and identifying each question and response by the time, recording all verbatim. Second, an analysis of domains (e.g., interviewees versus published records) was briefly conducted to understand the town as the citizens might see it. This was accomplished by constructing a paradigmatic chart (in essence, an upside down pyramid) constructed that conceptualized the taxonomy, where taxonomy refers to isolated categories of information from the most general category to the most specific (McCurdy, Spradley, and Shandy 2005). Third, a slide show presentation was developed and used as a further outline. Forth, a quasi-narrative was constructed to describe how events played out in the community and how people reacted to changes. Fifth, themes were identified from within the interview data and categorized accordingly. These steps provided the foundation for my analysis and conclusion.

Participant observations and photography

General observations and specific details of the community or the people I was interviewing were noted in a field manual. The other aspect of field observations was photography. Photographs, original and archived, are used to help paint a more elaborate picture than what words can provide. There were approximately 100 photographs taken during the one month of the field work. Participants who were photographed gave me their full consent.

The City of Kamiah

Kamiah is a Nez Perce word for "many rope litters." The Nez Perce gathered in the Kamiah valley to manufacture "kamia" ropes for the ceremonial practice of fishing in the Clearwater River. Nez Perce is the name of

the Nimiipuu tribe officially recognized by the U.S. government. Over 5,000 years ago the Nimiipuu were part the Cupnitpelu (the "Emerging" or the "Walking Out People"), a people that inhabited over 13 million acres of mountains, plains, water and desert (Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho 2003). Kamiah's lush landscape and mild weather was as appealing to the Nimiipuu as it was to the Euro-American immigrants who were to make Kamiah home beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Lewis and Clark came through Kamiah in 1806, and 99 years later Kamiah was incorporated as a town in 1905 (Brown 1974). Kamiah is located in the Clearwater Valley in Lewis County, Idaho, and has a population of 1,160 according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Just outside of Kamiah, east bound on US Highway 12, is The Heart of The Monster site where the Nimiipuu believe their people originated. The Heart of The Monster is both a physical monument and their creation story. The following is a paraphrased version of that story:

> A monster was eating all of the animals. Coyote fooled the monster into swallowing him. Using a set of stone knives that he had brought with him, Coyote cut apart the monster from the inside to release all of the animals that were trapped in the monster. Upon emerging from the remains of the monster, Coyote cut it up and threw the pieces all over the land, creating the Indian people who inhabit the land. Fox asked Coyote about the land around the monster, it had no people, what was he to do? As Coyote washed the blood of the monster off his hands, the drops became the Nez Perce (Nez Perce National Historic Park 2010).

Historically, Kamiah is a spiritual gathering place for the Nimiipuu. In 1872 Rev. H.T. Cowley organized the First Indian Presbyterian Church within walking distance of the Heart of the Monster (Brown 1974; Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho 2003). Today, there are 14 church groups in the Kamiah area (Kamiah Chamber of Commerce 2010).

Demographics

Men are 49 percent of the population, whereas 51 percent are women; Euro-Americans make up over 85 percent of Kamiah's population, American Indians represent just under 10 percent, and Hispanic Americans occupy 2 percent; 82 percent of Kamiah's citizens have a high school degree, yet only about 10 percent have obtained a bachelors degree or higher (almost 14 percentage points lower than the national average); the median household income for Kamiah is $28,909 ($13,085 less than the national average); Kamiah's median family income is $33,547 ($16,499 less than the national average); 11.4 percent of Kamiah's families are below the poverty line (2.2 percentage points higher than the national average); and, 15 percent of the individual residents are under the poverty line (almost 2.5 percentage points higher than the national average) (American Fact Finder 2000 U.S. Census).

There are three subdivisions of Kamiah: Pine Ridge, which is outside city limits by the Lewis and Idaho County lines drawn by Lawyers Creek; the Bethman Addition, which is directly parallel to Idaho State Highway 162 and within walking distance of the public school system; and Valley View, located across the Clearwater River, in Idaho County, approximately 1.5 miles east on Highway 12. There are two areas across the Clearwater River, in Idaho County's northern mountain ranges: Woodland, where the anti-government, anti-UN survivalist group known as "Almost Heaven" is located, and Gleenwood, an area characterized by small ranches, alfalfa farms, outdoor enthusiasts, and people seeking isolation and refuge in the Clearwater Mountains. Two Indian "projects" are located about 1.5 and 3 miles east on the Clearwater River. These "projects" are low-income Housing and Urban Development (HUD) establishments for Nez Perce tribal members. All of these places are located in the boundaries of Kamiah School District #304 and Kamiah's zip code 83536. The community is better represented by all the citizens residing in zip code 83536, which encompasses 3,650 people (American Fact Finder 2000 U.S. Census).

The isolated location and spectacular geography of the Clearwater Valley is analogous to the types of people that reside in Kamiah. The town is a secluded place, nestled away in the Clearwater Valley, and seems the ideal place for one to get away, to be left alone perhaps, or to simply live free. In many ways Kamiah is an ideal place. Wild fruit, roots, and fungus are plentiful, along with the fish and wild game. The terrain is just rugged enough for some people to enjoy its bounty and beauty while keeping the majority locked up in urban centers or the suburbs. However, after the closure of Three Rivers Timber sawmill in 2008, this scene of isolation and seclusion can be seen as more of an illusion because Kamiah is now facing a serious economic crisis that goes far beyond the local economy.

Kamiah's Timber Industry

When Kamiah was becoming industrialized in the beginning of the twentieth century, the timber industry was growing, vibrant, and bringing in all sorts of businesses, services and people from all over the U.S., establishing necessary social networks for a strong community (Brown 1974). In short it was in its "boom" phase. "The country to the east and north is Kamiah's greatest resource, and its greatest wealth just at present lies in its timber and sawmills" ([1907] Brown 1974:16). For example, the first medical doctor, the first pharmacy, and the first educational system (excluding the church establishments and boarding schools for the Nez Perce) all came to be because of a growing economy fueled by wood.

Western States Lumber Co. was the first major corporation to begin operating in Kamiah in 1917, but by 1923 the company had to end all activity. Other smaller, local corporations, Selway Lumber Company and the Valley Tie and Lumber Company, operated mills in the Kamiah area. Most important, though, was the fact that the majority of the timber industry during that time was run by local contractors. The first major mill closure came in 1923 when Western States Lumber Company put the city of Kamiah's sawmill industry on hold until 1936. However, outside the official city limits there were a number of operations taking place in Glenwood, Caribel, and O'Hara Creek. Such operations included a shingle mill established by Z.M. Powell in 1922. In 1923 the Crowe, McKeen, and Adams mills were producing lumber, and poles were hauled from Warren Knights mill down the Glenwood road and Adams grades by horses and a team of 40 men. In 1925, contractor Ira Root and his two GMC trucks with trailers were hauling 4 loads of poles down Glenwood 24 hours a day.

> In 1941 Leonard Floan constructed the Valley Tie and Lumber Company near the railroad depot at Kooskia. . . . The mill was destroyed by fire and in the fall construction began on a new mill near the mouth of Clear Creek, approximately three miles from Koosika. It became apparent that a location near a railroad spur was necessary and in the spring of 1947 the Conrad mill site at Kamiah was purchased. . . . Floan chose the name of Twin Feathers for his mills at Kamiah and Kooskia. From 1949 the Kamiah plant expanded rapidly and since purchase by Potlatch Forest, Inc., in 1953 emphasis has been on increased production and standardization with other Potlatch operations. (Brown 1974:18)

Potlatch's Twin Feathers provided hundreds of people work in North Central Idaho and were crucial in forming the vibrant and easy living community of Kamiah. Twin Feathers would also be the driving force in an extreme local economic depression and population decline after its closure in 1984. In those days Kamiah was a product of a much larger 1980s phenomena: the Reagan Administration policies of dismantling industrial America (Shell 2009; Wolff 2009). The closure of the Twin Feathers sawmills in 1984 absolutely devastated the community of Kamiah, Idaho to a degree from which the town has never quite recovered.

In the next few paragraphs I will examine a firsthand recollection of the 1984 Twin Feathers mill closure with two lifetime locals. Joe and Tammy Harding, a wedded couple, provided valuable insights into the 1984 closure and will provide a prologue to examining how the community coped after the 2008 closure. For my limited analysis, I assume that 1984 dates the beginning of Kamiah's industrial bust. Kamiah, as a community, has been fighting for its economic survival since long before I was alive and has been coping with economic transition for the better part of three decades.

"Tammy Harding, 50 years old, Forest Service ID Team Leader and sale administrator."

> Q: Is there anything that stands out in your mind things that you noticed around town after the mill closed down?
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> Tammy: I don't notice as dramatically this time [2008 Three Rivers] as I did back when Potlatch [1984 Twin Feathers] shut down. To me I thought it was worse then [in '84]. . . . I remember *suicides*, don't you [Joe]? I mean, I do, I remember there was a few people, younger people. . . . Now [today] folks were so much poorer to start with, our standard of living, everything, so much has declined to a point. You don't have the working age people out there, you don't have all the softball teams [for] the adults, you don't have all the large groups . . . you just don't have that type. We've turned into a *retirement community* where people bring in outside money, purchase homes, they build, live her for 10-15 years, they get too old and because of our lack of medical facilities they move on to Lewiston. And so we don't have near the spark. . . . What you do have here are . . .

more services that are sought over by older folks. And so it's just a different community now from what it was. I mean we used to have two clothing stores, two hardware stores, grocery stores, multiple ones, you know, auto part sales, auto sales, mobile home sales, all of those things were here. So in the past 30 years, those have all dried up and went away. *So from a rurals perspective, towns are much poorer because the dollars are flying out and nobody's here making them from timber.* (Emphasis mine)

Q: Well do you think that maybe the people that had experienced the mill closure of '84. . . . Do you think that kinda helped prepare this town in any sort of way for when Three Rivers shut down?

Tammy: No, I just think that it really totally changed the fabric of the town. Like I mentioned before, you lost your youth. . . . You lost a certain type of people. . . . We have the red neck contingency you might call it, a very back woods, self-sufficient type of individual that are drawn to living without much. But then it crosses over a line and you end up with border line groups. . . . But I think we weren't necessary prepared for this, *I think we just end up with a group of people that are either quite well off, financially set, they're retired, and it doesn't affect them. Or you end up with folks that are very poor, and they expect to be poor, and they don't expect much better than they're going to get by on the fringes.* (Emphasis mine)

"Joe Harding, 59 years old, part store owner."

Q: (To Joe) The same question: Well do you think that maybe the people that had experienced the mill closure of '84. . . . Do you think that kind of helped prepare this town in any sort of way for when Three Rivers shut down?

Joe: [The closure of the '80s] was a local deal for us. This time we're, for lack of a better word, we're a part of the whole problem. [When] Potlatch [Twin Feathers] went down it was just Kamiah. . . . Well when it went down this time it was actually part of the national decline in everything. People quit buying cars, people quit selling cars, people were out of work, you know, everybody was out of work. So I don't think you saw the people leave as fast because number one, getting unemployment in Kamiah's probably better than getting unemployment in Lewiston. It's a hell of a lot cheaper to live in Kamiah. . . . They're leaving because there isn't a perceived opportunity. . . . I mean you could go to work, you could start making $12 per hour, which in those days was pretty good money. And if you decided to hang it out and you wanted to go logging, you could go make $350 a day. . . . Actually you could make more money those days than the loggers could make today. . . . *And it doesn't all have that much to do with the mill closing, it's just an evolution that our society is going through.* (Emphasis mine)

Coping with Resource Dependence

Those who were hit the hardest were those directly involved in the timber industry. For workers, entire livelihoods were at stake due to actions and events outside of their control. 90 people lost their jobs at Three Rivers sawmill in 2008, as did many others working in the mountains for or as Three River contractors. These people obviously had to find something else to do if they were not satisfied with just collecting unemployment.

When asking residents why Three Rivers mill shut down, I received a number of conflicting and vague answers. Some feel as if it was the fact that a credit based industry, which timber most undoubtedly is, was bound to fail in the midst of a housing bubble burst like in 2008. Some blamed the previous managers for bad business policies. Some pointed fingers at the banks and greedy corporations, while others still said it was the unions or environmental movements. With this variation the residents appear not to really know why things ended up the way they did. Either way, it is a situation they will have to deal with.

There are two main objectives for the rest of the paper. First, to have the citizens of Kamiah tell us what it was like for them when they were faced with socioeconomic change. These experiences will be analyzed as the story is being told. The second, will be to categorize the coping strategies discovered during my field work, and discuss how, according to my original data, individuals, businesses and the community at large coped with the loss of the major employer. So, how is Kamiah coping with the loss of their economic backbone?

Things have become increasingly difficult for both contractors and laborers alike in Kamiah's timber

industry, especially after the mill closure in 2008. Both are at the whims of a global market and policy changes at all levels of government, both are exploited by non-local entities, and are members of one of the most ridiculed and attacked industries for environmental and social catastrophes. The nature of the timber industry, in all its historical context, has caused so much confusion, anxiety, anger, and a range of other emotions in all parties involved, that to have a civil and empathetic dialogue aimed to solve real problems can quickly turn sour, even turn violent (Foster 1993). The next conversation we are to observe is with a man who has been involved in these struggles for years, and now is faced with a sink or swim sort of scenario.

"Steve Uhlhorn, age 54, contract logger."

> Q: Was that [Three Rivers] a pretty big part of your operation?
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> Steve: [Three Rivers was] 90 percent of what we'd done. I employed six to eight guys directly, and had probably three to seven subcontractors. Usually work an average 45-50 hours per week. Pretty much a nine to ten month season, a little bit of shut down time and maintenance repair during the spring or wet weather. After Three Rivers we went to a four man crew the first year and a three man crew last year. And as far as season, it was about a seven month season the first year and about an eight month season last year . . . so a little short of the runway both years. And as far as contract truckers. . . . I went from three to six to about two and sometimes three.
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> Q: Why are things so bad for the timber industry?
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> Steve: One thing you got to realize is we cannot generate enough timber resource now the way the federal timber program is it's in the toilet. I mean we have more timber to waste than we cut, there's more dying every year than we cut on our national forest and wilderness.
>
> Q: Really?
>
> Steve: Oh probably 2:1
>
> Q: Why?
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> Steve: Gridlock (pause) the environmental movement has a concept in their vision that this is the way everything should look, it should never change. And, in reality it's a different concept than in the timber industry and the mining industry. . . . And the sad part of it is, you have to admire the zeal of some of the people in the environmental movement, but they're misguided. *They have no on the ground knowledge.* . . . Nature's dynamic, it's a constant change. It doesn't matter if it's man made, man-managed, it's always in constant change . . . it's not going to stay the same. (Emphasis mine)
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> Q: Where did you see exploitation?
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> Steve: If anything I would say the exploitation was from the work force. And that's because . . . now don't get me wrong, unions had their great day. They were a needed situation at one time, but they've become so lethargic they've gone away from their roots. They've gotten to where they've got a stranglehold on a lot of our industry, not just timber. That's why we're starting to see Detroit, Michigan suffer so severe financial losses. They're not competitive; the unions have run up their wage base so high that we can't compete with anybody. We've got used to that standard of living, and for us to back up is gonna be a real issue. I mean, people aren't used to it and they won't—they'll expect public assistance. Well that can go on for a couple of years but it can't for a lifetime or generation after generation. And that's probably the crux of it.
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> Q: Those people who got laid off or moved, do you know what they did to make money after?
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> Steve: Well for the first year a few guys did odd jobs here and there. Couple guys were in the timber industry or the mill industry took jobs driving truck or moved out of state part-time for

> filling in for other places you know. Alaska picked up a couple of guys up on the North Slope. Those guys got laid off this year because the oil industry got tough this year too. And as far as the loggers that moved out of town they all ended up coming back because it was just as tough all the way out the west coast. So there was really no logging industry per se last year. Anywhere, it wasn't any better anywhere. Montana is probably even worse than what we are. The largest chip maker there in the State of Montana did probably 40 percent of their revenue, closed the doors last fall. And so that's—it had a *filter effect*. The guys that had moved to there have come back (tape skips) from here are starting to filter back. But, there's nothing for them here. As far as log contractors go, there's too many contractors and not enough mills. So it's kind of a *game of attrition* now, see who can withstand it. Work is a lot cheaper . . . I was able to do pretty good maintenance and upgrade systems on equipment until two years ago. Then the cash flow pretty much withered and died. So it's just a subsistence deal, trying to pay the taxes, pay the payments, keep a couple your key guys employed, that's all I'm trying to do. (Emphasis mine)

Tammy Harding, who we meet earlier, can elaborate on these problems:

> Tammy: Before I was a timber sales administrator I was a scalier, which meant that I visited all the mills from here to Lewiston . . . from Elk City to Lewiston actually . . . and scaled, measured those mills that were receiving Forest Service wood. And I think I calculated at the time, there was, both large mills and small mills, there was 30 of 'em. . . . That's a lot of mills. And there was like five major ones that were large. And now were to the point where between Elk City and Lewiston, and that's considering Grangeville too. . . . We have three large mills, well actually two, and all of the other small backyard mills, or product mills, or pulp mills, or all these, we don't have those anymore.
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> Q: Tell me about the timber industry today.
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> Tammy: If you look at the records for the Forest Service, timber harvests peaked in the 80s and has been on the decline ever since. So at one time we were cutting over 80 to 100 million board feet per year, just off the Clearwater National Forests. We're now down to a point where we don't cut 20 million.

After Three Rivers sawmill closed a "game of attrition" began and has a "filter effect," or trickled down to the smaller businesses that relied (at least partially) on the business of well-paid mill workers and timber-harvesting contractors. The contractors, who once were key in preserving some quality of life from 1923 until 1936 when Western States Lumber Company closed down are now facing a crisis that appears strikingly similar.

It was observed that people who worked in the timber industry either began to rely on unemployment, generate alternative income (odd jobs), or would leave in search of other work (exodus). Steve had to cope by doing anything he could do to keep his business alive. Prior to Three Rivers, Steve had recognized that the industries and the markets of forest products were undergoing change. With these changes arose situations where reactions to such were critical to the survival of a company. Competition is everything, and Steve invested heavily in the tools of competition: technology.

> Steve: We used to it do by hand, cutting the bigger trees with two to three fallers, two to three buckers, two to three skidding rigs. We'd do 12-16 loads of logs a day. Now mechanized, using three to four guys, I'm doing 12-16 load a day. So, ya cut the man power in half. Basically I went from labor costs to mechanical costs –just to be competitive.

Investing and working in an industry that is unstable and largely controlled by wealthy non-local forces is no small challenge. According to *The North Central Idaho Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (2009:63) three things have compounded the negative effects of the recent market crash on timber industries in the North Central Idaho Regional Area (NCIR): 1) In the 1990s changes were made to U.S. Forest Service policy, which reduced the total amount of timber harvested in the subsequent years; 2) Advancing technology constantly reduces the need for human labor to extract and process the same amount of wood products as before; and, 3) government subsidies for Canadian timber industries have helped in the dramatic drop in global timber prices. These local timber contractors, who are more reliant on credit than ever, have been placed in an extremely precarious position and there

is literally no margin for error. Sacrifices and adjustments have to be made as things change, and one must adapt to these circumstances otherwise they will be quick to deal their last hand.

Most of the coping strategies that were developed by many of the laid-off laborers affiliated with Three Rivers could not be documented because I was only able to conduct an off the record interview with one. However, I was able to get many third-party accounts of what happened since Kamiah is such a small town, and most of the people I spoke with happened to be friends, or acquaintances, or relatives of one, or many, people who were employed through Three Rivers. Delia Nasura was able to tell me a little about what had happened to some of the timber industry workers after they lost their jobs, including a relative of hers.

"My name is Delia Nasura, I'm 41 years old, and I'm a pharmacy technician at Kamiah Drug."

> Delia: Some people just moved, they just up and moved. . . . You know a lot of them went to the oil fields. [A relative of mine] worked at the mill for several years. When he lost his job. . . . He had to actually move there and work in the oil fields and that's what he's doing now . . . [in Colorado].

Finding work at out of state oil fields appeared to be one of the more popular choices for those who decided to find a new job. Work on oil rigs was also a sought after by youth because of factors like restricted career opportunities in Kamiah, the high pay, and, as high school teacher Amy Woods put it, "they want some excitement." But for many others, for whatever reason, becoming a roughneck was not something they were willing to pursue.

For some, public assistance was enough to get them by, allowing them to wait it out or figure out what their next course of action was.

> Joe: They've extended the unemployment, the federal government has, in a lot of ways to keep the businesses from really dying. . . . Not that unemployment is a good way of life, but if you can keep your house, and you can keep your car, and you can feed your kids, then you can have any kind of a standard of living. You know, it's different than what it used to be. Used to be, like when Potlatch closed down [in 1984], initially there's a lot of people that just up and left because they had a finite amount of unemployment and they had to go find a job.

There were those who were able to find similar work at nearby mills, like Bennit's in Grangeville, or Potlatch in Lewiston, and either relocated or began to commute. One person with whom I spoke rents a room at a bed and breakfast in Lewiston to work as a millwright at the Potlatch paper mill, staying there four nights a week. But not everyone was able to find work at a mill or could afford to commute, and had to completely change what they did to make a living. I was told of one ex-Three Rivers employee who now commutes to the nearby town of Cottonwood to work as a prison guard, and another who chose to become a tribal police officer.

One person discovered opportunity in disaster by taking advantage of federal government grants that became available for the unemployed because the United States as a whole, not just Kamiah, was suffering from economic decline. Amy Woods, 50, provided the account: "I do know of one [person], he's about my age and he is being trained to be a nurse in Lewiston. So he took advantage of an opportunity to get an education that he didn't have."

One common theme that was expressed, without exception, in each interview was a "trickle-down effect." The exact phrase was not always used, but each person noticed that once the major employer in Kamiah had failed almost every business was soon after impacted. Several businesses in the area went under, a few people working for small businesses like local diners were laid-off, pay raises became out of the question, and the streets became notably less busy.

The companies and employees of timber industries that were not directly connected to Three Rivers were forced into a situation that was far beyond their control, and it became their turn to decide whether to sink or swim.

"Duane Nasura, I'm 50, I'm a timber faller."

> Duane: Well we didn't log for them [Three Rivers] but . . . how it affected us is their contractors were looking for work and, everybody gets hungry, and they came to the mill that we log for and they offered to work for less money . . . So the lowest bidders got the jobs. I know of three jobs that would have been ours, that were more-or-less taken from us because they offered to do it for less money. And my boss was offering jobs still but, he had to do it for the price they offered. . . .

> He refused to do them. . . . We had to take a little cut in pay because my boss had to start bidding lower for jobs. So, you know it *trickled on down* to everybody that worked for him. . . . For instance, a few years ago he was getting, say, $32 a ton on one job and then the next that basically was the same timber and everything, after Three Rivers closed, he was having to bid like $26-$28 a ton. . . . And a fuel prices have gone on up, and that's hurt everybody. (Emphasis mine)

Duane was eventually laid off and began to collect an unemployment check, but he was not satisfied. His wife, Delia, expressed to me how difficult it was to dramatically adjust lifestyles, and almost seemed as if she felt guilty for having to cut back the amount of money spent on their children. In response, extra care and attention was given to their vegetable garden, the couple basically quit going out to movies or dinner, and Duane did whatever he could to make a few extra dollars while he was out of work.

> Duane: Well last year I worked for Knife River, which is a construction, road construction company. I did that for almost three months. . . . Then I went back to logging 'cause, the mill pretty much assured us that it was gonna get better (laughs, but not happy). It picked up some but not like they told us was going to.

> Duane: When Knife River came in, they probably did like any other corporation, but . . . they took advantage of the fact that everybody was laid off at that saw mill, and so . . . the wages weren't what they would have been say two to three years ago, you know?

> Duane: I worked part time for an old feller out of town here, helped him . . . build fence, I cleared some land for him.

> Duane: Oh, we done it [building cabinets] for three months. . . . I mean we built a few and we did odd jobs, you know but . . . there was people you know, wanting stuff done but they just didn't have the money (laughing but not happy). . . . The biggest problem we ran into was they was wanting it done for nothing. . . . I mean, we had to make a profit. If we couldn't make a profit we just couldn't do the job . . . we ran into a lot of that.

Duane did everything he could to pay the bills and maintain a certain quality of life and he was successful. Granted, he only had to do the odd jobs for a short period of time and it cannot be known what would have happened had he not been called back for work. His experience as a laborer and his work ethic paid off and allowed him to weather the storm—this time at least.

His wife, Delia, on the other hand, holds a job with seniority that is not associated with the timber-industry. She has, however, not received a pay raise in three years and has noticed a drastic change in the community and in her place of work.

> Delia: When Three Rivers closed down we lost a lot of our business as a pharmacy. . . . [Those who] worked at the mill, they had real good insurance, and when they lost their insurance they had to end up paying out of pocket full price for [their prescriptions]. . . . Men lost their jobs, they had to move . . . people who decided to stay here and find just little part-time jobs ended up getting their prescriptions filled at Walmart, Costco, places where they could get their prescriptions cheaper. . . mail order. . . . I'd say we lost . . . about 30 percent, at least. . . . It was a big drop.

If the timber industry is dissolved any more than it already has been, more people will move away and it will most likely spell the death of many small local businesses. Some have already suffered that fate. Exodus was described in two different ways.

The first form of exodus we have already observed was when people physically left the community to find a new job. Their second form has two different connotations as it can be a mental or emotional escape from harsh realities through either substance abuse or divorce.

Substance abuse as a means to cope was noted by several people, some by observation, some through relationships, while other people didn't report to notice much difference at all. The extents of alcohol and drug abuse after the mill closure cannot be known, but it is a strategy that some have undoubtedly turned to. Allicia Oatman, mother of three, experienced one of the worst outcomes to be reported that came as a result of the mill closure.

"Allicia Oatman, 32, and senior citizens cook."

> Allicia: A lot of men went for the bars and in turn it kind of. . . . Well in my situation I was *divorced* from it. . . . [Losing his job] did kind of throw [him] through a whirlwind 'cause he was stable there for, oh gosh, 8 years. . . . [Before] he was happy, close to home, made good money, and it's steady, and it was something he loves to do too. But once it closed down he had more time to go to the bars. And for a month he was just kinda always drinking. (Emphasis mine)

Allicia, and several others, also stated that the mill did nothing to help out those who had lost their jobs. They were basically left to fend for themselves in the midst of a life-changing episode. This might be associated with the "mass anxiety" that was observed in the community by citizens. It also displays a breaking point. Lori Johnson, a 49 year-old liquor store owner, said that her business actually experienced a lag for the first several weeks after the mill closure. When I interviewed her at her place of business, a year and a half later, however, this did not seem to be the case anymore as our interview was interrupted several times by customers. In short, a "mass anxiety" caused many to quickly begin saving money (not buying alcohol for example) but after a while gave into temptation for whatever reason.

Another account of noticing an increase of substance abuse in the area was from a local health care professional:

"Brenda Hewlett, 49, and I'm a nurse practitioner."

> Brenda: Mostly perception drugs and alcohol. Yep, that's increasing. I don't think that that's any different though in this community than it is, I don't know (pause) alcoholism, is that increasing in other places? It certainly is here. Perception drug abuse is a problem nation-wide.

From what I observed during my field work, the majority of citizens in Kamiah that were directly affected in one way or another took one of the three obvious options: collect unemployment and see what happens, find a conventional job nearby, or leave the community completely in search for work. Others, however, decided that they wanted more control over their situation by adding a few extra dollars to their budget any way they knew how. Performing odd jobs like clearing brush or making home improvements were widely cited, but, unfortunately, were not seen as being extremely successful.

It can be assumed, as it was by my research participants', that the amount of success could be determined, partly, by the fact that the entire community was tightening their belts—the market for such tasks had been basically dissolved by people deciding to put off projects or doing them themselves. However, there are some small, informal markets that have not subsided because they are more specialized and require technical skills. Additionally, there are existing markets that may not appear on the surface to be able to produce profit, yet some have been able to spot them out and exploit them.

Nelson Davis is one such individual, as he was able to capitalize on two of those markets. The first is auto mechanics, a passion Nelson has had since he learned how to use a wrench. His technical knowledge and skill in the trade was a twofold educational process. He was first taught auto mechanics by his step father, and not long after he was rebuilding engines and transmissions. Second, after sticking out a delayed graduation from high school in 2006, he joined the two-year auto mechanics program at Lewis and Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho, and received his degree and technical certificate in 2008.

Unfortunately, his new piece of paper was not offering any real opportunity. Furthermore, Nelson had found himself in a completely new situation—he recently had a son. With more than one life to care for, and very few options, Nelson moved back home with his family and began to think about how to deal with his situation. His conclusion was to become his own boss.

He began to work on friends' and relatives' vehicles for discount prices, which were soon referring other people to him. However, the problem of not having a stock pile of spare parts was hindering and soon became obvious. This dilemma became the second opportunity once he realized that scrapping unwanted vehicles from private individuals could be used to salvage parts for his odd jobs. This solution was brilliant because not only did he now have access to free or extremely cheap parts (hopefully they were the kind needed), the rest of the vehicle that was not salvaged could be taken to a scrap yard and exchanged for cash.

"Nelson Davis, 23, I'm unemployed right now."

> Nelson Davis: I'm unemployed right now, [so I've] kind-a been scrapping rigs to get money. . . . How it works is there's a steel yard in town here . . . they'll pay ya 95 bucks a ton. . . . I'll go talk to people that got old junkers laying around in their yard or whatever, and I'll ask 'em if they want it out of their yard or not. . . . Sometimes I got to pay 'em for it, just a little bit though . . . but I'll just take it to the scrap yard and they'll pay me for it by weight. . . . They'll give ya 70 bucks a ton if you don't drain [the fluids out of] it, and 95 bucks a ton if you drain it.

This has proved to be a success, allowing him to provide for his new family and wait until he could get steady employment, which he received at the Itse-Ye-Ye Casino several weeks after our interview. He plans to continue "scrapping rigs" and provide small repairs for friends and family because it's something he loves doing and he can make extra cash doing it. Nelson claimed he has made over $700 in a day on more than one occasion.

In addition, Nelson Davis, a Nez Perce tribal member, was also able to use exercise the salmon fishing rights guaranteed by the Treaty of 1855. Nelson, along with any registered Nez Perce Tribal member, is able to fish in the Clearwater, Colombia, Salmon, and Snake Rivers and all their tributaries. These rights are helping tribal residents by providing families with food for the winter in some of the toughest economic times seen in Kamiah since the 1980s. Salmon fishing was not a coping strategy that was developed as a result of the Three Rivers mill closing, but it is something that has proved to be extremely helpful in times of economic distress. And, unlike the rest of the residents, the Nez Perce have been coping with economic depression their entire lives.

In the summer months one can observe the original inhabitants of the Clearwater Valley selling their catch on the side of many roads in Idaho. Salmon fishing was described to me as a "family business," a way to survive, and as a ceremonial practice within the Nez Perce culture. It is the right of the individual and family to decide how they practice their own rights.

> Nelson: We usually focus on getting' all the family fish first, grandparents and stuff. We fill up everybody's freezer first, then after everybody's got the fish they need for a long period of time . . . then we'll start making money off it. Ya the salmon dollars are big dollars.

In addition to individuals and families finding ways to cope, Kamiah was described to me as a tight-knit and supportive community and, as I observed, seemed to be coming together in ways that definitely helped out those in need. Debbie Evans, a grant writer for the city of Kamiah, responded to an e-mail interview and provided her viewpoints on the impact of the timber industry and future and the community:

> Debbie: Forest-based industry has been the basis of the economic well-being of Kamiah and the surrounding area. As the traditional means of support from this industry has declined so has the economic gains and stability. Conscious thought is beginning to evolve that natural resource value added, tourism-based, service, and small business/entrepreneurial opportunities need to be researched, taught and developed to create a healthy community. Big business and large manufacturing are not an option as there is not enough "footprint" space available, lack of trained workforce, and could/would jeopardize the "small town" atmosphere that is wished to be preserved. The logging industry will probably never be what it once was but it will still play a significant role in the economics of the area.

The residents of Kamiah, overall, had the same outlook, seeing that most likely the timber industry will never be as strong as in the past. As Dallon Wheeler Sr. described it, "everyone saw the writing on the wall." Furthermore, residents and groups noticed that, after the mill closure in 2008, their neighbors in Kamiah needed help and they sprung into action. There were not many accounts given about community solidarity but the ones I received are clearly worth mention.

- Many groups, such as the Pine Ridge Baptist Church, and two unidentified church organizations were cited by interviewees as giving much needed assistance for struggling families in the form of food.
- Avista Utility Co. was cited for giving up to $500 to keep the lights on for different needy families across the valley.
- Amy Woods, fitting it into her required curriculum, created a "careers" class for high school students at the high school level. They provide the students with one college credit from Lewis and Clark State College in Lewiston,

Idaho, while assisting them in finding a suitable career choice in pursue after high school graduation. They even make financial aid and housing arrangements for the students. This is much needed help for youngsters emerging into a world of little local opportunity. Mrs. Woods noted that, ." . . most of our graduating seniors are first generation college students. Or even first generation post-secondary training students." However, despite the good will and hard work of Mrs. Woods and companions, little success in the terms of completing secondary education/training has come from the program.

- An unnamed retired gentlemen who recently moved into the area volunteers his time to direct the high school drama performances. This saves the school money and ensures (for now at least) that the school can keep an invaluable program in the arts department.
- Dallon Wheeler Sr. coaches Kamiah middle school football and gave $400 of his $900 check for students whose parents could not afford the "pay to play" tax the school district imposes.

Findings

The range of coping strategies revealed on the individual level can be organized into the following categories:

1) Entrepreneurship: Scrapping rigs, auto-mechanics, odd jobs, and salmon fishing.
2) Alternative income: government assistance, i.e., unemployment, finding a new job, or commuting to a different job.
3) Education and technical training: nurse, tribal police officer, and prison guard.
4) Sustenance: fishing and hunting, vegetable gardens, and collecting firewood.
5) Exodus: leaving community for other work (oil fields, other mills, etc.), substance abuse, and divorce.

The coping strategies for businesses are as follows:

1) The "game of attrition": underbidding, layoffs and utilizing technology
2) The "trickle-down effect": once money started to disappear with the jobs many people in various sectors felt the strain. Those who were not financially affected as a direct result observed the results in the community as time went on.

The coping strategies on the community level can be categorized as:

1) Group organized donations: church groups and corporations set up food drives and help people struggling to pay bills.
2) Individual contributions to community: creating high school classes, financial donations for pay-to-play for student athletes, and volunteer work.

Kamiah appears to be a timber dependent, industry-resource town and is not isolated by any means from the global capitalist market. This fact was observed through the lens of the "trickle-down effect," which was translated into a "game of attrition," and illustrates the interconnections between the major local industry and the rest of the community. Once Three Rivers closed, the financial stress eventually trickled down the rungs of the economic ladder and generated a range and variety of coping strategies on the individual, business, and community levels. When the health of a community's main economic force fails, the effects can lead to serious hardship.

The theme of "trickle down" came up in every interview. From the viewpoint of citizens residing in Kamiah, "trickle down" referred to the overall economic instability that caused people to become more reserved and "anxious." The "game of attrition" was directly related to this "trickle-down effect" and influenced how the business community was coping. Strategies of this "game" included: layoffs, stagnant wages, underbidding, and business closure.

Individuals have made huge monetary donations and school teachers have made it a priority to help make sure Kamiah's youth have some knowledge base that will help them in an uncertain economic atmosphere. Church groups and corporations have also lent a helping hand in the form of money and canned foods.

These coping strategies may not necessarily be unique to Kamiah and they cannot be taken as generalizations of rural America or timber-dependent communities. As it has been rightfully stated, "when you've seen *one* rural community, you have seen *one* rural community" ([1991] Swanson and Brown 2003:397). However, one community is part of the economic and social whole, and as such, one community's experience can be analyzed to understand specific aspects of the whole, especially when a database of case studies exists.

Conclusion

Ethnography gives researchers a chance to capture the human experience by articulating socioeconomic change with the terms used by those humans who have experienced that change. Ultimately, the historical experiences of human society are translated into human action (collectively or individually), which can then be used to understand particular faucets of society. This study was a successful first step in that process. After speaking with citizens about their experiences it was easy to conclude that Kamiah may be isolated when it comes to geography, but its economy is extremely connected to non-local interests and markets. Despite the tough economic times many locals were able to be "resilient" and "resourceful" and were successful in keeping their houses and maintaining a certain quality of life with odd and temporary jobs, utilizing vegetable gardens, innovation, salmon fishing, collecting firewood, training for a new profession, and commuting. Others were able to ride out the storm on unemployment alone thanks to federal extensions during the worst economic catastrophe since the Great Depression. On the other hand, there were many who, for whatever reason, were not able to remain emotionally stable or stay in Kamiah and had to resort to exodus.

This research was successful in identifying a few coping strategies that were developed by individuals, businesses, and the community. More studies of this kind must be undertaken so that comparisons and correlations can be made to further understand the pressing social problems of rural America. But, as past research has suggested, and as we have observed here, the "how" question of coping must be immediately followed with the "why?"

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