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‘Tips’ to Affirming Cultural Identity through Communication

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Honors Senior Thesis

University of Portland

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Abstract

This study examines how cultural identity is affirmed through communication. It draws on experiences of communication with those who come to Brother André Café in Portland, Oregon. The study analyzes what is currently known about affirming identity through the lenses of identity, face, language, avowal and ascription, silence, cultural values, and themes of cultural identity. Through these different constructs, a 'TIPS Sheet' is developed which gives first time volunteers to Brother André some guideposts to help them in their interactions with those who partake in conversation. This TIPS Sheet causes minimal changes in the current routine of Brother André, and can be easily and cheaply implemented. It is expected to help volunteers come away with a better experience, as it guides them in their interactions, and can be applied to interactions beyond those that take place at Brother André.

### ‘Tips’ to Affirming Cultural Identity through Communication

I am a fairly new volunteer to Brother André Café, which is connected to the Downtown Chapel in Portland, Oregon and serves food and drink—including hot soup—to the homeless and anyone else who shows up every Friday night from 7:00-9:00 pm. At my first volunteer experience, I had no formal training, and was just kind of thrown into my duty (handing out bags to the people in line) with no preparation whatsoever on how to interact with those who came. These were people in a different, lower, socio-economic class than me, and who were struggling in their lives. I didn’t know how to talk to them. I remember, as I was struggling to get the bags apart and pass them out as the people in line kept passing me by, I put on a happy face and would try and say a few words to each person as I handed them a bag (typically just a hello). There was one guy around my age (early twenties), and after I briefly talked to him, I said, “Maybe we’ll see you again next time.”

To this, he responded, “I *hope* I don’t see you again.” I was somewhat shocked at his statement, but then he continued, “I’ve only been out here for a week. I need to get a job.”

From his explanation, I realized that by my casual offhand phrase “see you next time,” I was inadvertently reinforcing the downtrodden lifestyle of those who come to Brother André, and affirming their identity as homeless or poor people. This young man reminded me that sometimes people just come across hard times, but that they don’t plan to stay in that situation for long. It caused me to really think about what I say before I say it, and how anything I say might be interpreted in terms of identity (especially if it could be interpreted in a far different context than what I meant). Thus, I decided to study what is known about affirming cultural identity through communication, and use the research I found to come up with a training module, culminating in a “TIPS Sheet” filled with helpful practices and techniques for first time

volunteers so that they can be empowered in their communication and not make the same mistakes I did. This will also allow for a better volunteer experience, and increase the likelihood of volunteers returning to volunteer again.

*The Birth of the TIPS Sheet*

In deciding how to create a training module for volunteers at Brother André, I first talked to one of the coordinators for Brother André at the Downtown Chapel, who told me that volunteers are pretty much just thrown into their jobs and learn by doing. She then directed me to Andy Noethe, who is the pastoral associate at the Downtown Chapel and in charge of Brother André Café, to see if there was any sort of a training program already put into effect for volunteers—especially first time volunteers. To this query, Andy replied:

There is no formal training for Friday night volunteers. Because of the volume of volunteers, we limit training to a tour of our building, overview of our community programs, and an introduction to our mission for new volunteers, and then the following instructions are given before we open:

ANNOUNCEMENTS (before opening the doors)

Food Handlers' Gloves required for anyone serving food, even fruit.

What additional items if any, are being distributed: blankets, gloves, socks, etc.

If we are distributing any additional items, they are only available upon request.

We don't walk around with items asking people if they want them.

Saturday Social tomorrow from 9am – 11am.

We do not offer public restrooms. Restrooms are open 2 blocks west in the park blocks, 4 blocks east at the Portland Rescue Mission, or 5 blocks north next to Greyhound.

Identify any “point people”, who may be able to answer questions during the night.

Boundaries:

Volunteers may not give anything of their own to people. If someone is need of anything, please refer them to the staff person working.

Do not give or accept phone numbers or email addresses!

Volunteers should trust your gut. If you are not comfortable with a situation or conversation, please walk away. (Especially young, female volunteers.)

Volunteers under 18 should team up when providing sidewalk hospitality.

Any inappropriate behavior or drunkenness should be reported to staff.

Clean-up: When things begin to slow down, ask staff how you can help clean-up.

Update: People always go to the end of the line, even if it is their first time through.

A reflection is then offered at the end of the evening, upon request, to volunteer groups.

With this in mind, I know that my training module needs to incorporate small changes, so that it might be able to be put into effect without disrupting the current flow of things.

### *The Nightly Routine*

To explain a bit about what takes place every Friday at Brother André Café at the Downtown Chapel, volunteers first show up around 5:45 or 6:00 pm and introduce themselves to each other. Then, together, they all eat the soup that the volunteer cook has prepared for the evening. This is a powerful experience, because it allows the volunteers to eat the same soup that the homeless and suffering people who come to Brother André will be eating. After they've finished their soup, volunteers are assigned to a specific duty: either manning one of the food stations or visiting with the people who come as part of sidewalk hospitality. Then they package the desserts for those who will be coming, and bring all the food downstairs into the foyer of the Downtown Chapel. Once all the tables are set up and the food is ready, the volunteer

coordinator for the evening reads the announcements listed above, and then says a brief prayer before opening the doors to the public. Food is served from 7:00-9:00 pm, and the public is offered fruit, sandwiches, dessert, soup, hot chocolate, lemonade, and coffee, among other things. There is even a person to hand out bags to the people so that they can put all their food in it as they move through the line. Then, once outside, the people can enjoy their food in the company of others and sit in the chairs provided along the sidewalks on either side of the Downtown Chapel. Clean-up begins either at 9:00, or when all the food is gone, whichever comes first, and everyone pitches in to help with that. Yet, the position that is most important for my study is that of sidewalk hospitality. In this position, the volunteer's entire job is to just talk to the people waiting in line and have conversations with them. Because most of the people who come to Brother André are either homeless or at a very low point in their life, it can be difficult to know what to say or how to say something. This is where my training module and TIPS Sheet come in to play.

In volunteering at the Downtown Chapel and being on sidewalk hospitality, I analyzed my interactions with the people I talked to in order to come up with a training module for volunteers. The culmination of this project is a TIPS Sheet, filled with useful advice and tips for (primarily first time) volunteers that would be distributed by the coordinator in charge as the Friday night volunteers gather for the soup dinner. It includes dos and don'ts on what to say and why, and gives volunteers new way to think and notice things so that they can solve the problem of how, through communication, to affirm the identity of people different from themselves. My TIPS Sheet gives volunteers quick guidelines, or a new way to think, before they actually interact with those who come to Brother André Café, and is designed to be able to be read quickly either during the soup dinner or right before the volunteers head downstairs to serve. I

know that this would have been something useful for me, because I was absolutely terrified my first time volunteering at Brother André and had some idea, but not enough of the right idea, of what I was doing. A paper with any sort of guidelines on how to interact with the people who come would have been immensely helpful.

### *Why a TIPS Sheet?*

The Downtown Chapel runs on the service of the people who volunteer there. Furthermore, while there are regular volunteers, the Downtown Chapel also receives an influx of different volunteers. Oftentimes church groups volunteer, and even if the same church volunteers more than once, there may be different volunteers from that church every time. The Downtown Chapel does not have the time, space, or the means to provide an intricate training for Friday night volunteers at Brother André. It is not logical to train a volunteer if he or she might never show up again. Additionally, the Downtown Chapel is respecting the time of those who do volunteer. If they were to ask people to come in early for even a half day's worth of training, the number of volunteers would likely plummet, because people are very possessive of their time—especially in modern day American society, where time is a precious commodity and people must always be doing something. Thus, a TIPS Sheet seems like the best solution for training volunteers because it will help volunteers (especially first timers) know how to interact with those who are in different social classes and places in their lives than the volunteers. By having even a semblance of an idea of what is going on, the volunteer will have a better chance of having a good experience and therefore be more likely to volunteer again. Also, the TIPS Sheet can be read quickly and does not require extensive training in order to comprehend it.



### What is Known About Affirming Identity Through Communication?

In starting this project, I decided to look at what is known about affirming cultural identity through communication. Volunteering at Brother André Café, I meet a lot of different people, and am exposed to several different cultures. Typically, when most people think of people who are homeless, we have a tendency to make a distinction between “us” and “them”. Thus, to lessen this distinction, I opted to create a training module and TIPS Sheet for volunteers, teaching and giving advice on how to affirm the different cultural identities that they encounter while volunteering at Brother André.

I first looked at another training module on developing intercultural competence by Janet and Milton Bennett (2002) in order to get an idea of how to develop my own training module, while incorporating some of their techniques into my study. This model is particularly helpful to the process of affirming identity, because it guides the reader through the development of intercultural sensitivity, which is crucial to successful intercultural interactions. In this process, the Bennetts define six stages of the experience of difference, starting with the ethnocentric stages of denial, defense, and minimization, and moving to the ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Throughout each stage, the attitude is defined and then followed by a diagnosis, implications for organizations, what learners say at that stage and stage-appropriate intercultural competencies. Furthermore, in each of these six stages, the Bennetts describe subsections, or different types of sub-stages that may be experienced at each stage. Especially helpful is the fact that all of the stages except denial (the first stage) include a module to help develop competence at that particular stage. While this module does not focus solely on affirming cultural identity, it does guide the reader in how to develop intercultural competence, which must be achieved before one can affirm different cultural identities. Thus, this model was

a good place to start in creating my own training module, or TIPS Sheet. While I did not create a full training module for my project and instead opted for a single TIPS Sheet, I focused the majority of my tips in the ethnorelative realm as described in the Bennetts' training module of intercultural competence. After I had the foundational focus of my TIPS Sheet, I continued to look at what was known about affirming cultural identity through communication through the lenses of identity, face, language, avowal and ascription, silence, cultural values, and themes of cultural identity.

*Identity: Who are You?*

One of the key premises I found in the research concerned how we construct our identity. According to Domenici and Littlejohn (2006), "We co-construct our identities through our interactions with others" (p. 175). Notice that it says identities; we have more than one. Domenici and Littlejohn describe three distinct identities: person identity, relational identity, and community identity (p. 6). The key here is that an individual's identity as a person is "always formed in relation to others" (p. 91). Thus, because our sense of self-identity is always being constructed in relationship to others, we have many selves, or identities (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Ulrike Meyer (2009) supports this idea of multiple identities as he explores Amin Maalouf's "identity check-up" as a tool to be used for intercultural classes, in order to stop the perpetuation of stereotypes. First, Meyer explains that our ego identity, or self identity, is part of a larger group identity. He then refers back to Maalouf's book *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*.

In the beginning of his book, Maalouf explains that humans have the basic need of needing to belong somewhere, whether it be a group, family, tribe, or nation. We just need to *belong* somewhere. The main point that Meyer takes from this is that "we belong to many

groups AT THE SAME TIME.” Meyer then explains that Maalouf “tries to prove that each person has a large number of affinities – an individual belongs to one group and at the same time to another.” Because of this, Meyer stresses that we cannot merely apply cultural standards to individuals, because everyone is different. Also, there are several different factors impacting an individual’s identity. Domenici and Littlejohn (2006) argue further that because we are members of many communities, we are affected and influenced by multiple and different ideas of personhood from these different communities. Yet, they stress that our identity is always created in how we present ourselves, and how we act within the situations in which we live and work.

Through this idea of identity, we can see our liferscript. According to Domenici and Littlejohn (2006):

Each of us possesses a dynamic and changing liferscript that guides our person, relation, and community identities. The liferscript is a roadmap for how to live a life and how to respond to the constantly changing landscapes in which we exist. (pp. 6-7)

Further, the authors claim that our liferscript is always influenced by culture. However, because our liferscript is influenced by culture and our identities are created through our interactions, we must be aware of unintended consequences. Giddens (1977) reminds us that unintended consequences of interaction form a set of expectations that shape future possibilities, creating an environment that may impact ongoing or future interactions.

Continuing to focus on unintended consequences, such as stereotypes, Meyer (2009) recommends Maalouf’s *Identity Check-up* when teaching intercultural communication to students in order to stop the perpetuation of stereotypes, and has the students perform their own identity check-ups. The premise of the identity check-ups is that “intercultural learning has a lot to do with learning about oneself.” Therefore, by teaching these techniques, Meyer is attempting

to avoid exposing the students to a set of stereotypes regarding intercultural communication, and avoid establishing further stereotypes. In the identity check-up activity, students look at their own background and where they've come from in order to see their own identity. For instance, I am American; that fact narrows down the group of people I am associated with. Yet, I have a French last name, narrowing down the group even more. I am an Oregonian, I have red hair, etc. So, while I belong to all of these different groups at the same time, the common intersection of all the groups to which I belong narrows down. This intersection continues to scale down even further, until, in the end, only I am left. This is how Maalouf defines identity.

By looking at identity as defined by Maalouf, I can avoid establishing further stereotypes about the people with whom I come into contact, and thus be guided in affirming their identities. This technique will also help me discover where they come from, and to which groups they feel they belong; however, it also encourages treating each person as an individual, which is what I am trying to do.

*Face: Not Merely Fixed by Plastic Surgery*

In creating and maintaining our identities, face is very important. No, I'm not talking about the thing that's made up of your eyes, nose, and mouth and is on your head. In this context, face is a metaphor that equates the human face with one's public identity (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006). Thus, my face is the "me" that I present to others; it's how they see me. You've probably heard of the phrase "saving face." It's this metaphorical idea of face that is implied here. Our face can be lost, saved, built, etc. Our face is constantly maintained through facework, which is defined as "a set of coordinated practices in which communicators build, maintain, protect, or threaten personal dignity, honor, and respect" (pp. 10-11). Thus, our

identity is oftentimes portrayed through our face, and maintaining face—both your own and others’—is vital to establishing and affirming a positive identity.

### *Language is Power*

In the creation and maintenance of our identities and face, language plays a powerful role. I next looked at the communication theory of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and anthropological theories as a means to analyze the role of language in creating identity. It is argued that “by drawing on anthropological theories on ethnic identity... the relation between language and social identity is negotiated in interaction” (Lauring, 2008, p. 343). SIT, on the other hand, argues that group membership is fundamental to an individual’s sense of belonging, and that in an effort to reduce uncertainty and establish and maintain their self esteem, individuals categorize themselves and others into groups (p. 345). Yet, there is an important link between language and social identity; national affiliation is not necessarily used as a predictor of identity formation (p. 344). In studying these two types of theories of identity along with language, Lauring makes an important discovery about the power of language when he argues: “when languages is linked to identity it can both unite and divide, as it may become an object of oppression and a means of discrimination” (p. 348).

In the end, Lauring argues for negotiated boundaries among groups created through interaction, rather than objectified categories that are assigned to the group in SIT, such as race or nationality. Thus, the key takeaway from this study is that people create their identity by attaching themselves to groups, and groups create an identity through interaction with other groups, and language plays a powerful role in this process. Language is used as a negotiated object for identity making. It is used in either positive or negative differentiations, thereby expressing ethnic identity (Lauring, 2008). Our language group is also our ethnic group because

language is one of the most characteristic markers of identity. Furthermore, language is often at the heart of inter-ethnic conflicts. Most importantly, language has the power to affirm an identity, but it also has the power to completely tear someone down or destroy an entire group.

#### *Avowal vs. Ascription*

This concept of the importance of language was further supported in research of the role of avowal and ascription in creating identity by Kristin Moss and William Faux II (2006). According to Moss and Faux, “Individuals enact multiple cultural identities...in and through discourse with others” (p. 22). The authors then used a concept from another scholar arguing that language is “an important means through which intergroup distinctions are made” (p. 23). They use the ideas of avowal and ascription to support this claim: “avowal refers to how individuals portray themselves as group members, whereas ascription refers to how individuals describe or assign characteristics upon others” (p. 23). Because there can often be tension between these two processes, the authors claim that “cultural identity is negotiated in everyday conversation” (p. 23). Furthermore, Moss and Faux adopted the perspective that conflict, power, and inequality are present within any given interaction, which supports the idea that cultural identity is constantly being negotiated in everyday conversation and interaction. In their analysis, the authors noted that individuals use avowal and ascription to establish who they are as group members and then articulate those views to others. “Avowal and ascription processes are the means through which cultural identities are enacted, challenged, and reinforced” (p. 26). In listening to taped conversations regarding controversial intercultural issues, the authors learned that some participants had ascribed certain characteristics (perhaps wrongly) to specific groups, and therefore had biases against such groups. Further, label usage was a common process employed to establish outgroup membership. Through these and other discoveries, the authors

were supported in their idea that language is indeed a crucial aspect of culture and cultural identity.

*Silence Still Can Be Golden*

While language plays an important role in identity affirmation, in some cultures, silence is just as important. Thus, in trying to affirm identities through communication, I needed to know the different styles of communication out there that I may need to employ. I decided to focus on the importance of silence, which may bear great impact in affirming identities of the people I meet at Brother André. In the study I looked at, the authors look at how quiet and being undisturbed in one's thoughts (*olla omissa oloissaan*) can be seen as a positive occurrence within the Finnish cultural framework. The authors explain, "Being alone does not mean loneliness but a withdrawal into one's chosen peace...." (Carbaugh, Berry, & Nurmikari-Berry, 2006, p. 204). They then describe a Finnish girl's experience in the States, while she wondered why she was being pressured to talk all of the time. From this story, the authors segue into the idea of communicative action, or "terms and phrases that are used prominently and routinely by people to characterize communication practices that are significant and important to them" (p. 205).

In Finnish culture, being undisturbed in one's thoughts is an important way of life. Privacy is described as "being alone in a good way" (p. 211). Thus, moments of quietude are normal and natural in interpersonal life, and people want such moments because the quietude allows them to be calm and undisturbed in their own thoughts. Furthermore, quietude can take place in social settings; a large group of people may enjoy *olla omissa oloissaan* together. On the other end of the spectrum, Americans have been identified by the Finnish as *erottua*, or inappropriately standing out. The Finnish people in the study feel that it is "the basic human want of a person to be undisturbed or unimpeded" (p. 215). Thus, people should respect the

quietude, rather than interrupting it or engaging in needless chattering. One Finnish man sums up Finland's communication code matter-of-factly:

Communication in Finland can be described in one sentence, if you've got nothing to say: shut up. If you, on the other hand, have something to say, say it straight, brutal but truthful, whatever it is. Don't try any slick small talk. Again the Finnish culture shows not only its elegance but also its efficiency, wordless communication is, in fact, always the most truthful. (p. 215)

At the end the authors list a Finnish Code, which describes the different values about quietude that the Finnish people adhere to.

I believe that these findings have great relevance to my project, especially because I sometimes don't know what to say in conversation. This article lets me know that sometimes silence is appropriate, and even appreciated. Thus, I don't have to constantly fill every gap in the conversation with ceaseless chatter and small talk. This knowledge also helps my project of identity affirmation, as it helps show me whether or not the people with whom I communicate enjoy *olla omissa oloissaan*. Furthermore, the people I am conversing with are typically at very low points in their lives, and by sharing a silence together, I can help to affirm their identities through the wordless communication, which seems to be the most genuine form of communication.

Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) also remind us of the importance of silence when they note that the words "silent" and "listen" are both created from the same set of letters. Further, they describe *ting*, or the Chinese word for listening, which means "attending mindfully with our ears, eyes, and a focused heart" (p. 281). Simone Weil (1951) supports this idea of actively listening and giving our full attention when she says:



Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it *is* a miracle. Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough. (p. 114)

Thus, through my research, up to this point, I have discovered that our identities are constantly being negotiated through our everyday interactions, which also contribute to face maintenance. Further, in our communication and interactions with others, language plays a powerful role, and as we avow characteristics to ourselves and ascribe characteristics to others, we must be aware of unintended consequences. Yet, while all of these different facets revolve around our interactions with others, it is also important to note the value of silence and active listening. Silence can provide a calming escape from the harsh reality of life that the people at Brother André are currently experiencing, and by acknowledging that and being a presence to those people, I am giving them my attention and becoming attuned to their needs, thereby helping to affirm their identities.

#### 'Valuing' Cultural Identity

After looking at these different aspects which are all very important to our identities, I decided to look for and at values of cultural identity, since that is the identity I am emphasizing in my affirmation of identity. Yet, in trying to affirm cultural identities, one may encounter several difficulties in the process. Halvor Nordby (2008) argues that problems in intercultural communication come from lack of sympathetic attitudes toward the other culture. Nordby says, "It is necessary to identify personal values as direct relations between individual persons and the world around them." Therefore, by identifying the personal values of the people I meet and talk

with, I will be able to start to see the relationship between that person and world, and how they identify themselves, along with what they value in their lives, which helps to create their identity.

However, values are not concrete entities; they tend to change over time, influenced by our different experiences. Erla Kristjandottir (2009) uses the lens of phenomenology, which allows for changes, to examine the experience of eight American science majors studying abroad in France for three months. According to Kristjandottir, phenomenology “examines human lived experience by looking at the whole process of cross-cultural adaptation. Phenomenology does not ask for correct solutions, rather it asks for meaning that can be deeply understood” (p. 130).

In her research, the author found that people experience a lived relation in their interactions with others which helps create and strengthen their cultural identity. Often, the author claims, it is “not until back home with their family and friends, do students realize how much they have in fact changed in attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors during their stay abroad” (p. 142). I know that this statement rings true for me. My mom made the comment that I had changed so much even the first night that I was back home from Australia. Because I have experienced this negotiation of cultural identity firsthand, I can empathize with the cultural identity struggles that the people who I talk to may be going through. By being aware of how communicated encounters and interactions help shape one’s cultural identity, I can be deliberate in how I interact with them in order to help affirm their identity, at whatever point of self-discovery that they might be.

### *Themes of Cultural Identity*

In trying to wrap up my research and come up with some concrete and tangible bits of advice to include on my TIPS Sheet, I looked for themes of cultural identity. Kim (2007) analyzes several different academic frameworks of cultural identity and then thoroughly explores

the resulting five different basic themes of cultural identity: (a) an adaptive and evolving entity of an individual; (b) a flexible and negotiable entity of an individual; (c) a discrete social category and an individual choice; (d) a distinct and communal system of communicative practices; and (e) a discrete social category and a non-negotiable group right (p. 242). However, before delving into the results, Kim examined an ideological framework that she had utilized in previous research. Kim referred to this framework as the ideological circle, and explored its four interconnected positions with respect to culture and intercultural relations: assimilationism, pluralism, integrationism, and separatism (p. 239). Assimilationism and pluralism are contrasting positions, because assimilationism holds to the idea “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” while pluralism claims group identity while employing such metaphors as “salad bowl” that emphasize the individuality and distinctiveness of each group within the larger group. Looking further, integrationism and separatism are quite obviously opposites as well. Yet, the author qualifies that these four ideological concepts are not mutually exclusive, and, instead, “form an ideological circle, in which each position defines, and is defined by, the other” (p. 240).

Looking into cultural identity, Kim claims that the process of identity development embodies both the identity of the individual and the identity of the group being merged into one identity. Kim places further emphasis on the importance of cultural identity by agreeing that it is “at the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his or her ‘common culture’” (p. 240). I feel that Kim describes it best when she writes that cultural identity “has been deemed by many social researchers [as] an extension of the self...” (p. 241). Further, she talks about individuals having multiple identities (and being able to have an intercultural identity rather than having to choose merely one cultural identity) and these identities being revealed and negotiated through the presentation of face and the ability to maintain face in interactions (p. 244).

Thus, I feel that this article is quite relevant to my service project at Brother André Café, where I interact and converse with a large number of people who are quite different from me. By having knowledge of the ideological circle, as well as the importance of face and its role in negotiating and supporting identity, I can somewhat tailor my interactions to meet the face needs of those with whom I interact. Additionally, I like what Kim says about having an intercultural identity, and not having to choose just one cultural identity, because we are all somehow touched by the different experiences we've had. A lot of the people I've talked to have lived in several different towns, states, and even countries, which have all impacted and affected their identity in some way, whether they are aware of it or not. Yet, as I identified earlier, our cultural identity is not solely influenced by our geographic location; it is also influenced by our social position and our experiences. Remember that Luring (2008) argues that our language group is also our ethnic group. By viewing identity in this way, as poly-cultural rather than mono-cultural, I can help affirm the identities of those with whom I interact by including multiple aspects of their cultural identity rather than just emphasizing one aspect over another.

#### *Now What?*

Now that I've looked at what identity is in relation to face, language, silence, and values, as well as themes of cultural identity, I feel that I have sufficient knowledge to create my TIPS Sheet using all of these different lenses and taking on an ethnorelative focus. By adopting the TIPS Sheet as a tool for first time volunteers (and even as a refresher for those who have volunteered before), I believe that Brother André Café, and the Downtown Chapel as a whole, will benefit and the number of volunteers will increase. Volunteers will know that they don't have to figure it all out for themselves; they have guidance to help them along the way. While there may still be trial and error involved as volunteers interact with the homeless and other

people who come to Brother André, the volunteers will at least have some guideposts to help them throughout their experience. Further, the information provided on the TIPS Sheet does not have to be limited solely to interactions at Brother André Café; it can be applied to all areas of life. Because the TIPS Sheet provides a new way of thinking for interactions and tips on how to affirm one's identity, it is applicable to all future encounters—especially those that are intercultural. Furthermore, this project does not require excessive funding. It is a single sheet of paper that will be distributed to volunteers. Copies can be made fairly cheaply, and regular volunteers do not need to receive a TIPS Sheet every time they volunteer, so it would not become a hindrance.

This project is intended to move slowly so as not to disrupt the smooth flow of the way things are currently run at the Downtown Chapel. Yet, as the distribution of the TIPS Sheet is implemented and becomes a regular occurrence so that volunteers are familiar with it, it is possible for it to increase its depth. For instance, maybe business cards could be created and distributed that contain select tips and perhaps an acronym (i.e. IDENTITY) that would remind volunteers key things to do or say that would help the process of affirming the identities of those with whom they interact. The benefits do not stop with the volunteers; as the people who come to Brother André solidify their identity and have it affirmed by the volunteers—especially those on sidewalk hospitality—they will have a stronger self esteem and become empowered. Their empowerment will show through their person and carry them through the low points in their life. Who knows, maybe through a single conversation with a volunteer at Brother André in which the volunteer affirms their identity, a person may be inspired to take their life in a forward motion to a better place and perhaps even come back and volunteer at Brother André and the Downtown Chapel themselves. We will never know unless we try. I therefore strongly urge the Downtown

Chapel to implement the TIPS Sheet, even for a trial period, and see how many lives can be changed, or at least eased.

## ‘TIPS’ Sheet

Tidbits for  
Identity Affirmation in  
Preparing for  
Service/social situations

*Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. **The capacity to give one’s attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle.***

*Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough.*

—Simone Weil

Do’s and Don’ts:

- Don’t say “See you next time.” This affirms their current lifestyle as homeless or poor people who need to come to Br. André. You *can* invite them back the following week for more food and conversation.
- Do treat those you talk to as real people—distinct individuals with ideas, feelings, and values—because that’s what they are. Get to know them as people: find common ground and develop a relationship.
- Do try to give your full attention—especially when listening—while conversing with someone. Actively give your whole self to the conversation. Remember that “silent” and “listen” are spelled with the same letters.
- Do be mindful of what you say and how it can be (mis)interpreted. Mindfulness means taking care of your own internal assumptions, thoughts, and emotions while becoming attuned to the other’s assumptions, thoughts, and emotions at the same time.

\*Silence is okay. Don’t be scared of it. Remember the Chinese word for listen: *ting*. This means attending mindfully with your ears, eyes, and a focused heart.

\*Language is power. Use it wisely. Through your language, you can affirm someone’s identity, but you can also completely tear someone down or destroy an entire group. Keep in mind that language is often at the heart of inter-ethnic conflicts.

\*Be congruent in your verbal and nonverbal actions. If you smile while saying “Sorry,” you’ll appear to be insincere.

\*Don’t pretend to understand something if you really don’t understand—ask for clarification. This will increase the genuineness of your interaction and honor the intelligence of the person with whom you are communicating. In showing respect for others, you create respect for yourself.

\*Try to meet each person’s actual needs from the interaction by listening insightfully at the beginning. Some people want to talk, some don’t. Some just want a silent presence, some want to be left alone. Meeting the person’s actual needs will help to affirm their identity.

\*Just **be yourself**; the people you interact with are very perceptive, and will appreciate you more if you are genuine and honest.

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