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Rapid Identification: River Guides, Storytelling, and Sharing Identity

by

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I moved to Moab from another Utah town in the spring of 2005 to train and guide on the Colorado River. Over the course of two summers I rowed or paddled on three Colorado River sections—Fisher Towers, Westwater and Cataract Canyon—as well as Desolation/Gray Canyons on the Green River and the Main Fork of the Salmon River. The next fall, during my first semester of graduate study in folklore, I became interested in studying river guides as a folk group. I wanted to study the formation of “community” based upon both guide and passenger interactions on river trips. However, because I guided commercially and not for research, I decided against trying to study my passengers. Instead, I focused on different aspects of river guide identity, storytelling and why river guides choose to leave the work and lifestyle behind. This thesis has grown out of my search to describe river guide identity but focuses specifically on the creation and performance of shared identity or community through storytelling. In my research I have found that storytelling events, because of their circulation, shared or similar content, and the interposing—interrupting and interjecting—of multiple narrators, create shared identity, a sense of “groupness” or community.

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The other river guides and I had just finished cleaning up dinner. We had even handed out the last of the strawberry shortcake to our fifty or eighty passengers and were “wind-proofing” our gear so that nothing would blow away if an unexpected storm came
while we slept. Our passengers, mostly teenagers, were playing cards or Frisbee or were sitting in their tents gossiping. We were stopped for the first night of a three-day, truck-supported river trip that we affectionately called Ciscos, named after the Southeastern Utah town where our company, World Wide River Expeditions used to put-in when the Colorado was higher.¹

We were not expecting any visitors. Even Marcus and Acey, who were better friends with Zo and Brie than the rest of us, were surprised to see Zo’s forest green Chevy pull up. Brie and Zo never visited the guides working Ciscos. We leaned on our aluminum tables as they opened the truck doors and walked up, handing us much appreciated Gatorades and gummy snacks from a Maverick gas station. We joked about the river and the Cisco for a few minutes, but Zo and Brie looked grave. Brie needed to talk.²

_I always catch up_, she said. _I always catch up, but today I couldn’t_. Brie always rowed the one oar rig our company sent down the “daily.”³ I always catch them by Little Professor⁴ but something kept me back today. _I don’t know what it was. I was pushing just like any other day, but I just couldn’t catch them_.⁵

Brie still had not caught the group when she got to Cloudburst,⁶ and approaching the rapid, she saw an upside-down ducky floating in the eddy lines at the bottom of it.⁷

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¹ A put-in is the ramp where we put the boats in the river. Cisco is also the take-out point for Westwater Canyon. _The town is purportedly on the market for a cheap two million dollars._
² Brie was unable to relate her story to me for this paper. This is my memory of the first time I heard it.
³ We push the paddle boats and duckies—two man inflatable kayaks—away from the ramp first and then the oar rig, a large, inflated row boat with a metal frame rowed by one guide. Rowing is faster, so it is easier to catch up if the last boat in the water is far behind the rest of the group.
⁴ The second rapid in the Fisher Towers section, about two miles downriver from the put-in.
⁵ Pushing—facing downstream and pushing on the oars—is slower and harder than traditional rowing, where the oarsman faces upstream and pulls on the oars. But, it is a better workout.
⁶ The third rapid. Two miles downriver from Little Professor.
She pushed for a few more seconds, looking for the passengers who had fallen out. And as she got closer to the rapid she saw that there was one person—a man in his sixties—floating near the shore in the eddy directly below the rapid. Then I saw something else. It looked like a dry bag from far away. Then I realized it was a life jacket. I was like ‘Whoa’ ‘cause it looked like an empty lifejacket. I rowed as hard as I could through the rapid; the other passenger seemed okay; he was holding on to the ducky. When I got to the jacket I realized there was a body in it. She paused, looked down, then up again.

I said body because he was not alive when I got to him. I don’t know how long he was under, but the jacket was so loose on the guy that he was completely under the water. I pulled him up on my boat as fast as I could and was about to start CPR ‘cause the guy was dead. But as I was about to start, he coughed and started to breathe.

She steadied the man on the boat and pulled his dad in. I rowed as fast as I could down to Sorrell and called 911. It took them a while to get there, and the guy kept trying to get up and walk around. Me and some Sorrell people had carried him inside, but he kept saying that he was okay. ‘I don’t need to go to the hospital. I’m fine.’ But when he tried to walk, he kind of fell over, so the paramedics took him away on the gurney.

We asked questions any guide would ask: “How long was he under?” “How did no one see these guys go over?” “Why was his jacket so loose? Didn’t somebody check him before he got in the ducky?” “Do you think he’ll be okay?”

7 Eddies are sections of river (often in river bends or just after rapids) where the river flows upstream. Eddy lines are the division between the eddy and the rest of the river. They are generally quite visible when passing by.
8 A special bag used to keep personal items dry.
9 Sorrel Ranch, a luxury retreat, is within a half mile below Cloudburst rapid.
“That would have been the end of World Wide if the guy had died,” Zo later said.

“She saved the guy’s life. We’re lucky she was so far behind the group so he had time to surface. She might have missed him if she was any closer.”

Brie shook her head but not in disagreement. “I just can’t believe he was still underwater when his jacket popped up. I’m not kidding when I said it was a body in that jacket. The dude was gone.”

Brie’s story affected our entire company. Earlier that summer we had all confidently rowed over the pillowed-water above the teeth—two rocks had that formed the rapid—for a quick drop and punchy hit of water from a wave that broke just below. But as we passed the story along, we collectively worried about the undercurrents and further respected a rapid that had seemed to pose no threat. No longer did we casually enjoy a hit from the wave below the teeth. Nor would we shoot between them when the water dropped and those two rocks, “jaws,” emerged. We changed how the company collectively approached the rapid: my sister and brother-in-law who met while working there a few years previously, visited that summer and threaded their ducky through the teeth and then asked why the guides hadn’t taken our paddle boats through; they had seen no reason to not thread the jaws, but we did. Brie’s experience and our circulation of this story affected how a group of river guides viewed a rapid.

The next year, 2006, there were new guides who were told not to thread between the teeth or drop in near them. They needed to understand that even though the size of the water was not intimidating, its undercurrents could be. I told them Brie’s story, and after listening to it Brie’s respect, my respect, all those returning guides’ respect for the river

\[10\] Guides “respect” water when or because they understand the power that it has, and that even though they may be knowledgeable, strong, and experienced, things can always go wrong. Respecting the river denotes an approach or attitude of caution.
Paxton 5

grew on them. As the story had for us the previous year, it became part of who they were in regard to the river. The new guides, who worked that section more than the returning guides, grouped up before the rapid to collect and instruct passengers who paddled duckies as we had for years with a larger, more obviously dangerous rapid a few miles downriver. This story again changed the collective behavior and attitude of the river guides who listened to it and passed it along.

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There are already articles, books and at least one doctoral dissertation on the identity of the river guide. Guiding, as is evident by the variety of stories available in collections like Michael Englehard’s *Hell’s Half Mile* (2004), often affects the whole of a person, from political views and type of books they read (often dealing with human and natural history) to requiring specific skills like cooking, reading water and fixing any broken equipment to their interactions and relationships with passengers and other guides (Jonas 1997). Guiding affects behavior and attitudes extensively because it is a lifestyle rather than just an occupation; guides work twenty-four hours a day every day they are on the river, nearly every day during the main thrust of the season which runs late spring through early fall (Jonas 1997).

Current scholarship focuses on the performative nature of commercial river guides and their roles or identities at work or on the river. Some writers, like Jonas, delve into seemingly every aspect of a river trip—planning, packing, rigging, putting-in, setting up camp, cooking, storytelling, constructing danger, cleaning up, taking-out, and derigging as well as actual on the river activities and guide-passerenger interactions.  

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11 Rigging (the preparation) and derigging (the cleanup) a river trip differs from simple packing and unpacking for a family vacation. Rigging includes packing everything (food, water, cooking, camping and
examining these activities Jonas seeks to illuminate "the process of identity construction" among a folk group whose identity she categorizes as "extraordinary" as part of her thesis which claims that river guides must continually prove their identities as outstanding river guides because their audience—passengers and other guides—is continually changing (Jonas 1997:15).

According to Jonas, commercial river guides may be viewed as extraordinary or unique because their lifestyle differs from the average American’s routine. Guides can be described as masters of many things: “[B]oatmen/boatwomen ... experts in the fields of river history, whether ancient or contemporary, natural or human ... Jacks-and-Jills-of-all-trades... [and finally] ‘adventurers’—modern day ‘Indiana Jones’” (Jonas 1997:230).

Guides must continually prove themselves as masters of their work and its inherent risks because their audience (both passengers and other guides) continually changes as river trips begin, end, and begin again. In order to do this, Holyfield and Jonas (2003) identify three techniques to illustrate their master-of-river guiding skills. "River God or Goddess" identity: "(1) constructions of danger, (2) subordination of passengers, and (3) excessive alcohol consumption" (286). "Constructing danger" manages passengers’ emotions through balancing feelings of safety and risk, thus beginning the process of subordinating passengers, which proves the passengers to be incompetent with required “river skills” and the guides competent and therefore the

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describing the process of derigging, removing equipment, packing it for the drive home. Everything must be strapped down in case of a flip. This can be a long and aggravating process, and so is done before passengers arrive. This whole procedure is basically repeated at the end of the trip in derigging, removing equipment, putting the boat on the trailer and repacking everything for the drive home. Derigging also includes cleaning or scrubbing everything and any necessary maintenance or patching.
necessary key to a successful trip. The first two of these categories create and reaffirm guides’ authority and God- or Goddess-like status because they, the guides, can allegedly do anything on the river or in camp and face and perform well in the midst of the real or perceived danger. Holyfield and Jonas include the amount or level of alcohol consumption because they did not limit their study to commercial river guides. River rafters (commercial, private, and research) are known for excessive drinking, but commercial guides, since 1989, have been prohibited from drinking while on the river, and many companies have also instituted policies against drinking even when in camp for the night. The ability to perform amidst risk or danger, manipulate passengers (often through the constructs of danger) and drinking to excess drinking to create a larger than life aura that guides are known for: the River God or River Goddess. In their elements—the river, the hiking and camping, the work, the playing with people—they can allegedly do anything.

Commercial river rafting also requires people skills because river trips can last anywhere from just a few hours, during which time guides meet a variety of new passengers daily, to a few weeks, which requires a deeper connection to and tolerance of people. Guides must be personable at all times. Most guides’ personable nature is in part performed through their knack for storytelling, both on and off the river. Engelhard, a long-time guide and editor of collected guide tales, says, “Whether in bars or around campfires, on boat ramps, at trade shows, weddings or wakes—where two or more specimens of Rattus aquatus (the common river rat) come together, they will reminisce and swap tales” (2004:18).
The notion that story swapping—trading stories back and forth or among a group of guides—creates group cohesion is not uncommon in the field of occupational folklore. Long (1992) discusses various ways that railroad workers develop and maintain individual and social identity through occupational folklore, saying “Anecdotes of railroad characters gave these men a strong sense of the group they worked with and belonged to” (1992:232). Such group interactions helped develop identities “as railroaders.” Identity, then, is not only affected by the actual work but also by the sharing of stories, jokes, and nicknames; the sharing further cements individuals together as a group.

The two main divisions of river guides’ stories or storytelling events, on-river and off-river stories, differ not only because of audience makeup (passengers while on river and other guides while off river), but also in purpose. Drawing on existing scholarship and a number of interviews, I have previously concluded that on-river stories can be used for entertainment, teaching passengers about the history or geology of an area, and to manipulate passenger behavior—often constructing a sense of danger or urgency so passengers will behave in a certain way (Paxton 2006). Jonas, along with exploring on-river storytelling which covers much of the same ground I did, also explores off-river storytelling; her focus, however, is the construction of individual guide identity as competent or outstanding. She also covers the ways that stories relate the expertise, qualifications, and adventurous spirit of the guide, thereby reaffirming a guide’s identities to the guide himself, other guides, and passengers. Off-river stories do not cater to passenger entertainment; rather, as Jonas suggests, they reiterate guides’ identity as river guide. Jonas notes that because commercial guiding is seasonal, guides must renew their
identity as river guide while in the “real world” because it is a lifestyle they are not currently living (1997). A guide identity is not always readily used or available in the “real” world; storytelling is one situation that confirms guides’ identities. Telling stories reminds the guides and those with whom they associate that guiding is an important aspect of their lives. Along with affirming individual identity, river stories “ensure commonality of experience among river runners” (1997:180).

Because storytelling seems to be an inherent characteristic of river guides I further Jones’ notion that storytelling affirms guides’ identity by focusing on how it affects and even creates community or shared identity in this folk group. Stories essentially provide validation of guides’ experiences and identity. They are a venue for guides to share part of who they are; they provide opportunities to develop a shared notion of folklore, folklife, and occupational identity.

It is not, however, just story content that creates community among potentially very different members in these occupational groups. The actual telling, the behavior of the “storyteller” and the “story listener” during narrative events, illustrates social roles and social identities as well (Georges 1990). Both the storyteller and the story listener have expectations of themselves and of others. The teller is expected to convey a story, through words and body language, which the listener hears, interprets, and responds to—usually kinesthetically. The interaction is cyclical because the storyteller, upon receiving the feedback, must respond, affecting the narration, reiteration, emphasis, or even the message of the story (Georges 1969). As the storyteller and the story listener continue to interact, they “shape the message jointly” (1969:322) which intensifies until the telling/listening is over. This whole process, says Georges, “generates its own unique
systems of social and psychological forces" and affects both the storytelling environment and those who created the environment (1969:322).

The cycle of narration and feedback stems from both the roles people expect to play (teller or listener) during the storytelling event as well as the ways the narrator and audience normally relate (Georges 1990). Identity is revealed in storytelling behaviors because people assume multiple roles at the same time (storyteller as well as more daily roles). People are more than just storytellers or story listener during a narrative event because their interactions and general behavior are “based on their knowledge of, and expectations about, what behaviors are required by appropriate to (1) those communicative roles and (2) who they conceive themselves and each other to be” (1990:56). People cannot ignore the circumstances of the telling nor can they ignore their unique knowledge and identity.

Guides perform and relate identity not only while they work but through off-river story swapping. Their swapping and narrative behaviors illustrate much of the previously reviewed folklore theory about roles and shared identity while refuting certain aspects, specifically that narrative roles are rigid.

Storytelling is not the only way to develop or maintain individual or shared identity; there are many. My focus on off-river story-telling, however, shows, that story swapping or interposing generates shared identity. In regard to stories and identity, Jonas focuses on storytelling’s ability to reinforce individual qualifications and identity: guides tell stories to show their expertise. She also hints at the notion of stories bonding guides together off-river but leaves the idea generally unexplored. My thesis picks up this notion and further illustrates that swapping stories—interposing them by telling,
hearing, interrupting, joining in, and retelling—proliferates shared identity and develops the kind of cohesion that Long portrays.

By focusing on off-river story swapping, I show that the work place is not the only place that shared occupational identity is developed, performed, or professed. Off-river sharing is important for guides because many people spend much of their year off river. The actual river guiding season typically lasts from three to seven months; very few guide year-round. Because, as scholars such as Oring (1994), Abrahams (2003), and Noyes (2003) claim, shared identity is created through interactions and performed folklore, guides need a way of continuing the performance and retaining their identity when off river. It is necessary, then, to engage in ways, other than work, of developing and reaffirming river guide aspects identity. Sharing experiences and reminiscing about the river—done in various off situations as Englehard (2004) notes—can reinforce both individual identity and group community.

It is the intersection of personal identities—interactions and experiences—that creates the group community or collective identity and provides a way to share experiences, thus modifying, creating or maintaining shared identity (Oring 1994). The manner that river guides assume storytelling roles illustrates their personal and social, or in this case occupational, identities. Stories, whose content group members can identify with and are also told in a manner that blends narration or narrative roles, further generate community and collective identity because of the acts of sharing and interposing stories. The ways that guides interact while telling and listening collectively highlight what they identify with as guides display communal aspects of the storytelling event and the participants themselves.
Even with the admission that narrative roles are affected by personal identity, scholars traditionally presume fairly rigid narrating roles (teller or listener): despite responding to the narrator, the listener leaves the telling to the teller (Georges 1990). River guides, however, seem to ignore this norm by interrupting and joining in the telling, taking over a story or redirecting the path that swapped tales seem to be following. One guide might begin to relate a story to a group of guides. Part way through another guide may interrupt him, adding in her perceptions or thoughts, or even going so far as to make up dialogue or actions for the story’s characters. The original narrator may then pick the story back up, or it may flow another direction with the interrupter or someone else telling a different, but generally related, story. The creation of multiple narrators generally sidetracks the story from the original tale into another and can even break the story swapping into a discussion for a few moments before someone begins narrating again.

In other words, rather than maintaining distinct teller/listener roles, river guides tend to allow multiple narrators. In interrupting each other and interposing thoughts, attitudes, and stories, they change the direction of the story and allow listeners to become narrators and narrators to become listeners. They blend narrator-audience roles.

Essentially, guides share both the story and the narration itself. Aside from changing a story’s authorship from individual to communal, this kind of sharing brings group members together because they are not only affected by the content of swapped stories but by the acts of interrupting and joining. Identities that the story or stories have the potential to create become available to those who hear them and to a greater degree to those who participate in the telling.
In 2006 I interviewed, both in person and by phone, more than a dozen guides who work for various companies based in Moab, Utah: O.A.R.S., Sheri Griffith Expeditions, Adrift Adventures, World Wide River Expeditions, Western Rivers Expeditions, and Navtec Expeditions. The guides had all been in the business for varying lengths of time, from very few seasons to nearly thirty years. Some of them bought, started, or managed companies, and most have guided on multiple rivers but are, at least currently, focused on the Green and Colorado rivers. What I have selected to present are two interviews that illustrate my argument and thesis: that shared identity can be created by the content of swapped river stories and also through blending narrative roles.

During many of my interviews I sometimes found that the interactions between the guide and myself changed from interviewer-informant to guide-guide when I was given moments to share my own experiences. During those moments the roles of interviewer-informant (or story listener-storyteller) became overshadowed by other aspects of our identities: the fact that we had guided. The stories foreground guide identity over narrative roles, allowing for the creation of mutual understanding and bonding as a pair or group based solely on occupation—river life.

Part of my interview with Michele Wurth illustrates the performance of a shared identity based upon this ability to connect with each other and the river life by swapping stories. I met Michele the Sunday morning in September, 2006 that I interviewed her at Mondo’s Café in Moab. Sheri Griffith, founder of the socially progressive and upscale Sheri Griffith Expeditions, had given me her name during an interview because both Michele and her husband had guided for years in and around the Moab area and had then
settled in Moab after “retiring” from the river. Michele had guided commercially for five years—three for Sheri Griffith and two for a non-commercial youth-centered program.

Michele and I began the interview as most are conducted: interviewer and informant, student and expert. We had, as Georges says of storytelling, certain roles to adhere to, each with its own expectation and “duties” (1969). These roles persisted until I began voicing my own experiences. After Michele started telling stories and I joined in, swapping my tales with hers, our guide identities, which had been overshadowed by traditional interview roles, became more evident because of the knowledge and experience we shared, evident in not only the content but the language of the stories. Here, as with Brie’s story and in the interview to come, the language used has occupation-specific definitions, as noted by the many footnotes. The foreshadowing of our guide identities through experiences and language began to transform our interactions into dialogue or conversation rather than a question-answer mode. We created a bond or relationship through the swapping of stories.

The following quotations illustrate the difference between the tones of the interviewer-informant relationship and the guide-guide relationship. The first excerpt begins with a question and moves into a short exchange or dialogue in which Michele recognizes me as a guide, as someone who knows at least the workings of the company I worked for. The interaction, however, is still interviewer-informant because I, as the interviewer, am primarily asking questions and Michele, as the interviewee, is primarily answering them.
Lisa: Do you find that guides share a lot of political philosophies?

Michele: Yeah. Anything liberal. Definitely where I worked. There are different companies that have different cultures that attracts more similar. I think that every place starts to attract their own similar group. Otherwise you wouldn’t feel comfortable doing trips together, if you’re all totally different. Although Eric who has my similar views, you know way left, he’d done some trips for Steve [my boss and the owner of World Wide River Expeditions] and it worked out great, but he’s able to come together. You’re still guides, no matter where you are on the spectrum, political, religious, music. You’re still out there guiding sharing that, so I think that’s an interesting spot that people mix that normally wouldn’t mix too much, which is cool. I think that Eric liked those trips a lot.

Lisa: Did he work for Steve very often or just on occasion?

Michele: I wish I could remember. He wasn’t on full-time for Steve. You could talk to Steve Hazlett about Eric Trembule. Ask him; I just know he did a few. Do they do triple rigs, I can’t remember.

Lisa: No, they do S- rigs.

Michele: Mmm, S-rigs. You’d have to ask them. Eric worked for a lot of people, so I don’t know.

Lisa: I’ll ask them about Eric.

Michele: He guided for fifteen years. He worked all over the place. And definitely more of a guide. Sheri might have said that I was interesting, but he was-a-guide.

Lisa: So, what does that mean?

Michele: Super into it. I mean really, I think, like we’re talking Steve Haase, Dave Lyle, Eric Thompson, Michele Hill... these people that have been doing it...it is their life’s work. They identify with it a lot.

Even though Michele and I veer a little away from question-answer mode as she takes the conversation where she wants, we still do not connect or create bonds. We simply have nothing to really share at this point. I am, for the most part, asking questions while Michele answers.

This next transcript shows an interaction that directly followed a few stories we had swapped (see Appendix A). Michele related the carnage\(^\text{12}\) she had caused during a careless moment in Desolation Canyon on the Green River. In a moment of relaxation on a flat section, she had not noticed a low, sharp rock and floated over it, tearing a large (foot by foot) “L” in the boat’s floor. She had had to spend the evening patching the boat.

\(^{12}\) Carnage is any damage to boats, equipment or people. Carnage is generally the result of a bad run through rapids when equipment is either lost or damaged, but it can happen during calm moments as well.
and broke two of the three needles as she began stitching; it was nerve wracking to say
the least. “I break one more needle and we’re done,” she said. There would be no way to
fix that or any other tear, and it would be nearly impossible to navigate the river with
such a slash in the floor.

I then related a story that also took place in Desolation Canyon but on Coal Creek
Rapid instead of the flat section near Rock Creek. The water was low, and as I
positioned myself to enter the rapid, I hit a submerged rock with my oar and popped it out
of the oar lock. I could not shove it back into place because the pin, which looks like a
large hook, was tight and did not fit well, and I could not stop mid-rapid to try to force it
in. Perhaps it was because of this, perhaps it was not, but I found myself in the wrong
place on the rapid and after passing by the worst part, saw three rocks in my path, the last
of which I could not avoid, so I lined up to hit it head on, hoping to bounce off it and not
wrap. The bounce was slow and the front few feet of the boat perched atop the rock for
a few seconds before I maneuvered off. Like Michele I skirt a nightmarish outcome.
Michele escaped a nasty fate of a large hole and no needles; I narrowly avoided my fears
of wrapping my boat or tearing a large, most likely unpatchable hole in my boat.

From our years spent guiding, experiencing the stories we told, Michele and I had
previously, independently developed “river identity.” McCarl says that “The complex of
techniques, customs, modes of expressive behavior which characterize a particular work
group comprises its occupational folklife” (1978:145). We had both learned and
developed folk knowledge and folklore about river guides through working and living as
river guides. However, sharing the identity that we had each developed independently

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13 Wrapping boats is bad because the current, in a sense, glues the boat sideways to the rock. Rescuing
wrapped boats is time-consuming and sometimes dangerous.
needed to be done through performance, because as Noyes says, “The community exists in its collective performances” (2003:30). Telling stories—and participating in each others’ stories—not merely talking about the river is key. The content of our stories shows that we both could deal with the sometimes rough consequences of working on the river. Michele proves that she had the skills to patch a rather bad tear, while my story provides details of my wherewithal to assess a situation and maneuver my boat. The context of using each skill verifies our knowledge of it and our ability to use it. But it is the stories, not simply the skills, which allow us to share the river guide identity while not on the river. Off-river sharing of identity, because it must exist in performance, requires more than professed folk knowledge; it needs proof. Relating folklife or knowledge through stories fulfills the requirement of community creation by or through performance. The actual performance, the way we narrate, is telling. Because we interrupt each other, blending narrative teller-listener roles, we further share the related experience and the identity it professes.

Noyes’ notion of community existing in or through collective performance verifies my adaptations on storytelling theories that center on rigid roles. Narrators and listeners do not have to be separate. Michele and I interrupt each other, blending narration and sharing the telling of the story. The following transcription illustrates this point. It is the conversation that occurred directly after the exchange of stories.

**Michele:** Lucky it [the rock] wasn’t sharp, right.
**Lisa:** Yeah, no it was pretty rounded. A rounded rock, but I was so scared. My passengers thought the rock was going to come through. I’m like, “Get ready for a bump.”
**Michele-** They’re like, “I’m not ready for a little bump; I’ll go swimming right now.”
**Lisa-** It wasn’t a huge rock; it was about a foot and a half out of the water, it was pointed enough but rounded. You could see where it pushed us, and I thought
“Oh my Gosh, this could be really really really bad,” and the other girl I was with was like, “Lisa, you made me so nervous.” I was like, “I made myself nervous.” She said, “Don’t do that to me again.”

**Michele:** That was smart, though, good training that you knew not to go sideways. Because you can do something with one oar. Good to not park it sideways.

Note how in this short passage our exchange changes from the question-response mode of the first transcript to discussing the situation and interacting *with* the story. Michele even *joins* in the telling of my story (lines 5-6) by making up passengers’ reactions to the situation, “They’re like ‘I’m not ready for a little bump; I’ll go swimming right now’” by using indirect reported speech. This allows Michele to participate in the telling. By interrupting my story, she is showing that she indeed understands the type of situation I am relating. Our stories are the means by which we accept each other as legitimate members of the folk group that had existed in Moab for decades.

This next transcript further illustrates how our shared river guide identity is highlighted and enacted as we discuss the stories we tell and even join in or interrupt each other’s stories. Near the end of our conversation Michele told stories that she classified as “guide-based”—about guides rather than passengers, rapids or the work itself. (*see Appendix B*) I followed by lapsing into my own related stories and soon we were discussing my tale (*see Appendix C*). A guide on a trip I was leading had asked to switch from a paddle boat to the oar rig.14 She’d never rowed this rapid before but had “paddle-captained” it multiple times a week all summer. She parked the oar rig on a rock just below the surface.15

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14 Paddle boats have no frame; the guide sits at the back and steers/rudders with a paddle while passengers paddle. *Oar rigs, see note 3, are manned by one guide.*

15 Got stuck, much like wrapping, but generally easier to dislodge.
**Michele:** Getting wrapped; sometimes you’re just wrapped; the water level changes.

**Lisa:** It was under the water. Apparently you can get wrapped on those; I felt so bad because I was in charge.

**Michele:** You’re like, “Here, try it; it’ll be great.”

**Lisa:** “You’ve been paddle boating all season, you know how to run the rapid; I don’t care.” It was Whites at low water.

**Michele:** Right.

**Lisa:** All you have to do is make sure you don’t hit stuff on the right.

**Michele:** It’s interesting because it’s never “just.”

**Lisa:** Yeah; you always have to respect it

**Michele:** Because you could get messed up anywhere.

Here, Michele and I talk about this rapid and then the idea of respecting the water.

Line 5 shows that Michele is sharing my story as she again joins in the telling, this time putting thoughts or words into my mouth instead of hypothetical passengers’ mouths.

Line 12 also demonstrates the connection we had begun to develop as she literally interrupts me, finishing the thought of why the water must be respected, “Because you could get messed up anywhere.”

With this and the previous transcript, Michele and I break down narrator-audience roles typical of storytelling. The interview ceases to be her narrating and me listening; we take turns narrating, we interrupt and finish the other’s thoughts, we share the stories and narration. Thus in sharing, the stories provide a common ground upon which to build a relationship. Even though we had never met before, we both know the particular rapid well, understand the frustration in getting stuck on a rock, and feel a respect for the river. All of this is relatable through stories and is then further developed by the conversations that follow. Story falls into story, then understanding and back into story again.

**Michele:** At least she [the girl from the previous story] was below for pictures. I’ve had a pretty epic one; it was at forty thousand.

**Lisa:** Oh wow; I’ve never seen it that big.
Michele: I hadn’t either and I flipped there. We were coming down Westwater; it was a four day trip and had rowed the daily hardly.

Lisa: Yeah.

Michele: I’m like “The Daily, whatever. I just came off Westwater. It was all flushed out.”

Lisa: Right.

Michele: “Still, I can row this.” And you know the popcorn stuff that’s not a continuous wave emerging?

Lisa: Yeah.

Michele: I went to square and it came from the side and chhhh. My husband, my boyfriend at the time, he’s like, “I saw your pictures,” and I thought “Oh that’s the tragic thing about working the daily. All your exploits are on film.”

Lisa: Then they have that party every year and they go through the pictures, and

Michele: Oh, the highlights.

Lisa: And you get to see everybody’s flips and stuff. There were some Cat guides from Western that flipped on Whites last year in oar boats. If you flip a paddle boat, you flip a paddle boat. If you flip an eighteen-foot oar rig, that’s impressive. Yeah, they got hounded pretty bad.

Michele: If it’s on film, you can see how unsquare you are how your oars are grabbing air. All there for you. Oh, look, I was completely sideways.

Lisa: Yeah, yeah, “That was that the bad decision on my part.”

Michele: That’s what happens when you go sideways.

Lisa: There were some good pictures too. Luckily none of my hair-ball runs seem to get on there. I paddle-boated it backwards once.

Michele: Alright, those are good skills. Personally I’d rather go down a trip with people who have flipped before because someone who hasn’t doesn’t know how to recover as well. Real guides have done all that before. They know how to fix boats, how to unwrap, how to turn back over, how to logically get your boat and your things back together, all those things. I don’t think it’s a scourge to have flips on your record; it’s like “Oh great, you’ve experienced that. Now you know how to recover.” Good times. (Pause) So you’re still guiding?

During this last story Michele and I again join in each other’s stories, making comments about them, imagining the situation as if we had been there too. Line 16 shows me trying to connect to her story by jumping in at the end of it and taking it elsewhere with a side comment, “Then they have that party every year and they go through the pictures,” to which Michele immediately responds to. We then allow the conversation to flow that direction. Because we both participate in the story, both being narrating and listening, the performance of stories becomes the platform for generating
shared identity in addition to the actual substance of the stories. It is not merely what we share that creates shared identity but how we perform. It isn’t even until after swapping the stories that Michele asks whether I am a current guide or not. Status does not matter in terms of creating a bond or cohesion with her, rather the ability to swap stories, experiences or ideas is what matters.

* 

In March of 2005 I conducted a group interview to explore the uses of guides’ on-river stories. I do not include it for what specifically is being said but because the conversation illustrates how exchanging occupational stories—even short ones—constructs and foregrounds shared identity, even in very off-river situations, and even though most of the participants did not work together. Only two (Ryan Stucki and I) had actually worked together. The rest of the participants met and associated with each other not because of guiding but through their social network in Logan, Utah, where they were all either currently or had recently been attending Utah State University. All except one had spent at least one summer river guiding. Morgan Edwards (Mo), Ryan Stucki, and I had lived in Moab, Utah, and guided mostly on the Colorado; Mo, however, had worked a summer that neither Stucki nor I had. Meagan Chadwick rowed on the Mersaid River in California, and Seth Flanigan guided on the Snake River just outside Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Cody Clark, Seth’s roommate, never guided commercially. Many of his friends have guided, and he had previously heard many river stories and thus had a cursory knowledge of the situations and circumstances the group discusses.

Cody provides a reference for the group’s previous social interactions and relationships. He is quite vocal at the beginning of the interview, indicating an ease in
talking and joking among friends, but as those who have guided start recounting stories and sharing their experiences, they construct different bonds than those their friendship had already established. There is a level of acceptance and understanding that Cody cannot reach. He has no specific stories to tell and eventually cannot participate fully in the conversation.

In the section below, the primary identities highlighted among the group are those of friends and social equals. In this context Cody is vocal and people respond to him.

Meagan: When I think of stories on the river, my favorite stories, well, they’re not necessarily a story, they’re more a—my favorite thing is when people ask stupid questions.

Cody: Like “Do we end up in the same spot?”

Meagan: That’s a good one

Stucki: Like when…

Cody: …is this a loop?

Stucki: We get that.

Meagan: Which way do we go?

Cody: When you get in the river and it’s only one way, “Which way do we go?”

Meagan: The other funny one we get is they ask if we turned the waterfalls off at night.

Lisa laughs.

Cody: Do you ever have people ask if there’s sharks in the water?

Meagan: No, we never got that.

Cody: There’s some of those in Jackson.

Meagan: What else? Oh. Yeah, those are my favorite ones. Those are the two best I got is, “Which way do we go?” and “Do they turn the waterfalls off at night?” I was like, “Are you kidding me?”

Cody: One of these days just for fun you should be like, “We go that way.” And point up stream and watch ‘em all try to paddle.

Meagan: I’m like “Aaaaaahhh” (mimics people paddling frantically)

Cody: “Go forward faster. Ah, this is going to be a long trip.”

This exchange shows the ease of conversation among all group members. They interrupt each other or join in each other’s anecdotes or hypothetical scenarios (lines 4-7 and 20-24), and there seems to be general camaraderie since everyone but me is talking and laughing. I was trying to remain in the background and capture the group’s thoughts.
As the conversation progresses, certain social identities ("friends") of the group gradually become back-grounded and their "river guide" identities become foregrounded. As those who have similar occupational experiences to share do so, Cody gradually disappears from the conversation. Although he has some cursory knowledge and still makes a few comments, his lack of river guide identity does not allow him to participate in the storytelling and banter in the same manner as the rest of the group.

Stucki: So I was thinking. I don’t know if I could think of a story right off the top of my head. But I do tell stories all the time and talk a lot on the river, so that’s weird,

Someone laughs

Stucki: But um here’s what I was going to say. My favorite stories to tell is like if I’m like when I’m taking a paddle boat down Cataract Canyon or Westwater, then I want to get my passengers really pumped to, like, paddle good, and so, I think it’s kind of a tricky thing though, because I try to tell them stories that’ll help them to paddle good. And so sometimes it’s like a fine balance between like freaking them out too much and freaking them out just enough so they’ll paddle and do what you say.

Meagan: Oh, yeah, I agree with that.

Stucki: Um, like I think that’s the funnest you start telling them stories about... getting scared.

Meagan: The Magnetic Wall.\(^{16}\) She laughs

Stucki: Get them a little bit scared, yeah. The Magnetic Wall and get them, like, get them a little worried and like...

Meagan laughs

Stucki: Sometimes they just get more excited and want to flip, and so then you’ve got to like notch it up a little bit and tell them some horror stories, you know, and like you got to get them a little scared.

Lisa: Do you ever exaggerate to the point where it’s not specifically true?

Stucki: Oh, I—

Lisa: Like, they say Cat guides are liars.

Stucki: I don’t really lie too much. I exaggerate, for sure. I’m Cody: Is there a difference?

Stucki: The more times I tell a story, the better it gets...

Cody: The hole was thirteen feet wide.

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\(^{16}\) The Magnetic Wall is a sloped rock at the base of Sock-It-To-Me, a rapid in Westwater Canyon on the Colorado River. The current pushes boats into and sometimes up on the Magnetic Wall. My older sister was knocked unconscious during her training trip because the guide-in-training ran into the Wall and the guide in the next boat followed too close and while trying to avoid the Wall, hit her head with his oar.
**Stucki:** But part of the reason it gets better is because I get better at telling the story and I kind of emphasize stuff or exaggerate a little bit more, but I don’t lie too much. That was a good question.

In this exchange, Cody tries to keep himself in the conversation, but his attempts are largely futile. In line 26 he asks a rhetorical question about lies and stories to keep pushing the conversation in a direction in which he can participate, but Stucki simply continues his thoughts, perhaps not even hearing Cody’s comment. Later, in line 28, Cody again interrupts and tries to join in the sharing by making up a hypothetical lie that guides might claim, “The hole was thirteen feet wide,” but again, his attempt is rejected or glanced over as Stucki persists in his narration. Even though Cody tries to participate in the discussion and tried to blend narrative roles, his lack of experience or folk knowledge inhibits this; his comments are ignored. Whereas before the guide identities emerged, Cody did influence the conversation, the guides instead listen to Stucki, who does have experiences to share. Cody’s attempts to share with the group here do not develop shared identity because they do not affect the telling of the story. Stucki is still the narrator and Cody, for all his attempts to alter his role, remains listener. His inability to share in the narration reflects his lack of folk knowledge. He does not share their occupational identity. Interruptions between Michele and me, on the other hand, generated shared identity because they were not ignored; we responded to and built upon them.

Cody’s outsider status, although unstated or unacknowledged by the group, becomes even more apparent during later moments of the interview when he only asks questions and sits silently for stretches of time while others swap stories. He is further removed from teller rolls, reacting solely a listener. In the following example, Cody asks
questions for which he needs clarification but the others do not—like specification of a rapid’s name and location. He is like everyone else, an audience member, but unlike the guides, he is not a knowledgeable listener. His feedback denotes a lack of understanding that the others possess, so although his question elicits a quick response, it does not affect the overall narration, and he does not participate equally with those who are knowledgeable listeners or narrators. The following story is a “what guides do on their day off” story, from early June Of 2005, that I tell other guides and sometimes passengers.

Lisa: I tell the Four-Stack Friday story.
Stucki: Yeah. *laughs.*
Cody: Four-Stack Friday?
Lisa: Yeah. We took four sixteen-foot paddle boats (*people laugh*) and we stacked them on top of each other and strapped them together and went down White’s.
Megan: You did?
Lisa: Yeah. It was so fun.
Stucki: *(interrupting)* and it just rolled.
Lisa: We were all in the river.
Cody: Did they stay together?
Lisa: Yeah, they were strapped together, so you don’t want to hit the first hole in Whites, right? And—
Cody: How did you steer?
Lisa: We took ducky paddles, you know, the big, long, kayak-like paddles
Meagan laughs.
Lisa: ... and we just stuck them over the side so that they could catch the current. I mean, you couldn’t paddle in this thing. We were so high; it was just really really hard to even get going in White’s Lake. I mean, it didn’t want to get in the current. We kept going into the side of the river into the bank. And so we finally got going.
Cody: Were you on there Stucki?
Stucki: No. I just saw pictures.
Lisa: No. Stucks wasn’t there. Western and another company had just passed
where we were so they were like going really slow purposely so they could, like, see what would happen. I mean here’s a bunch of nutty river guides in Speedos and cowboy hats going down a four stack. And you don’t want to hit the first hole because it’s a big pour-over. It wasn’t too bad at that point in time. You could hit it just fine, but normally you don’t.
Seth: Especially not with a four stack.
My story continued detailing how our boat spun and spun as a few guides and my boss’s son tried to come up while my cousin was able to climb up on top when it finished rolling, but by this point in the conversation, Cody’s role during this story is quite different than the rest of the group’s. Whereas in the previous example, Cody is still making comments and trying to participate, in this example he only asks question and seeks clarification. In line 14 he asks how we steered the stack of boats. His cursory knowledge told him that neither rowing nor steering with a regular paddle would have worked, but he hadn’t thought of using a ducky paddle to catch the current. The answer to another question, “Did they [the boats] stay together,” (line 11) for example, was obviously yes; we had strapped them together, which I had already noted. Because he lacked river experience, he did not realize that once strapped together, boats will stay together until unstrapped except in extreme circumstances, which I would have mentioned on the outset of the story because such a situation would have been unexpected and therefore an imperative detail. Those who had guided knew all this and had no need to ask such questions there. Once again, Cody’s actions and the groups’ reactions denote that his relationship with the group is quite different from everyone else. While he is still communicates through his “friend” identity, the rest of us had switched to a river guide identity.

In contrast, Seth’s interactions demonstrate that bonds alternative to those based on previous friendships, like those based on occupational folklore, can be highlighted even when the group primarily associates through social networks. Although Seth enters into the conversation late, he immediately joins the discussion, interjects comments and stories, and relates to the rest of the guides.
Mo: Or there’s the little thing, you know the swallows’ nests that are stuck with mud on the side of the canyon. I’d be like, because I heard someone do this to another group, I’d be like “Yeah, a group of boy scouts came down and thought they’d make some homes for the birds.”

Meagan laughs.
Seth walks in.
Mo: “And had stuck them on the wall” and they’d be like, “Ha-ha. Is that true?” ‘Cause some people are like “Oh, really,” I’m like, “No. I’m just kidding.”

Meagan: “No, you idiot.”
Mo: Like things, just kind of either make fun of other people or like the story, like the kids who like those little sayings you drew for kids or something, thought that the raft was on a track and that you were going in a circle. ‘Cause they didn’t, like. ‘Cause I tell people things like that because they thought was really funny.
Seth: I think that’s definitely river guide folklore.
Mo: Yeah, because you’d be like, well I heard this. Or, sometimes, I probably just say, like, well I’ve had these say this but really never have.
Meagan laughs.
Lisa: So what we’re finding is that river guides are a bunch of liars?
Mo: You can, though. You can lie all you want.
Seth: (cuts in)—some people don’t know any better.
Mo: It’s not easy though.
Stucki: Usually if I tell a blatant lie, I usually tell them after it that it was a lie.
Meagan: That’s nice of you. Laughs.
Cody: At least they know not to trust you now.
Seth: It’s always really fun to make sure that everybody else on the boat knows that the person that asks that question is a fool. To make sure that they understand it. Like that rivers flow up hill.
Lisa: Oh, yes they do.
Seth: And that there isn’t a certain elevation that elk turn into deer.

The conversation continues with banter about what kinds of stories guides refrain from telling passengers. Again, Seth engages in the conversation because he has the ability to share in the stories and thus share a river guide identity. As the group shares individual experiences, creating a shared identity, there is further proof that the bonds these experiences create are based upon the occupational folklore and not upon their previous friendship. Because he joins the conversation, voicing his opinion so much without asking what exactly is going on, I ask Seth whether he had guided or not.

Lisa: Seth, did you guide?
Seth: Up in Jackson last summer.
Lisa: I didn’t know that. Well welcome to the conversation. I’m so glad that you’re here.

*Seth moves from the door to the couch and sits next to Mo.*

I knew Seth was interested in forestry but I had not known that he had guided in Jackson Hole the previous summer. His ability to join in the conversation so convincingly prompted me to wonder at the source of his knowledge. Despite my need to verify his knowledge (my goal for the interview was to hear what guides, not their friends, had to say about stories), the mere fact that he was able to interpose his thoughts and stories and participate equally shows that Seth’s guiding identity was indeed believable.

As seen particularly with the difference between Seth’s and Cody’s relationships to the others, it is during the interaction of stories—the telling, interrupting and joining in—that the friends portrays the construction a collective identity based upon occupation. They agree on what types of stories are and are not acceptable to tell passengers, something that is beyond Cody’s cursory knowledge but is evident to everyone else. The group evolved toward sharing identity as they moved from regular conversation and side-quips at the beginning of the interview to storytelling, during which the occupationally-based shared identity overshadows that of the friendships formed in Logan.

Stucki’s interruptions exemplify the importance of not only subject matter, but also of communal narration. He adds a quick detail and more specific action to the narration of my four-stack narrative, even though he did not experience it. Having worked together all summer, Stucki and I had already shared many river stories and had created bonds because of them. My story, in a sense, became his. Communal stories—
those told by multiple narrators or those told by people who did not experience or witness
the tale—also show guides’ attitude toward collective identity: sharing is expected.

The idea of this is illustrated in the preface one contributor gives in Engelhard’s
collection.

It sounded like just another river story, with the usual variations. But it came up
again and again. In the plain light of day or the dead of night, in letters, on
postcards and shredded cocktail napkins, in bathrooms and bars an moving cars,
on epic hikes or casual strolls, in The Canyon, or on the road, people were talking
about an apparently historical takeout. This seemed strange to me. A story about
a takeout? And when I finally realized that large numbers of storytellers (thirty­
four at last count) claimed vehemently to have been on this takeout, my curiosity
got the better of me. Obviously all these people could not have been in the
vehicle in question on that fateful day. As anyone who has ridden in the Grey
Ghost knows, it can hold six, perhaps eight boatmen and their gear in some degree
of comfort. Add a dependable driver—if you can find one—and that’s all, folks.
(Welch)

The tale then follows, but it is interesting to note that its veracity is not diminished by the
fact that so many people honestly think they own the story. After all, as Vincent himself
admits, “these were stories from the river, and the truth—I knew—lay in the telling”
(225).

The idea of stories with multiple “owners” or tellers is further exhibited in the tale
that Stucki relates below. The actual telling of a story does not require the whole
experience to personally have been his. The group does not question his knowledge or
my interruptions. Stucki had made the story his own by hearing, adapting, and retelling
it. It then becomes available to the others to tell at their own discretion.

Stucki: I get reminded of stories. I think it’s funny, like when other river
companies have carnage.
Lisa: Yeah, true
Others laugh.
Stucki: Like...
Cody: Glorify your own business
Seth: And you always tell them about other river companies even if it was your company. Make sure it (others laugh-interrupt him)
Stucki: Like just reminded me of the time when, I was sitting right there at White’s because I was supposed to direct the duckies to miss the first hole, and while I was sitting there waiting for the duckies to come down, then Western came down. And they had an overnight trip. And they had this, like, really experienced guide rowing and 18-foot row boat, fully loaded with all this gear; flipped it in Whites and then the next boat that comes through. Another big, huge guy, a row assist boat 17 just goes right in. Flips that one too. They had crap floating all over the place. Like, Lisa: They didn’t tie it down.
Stucki: It was the craziest thing ever. Like two boats right in a row, on the daily section. They were both like experienced guides. Cody: Is that Whites, the daily section? Someone nods. Okay.
Meagan: Oh my gosh.
Stucki: and I mean, especially since the boat was loaded and, like, a row boat. That’s hardest thing in the world to flip, and uh, yeah they flipped ‘em both.
Cody: So White’s is the rapid right off there off Red Cliffs?
Stucki: Yeah.
Cody: Okay.
Stucki: Yeah, ’cause it used to be White’s Ranch; now it’s Red Cliff’s Ranch. And then the other funny thing about it is that some of the other river guides like Acey. They were over at Aarchway.
Meagan laughs.
Stucki: They were over at Aarchway, sitting in the hot tub and several Western guides were over there also, and they didn’t recognize and these guys. So they’re sitting there talking about it and they were making, like, all kinds of stupid excuses. And they were just like the, the, this big, ya know, muscular guy that had flipped his row boat in whites, he was like “Dude, Whites is an un-runnable hole right now.” Blah blah blah. Like all this stuff, they were making all kinds of excuses. And then after Acey and those guys had listened to it long enough, they were just like “You guys are dumb, man. Our friend, man, he saw you guys flip those boats. You guys just suck.” So that’s funny. There’s plenty of pictures on the Internet of that too. Actionshots was taking pictures of their crap floating down river. It took them all the way until sandy beach, which is like way the freak down there, like over a mile before they got all their stuff all gathered up and everything.

17 A paddle boat where the guide, rather than ruddering, sits on a small frame at the back of the boat and assists the passengers paddling with oars. Our assists are nice with a boat full of people who do not have the strength to paddle well through rapids.
This story is not solely Stucki's. Part of it was Acey's, because it was Acey who spoke with the Cataract Canyon guides in the hot tub at Aarchway Inn. Stucki incorporated this part of the narrative into his bank of stories, and although he credits Acey as having experienced it, the complete tale is Stucki's. He appropriated Acey's experience into his own story, connecting the two parts to create an experience they “shared.” His further telling it, my interruption, and everyone else's acceptance of the communal tale show the process by which stories develop a shared identity. Stories are not simply told; they can be incorporated, adapted, retold and molded to fit the narrator and conversation. Sharing the story gives it a communal sense and connects the guides' experiences and identities.

The sharing of this story actually continued during my conversation with Michele Wurth. I made a brief reference to this very story as we discussed “carnage” on White’s rapid being caught on film by Action Shots. I had not realized that I had mentioned a swapped or passed along story until I was examining both Michele's and the group’s interviews. I do not recall making the comment, but it shows that guides do, often unconsciously, appropriate each other's stories when they swap tales. The two experienced Cataract Canyon guides flipping in White’s Rapid had become part of my folklore about commercial guides and as such was worthy to share even though neither the experience or story were mine.

The communal aspects of storytelling events—both narrative and narration—indeed provide a way for guides to create collective identity. The group interview primarily illustrates that even though we are all friends, the sharing of occupational folklore, stories about questions passengers ask and about adventures on a certain rapid,
create a different way for us to relate. We are primarily friends but in this ability to relate in another way, we also share something unique, an identity that not all of the friends in our social network share. We share occupational identity, and we do it through swapping and interposing stories.

Conclusion

When shared, river stories can help guides relate to each other and thus build community. Because folk groups exist in shared performances, the stories (related performances of folklife) establish group members as sharers of the folk knowledge and folklore they know. For river guides it is the “river life” or simply “the river.” Shared stories, such as Brie’s, can affect a group’s behavior and attitude; they can reaffirm individual identity and establish the groundwork for sharing previously attained identity, as with Michele Wurth. They can also act as agent for group cohesion—altering the way in which people associate with each other as happened with the group interview. However, it is not simply the content of stories—even “communal” stories—that affects a group’s notion of shared identity but also the manner of narration. The physical act of blending narrative roles denotes shared identity.

Yet, the study of storytelling is generally modeled according to clearly defined narrator-audience roles. Even in studies where the emphasis is on telling or exchanging narratives, these roles largely remain in place. However, when a shared identity is present, the teller-listener roles often blend, creating multiple narrators and allowing participants to simultaneously be audience and narrator. Identities of this nature, instead
of bending to roles, overshadow the expectations and acceptance of rigid narrative roles and are the foreground of interaction rather than the background.

As a story is broken apart and passed around, it is no longer the same narrative originally related. Different narrators incorporate and change it, it becomes communal, or folk, property. This calls into question issues of text and context. The background of a story is not one narrator’s background, and the text is not a simple narration. Examining stories in this light should take into consideration the aspects of identity that the group might share for a more comprehensive exploration of group identity and the complexities of shared content and shared context.

Further, I have concluded that the swapping and interposing of stories is not a phenomenon among only river guides. Most groups, whether occupational, familial or interest-based, tell or swap stories. For some, subject matter is key because they adhere faithfully to narrative roles, but for other groups, whose relations are reflected in and created by their stories, the interposing of multiple narratives is prevalent and should be examined. In these instances the act of storytelling and the roles and manners in which people participate should be considered because they can reveal relationships and shared notions of identity. Given further case studies that illustrate this, folklore theorists may need to adjust traditional conceptions of narrative roles and identity by combining the study of story content and storytelling performance.

Telling stories can reaffirm identity; swapping them can create shared identity; the performance of it all illustrates how different identities are highlighted and enacted.
Guides relate their life—their lore—through stories. A final quote summarizes, in a guide’s, perspective, why they “rehash” their stories.\textsuperscript{18} It also answers why they guide and why they live this lifestyle. This comment comes from Reece Wilson, who is generally never very serious, but as he reflects on why this lifestyle is important to him and why telling stories now and having stories to tell in the future is important, he stops joking and laughing for a few moments. Reece anticipates this seventh guiding season to be his last. Perhaps the somberness stems from that, perhaps not, but whatever the reason for his solemn tone, his passion for the lifestyle is apparent. That is the final common thread in all of these interviews and stories and why guides tell stories in the first place. I have been able to conclude what stories do (create and reaffirm shared identity). The final key—passion—explains why.

If you think about it, these are our glory days. These are the days of our lives that we’ll look back and say “Man, I did that; I did this.” We get older; we start having kids; we move on to a different stage. This is the stage that is the exciting stage. The stage where a lot of dreams happen, a lot of near-death experiences, just where you’re living on the edge a little bit, and you could fall off and die. I think this is the time of our lives [where] you look back, when you’re fifty years old, and you look back at the photo album and your kids are sitting with you, your grandkids, whatever and they say, “Was that you?” That’s the whole reason we live this part of our lives. We want to look back and say there was nothing you didn’t try, nothing you didn’t do. Nothing left unwanted.

\textsuperscript{18} Swap or retell
Appendix A
Interview with Michele Wurth. September 10, 2006 in Moab, Utah.

Lisa: Any carnage stories?
Michele: All the time
Lisa: Favorite carnage story?
Michele: I should tell one about myself to be fair. I can tell lots of carnage stories of other people, but I should tell my own to be fair. We were doing a five-day Deso/Gray trip. It was an AA trip. Not alcoholic anonymous, but America’s Adventure—out of Denver. They do these trips all around America, and we trade around the kids on the paddle boats; sometime you’re on the oar boat, sometimes one of the guides gets a break which means they get to row by themselves. It was finally my turn and I was so excited to get all those twerps off my boat. Half of them didn’t want to be there. It’s different when they don’t want to be there; you don’t want them to be there. I got the twerps off my boat. They’re supposed to learn how to cook; basically they’re burning all the food, you’ve got crap on the bottom of your pans every night, trying to stash your dinner so you can have something to eat that’s not totally burned.

Lisa: Hmmmm.
Michele: You tell them to stir the spaghetti and they do, but just the top so the bottom’s like seaweed. “I told you guys to stir it.” They’re like, “I did.” They don’t know how to slice carrots. One time I said, “Slice the tomatoes,” and they said “How?” and I thought they were like diced or whatever, but they meant “How does one apply a knife to a tomato?” They were from New York; they had maids. They were from Fifth Avenue. They didn’t mean what style; they meant how does one cut a tomato.
Lisa: Wow.
Michele: So it was one of these trips; I finally got the kids off my boat. We were around the corner, do you know where Rock Creek is?
Lisa: Yeah.
Michele: We were around the corner from where Rock Creek was and I wasn’t looking, and I had my feet up on my dry box; I was like this (stretches out, arms behind her head). “Ahhhh,” and all of the sudden the boat stops you here the metal box you’re sitting on, this “CRRRRRR” and the boat turns “CRRRRRR.” Beautiful nice “L” tear. You’re stuck on the rock, wedged the other way. And I couldn’t find the bow line, and I see something like the bow line out, but I was like “How is my bow line out there, but I can’t see it going over the boat. Oh my Gosh, my whole is so big that the rope has gone underneath.” The bow line is underneath the boat; it’s not going over because I have a huge old tear; I started filling with water; it was pretty epic. It wasn’t even in a gnarly thing; I just wasn’t paying attention. Huge tear in my boat. So my husband now, not my husband then, he was on the trip, my best friend was on the trip out from California; she was with us. So we pull over because we have to do some repairs. We take everything out of the boat; everything de-rigged the boat, upside down. You’re hoping that your repair kit is really good at that point and that you go, “Yeah, repair kit.” Luckily our repair kits were always really good at this place that I worked, and I’m talking this by this (shows the dimensions with her two hands: foot by foot). Like an L. That’s a lot of
thread. You want to make sure you have a lot of thread and you’re always breaking needles because that rubber is so thick. I broke two needles. I was down to one needle.

Lisa: Oh no.

Michele: And Eric was looking over my shoulder all the time I was like, “You’re making me nervous; you’re making me nervous. I break one more needle and we’re done. What do I do? I have to keep sewing this rubber.” So we sewed it, and he put patches on each side. It was a really nice patch job; still we had to repair it back at the house, the warehouse, but it was a gigantic tear, had to let it dry overnight. It was kind of epic, but Eric and my friend, Carry, they took the kids did dinner and whole thing. It was like a repair in the book.

That was one. It wasn’t like anything dangerous, totally flat water, nothing going on, just a rock that was sticking out. It was really bad, just not paying attention

Lisa: I had a fun Deso this last year, we went down and I’d only taken a boat down Deso [once] before and it was high enough water that Coal Creek was not a big deal at all. We rowed Coal Creek and I was like, “Wait that was Coal Creek? Where’s the gnarly hole?” I look back, and it didn’t seem as big and gnarly as people had talked about—Deso-sized gnarly not Cat-sized gnarliness. But I entered coal creek this time a little too far center, not far enough right, part of the reason was that my oar popped right when I went in. So I was rowing with my oar half in because it was an oar pin not an oar right. It was too tight for me to put back in, super tight oar pin, and I’m rowing with it, it was my left, with it partly in and oh, like this is great. In front of me I see three rocks. Completely in my way and I thought “There’s no way I can get around these rocks with this oar like this.” And I thought, “If I could get over to the left right there.” This is at the bottom half past the hole and there’s the little house that’s on the side. So we’re passed the worst part, and I’m like “Oh crap, there’s no way; I’ll just line up and bounce off as best I can so I don’t wrap.”

Michele: That’s good.

Lisa: And so I just push against it to get the bounce and we go up and you could just see the rock underneath my boat; I thought it was going to come up at us. I was just ready for this rock to just bust through the floor and I was there for a couple seconds and did a spin-turn, and it was fine, but I really though that rock was going to come through my floor, and it was going to have a hole like a foot wide which would have been, I don’t think we could have done it.

Michele: Lucky it wasn’t sharp, right?

Lisa: Yeah, no it was pretty rounded. A rounded rock, but I was so scared. My passengers thought the rock was going to come through. I’m like, “Get ready for a bump.”

Michele: They’re like “I’m not ready for a little bump; I’ll go swimming right now.”

Lisa: It wasn’t a huge rock; it was about a foot and a half out of the water, it was pointed enough but rounded. You could see where it pushed us, and I thought “Oh my gosh this could be really really really bad,” and the other girl I was with was like “Lisa, you made me so nervous.” I was like, “I made myself nervous” she: “Don’t do that to me again.”

Michele: That was smart, though, good training that you knew not to go sideways.

Because you can do something with one oar. Good to not park it sideways.
Appendix B
Interview with Michele Wurth. September 10, 2006 in Moab, Utah.

Michele: Okay, you know there’s different kinds of boating; there’s creek boating, tight-small, clear water, rocks. Low water, usually. There’s high-volume, big water like we’ve had here. I’m not going to say companies’ names, but we had a guide one time and he’s from back east, a creek-boater, and we were at Westwater. I can’t remember the water levels; I’ve seen them all. I think it might be the teens; I should remember this because I was out there all the time, but when let’s see 13/14 thousand kind of…

Lisa: Bigger but not washed out.

Michele: Not washed out, kind of grabby and kind of big

Lisa: Yeah.

Michele: Gonna kind of mess you up all the time. A lot of chances to mess up, and we’re getting ready to go, and Alvin, I don’t know if he’s still out there, but a ranger, and my clients were already nervous and the guides were nervous, and it kind of makes you bummed when your crew’s nervous. Not only have to buoy up your clients, hold their hands, but the guides are holding it very well. And Alvin, the ranger said, “oh you should see funnel it’s as big as Texas right now.” And I was like (cut it out signal) and he’s like, “It’s Huuuuge.” So not only are we not running that day, but we’re camping that night, so we get to stew over it all night. Next morning we let part of the crew get up late. We had different times to get up so not everyone has to get up so early if you pull the night shift or something like that, stay up with the clients ’til they go to bed, something like that. So this guy was on the sleep-in crew. Sleep-in means you don’t have to get up before making breakfast, but you should be up with your tent down by breakfast, duh, right?

Lisa: Right.

Michele: Not one of the clients here, you’re still working. I don’t see him; I don’t see him; I don’t see him. He’s still asleep, so how do I go talk to him without everyone hearing or seeing over there. “Hey, you awake yet?” “Yeah.” “Um, you have to get up and rig your boat.” “Yeah.” “No, you have to get up now. You have to have some of these people; I can’t fit them all on my boat.” He was denying the whole experience was going to happen. He was just hiding there in his tent. I don’t know what he was doing; you can’t just disappear. Anyway, I had to get him up without making a scene, get everything ready on his boat; get him up. I don’t know what I did, but he had to get up. He made it just fine, but that was it; it could have been potentially bad had he refused. He would have been fired; I’m sure, but how to get everyone down the river?
Appendix C
Interview with Michele Wurth. September 10, 2006 in Moab, Utah.

Lisa: Parking sideways would have been nasty. I had a girl wrap on Whites at the end of the season. I was down below and she asked to row. We’re always in paddle boats and she wanted to get away from the kids, so I was like, “Just make sure you don’t go over the pour over on the right, stay a little bit left.” And before we got there she was like, “I think I’m going to go all left, I’ve got this sick kid in my boat.” He was not doing very well. So I was like, “Okay.” So I was down there with my paddle boat; she wasn’t around the corner by the time I was, I didn’t see her and finally someone was like, “Lisa, Lisa, Megan’s stuck at Whites” “Oh great,” so I pull over, grab a ducky and start going from eddy-line up that way and eventually I have to chuck the ducky, and I’m running down the road and I finally I can see her coming down, she was probably stuck for a good half an hour or more. And I knew that more companies were coming down; that’s the thing about the Daily is that there’s always somebody there, and there were private boaters that were there and if nothing else. Hopefully the private boater could help her. And she had missed training and didn’t know what to do because she came late, and “I’m like why didn’t you get out and push it.” She’s like, “I couldn’t the current would have taken me away.” The other group tried to instruct her, throw a bucked out, see if that would help and she couldn’t/wouldn’t do anything; I felt so bad. “I’m sorry that I wasn’t there.” I went through later and I don’t know where she got stuck. Still not sure.

Michele: Yeah, how do you get parked on that? It’s hard to not get in the current. It moves strongly around it.

Lisa: Yeah, that’s why she didn’t jump out and move it. She had a rough day. I felt bad for her.

Michele: You can stick one oar in.

Lisa: She said she’d tried that and nothing worked.

Michele: Getting wrapped; sometimes you’re just wrapped; the water level changes or 

Lisa: It was under the water. Apparently you can get wrapped on those. I felt so bad because I was in charge.

Michele: You’re like “Here try it; it’ll be great.”

Lisa: “You’ve been paddle boating all season; you know how to run the rapid; I don’t care.” It was whites at low water.

Michele: Right.

Lisa: All you have to do is make sure you don’t hit stuff on the right.

Michele: It’s interesting thought because it’s never “just.”

Lisa: Yeah. You always have to respect it

Michele: Because you could get messed up anywhere. Anywhere, luckily they’re not way out in the wilderness, but you could get really messed up out there.

Lisa: Crazy. Luckily Adrift was there and they didn’t pull that “Don’t help other people on the river” thing that they having going on with Mike, and they helped her.

Michele: How’d they?

Lisa: They eventually got her a line and helped pull it off I think.

Michele: Were the clients like, “That’s great, and epic thing?”

Lisa: She just had the one sick kid and...
Michele: not real impressed.
Lisa: She was like “Get me off this thing right now.” She was so mad that she couldn’t
do anything. She didn’t want to see passengers; and I was like “Are you sure you want to
get back on the paddle boat with passengers who are asking you what happened?”
Michele: Right.
Lisa: I don’t remember whether I took the boat or she took it because there’s nothing
after that; it’s just flat water.
References


Interviews


Wurth, Michele. 2006. Interview by author. Tape Recording. Moab, Utah, 10 September.