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In the introduction of “Cultural encounters—representing ‘otherness,’” authors Elizabeth Hallam and Brian Street (2000) reveal their desire to explore and analyze cultural encounters “to expose the diversity of ways in which ‘otherness’ has been constituted, communicated and transformed in contemporary and historical contexts” (p. 1). In chapter eleven of the book they expand on this idea by investigating the “relationships between texts and objects as configured in certain fields of academic research and in museum practices” (Hallam and Street, 2000, p. 260). To understand what the authors are discussing it is first important to grasp what is meant by the terms diversity and otherness. Diversity is defined as the condition of having or being composed of differing elements, especially the inclusion of different types of people. ‘Otherness’ is the quality or state of being other or different; a strangeness; uniqueness; distinctiveness; oddness; dissimilarity; unlikeness. The authors describe others as being a group or culture that is different or distant.

Hallam and Street (2000) explain that the idea of ‘otherness’ has been problematic and has created concerns within the discipline of anthropology and within critical museum studies (p. 1, 260). Many critiques have shown “anthropological representations as negotiated, constructed, and partial” (Hallam and Street, 2000, p. 2). Anthropologists have been accused of conveying “partial truths,” of misrepresenting women, of presenting conflicting interpretations, and of construing “the ‘other’ as negative: the ‘savage’, without history, writing, religion and morals...” (Hallam and Street, 2000, p. 2). The authors contribute these

problems with the fact that anthropologists are associated with the cultures and societies they are describing. Also a concern is the use of cross-cultural representations created by Western discourses (p. 2). An example given in chapter eleven gives insight into these assumptions. The authors explain in the later part of the nineteenth century there was an emphasis on presenting primitive societies, dead or dying, and exotic others within museums and illustrated travel books and literature to promote the idea of access to knowledge of 'others.'

The authors indicate that careful steps need to be made to re-present 'otherness' within the field of anthropology. The process is complex and difficult because cultures are always changing and the "representation of 'other' is integrally related to the representation of 'self'" (Hallam and Street, 2000, p. 6). Chapter eleven suggests the inclusion of a historical analysis of anthropology and of 'other' forms of evidence, such as archival sources written by explorers, missionaries, etc.

The authors discuss the use of written text and objects, such as the anthropologist's field notes, within museum studies. Bond (an anthropologist quoted within chapter eleven) states the following with regard to field notes, "They are...an important key to understanding the nature of what anthropologists do; they are records of our findings, if not our own self-discovery as artists, scientists and—more accurately—*bricoleurs*, assembling cultures from the bits and pieces of past occurrences" (Hallam and Street, 2000, p. 268). These become a crucial object of analysis because they represent an 'other' describing the 'other'.

Chapter eleven provides a case study aimed to address a "re-conceptualization and a re-presentation of 'otherness'" as mentioned in the

introduction (Hallam and Street, 2000, p. 7). In this study, special attention was given as to how 'otherness' was presented within a museum exhibit. The exhibition incorporated texts, visual images, and material images. Care was taken in developing how everything was displayed and included items usually not incorporated in an exhibit such as field notes, historical documents, maps, etc. The curators were informed of what and how the materials related to each other and needed to be presented. The authors concluded that presenting the "relationships between 'self' and 'other' can be facilitated through anthropologies of cultural representations" and "involves critical and creative anthropologies of cultural representation which confront the question of 'otherness'."

In the introduction, Hallam and Street walked the reader through areas of concern that have arisen with the presentation of 'otherness'. Chapter eleven provided a clear view of how to alleviate problems through careful thought and preparation. The bottom line is, our world is diverse. Our family background, our environment, and our economic status are just a few things that play into how we perceive the world around us and how we perceive others. Perception can taint views and perception can enlighten views. As a result, there is always going to be the 'other'. It is how we present the 'other' that is important—as equal, as another human being, just different.

References:

Diversity, otherness. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus*. Retrieved October 30, 2014, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com>

Hallam, E., & Street, B. V. (2000). *Cultural encounters--representing 'otherness'*. New York, NY: Routledge. Retrieved October 26, 2014