

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

“MONDAY NIGHT IRISH:”

ENGENDERING IRISH IDENTITY AT THE CELTIC ARTS CENTER IN LOS  
ANGELES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Master of Art  
in Anthropology

By

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## Preface

My thesis topic was initially inspired by my interest in my own Irish ancestry, but when I traveled to Ireland in the summer of 2010, that interest broadened dramatically to incorporate all aspects of Irish culture. I instantly became “Irish” as travelling abroad with my now husband solidified how much I felt that I naturally blend in with the Irish people. My light skin, freckles, red hair and blue eyes were a sharp contrast to my husband’s brown skin, brown eyes, and black hair. While walking the streets of Dublin one morning, an older Irish woman walked up to us and simply stated to me “You have the beauty of Ireland in you,” and continued on her way. Subsequently, it was from my journey throughout Ireland that I began to contemplate what it meant to be Irish and the ways by which one might determine levels of Irishness. Am I, for example, more Irish now than the rest of my family because I have been to Ireland?

My first academic foray on the path of all things Irish was through my classes at CSU Northridge. I began my graduate career with an interest in Irish culture, but without a distinct research focus. My first opportunity to write on an aspect of Irish culture was in my Anthropology of Fashion seminar, where I chose to expand my knowledge of Irish culture through the quintessential piece of Irish fashion: the Aran sweater. It was through my investigation on the Aran sweater that I began my research on Irish identity in earnest.

The Aran sweater, through the globalizing effects of the Internet, constituted the ultimate icon of Irish identity to the world. I further expanded on this research with my presentation “The Role of Social Networking in Ethnographic Studies: How Fashion

Spreads Globally,” at “The Art of Anthropology” conference that took place in Belfast, Northern Ireland in September 2011.

I recognized at the outset of trying to formulate an actual research topic and research design that I faced a significant challenge. Unlike Boston, New York, and other cities in the eastern United States, Los Angeles lacked well known Irish and Irish American enclaves. Rather, the “Irish” of metropolitan Los Angeles were a dispersed population; I would have to find a central place, or institution, where common interests converged.

The Celtic Arts Center was chosen as my field site because it allowed me to take a grounded approach to my research. I began my research based on curiosity in Irish diasporic identity, which later developed into how Irish identity operates. I utilized participant observation in my research at the Celtic Arts Center; this involved going to events and meeting people within the community in an informal way. My participant observation included enrolling in the Irish Gaelic class, and attending a few *seisiúns* (Irish traditional music) offered by the Celtic Arts Center. I participated in the Irish Gaelic class almost every week for approximately six months, which allowed me into the inner circle of the Celtic Arts Center. I was able to meet some of the most dedicated members of the center, including the President of the Board of Directors through my participation in this class. From these initial connections I was then introduced to other members of the Celtic Arts Center who participated in the Irish *céilí* dance class and the Irish music *seisiún*.

I chose to take a mixed methods approach to my fieldwork, using both participant observation and surveys. My survey questions were aimed at gathering general

information about the participants, primarily to form the demographic picture of the Celtic Arts Center. In addition, the surveys acted as an introduction to my research for those I had not spoken to on an individual basis, thus allowing me to expand the number of individuals in my study. Furthermore, the surveys also enabled me, based on their responses, to discover whom the most suitable participants would be to conduct individual interviews. They also allowed me to tailor my interviews for each person based on their previous answers, which decreased the time needed for interviews, an important consideration. All of the interviews took place directly after the Irish Gaelic class in the front lounge area. While the location of the interviews was convenient, time was a contributing factor because the *céilí* dance class was occurring at this time and throughout the interviews you could hear the music through the walls. In addition, whenever the door opened you could hear music and people talking. Since this location is the entrance to the other two smaller rooms at point it becomes busy like a train station; as people head in to dance and later people begin arriving for the *seisiún*.

Through the surveys and interviews conducted I was able to investigate the ways in which identity making processes are at work at the Celtic Arts Center. It was the interviews that led to the discovery of the multiple Irish identities present at the Celtic Arts Center, such as, the “Monday Night Irish,” the “Everyday Irish,” and the “Cardiac Celts.” These categories were influenced by many factors, including travel to Ireland, distance traveled to the Celtic Arts Center, and the amount of Irish ancestry. In addition to these categories of Irishness, the Celtic Arts Center evokes an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) based on primarily symbolic identities. I focused on “Monday Night Irish” because these individuals offered a current and new way in which to view symbolic

identity. Symbolic identity relies on the identity not being part of an individual's everyday life, usually referring to the enactment of the identity on holidays or other special occasions. At the Celtic Arts Center, the use and disuse of symbolic identity occurs on a weekly basis.

Dedication

For my love, Ramon

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## ABSTRACT

“MONDAY NIGHT IRISH:”

ENGENDERING IRISH IDENTITY AT THE CELTIC ARTS CENTER IN LOS ANGELES

By

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Master of Art in Anthropology

Based on ethnographic research conducted at the Celtic Arts Center, I analyze the emergence of multiple Irish identities for Irish Americans in Los Angeles. Based on socio-historical context, largely influenced by globalization, the ways in which Irish American identity has been created are illustrated through personal accounts. The patrons of the Celtic Arts Center formed their Irish American identities around multiple factors, including, travel to Ireland, distance traveled to the center, and the amount of Irish ancestry one possesses. Members of the Celtic Arts Center fell into three main categories of Irish identity: “Monday Night Irish,” “Everyday Irish,” and “Cardiac Celts.” In addition, to the ways in which the Celtic Arts Center influences the creation of personal identity it also acts as an imagined community for its members.

## **Introduction**

The ways in which identity has been constructed and analyzed have changed throughout history. The following chapters are a glimpse into the vast array of theories regarding identity and the historical context associated with the multiple Irish identities that have occurred over time. The Irish at the Celtic Arts Center represent a sample of the Irish in Los Angeles. While the Celtic Arts Center promotes itself as a pan-Celtic organization, they primarily focus on Irish culture through their dedicated Monday night Irish programs. These programs touch on some of the basic cultural elements associated with the “quintessential” Irish person, namely language, dance, and music. Through the research conducted at the Celtic Arts Center the questions that arose were: To what extent is Irish identity in the United States a purely symbolic creation, as Herbert Gans and other scholars have argued that much Euro-American ethnicity is (Alba 1990; Gans 1979)? For Gans (1979), symbolic ethnicity is when the ethnicity in question is not part of the individual’s everyday life; instead it is only used in specific circumstances. How does Irish identity vary from other identities? What role does white ethnicity or European ethnicity play in the identity formation of individuals in the United States? In addition, what are some of the multiple Irish identities that have evolved over time in the context of the United States? Through my research at the Celtic Arts Center these questions are addressed.

I chose to explore questions regarding claims to particular ethnicities, symbolic ethnicity, ethnicity as a form of social solidarity, and the ways in which Celtic themed clothing attire acts as an outward expression of identity. These questions included what ethnicity do you claim and why; do you view your ethnicity as symbolic in nature; do you

believe ethnicity acts as a form of social solidarity; and what are the circumstances behind your choice in Celtic themed attire? I felt these questions were important to key debates within the academic field of anthropology of identity and ethnicity. These theories include the concept of the “melting pot”, the “martini cocktail” and the theory of globalization creating multiple identities for the Irish American population dependent on the socio-historical context (Griffin 1998; Ong 2008). All these theories act as a lens in which issues of immigrant acculturation and identity have been constructed. In order to frame the research at the Celtic Arts Center, this paper first addresses the several theories of identity that this thesis engages with, followed by a historical overview of Irish American identity. The historical section demonstrates that there are various Irish American identities throughout time, which are largely dependent on context. The historical chapter provides support for Aihwa Ong’s (2008) argument that there is no universal identity for particular ethnic groups. According to Ong, as a result of globalization multiple ethnic identities are created throughout time and space based on the particular socio-historical context of the individual or groups in question.

This thesis then examines more closely the Celtic Arts Center of Los Angeles as a vehicle that creates an Irish identity for its members. I will argue that there are various ways in which individuals at the Celtic Arts Center promote and identify as Irish or Irish-Americans. The rationale for this research is based on two theories of identity: white ethnicity and symbolic ethnicity. The theory of white ethnicity states that white ethnics or certain groups of European ethnics have a choice when it comes to identifying with a particular ethnicity because their skin color does not automatically ascribe to them a specific ethnicity (Alba 1990). The theory of symbolic ethnicity expands upon the theory

of white ethnicity, in that it explains that individuals, who claim a white ethnicity, largely view their ethnicity as symbolic. In other words, for white ethnics, their ethnicity is symbolic because it is not a part of their everyday life (Alba 1990; Gans 1979). The objectives of this study provide evidence for one or both of these theories in order to determine the current view of “Irishness” present at the Celtic Arts Center. For example, the objectives of determining how and why individuals identify as Irish will provide evidence for the former theory of white ethnicity. In comparison, the objective of determining the ways in which individuals utilize their Irish identity will provide evidence for the latter theory, symbolic ethnicity. As such, the Celtic Arts Center will act as a sample of the Irish population in Los Angeles in order to determine the extent that white ethnicity and symbolic ethnicity are at play.

Aihwa Ong (2008) argues entire populations are homogenized by ignoring internal variations in favor of generalizing stereotypes (i.e., caricatures). Ong contends that transnational populations have created the view of a global ethnicity of and for minority populations through new technologies, primarily the Internet and in more recent years, social media. The continuance of generalizing stereotypes does not only occur through new technologies. For example, historically the population of Scotland was seen as overflow from Ireland where any traditions they had were not their own but borrowed from the Irish culture (Trevor-Roper 2000:15). Therefore, Irish identity used to apply to all residing on the “Island,” as well as to those residing in Scotland (Trevor-Roper 2000). This view of Scottish and Irish as essentially the same was conveyed through personal communications and not through the various technologies that are now present. The totality of Irish people is routinely “whitewashed” into a singular version of “Irishness.”

It is this radically oversimplified distortion that I demonstrate is problematic by illustrating that multiple Irish identities occur through time and space. Taking a historical perspective of the changes in Irish identity will give context to the current Irish identities witnessed at the Celtic Arts Center. It is important to know the context behind the struggles of the Irish in order to better understand their current place in history. The Irish entered into the United States in multiple waves throughout history and within each wave there were multiple Irish identities portrayed based on the particular historical context of that wave.

Through the use of ethnographic examples, the theory of symbolic ethnicity acts as a lens through which the statements of participants can be interpreted. Symbolic ethnicity is described as an ethnicity that does not operate as a part of the individual's everyday life. For example, in the context of the Celtic Arts Center, the issue of symbolic ethnicity presents itself in the concept of the "Monday Night Irish." The "Monday Night Irish" are those who become Irish on Monday nights only while participating in events at the Celtic Arts Center and cease to consider their Irish ethnicity upon their exit from the center. In addition to the "Monday Night Irish," the other Irish identity concept that arises at the Celtic Arts Center is the idea of the "Cardiac Celt." Marion Bowman (1996) originally proposed the concept of the "Cardiac Celt" as an individual who was drawn to the Celtic culture based on their feelings and not based on their ancestry.

Essentially, do the participants only become Irish on Monday nights or are they Irish in every aspect of their life? Furthermore, do the participants utilize their Irish identity as a form of social solidarity in which they have created an "imagined community" with all Irish people? In the same vein of being "Monday night Irish," do the

participants change their appearance when attending the Celtic Arts Center? For example, do participants wear Celtic themed attire only on Monday nights or do they wear Celtic themed jewelry and clothing outside of the center? In addition, does the Celtic Arts Center operate as a focal point for the local Irish population? Lastly, has the Celtic Arts Center facilitated an “imagined community” for its participants? For example, do the participants feel connected to the Irish world through print and digital media?

This thesis is organized into six chapters: following this introduction, the second chapter is a detailed report of identity theories that have been discussed in various disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences and their relation to the Celtic Arts Center. The third chapter provides the historical context of Irish American identity throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It is in this chapter where the reader will see the move away from an essentialized view of Irish identity into a plethora of multiple Irish identities. These multiple Irish identities are predicated on the historical, economical, religious, and social context of each century. The research I conducted at the Celtic Arts Center is part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century of historical Irish and Irish American identity. The fourth chapter provides a detailed look into the Celtic Arts Center, its history, purpose, role of tradition, cultural expressions, use of ancestral languages and ethnic customs. In the fifth chapter a base line of data is reported on the demographics of the Celtic Arts Center Monday night events. In addition to the base line data, the information gathered from interviews is analyzed as it relates to the process of creating a symbolic Irish identity and by extension an “imagined community.”

## **Approaches to Identity in the Social and Behavioral Sciences**

In order to fully understand the ways in which the Celtic Arts Center engenders Irish identity, I must first describe the various facets of Irish identity, from a symbolic to national level. Irish is an interesting case study because it is a national identity, but Irish identity is also a highly religious and a symbolic identity. The common terminologies associated with the study of national identities are race and ethnicity. As was shown throughout my field research at the Celtic Arts Center, race and ethnicity are two different things when dealing with an Irish American population. Race is an important distinction for my field consultants, as the majority of them considers their race as white, Caucasian, or simply American. The identification of American does not usually refer to race but rather ethnicity. However, for my participants they do not separate the two, which leads many of them to identify as American for both categories. This has been problematized for Americans throughout history with the pressure for individuals to assimilate into the general American population. Irish immigrants in the United States were treated poorly; however, if they were able to claim to be white or American they were able to blend into the population.

There is a difference between the colloquial and anthropological use of these terms as well as by academics in other fields of inquiry. It is important at the outset to have an understanding of these distinctions since they are fundamental to addressing the key questions about national identity and its purpose or function in society. Ethnic identity as set forth by Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2001) is the most widely accepted construct in anthropological considerations of the phenomenon. Eriksen argues, “ethnic identity should be taken to refer to a notion of shared ancestry (a kind of fictive kinship)”

(Eriksen 2001:2). In contrast, race is usually viewed as a biological construct of identity, i.e., something that cannot be changed based on decisions made involving cultural practices. For many, race cannot be changed where an individual's ethnicity can change over their lifetime. With these definitions in mind, we can see the Irish make an interesting case, as racially they are white; their racial status does not change but their choice in ethnic identity changes over time. Ethnically, the Irish are often automatically considered Irish Catholic, essentially linking ancestry with religion in order to claim an Irish identity. This is an important distinction for many who do not view Irish Protestants as Irish; instead they get grouped into the "catchall" group of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP). If we were only to consider race, both groups would be considered the same; instead both groups are defined based on religion. The role of religion in Irish American identity falls in and out of favor throughout history; religion seems to be of less importance for Irish Americans now than it was in the past.

The Irish, whether Catholic or Protestant, from Northern Ireland (which is part of Great Britain) or the Republic of Ireland, consider themselves Irish in present time. However, this was not always the case. The distinction between the two groups of Irish and their identification as such, by themselves, outsiders, and those from the conflicting Irish group have changed over time. In the first waves of migration to the United States, prior to the Great Potato Famine of 1848, the majority of immigrants were Irish Protestants from the North of Ireland. As such, they were able to assimilate easily with the Protestants in the United States at the time. During the largest Irish immigration to the United States due to the Potato Famine, the majority of Irish immigrants were Irish Catholic, working class, and poor. The conflict between the two groups was carried over

from Ireland to the United States. In Ireland, the Protestants were the landowners or ruling class, and the Catholics were the land workers. The Protestants who viewed them as uncivilized barbarians treated them poorly; it is these attitudes that were transferred on to the Irish Catholic population in the United States.

To protect themselves from increasing backlash from the majority culture of Americans, Protestants did everything possible to distinguish themselves from the new, uneducated, poor, working class, and “uncivilized” Irish Catholics. In the United States, there was a great distrust of anything Catholic and a fear that they would take over and be influenced by the Pope. Therefore, the Irish Protestants first decided to claim Scots-Irish, and eventually dropped the Irish portion completely, and finally just considered themselves Americans. It is important to remember that the Irish Protestants from the northern portion of Ireland were descendants of the Scots-Irish, and further the Presbyterian Scots who were enticed to move to Northern Ireland during the 1600s as part of Britain’s effort to colonize and subdue Ireland. The Catholics were quick to concur that Irish Protestants were not really Irish because the English Crown ruled them; they were placed in Ireland to control the Irish Catholics. In addition, they had not been in Ireland as long as the Catholics and did not have the same connection to the land.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity can be expressed in two ways: relational and collective. A relational identity is when an individual or group define themselves based on not belonging in another categorical label. In comparison a collective identity is a group identity in which members take on roles and characteristics associated with the larger group. Relational and collective identities are seen as overlapping by the majority of

researchers (Vignoles et al. 2011). At the Celtic Arts Center, relational identity is evidenced in every interview. The field consultants identified themselves by certain characteristics commonly associated with being Irish, which include physical appearance and temperament. To explain how ethnic identity and ethnic groups are defined, Jack Eller writes, “I am a \_\_\_ because I share \_\_\_ with my group” (Eller 1997:552) thus, emphasizing the need for groups to have another group in binary opposition to it. It is common for the Irish to consider their “binary opposition” as the Scottish. Individuals are quick to correct a mis-identification as either, in other words, Irish are quick to refute a Scottish label and vice-versa. This holds true at the Celtic Arts Center, which has members of both groups: one male in the group wears a kilt every Monday, easily identifying him as Scottish. Another male whom I interviewed felt very strongly about his ethnic identity, and thoroughly identified himself as all Scottish. It is common practice to ask newcomers why they chose to attend the Celtic Arts Center, and the most common answer is that they have a little bit of Irish or Scottish in them.

Identity formation is important to anthropological studies because it gives the researcher context of the culture being studied and the differences between those studied and the studier. According to Claude Levi-Strauss (1966:170), ethnic categories influence everyone’s behavior and inclination for specific types of work. Levi-Strauss (1966) did note that affirmation of a particular identity is only an influence or pretext for distinguishing behavior between categories. At the Celtic Arts Center, particular identification, whether Irish or Scottish, acts as an influencing mechanism for other outward expressions of identity. Based on my observations, both Scottish individuals worked harder at displaying their Scottish identity through unique clothing and jewelry.

In contrast, most of the Irish individuals were more subdued in their outward expression of their Irish identity. One possible explanation may be that the Irish feel more confident in their place at the Celtic Arts Center; after all, they have a whole evening dedicated to Irish programs. The Celtic Arts Center promotes itself as a Pan-Celtic organization; as such, Marion Bowman would say that it “promotes homogeneity between Celts and assumes similarity of belief, practice and worldview among all Celts” (Bowman 1996:247). The “Celtic” nations were formed based on a common ancestral language linking them all. In this vein, some choose to group these nations as one category based on this similarity. In addition, there are many myths surrounding Celtism, which would link these nations further based on traditions and similar cultural practices. However, these similarities cannot be historically proven; instead, they are perpetuated in the mainstream culture to lend authenticity to the whole group.

According to Michael Kearney (1995), the world has become increasingly interconnected through globalization. Essentially, he asserts that people are not isolated based on culture; instead, people constantly interact with people from other cultures, resulting in an ever-growing interconnected world (Kearney 1995). The Celtic Arts Center confirms that identity is not an isolated quality; members and nonmembers come from varying backgrounds and are able to meet and exchange ideas and customs. It is now common practice to view identity as a global phenomenon that does not exist in isolation; however, this has not always been the case. It used to be common practice to try and find a group of people that did exist in isolation.

The Scottish and other Celtic individuals feel like they are welcome to participate in the Irish programs, and the Irish feel welcome to participate in the varying other

programs the Celtic Arts Center offers that are based on the other Celtic nations. For example, everyone is encouraged to volunteer at varying cultural festivals in which the Celtic Arts Center has an information booth. At the Welsh festival, Irish individuals are volunteering their time, and at the next event, the Irish Fair non-Irish individuals will volunteer their time.

In addition to identity acting as a relational construct at the Celtic Arts Center, it also acts as a collective identity, in which members have taken on roles associated with identifying as a member of the Center. Benedict Anderson (2006) is one of the strongest proponents for collective identity. Anderson's view that identity is collective is evidenced in his discussion of "imagined communities"—a concept I use throughout my thesis as it applies to the Celtic Arts Center—and "print-languages." According to Anderson (2006), print-languages created languages of power and made people more aware of others who spoke their language. These print-languages created a collective identity for all who spoke and or read the specified language. They identified with each other, feeling empathy for those in the stories despite never physically meeting them. Language is what links together the Celtic nations: Brittany, Cornwall, Galicia, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales. These nations became linked after it was discovered that the languages from all of them were descended from a common ancestral language. Language is in fact the primary link between these nations as it is almost impossible to reach a consensus on the history of and the current composition of the groups (Bowman 1996). The Celts are not a homogenized group but instead offer varying aspects of "Celticity," where there has been much debate over the authenticity of certain forms of "Celticity" (Bowman 1996).

At the Celtic Arts Center, they give out free copies of the monthly newspaper, *The Irish Herald: Southern California Edition*, which almost everyone takes immediately. This newspaper covers major news stories in Ireland and has various articles about Irish Americans. Individuals at the Celtic Arts Center feel empathy for their Irish “brothers and sisters” whom they have never met. They simply feel allegiance and empathy with the subjects of the articles because they are Irish. The newspaper helps support the imagined community and collective identity of the Irish at the Celtic Arts Center; it is the field consultant’s way of keeping up to date on Irish news. For many of my field consultants this is their only access to Irish news because they do not look for the information on their own. The participants at the Celtic Arts Center read the Irish newspaper because it is convenient, it is provided for free, and does not take any extra time on behalf of the individuals to research the news themselves.

According to Charles Lindholm (2007), culture creates collective identities for the population, which then provides social roles for the individual’s to operate, which furthers the sustainability of the group. Field consultants from the Celtic Arts Center use their collective Irish identity essentially as a template by which to model their behavior. In essence they personify some of the stereotypes associated with being Irish. Irish individuals are most commonly white, and as such they have a range of personality templates in which to construct their social roles. Therefore, the Irish aspect allows them to create a specific template for social roles.

Ethnic labels and identity are closely intertwined, especially for the Irish due to their phenotypical whiteness. In other words, the Irish, like all white ethnic groups, have more choices (and privilege) when it comes to “picking” an ethnicity; based on the color

of their skin they have a range of possibilities from which to choose. Essentially, ethnic identity is a choice for them in a way it is not for people of color. According to Richard Alba (1990), in more recent years there has been a transformation in how white ethnicity is viewed, this is especially the case for non-Hispanic whites in the United States. Alba's (1990) theory about ethnic identity is sectioned into four parts: (1) ethnicity as a working or lower class phenomena, (2) politicization of ethnicity, (3) revival of ethnicity, and (4) the emergence of symbolic ethnicity.

The relevance of Alba's theory to my research conducted at the Celtic Arts Center needs to be addressed; the first problem is time and the second location. Alba was developing his theory during the 1960s and 1970s, a stark contrast to 2013. In addition, his research was based on the ethnic communities on the East Coast, in which there are major differences compared to the ethnic communities on the West Coast. However, despite some of the discrepancies in the relevance of Alba's theory to the local Irish American population of Los Angeles, it still holds some relevance. First, Alba states that ethnicity is expressed more in socially disadvantaged groups. Second, he notes that "ethnic identity should be strongly linked to political attitudes, participation, and behavior (Alba 1990:28). In the third aspect of Alba's theory of ethnic identity, he "suggests a strong association between ethnic identity and involvement in ethnic cultural activities" (Alba 1990:29), such as learning an ethnic language, attending ethnic festivals, or joining an ethnic group. In relation to the Celtic Arts Center, the participants do not seem to be particularly socially disadvantaged groups. There are, however, a couple members who fit within this category. For the most part, participants are older, white, possessing a high educational background. There are a few members who have been

underemployed or unemployed at various times during my research. Employment and educational background seems to be dependent on the particular Monday night event in question. For example, those in the language class are primarily under-employed rather than unemployed, in large part due to their professions in acting, film, and the cosmetic industry. In contrast, other members of the group have steady full-time employment. I have heard on multiple occasions, “I will be here next week unless I get a job.” In contrast, those participating in the music *seisiún* are all older than the demographic of the language class and for the most part, retired. Therefore, it has been shown that Alba’s findings do not apply here, because we are discussing Irish Americans and one “Cardiac Celt” in California rather than the East Coast. In addition, it is 45 years later, and “white ethnics” have for the most part assimilated into the mainstream.

The second phenomenon described by Alba (1990) is more present at the Celtic Arts Center, which has a policy in place that no flyers or announcements can be given out at the Center that promotes certain political or religious organizations, to avoid alienating anyone. In addition, the policy allows the center to remain a neutral party that does not endorse any specific organizations. However, people are free to discuss their views, and from the conversations I have been privy to on multiple occasions they all seem to slant to the left or liberal side of the spectrum. The Irish American population is known for its liberal stance and historical affiliation with the Democratic Party.

The third phenomenon presented by Alba (1990) is the most present at the Celtic Arts Center. This is not a surprising fact as the third phenomenon suggests a strong association between ethnic identity and participation in cultural activities, which is what the Celtic Arts Center is in its entirety: a cultural activity. The question then arises: does

participation at the Celtic Arts Center make an individual more Irish than nonparticipants? Some informants have told me that their friends consider them extra Irish because they are learning Irish Gaelic.

While all three aspects of ethnic communities presented above by Alba (1990) offer insight into ethnic identity, overall, it is the lack of ethnic identity as a central focus of an individual's life that categorizes what Herbert Gans (1979) calls "symbolic ethnicity." The case of symbolic ethnicity is primarily a phenomenon in multicultural societies such as the United States, because there is not one all-encompassing ethnicity. In addition, in an increasingly interconnected world the majority of people are of mixed backgrounds that give individuals options when choosing their ethnicity. This is especially the case for white ethnics, such as the Irish. Individuals who are not easily identifiable as part of a particular group because their skin color is white have the most choices available to them in the United States. Essentially, they can claim to be simply "American" with no further elaboration, or they can choose a particular European ethnicity that may vary depending on the situation. Symbolic ethnicity is when an individual "feels ethnic" without "being ethnic," essentially they claim the specific ethnic label without fulfilling any of the commitments or actions associated with the ethnicity (Alba 1990:75-76). According to Gans (1979) symbolic ethnicity is when individuals claim a specific ethnicity and may participate in cultural events based on this claim for special occasions but it is not something that permeates their everyday life. In Gans' opinion, symbolic ethnicity is an "ethnicity of last resort, which could, nevertheless, persist for generations" (Gans 1979:1). He argues that there is no ethnic revival because the processes of acculturation and assimilation are always in progress (Gans 1979). Gans

further elaborates that what appears to be an ethnic revival is merely a new phase of acculturation and assimilation. Essentially Gans argues against the “melting pot” model because he sees acculturation and assimilation as an ongoing process in which symbolic ethnicity plays a key role. Therefore, he does not believe people of varying ethnic backgrounds would all begin to blend into the majority population.

The idea of the “melting pot” in the United States is not new; however, like any other theory it falls in and out of favor periodically. Historically, there have been three distinct models of acculturation in the United States, beginning with the “melting pot,” and later followed by “vegetable soup” and the “martini cocktail” (Griffin 1998). The first was popular in the early 1900s because it championed the view that all immigrants of European descent would eventually “melt” or “blend” into the population creating one American identity. The melting pot theory has since fallen out of favor; currently people identify with the “vegetable soup” or “martini cocktail” models. The “vegetable soup” model constructs society as made up of groups with various identities, which retain a separate, identifiable nature while still contributing to a coherent whole. This is the current “multicultural” model with its origins in the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s. The “martini cocktail” model groups society into two categories: the dominant and the dominated. The dominant group is relatively colorless, but powerful, as is gin in a martini cocktail; color is provided by the less-powerful minorities (Vermouth and Angostura bitters). In the case of the United States the dominant group would be white American, which overpowers the more “colorful” minorities. While Gans believes that there is no ethnic revival, simply a new phase of assimilation, another possible

explanation may be that these revivals are happening on a smaller scale than previous generations. (Griffin 1998).

One way in which to explain how ethnicity became symbolic in the United States is to look at the changes in models involving ethnicity, such as the “melting pot,” “vegetable soup,” and the “martini cocktail.” During the time when the “melting pot” theory was favored there was a push for people to assimilate into the larger majority population, thus, eliminating differing ethnicities and creating one homogenized “American” ethnicity. It is now recognized that the “melting pot” does not and has never really existed to the point where everyone assimilated. Following the decline of the “melting pot” theory, the theory of “vegetable soup” emerged to explain the ways in which differing ethnicities interacted in the United States. According to the “vegetable soup” metaphor all ethnicities were equally meaningful in the soup, from the broth to the addition of vegetables. In contrast to the “vegetable soup” metaphor, the “martini cocktail” metaphor posits that while different ethnicities are all present in the cocktail they are all overpowered by the American (gin) portion. As this relates to symbolic ethnicity, the addition of the olive can symbolize the symbolic ethnicities of people because it is simply added as a decorative feature and is not always present. What all the theories have in common is the belief in personal ancestry. This belief in ancestry does not have to be valid, just believed by the individual.

According to the melting pot model, there should be a disappearance of various ethnic groups in the United States, as everyone would essentially become an amalgamation of all of them, creating one uniform American ethnicity (Gans 1979). However, the melting pot model has fallen from favor, as Gans points to several

criticisms of the theory. The first criticism as presented by Gans (1979), is the belief that the United States will become one homogenous group, which no longer stands as it may have in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a general consensus that the United States is a mosaic population full of subgroups and subcultures. However, the mosaic nature of the United States does not completely invalidate the melting pot model because ethnics can still be absorbed into other subgroups based on varying factors, such as income, religion, and education. The second criticism of melting pot model is that it does not differentiate between religious and nationality groups. The third critique of melting pot model argues that ethnicity exists because it is functional and has little relation to European ancestry. In other words, this third critique expands the melting pot theory saying that in addition to the other factors presented, ethnicity should be seen as “responses to current needs rather than only as departures from past traditions” (Gans 1979:3). The fourth critique is that what is actually seen is the persistence of heritage, and that perhaps acculturation and assimilation have been overestimated. The final critique of melting pot model is the question of whether it is still relevant. This final critique is based on the ability of third generation immigrants to socially afford to remember the ancestral culture because of ethnic revivals. These ethnic revivals then lead to the creation of symbolic ethnicities. The concept of symbolic ethnicity is an interesting one that may be further expanded upon when aspects of ancestry and identity are taken into account. (Gans 1979).

In, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (1991) argue based on their research done exclusively in the urban ethnic enclaves of New York, a combination of religion and race will define the next phases of American evolution of group identities. This is not a surprising development, at least for the Irish, as they have

always been defined based in large part on religion. Traditionally the Irish are characterized as Irish Catholic, to the exclusion of all other religions, to the extent that Irish Protestants were not considered Irish. The Irish are a perfect example of Glazer and Moynihan's view that religious identity "for the most part [is] transmitted by blood line from the original immigrant group" (1991:313); in cases of marriage between different religions one is usually more dominant.

According to Alba (1990), ethnicity is usually based on an individual's belief in their ancestry. In other words, individuals who belong to ethnic groups share in the belief that they have a common ancestry. It is with this framework that ethnicity can be seen as a sense of nostalgia for the past, whereas identity is more concerned with the present. However, the fundamental concept here is that in order to know an individual's ethnicity, their ancestry must be known prior to categorization of a specific ethnic label. As Alba states "ethnic identities apart from diffuse sense of being American cannot continue on a mass scale without widespread knowledge of ancestries" (1990:42). The important part is an individual's belief in their ancestry; it is not necessarily a case of determining the truth behind the belief.

Furthermore, the common ground between identity and ancestry is important for understanding current views of ethnicity in the United States. This is critical, and possibly a unique factor for the United States because of the socially encouraged view to simply state that one is "American" more than celebrating the different ethnicities that construct the ethnic diversity of the United States. However, according to Sabina Magliocco (personal communication, April 8, 2013) an argument can be made that identifying as simply "American" has fallen out of favor, especially in a diverse state like

California, where, often a “white” ethnicity signals a lack of colorful traditions and interesting customs, in contrast to the more “colorful” and marked ethnic identities in the state. This creates some pressure for Euro-Americans to reclaim their ethnic identity through activities such as those engaged in at the Center (Magliocco 2013).

Further compounding the issue is the large proportion of people in the United States who are of mixed ancestry. Symbolic ethnicity is a central component to theories on ethnicity and identity when it comes to those of mixed ancestry, especially for those who are viewed as white. As Alba notes, it is those who are perceived as white, where ethnic identification is a choice and not superficially imposed by outsiders (1990:61). It is the aspect of choice that is seen most often in Irish populations. According to Alba, those of mixed background are more likely to choose one specific ethnicity from the choices available. For example, those with any amount of Irish ancestry in their background will identify as Irish at a rate of three to one, compared to identifying as another ethnicity also present in their background (Alba 1990:61). At the Celtic Arts Center there are two examples in which the individuals are of mixed ancestry but claim Irish. Tricia is Irish and French Canadian—both “white” and unmarked ancestries in the United States—and she chooses to highlight her Irish heritage. In addition to Tricia, Thomas is of Irish and Chinese ancestries, and he highlights his Irish background even though the rest of his immediate family does not. For Thomas, the only time he claims his Chinese ethnic identity is when he is around his Chinese relatives.

Furthermore, it must be noted that despite an individual’s identification with a specific ethnicity, it matters little if they do not act upon this conscious choice. In other words, ethnic identity on an individual level does not help sustain ethnicity on a larger

scale if the individual's actions and experiences do not reflect the ethnic identity (Alba 1990). It is this aspect that has led to a decrease in white ethnicity in the United States. By this I mean that whites have the ability to blend in as part of the privileged class; they do not need to choose, or be assigned to, an ethnic identity that will portray them as an outsider. As a result, ethnic backgrounds for whites do not represent either extremes of the spectrum. In essence, they neither make it a central aspect of their life nor deny it completely. In addition, this goes hand in hand with the general identification as "American" first and then an individual may elaborate on where their ancestors originated.

The question then arises, why do people bother to claim an ethnic identity if they do not use it in their everyday life? This discussion overlooks the issue of power and status with ethnic identity. In the simplest view, the answer can be found in the American concept of individuality, and for some people an ethnic identity is imposed. Everyone wants to be special but at the same time belong and ethnic identity offers exactly this for individuals. For example, an ethnic identity may make an individual unique among his peers and at the same time it gives the individual a claim to a larger group without the social commitments commonly found among the small social circles.

An individual can claim to be Irish and still selectively choose which aspects of their Irish identity they wish to portray. The individual's symbolic ethnicity gives them more leeway in which sets of traditions they choose to follow, and which they choose to adapt to other aspects of their mosaic ethnicity. Mosaic ethnicities are commonly found in the United States due to the high rate of immigration and interracial and interethnic pairings. Through these aspects of American culture, individuals are born with a number

of ethnicities in their background of which they may selectively choose to express. The change of traditions over time is a result of the ebbs and flows of ethnic identities. These changes occur as aspects of the traditions are adopted and influenced as they come into contact with various other ethnic traditions. Ethnic groups lose members to indifference when there is no common ground between the members. Without a cultural pattern that defines them as different from other groups ethnic identity cannot be used as a rallying point (Alba 1990:76). As a result, there is a lack of cohesion and apathy for the group begins in the mindset of members.

As we delve deeper into the concept of “symbolic ethnicity,” the symbolic nature of ethnicity demonstrates the shallow nature of the ethnic symbols individuals choose that do not interfere with their life. Some examples include the participation in specific ethnic festivals (e.g., St. Patrick’s Day, Samhain), use of symbols in art or attire, and choice in music and dance. All of these examples have one thing in common: they do not intrude on the individual’s everyday life because they can easily be hidden from prying eyes. These examples do not play a role in revitalizing ethnicity because they can remain in the personal sphere without involvement in ethnic networks and institutions (Alba 1990:77). As the Irish are not excluded from American society the way they were in the past, they are now able to play a more mainstream role. Perhaps one reason why St. Patrick’s Day and Samhain do not revitalize ethnicity is because the general public has commodified them.<sup>1</sup> As these holidays have become culturally commodified they are no longer a

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<sup>1</sup> The view of Samhain not revitalizing ethnicity is reserved for Irish communities outside of those who identify as Wiccan, Druid or Celtic Reconstructionist. These three identifications place great importance on Samhain and would consider it as a form of revitalizing ethnicity. This observation primarily relates to the Irish population in general and not specific sub-groups.

unique expression of the Irish people to the extent that they celebrate as a community; instead, expression has been relegated to the private sphere.

## **Conclusion**

According to Glazer and Moynihan (1991), Irish identity may become questionable in future generations because it is socially constructed like all forms of identity, such as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) identity. The WASP “is a created identity, and largely forged in New York City in order to identify those who are not otherwise ethnically identified and who, while a small minority in the city, represent what is felt to be the ‘majority’ for the rest of the country” (Glazer and Moynihan 1991:xxx). Glazer and Moynihan (1991) believe white ethnicities should be declining because of their ability to fully assimilate into the general population; however, this has not been the case throughout history. This leads Glazer and Moynihan to assert that the continuance of ethnic identity is not an accident and that there are a multitude of reasons that ethnic identity may persist. Essentially, ethnicity persists because it is a social construction that is always in flux based on the needs of individuals and groups at a particular time and place. (Glazer and Moynihan 1991; Eriksen 2001).

James Clifford’s (1994) belief that identity is always changing, constructed, and both relational and collective is evidenced in his discussion of diasporas where he gives a list of criteria that encompass a diaspora in the definitional sense. It is the constant changing of categories that makes the diasporic identity to be in a state of flux and not stable. Diasporas are relational in Clifford’s criteria because their identity is based on the comparison identification to homeland versus their oppositional identification to the host country. Diasporic identity is collective in that all members “maintain a memory, vision,

or myth about their original homeland... [and they] see ancestral home as a place of eventual return” (Clifford 1994:217-18). Members of a diaspora therefore identify with a group that shares the same feelings and beliefs towards their homeland.

The creation of Irish identities at the Celtic Arts Center supports Clifford’s claims of identity as a social construct. The Center exists in one of the largest Irish Diaspora’s, the United States, and as such, identity created here is always in flux because of its diasporic nature. However, this view can only be applied to the Celtic Arts Center in the loosest understanding possible. While the United States does have Irish Diaspora populations, they are predominately on the East Coast. In addition, the question then becomes are they true diasporas in the strict sense of the term? The answer is no, in the United States most Irish Americans do not view Ireland as a place of eventual return. The exception may be the newer arrivals of Irish immigrants. At The Celtic Arts Center this is not a concern, as most members claim Irish ancestry based on long past relatives; relatives they did not necessarily ever meet in person. At the Celtic Arts Center, there are three exceptions, all of who were born in Ireland and immigrated to the United States decades ago. These individuals may choose to return to Ireland, either to visit friends and family, or to eventually make a permanent move.

Fredrick Barth’s (1969) belief that identity or ethnicity is changing is evidenced in his discussion of “Pathan Identity and its Maintenance.” According to Barth collective or ethnic group identities can “only be maintained if it provides a practicable self-image and is moderately consistent with the sanctions that are experienced in social interaction” (Barth 1969:120). If the identity is no longer practicable for the individual then they can abandon that identity if there is another identity available. While Barth was discussing

Pathan identity, his theory relates to the theory of white ethnicity. White ethnics have a choice when creating an identity; for some their ethnic identity changes throughout their lifetime. People of a generalized mix of European ancestry are able to emphasize certain aspects of those ancestries dependent on which benefits them the most at the time. If too many individuals do not prosper in the identity and no other alternatives are available then the ethnic group is no longer consistent. The inconsistency caused by failure of participants in the ethnic group to conform may lead to changes in the ethnic identity as a whole, including organization and boundaries (Barth 1969). In summation, Barth's relational approach to identity concludes that identity is always changing because the power dynamics of relational factors (i.e. language, religion) are always changing. It is through these changes in power dynamics and other relational factors that the emergence and decline of white ethnicities change in popularity over time. For example, Irish is a popular ethnicity to claim at the moment; however in the future we may see the rise in more people choosing to claim Scottish ancestry since Disney and Pixar released the film *Brave*.<sup>2</sup> Doug, the President of the Board of Directors for the Celtic Arts Center, mentioned that he thought more people would express interest in the Center after this movie was released because it is about a Scottish princess. In general people begin to identify more with their ancestries after they have been exposed to it in popular culture.

At the Celtic Arts Center, claims of Irish identity acts as an influence for distinguishing behavior for some of the participants. As with Levi-Straus' view, it was only an influence and not an all-encompassing aspect of behavior. In the United States, as

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<sup>2</sup> The film *Brave* was released in 2012 and is about a Scottish princess trying to change her fate. It was set in the mythical past of Scotland.

a result of globalization, there are many other factors at work when attempting to distinguish behavior between groups of people. In large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, this becomes increasingly difficult because it is a major hub of immigration. Essentially, any population can be divided by ethnicity; these divisions are based on interactions between individuals or groups of common origin and those of different origins. Mixed ancestry, specifically with Mexican or Latino, is common in Los Angeles. When importance is placed upon ethnicity it plays a vital role in the everyday social life of the individual. In general, people in Los Angeles will emphasize the Mexican or Latino portion of their identity because it is the ethnic majority. Particular groups portray the emphases of specific “ethnic” characteristics, which help “people meeting for the first time to place each other quickly and establish communication” (Alba 1990:133). Ethnicity acts as a window to communication between groups and is frequently used in education, politics, and the medical field because people have different frames of reference on situations based on their backgrounds. In this globalized climate it often becomes the ways in which people self-identify that gives any insight into reasons for specific behaviors. However, these self-identified identities sometimes change over an individual’s lifetime.

Los Angeles is a prime example of what Benedict Anderson (2006) termed an “imagined community.” In this metropolitan area people feel empathy for other “Angelinos” despite not knowing them personally. At the Celtic Arts Center, patrons have formed another imagined community, between themselves and all people of Irish descent, both in the United States and Ireland and between other members of the Center. In essence, members of the Celtic Arts Center have created a collective identity for

themselves and other members based on their similar cultural backgrounds. These similarities of culture and ethnicity are largely based on choice. For them, they have the choice of a specific Celtic identity or a Pan-Celtic identity in which they can select aspects from all Celtic cultures in which to identify. Based on Marion Bowman (1996) discussion of “Cardiac Celts,” those who choose to select aspects from all Celtic cultures would be what she termed “Free Range Celts.” According to Bowman, “Free Range Celts” are usually found in the Pagan and New Age sub-cultures; these groups choose the aspects of varying Celtic cultures that work best for their needs. At the Celtic Arts Center I did not observe any “Free Range Celts” as most chose a specific Celtic region in which to identify. However, there is some overlap based on mixed ancestry where individuals may choose different aspects of their multiple Celtic ethnicities.

According to Alba (1990), ethnicity was a working-class phenomenon, which was politicized, went through times of revival, only to emerge as a symbolic ethnicity in the United States. The majority of his theory does not apply to the situation at the Celtic Arts Center or Los Angeles as a whole. His theory was not fully relevant because he was writing about the ethnic enclaves of the East Coast and not California. In California, and specifically Los Angeles, we do not see the same Irish ethnic neighborhoods that exist on the East Coast; the Irish in Los Angeles are spread apart through larger geographic areas. In addition, there is a large space of time from when Alba was writing and the present day. In the 45 years since his research, there have been many socio-cultural and historical changes; primarily, white ethnics have become more assimilated than they were at the time of his research. The most relevant portion of Alba’s theory was his claim that in the United States we see the emergence of symbolic ethnicity. Gans first developed the

theory of symbolic ethnicity as a way to describe the ways in which ethnicity has evolved into an aspect of an individual's identity that is not part of their everyday life. At the Celtic Arts Center, the majority of people viewed their identity as symbolic in nature because it was not part of their everyday life. Instead, these individual's primarily utilized their Irish identity in specific circumstances, such as attending the Monday night programs or to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

The various theories of identity illustrate the ways in which multiple Irish identities may have evolved over time. Looking at the ways relational and collective identity interacts with members of the group and outsiders it becomes clear that there are various levels of Irish identity. Aihwa Ong (2008) argued that there has been an attempt to homogenize entire populations, such as the Irish. The perpetuation of stereotypes and the classification of individuals as a representation of the entire group is the result of ignoring internal variations within the population. Ong saw the emergence of global ethnicities as a result of new technologies and media forms, such as social media; it is through these new forms that a homogenized view of a particular group is perpetuated into the public domain.

At the Celtic Arts Center it is abundantly clear that no individual truly represents the "quintessential" Irish person. Instead, what becomes evident is the multiple Irish identities that arise based on socio-historical context. In terms of Irish identity, the biggest take away from this research is that ethnicity is a choice based on individual preference that may change over an individual's lifetime. For example, when the "melting pot" theory was preferred different ethnicities were supposed to blend into the majority population, as such, these differing ethnicities were not promoted. Then as times

changed, the “vegetable soup” metaphor became popular, in which all-ethnic groups contribution to an individual was seen as equally important. Lastly, the “martini cocktail” metaphor allows for all aspects of an individual’s identity to be present, but one ethnic label usually overpowers every other ethnic contribution. The emergence of various Irish American identities throughout history will be portrayed in the next chapter. The view of a universal Irish identity is problematic as history will show the various ways in which people have self-identified as Irish and the ways in which that identification has been treated throughout history has greatly impacted the current view of Irish identity.

## Historical Treatment of Irish Americans

The first waves of Irish migration to the United States/ North America were comprised of those dislodged from their local culture and enclosed in a diasporic community in the host country. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, immigration was viewed fundamentally as an exile, even if the move was “voluntary,” inasmuch as technology did not allow easy transit between the homeland and host country. According to Ong, “‘diaspora,’ as the term is widely used today, refers not to permanent exile” (2008:170) but is instead used as a form of “power through the use of informational technology” (2008:170). Ong calls for a distinction between the political use of the term “diaspora” and the use of it as a term meaning exile. In the Chinese diasporic identity that in which Ong writes about, it is those who are not living in a diaspora but are global citizens of Chinese ancestry that are invoking the word to spark a call to political action.<sup>3</sup> The call to action on behalf of the Indonesian Chinese by ethnic Chinese globally, according to Ong (2008:168), was the result of “the seeming global indifference” to the situation in Indonesia. It is through the global links of ethnic Chinese through the Internet that news of the injustices faced by Indonesian Chinese spread and the World Huaren Foundation (WHF) was formed.

The WHF was established “to foster a stronger sense of identity among Chinese people everywhere, not to promote Chinese chauvinism but rather racial harmony”

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<sup>3</sup> The call to action was to help the Indonesian Chinese who were victims of brutal attacks in Indonesia after the decline of the rupiah, the official currency of Indonesia; they had become the scapegoats for all of the country’s financial problems. They were viewed as plunderers of the Indonesian people who sent all their money overseas, price-gouged the locals, and hoarded food for them. The local population looted their homes and business, and their women raped by soldiers.

(Arnold 1998). While the Irish have not faced such atrocities as the Indonesian Chinese they are spread globally much like the Chinese. The Irish have a website much like the WHF that promotes a sense of identity called “Seventy Million: connecting the Irish one click at a time” which acts as a platform for all people of Irish ancestry to connect with each other and share news and events. Websites, such as WHF and Seventy Million help create and promote an imagined world where everyone of similar ancestry seems to personally know each other. The imagined world invoked by Irish transnational subjects becomes an integral part to their worldview.<sup>4</sup>

Ong (2008) asserts that transnational migration is based on globalizing market forces, which affects population flows. Ong differentiates transnational migration and diaspora as such because many cross-border flows are voluntary versus involuntary. The latter is associated with diaspora, in the strict sense of the word. The Chinese who started the WHF to support the Indonesian Chinese, were not from Indonesia themselves but from New Zealand. In both contexts the Chinese were not exiled but choose to move based on global market factors. The Indonesian Chinese actually sometimes considered themselves simply as Indonesian, who happens to have Chinese ancestry. It is for this reason that they consider themselves Indonesian first and Chinese second. This way of identification is not unique to the Indonesian Chinese as it can also be seen in the Irish American population. While people in the United States often hyphen their unique ethnic identity to the American portion, this primarily happens in name alone. At the Celtic Arts Center it was common to say one is American first and then Irish. Most interestingly

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<sup>4</sup> This is based on the concept of “imagined communities” by Anderson (2006), in which people create an imagined community where they feel connected to everyone but do not actually know them or have direct interaction with other members of the community.

were those who are first generation Irish who insisted they were American like everyone else, and did not distinguish the Irish portion.

Using Ong's paradigm I will illustrate the multiple Irish identities that have been available throughout history in which processes of globalization and migration affected these identities. In this chapter I call for the abandonment of universal ethnicities that are commonly portrayed through new technology, such as various forms of media and the Internet. Ong (2008) argues for this change in view for the Chinese of the world, and I do the same for the Irish because there is not one Irish identity but multiple Irish identities. This latter fact is significant within the context of globalization and immigration reforms. Immigration has been utilized for centuries as a control mechanism for dealing with various social, political, and economic situations in both the home and host countries.

The Irish population is characterized as a population of emigration to the United States throughout its history in times of duress. According to William Shannon (1963) the Irish in the United States began "from a sharp and tragic rejection," and "to 'come out' to the new country meant thrusting behind the old, usually forever" (25), a fact especially true for later generations of Irish immigrants. Irish immigrants who traveled to the United States after the Great Potato Famine were characterized as poor farm workers who barely had enough money to afford the trip over to the United States. Furthermore, some Irish immigrants were only able to afford the travel to the United States because they sold themselves as indentured servants. It is from this history of servitude and lack of resources that the "Irish spirit" is born and passed to future generations.

Historically, there are four primary phases of Irish migration occurring between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The first phase began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, i.e., the colonial era,

and was characterized by the movement of people from the Northern portion of Ireland to the United States. The second phase is the first mass migration of the Irish, following in the wake of the Potato Famine. The third phase is comprised of changing flows in the movement of people based on global events, such as the World Wars, the Great Depression, Ireland's independence and its entry into the European Union. In contrast to the previous phases, the fourth and current phase, while brief, illustrates a directional shift in migratory flow, *into* Ireland instead of out. This change in flow of Irish immigrants changed the composition of Irish Americans still present in the United States. The research I conducted at the Celtic Arts Center is an example of the new processes affecting Irish American identity at work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **18<sup>th</sup> Century**

The first major wave of immigration to the United States from Ireland occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when, according to Jay Dolan, "as many as 250,000 emigrated from Ireland, most from the province of Ulster, in the north of Ireland" (2008:4). However, it is important to note that not all scholars include this as the first wave of Irish immigration; it was small in comparison to the later waves and it had a different group demographic. This particular population of migrants is different from later populations because the individuals historically did not have the same ties to the culture on the Island.

According to Audrey Horning (2002), an estimated 4,500- 7,000 people from Northern Ireland migrated to the United States in 1710. In 1718, the first large exodus began, primarily as a result of crop failure leading to starvation for many (Dolan 2008). The crop failure of 1718 is similar to the crop failures seen in the 1840s. Both crop failures resulted in starvation for the Irish people and were a last resort migration to the

United States. In addition to the crop failures occurring in Ireland, by 1729 the linen trade, which accounted for half of all exports from Ireland, was also in a downward trajectory resulting in a rush to the United States (Dolan 2008). There was a mass exodus from Ireland when the linen industry completely collapsed in the 1770s (Dolan 2008). By 1775, the numbers of immigrants from Northern Ireland increased to 155,000-205,000 of those three-fourths were Protestant (70 percent being Presbyterian). Furthermore, William Shannon notes, “the first Federal Census in 1790 listed only 44,000 persons of Irish birth; in addition, there were perhaps another 150,000 of Irish ancestry out of a total population of 3,000,000” (Shannon 1963:29) compared to approximately 250,000 Irish who entered the United States between 1820 and 1840 (Griffin 1981:6).

The Irish immigrants entering the United States in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were predominantly Protestant Scotch-Irish from the North of Ireland. There are two issues regarding the classification of this group of immigrants as Irish. First, they were Protestant not Catholic. Second, they were from the North of Ireland, which is currently part of Great Britain. These were fundamental issues for self-identification and identification between the two groups of Irish. In terms of citizenship the Irish from the Northern portion of Ireland are British citizens, as such they do not hold an Irish passport. Originally, those occupying the North of Ireland were British citizens placed there by the British royalty in an attempt to control the local Irish Catholic population before they gained their independence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is not until the Southern portion of Ireland gains independence that the names “Northern Ireland” and “The Republic of Ireland” come into use.

In addition, the Protestant Scotch-Irish began to differentiate themselves from their Irish Catholic counterparts because they viewed them as uncivilized barbarians. The animosity between the two groups was not one sided; the Irish Catholics resented the Protestants because the Protestants were the ruling class in Ireland and as such kept the Catholics subordinate land workers instead of landowners. Based on these historical issues, the Irish Catholics were quick to disown the Irish Protestants in the United States. The issue of Protestant immigrants from Northern Ireland not being considered Irish immigrants was a label applied to them as a group after the large mass migration of Irish Catholics from Ireland during the Potato Famine. The Protestant Irish already present in the United States began to distinguish themselves from later immigrant populations whom they viewed as barbaric in nature and to quell suspicion of the Protestants being grouped with the Catholics. The anti-Catholic movement was in full force at this point in history in the United States. The Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants carried over their long history of confrontation and animosity from Ireland to the United States. It is through the historical context of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that we can better understand the ways in which previous conceptions of Irish identity have been and continues to be influenced by external factors.

The Presbyterians moved due to a range of economic and religious reasons therefore this migration is not viewed as an “exile” as later migrations are characterized. This era of migration is characterized as a last resort to deal with economic and/ or religious hardships, as well as the various wars during this time made the journey from Ireland to the United States dangerous. According to Dolan (2008) few Catholics

emigrated during the 18<sup>th</sup> century because many North American colonies did not welcome Catholics. For example, the South Carolina:

Legislature passed laws banning the immigration of people ‘commonly called native Irish, or persons of scandalous character or Roman Catholics.’ To prevent the immigration of Irish servants, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Georgia passed laws that levied a tax on such servants. [Dolan 2008:9]

Penal laws, like those in Maryland denied Catholics of many rights, such as voting, establishing their own schools, and the ability to worship in public (Dolan 2008).

According to Ong’s definition of diaspora, the 18<sup>th</sup> century would be a good representation of the permanent exile associated with a diaspora. Compared to the future generations, the 18<sup>th</sup> century would not be considered a form of transnational migration for the Irish. The 18<sup>th</sup> century represents the first Irish identity in the context of the United States, the Irish Protestants an important distinction that will be expanded on in the following section. The major distinctions between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish immigration involve the amount of individuals entering the United States, their religion and whether they were from the northern portion of Ireland or the southern portion. These distinctions act as a template in which multiple Irish identities sort around throughout history, in both self-identification and identification by outsiders.

## **19<sup>th</sup> Century**

In contrast to the smaller immigration of Scotch-Irish in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrants were predominately Roman Catholic, poor and unskilled fleeing the Great Potato Famine in Ireland during the 1840s. The Great Potato Famine of 1845 was a major turning point in Irish history. The Famine occurred when the plant disease known as the potato blight infested the staple crop of Ireland, the potato (Griffin 1981). The

potato blight continued to infect the potato crops for multiple seasons resulting in tens of thousands of deaths and the fleeing of hundreds of thousands to the United States. According to Lobo and Salvo (1998), the Great Famine in Ireland during the 1840s was the beginning of mass migration of the Irish to the United States. According to McCaffrey, “for those who survived, the famine resulted in substantial economic benefits. Death and emigration reduced the 1851 population from its expected nine million to six and a half million, lessening pressure on land resources” (1976:73).

In leaving Ireland, they became Displaced People (or Persons), who like others at various times and places, are simply trying to escape famine or war. Irish immigrants afforded the trip to the United States “often by selling their belongings, using up savings and spending money sent by relatives already in America” (Sowell 1981:23). The possibility of safer travel led thousands of Irish Catholics to immigrate to the United States “drawn by the promise of economic opportunity as well as the prospect of religious freedom (Griffin 1981:5). Lawrence McCaffrey (1976) notes, that more than a million Irish entered the United States between 1818 and 1870 with the bulk arriving between 1845 and 1854. The majority of new Irish immigrants were Protestant during this time, but as famines increased in frequency and travel became more affordable the trend of Irish immigrants transitioned primarily to Irish Catholics (McCaffrey 1976). According to Griffin (1981), some scholars believe the 19<sup>th</sup> century to be the first wave of Irish immigration as it was vast in numbers compared to the Irish immigration of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, “between 1840 and 1860 approximately 1.7 million men, women, and children [of Irish descent] entered the United States” (Griffin 1981:7; McCaffrey 1976). To put this into context, this is nearly seven times more than in the 1820s and

1830s (Griffin 1981). Overall, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “more than 4 million people emigrated for Ireland to the United States” (Sowell 1981:25).

According to Thomas Sowell (1981), “when the Irish began arriving in the 1820s, and especially after their massive immigration in the 1840s and 1850s, they began at the bottom of the urban occupational ladder—the men as manual laborers, the women as maids” (Sowell 1981:17). They settled in urban ghettos and experienced widespread discrimination (“Irish Need Not Apply”). In addition they were viewed with suspicion as Papists in a largely Protestant country. It is this sense of oppression by Protestants that Irish Catholics created their “sense of identity and cohesion as a people oppressed by foreigners in their native land” (Sowell 1981:23). The past experiences of the Irish Catholics helped them politically in the United States. According to Sowell, the Irish had been able to organize politically through a network “trusted social and political leaders in their priests” (Sowell 1981:23). The priests had previous experience “with secular organizations as a result of the persecution that the Catholic Church had suffered along with the Irish people” (Sowell 1981:23). This shared history of persecution leads to the Irish faring better than other immigrants in the political arena because they were accustomed to building underground networks of communication while being persecuted.

Here, the Irish became the builders of the great American cities. Their labor was used to offset the major expansions of American cities. According to Shannon (1963), the Irish built streets, sewers, water systems, and housing. Despite the low wages paid to the Irish, they still viewed the United States as the land of opportunity, where at least they had employment. The rise of the Irish in the United States is connected to the rise of the

United States for the Irish had played a huge role in making the United States both physically and historically (Shannon 1963).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Irish primarily occupied four states, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois (Sowell 1981). In addition to these four states, McCaffrey notes,

At the close of the nineteenth century, only seventeen percent of Irish-American males lived in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, while nearly as many—fifteen and a half percent—were in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. The largest concentration of Irish—thirty-five percent—settled in the Mid-Atlantic States of New York and Pennsylvania. [1976:78]

The Irish population in these four states was greater than the total population in Ireland. There was a shift in destination for the Irish in the late 1840s and early 1850s. During this time, the Irish began to move west towards California, primarily at the onset of the Gold Rush. The Irish worked as laborers on riverboats and railroad lines in their move west. Railroad towns, such as “Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, Peoria, Omaha—became a center of Irish strength” (Shannon 1963:28). Following the gold, numbers of Irish made it all the way to California to work the goldfields after 1849 (Shannon 1963).<sup>6</sup>

According to Shannon (1963), San Francisco had a sizeable Irish population from the beginning of the Gold Rush boom that spread inland as time passed. However, the Irish were not typically among those who made fortunes from the goldfields, but they were instrumental in the economic and political development of San Francisco (Shannon 1963). Among the exceptions were John Mackay and James Fair, whom “struck it” rich

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<sup>6</sup> However, there were some Irishmen in California before the Gold Rush. The Mexican government granted Irishmen who entered California before the Gold Rush land rights, as it was not yet part of the United States.

with the “Bonanza,” a gold and silver mine, valued at one hundred and ninety million dollars (Shannon 1963). According to Gloria Ricci Lothrop (2012) the majority of the Irish who went to California for the Gold Rush in 1849 were “young, single, male and grateful to have escaped the famine at home.”

During the Gilded Age there was a small number of Irish men and their wives who were influential where they were not during the Industrial expansion (Shannon 1963). The Irish who made the leap of faith to venture to California found their lot in life drastically improved from their counterparts still living in the slums of Boston and New York. Furthermore, the Irish on the West Coast “were amassing millions from the Comstock Lode and the Montana copper mines, running the governments of Nevada and California, and setting the social tone of San Francisco’s Nob Hill” (Shannon 1963:86). The major differences between the Irish on the East Coast and those on the West Coast illustrate the ways in which multiple Irish identities operated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Following the Potato Famine, there was a continuous flow of Irish immigrants into the United States, as such, it became known as the “Inishfail” or “island of destiny” for many. According to Griffin, “it is, perhaps, no coincidence that it was an Irish-American journalist, John Louis O’Sullivan, who coined the term ‘Manifest Destiny’ to describe America’s imperial mission” (1981:1). The United States became known as a land of promise, a place where grand dreams could be fulfilled, dreams that could no longer be fulfilled in Ireland (Griffin 1981). Many Irishmen fulfilled their dreams by becoming involved in public service, demonstrating another facet of Irish identities

operating in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> In Ireland, the Irish Catholics did not have such opportunities to get involved in public service or politics. An interesting point is that Irish on both the East and West Coast naturally gravitated towards public service and political positions.

The most notable of Irish public servants in California was John G. Downey. Downey worked briefly at the gold mines before moving to Los Angeles to open the town's first drug store, with his partner Dr. James P. McFarland. According to Ricci Lothrop (2012) Downey worked in several public service offices, was elected Lieutenant Governor of California, and later the thirty-second Governor of California. After the completion of his career as Governor of California he divided his property into residential properties, thus creating the city of Downey (Ricci Lothrop 2012). Downey represented the epitome of Irish success in California and specifically the greater Los Angeles area.

The first most notable of the Irish in politics on the East Coast was John Fitzgerald, "Honey Fitz", who was elected Mayor of Boston in 1906. The Irish in Boston were able to maintain political supremacy over other new immigrants because of their long occupation of the area, command of the language, political leadership, and sheer numbers. The Irish immigrants entering New York "got off the boat to find their identity waiting for them: they were to be Irish-Catholic Democrats" (Glazer and Moynihan 1991:221). Newer, non-Irish immigrants did not have these qualities to the same extent of the Irish. Essentially, the Irish in California had more options when constructing their

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<sup>7</sup> For example in 1870, 222 out of 476 Irishmen in California were registered to vote, which revealed their occupations as public servants. Some examples of famous Irish public servants are Edward F. Spence, Henry King, Richard A. Ryan, William B. Lawlor, John G. Downey, and Dr. James P. McFarland (Ricci Lothrop 2012).

identity because they were not part of a condensed, well-established ethnic community, such as those seen on the East Coast. There were plenty of Irish in California, and specifically the Los Angeles area. However, these Irish communities were not well established compared to those seen in Boston and New York, as a result their identity was not assumed.

Irish Catholics entering the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were not readily accepted into “Irish” organizations such as the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, where Irish Catholics waited sometimes two or three generations before being accepted. Instead the Irish Catholics formed their own group, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, who were simply Irish Catholics. In comparison St. Patrick was a Briton, whereas the Hibernians were Irish Catholic (Glazer and Moynihan 1991). According to Glazer and Moynihan “the result was the Protestants ceased being Irish. For a while they became ‘Ulster Irish’ and took to celebrating the Battle of Boyne. But before long the Protestant Irish blended into the composite “native” American stock that had already claimed the Scots” (Glazer and Moynihan 1991:240).<sup>8</sup> This process of homogenization of Irish Protestants was quickened by the rise of nativism in the United States. In addition to the religious and cultural factors at work in New York, the division between Irish Catholics and Protestants was based on views over British rule in Ireland.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century fully represents the idea, as presented by Ong, that there is no universal ethnicity. It is within the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the separation between distinct Irish

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to remember that in this context “native” American population refers to the native white population. Essentially, “natives” are people of white European descent who consider themselves the original population in the United States, and as such no longer consider themselves European.

identities begins to take hold in the mindset of the Irish in the United States. During this century the Irish in the United States began to separate primarily on one basic principle, religion. However, it is important to remember that even within the two major divisions there are still more Irish identities. It cannot be assumed that everyone with the same religious background will have the same exact views in all aspects of their lives. The Irish of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, much like the 18<sup>th</sup> century would still be considered to be in a state of permanent exile as there was no belief that they would ever return to Ireland. Ong's article illustrated the ways in which the Indonesian Chinese became the scapegoat for everything wrong in their society; we see the beginning of this same type of environment in the United States as it applies to the Irish. In the case of the Irish the difference is that one group of Irish were blaming a different group of Irish. In addition, the animosity between the two groups was so strong that one group of Irish ceased to be considered Irish both according to themselves and by the second group of Irish.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, changes in immigration policy in the United States resulted in decreased legal immigration with many Irish assuming the status of illegal immigrant. Compared to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the first time the Irish began taking the identity of illegal immigrant leading to a lot of friction between the new immigrants and older generations. Their status as illegal led to the creation of more Irish identities and changes in the demographics of the population. The new immigrants were forced to work for cash and had no protection from corrupt bosses who took advantage of the situation. Irish immigration to the United States decreased at the beginning of the 20th century due to the Great Depression, when people could not afford

the trip to the United States.<sup>9</sup> However, the Irish did continue to travel to the United States between 1941 and 1961 but not at the same levels seen before the Great Depression.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great triumph for the Irish Catholics and an “eye opener” of the prejudices they still faced based on their religion. They were primarily feared due to a perceived allegiance to the Pope over all other governing bodies and laws in place in the United States. According to Linda Dowling Almeida, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Irish in the United States were “well on [their] way to transitioning from an immigrant to an ethnic community” (2006:548). Irish communities in postwar America were well established, which allowed for a more secure transition for the new Irish immigrants (Almeida 2006). These established Irish communities were in “working-class communities in large industrial cities” (Almeida 2006:552). New Irish immigrants were typically single men under twenty-five who slept on the couches of families and friends until they were established (Almeida 2006). According to Almeida, “the typical immigrant had at least two years of high school. They tended to marry, settle down in the communities to which they migrated, and send their children to Catholic school” (2006:553). In contrast, the young Irish in Ireland at this time were delaying their adult lives because of poor prospects for the future (Almeida 2006). In the already established Irish communities, immigrants formed Irish fraternal organizations, primarily socialized within their community and attended mass weekly.

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<sup>9</sup> In response to the Great Depression, “the total number of Irish arriving in the United States dropped from 211,000 in the 1920s to just about 11,000 in the 1930s” (Almeida 2006:549).

Perhaps the biggest triumph for the Irish in the United States came with the election of one of their own into the highest political office of the nation. In 1960, a prominent Irish Catholic, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was elected President of the United States. Grandson of “Honey Fitz,” Kennedy had been born into a life of privilege with strong family ties to politics. He was known for his independent liberal thinking as he “personified political traditions that were specifically Irish and Catholic” (Shannon 1963:401). The Irish also believed the interests of the present should not outweigh future benefits. The Irish in both the political and personal arena believe in loyalty and personal leadership. Glazer and Moynihan believe that had President Kennedy “lived out his time he might profoundly have altered the course of the Irish-American world” (1991:287). Within two years of the assassination of Kennedy new legislation was passed, effectively limiting the legal immigration of the Irish. Essentially Kennedy represents a template for Irish identity for future generations (Shannon 1963; Sowell 1981).

In 1965, the United States passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which ended “national origin quotas that favored the Irish and other northern European immigrants and placed all countries on an equal footing” (Lobo and Salvo 1998:258). This immigration reform drastically decreased the number of Irish people allowed to enter the United States legally. Family reunification and job skills became the main way to enter the United States. Unfortunately, many Irish had lost their immediate generational links with those in the United States. As a result, many entered under tourist visas and never left, becoming part of the undocumented and invisible population. This was a dramatic change for the Irish as they went from being legal citizens that were able to blend in with the majority population to illegal immigrants that were forced into the

underground world of employment and residence. For many Irish during this time they became second-rate citizens because they were unable to obtain legal citizenship.

Despite, these setbacks for Irish immigration, the Irish were reported to be “the most affluent and best-educated white ethnic group in the country behind the Jews” (Almeida 2006:550) by 1970. According to Almeida, “scholars and social observers criticized the community for Americanizing themselves out of an identity. The critics argued that in the quest to participate in the American dream, the Irish had erased all the Irishness off themselves” (2006:556). Others argued that the Irish had more of a religious identity than an ethnic one. The change in identity was not the result of one specific thing, such as the Catholic Church, but rather a combination of many confounding factors. In the earlier generations of Irish immigrants, holding onto a unique Irish identity was done with ease because they all lived in the same neighborhoods and primarily only socialized with other Irish immigrants. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, immigrants began moving away from city centers and into the suburbs and this paired with an increase in participation in public schools and intermarriage had as much of an effect on Irish identity as the decline in immigration (Almeida 2006).

Further immigration reforms were introduced in the United States during the 1980s. The first visa lottery programs were introduced in 1986 and became a permanent feature of immigration diversity in the Immigration Act (1990). Visa lottery programs are one way in which people unable to get a visa through the employment or family reunification process can gain legal entry into the United States by “winning” one of the

various diversity visas.<sup>10</sup> One-third of Irish immigrants settled in New York, with Massachusetts and California being other popular destinations between 1972-1986 (Lobo and Salvo).

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 “legalized undocumented immigrants who had continuously resided in the U.S. since before January 1, 1982” (Lobo and Salvo 1998:261). This allowed illegal Irish immigrants who entered under tourist visas after 1965 and before 1982, and who stayed in the country, citizenship.<sup>11</sup> This new legal status was a major change for the Irish population, who at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century occupied an illegal status. The Irish mobilized and took advantage of the amendment to IRCA and won 40 percent of the lottery visas. The “New Irish” of the late 1980s and early 1990s were more educated and had higher skills than previous immigrants due to the 1960s Irish government investing internally and entering into foreign outreach, which “brought Ireland into the twentieth century economically and culturally” (Almeida 2006:554). Investment into Ireland increased educational opportunities, which were illustrated in the higher skill set of immigrants entering the United States in the late 1980s compared to those who entered the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and those of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>10</sup> Morrison visas from 1992-1994 awarded 40,000 visas annually, 40 percent of which were reserved for the Irish.

<sup>11</sup> However, IRCA still “penalized employers who hired illegal aliens, set in motion restrictions that inhibited the formerly easy travel back and forth across the Atlantic for undocumented aliens, and contained an amendment that established a lottery for forty thousand unrestricted visas available to thirty-six countries, including Ireland, that were adversely affected by the 1965 law” (Almeida 2006:564).

According to Almeida, “the arrival of the new Irish in the United States marked a turning point in the history of the Irish in America. This generation of immigrants entered the country at a time when the Irish ethnic population in the United States was at its most comfortable and successful” (2006:562). The “New Irish” arriving in the 1990s were the first generation to leave an independent Ireland who viewed their foray in the United States to be temporary, a result of economic failure back home. Individuals entering the United States during this time were raised during a time of economic prosperity in Ireland and did not believe that they would have to emigrate. As a result, the “New Irish” were resentful of their situation and viewed their time in the United States as temporary. According to Almeida, “their experience in the United States was complicated by the fact that most entered as illegal aliens and never fully integrated themselves into the mainstream of American life” (2006:562). They entered legally under tourist visas and overstayed their visas because the “New Irish” did not have the relatives in the United States that could sponsor them because of the previous decades of immigration reform limiting the Irish in America. The “New Irish” immigrants often clashed with the older generations because the newcomers were often seen as ungrateful and arrogant. Following the first visa lottery of 1986, where Irish individuals won 40 percent; the 1990 census illustrates the massive amount of Irish in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

## **21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Currently, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is experiencing a dramatic shift in net emigration to Ireland and aspects of Irishness are called into question as Ireland becomes increasingly

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<sup>12</sup> According to the 1990 census, seventeen percent of the population claimed Irish ancestry (Almeida 2006).

multicultural. In the United States, the drop in immigration from Ireland was shown in the 2000 census, where only 12 percent of the population claimed Irish ancestry, down five percent from 1990 (Almeida 2006). Ireland began to develop cultural policies emphasizing multiculturalism in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to the influx of migrants that began entering Ireland when the country joined the European Union in 1973. “Irishness” has thus become a central issue to immigration policies. In 2004, the Republic of Ireland passed a law that removed birthright citizenship from children of non-nationals. Essentially, Ireland determined that only people who possessed Irish ancestry could claim to be an Irish citizen.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, in the United States individuals may choose to claim whatever ethnicity they desire. At the Celtic Arts Center, the emergence of “Monday Night Irish” and “Cardiac Celts” makes this explicit, for some members claim an Irish identity because they “feel” Irish.

The Irish in Los Angeles, specifically during the 21<sup>st</sup> century have a distinct socio-historical context. They are a more mobile population than their counterparts in the ethnic communities on the East Coast, making it difficult to easily identify so-called Irish neighborhoods. The mobile nature of the Irish in Los Angeles leads to less attendance in ethnic organizations as they are harder to attend based on their location. The Celtic Arts Center has faced this problem, as it is located in North Hollywood which makes them a good distance from certain areas of Los Angeles city proper and other outlying greater Los Angeles areas. Irish identity is more symbolic in nature in Los Angeles because of

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<sup>13</sup> According to Veerendra Lele (2008) the debate surrounding the passing of this act was about Ireland’s “European character” and not specifically about Ireland alone. The Referendum was an attempt to define the “Other,” individuals that the EU as a whole did not want as citizens because it allowed freedom of movement between all EU countries.

the large geographic spread of people. The lack of well-known ethnic enclaves in Los Angeles, results in the Irish in Los Angeles not having an identity automatically ascribed to them as those who entered during the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the East Coast. These differences clearly demonstrate the multiple Irish identities present in not only Los Angeles, but throughout the United States. While the 21<sup>st</sup> century could easily perpetuate a global ethnic identity of Irish Americans due to the prevalence of technology, this has yet to be seen. Instead, what is portrayed online is the varying individual traits of Irish Americans.

### **Conclusion**

The attempt at homogenizing Irish identity primarily occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Irish immigrants were viewed as “Americanizing” themselves. The homogenized view of populations occurred because of new technologies, which created the idea of a global ethnicity of and for minority populations. The result was a loss of traditional Irish culture and by extension traditional views of Irish identity. Thus resulting in the creation of general stereotypes to represent the newly homogenized groups. A glimpse in to the history of Irish Americans demonstrated the ways in which the Irish are not a homogenous group. Irish from what is now Northern Ireland characterized the first wave of Irish immigrants into the United States during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This wave of Irish immigration has largely been discounted as the first wave because it had a small number of immigrants compared to the later generations and it had a different religious demographic.

Following the Potato Famine in Ireland in 1845, there was a mass migration of the Irish to the United States, characterizing the second phase of immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Irish immigrants during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were primarily Roman Catholic, poor,

and unskilled. The ability to travel to the United States during this time was largely dependent on having possessions to sell and family already residing in America who would send money to relatives in Ireland. The Irish Catholics created a diasporic community near their ports of entry. Their sense of cohesion was built around their sense of being oppressed first by foreigners in Ireland and second by Protestants in the United States.

In addition to the larger number of Irish immigrants entering the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Irish began to move west away from the traditional states of Irish occupation: New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. The Gold Rush in California attracted many Irish to the West Coast, where they helped build the cities as they did on the East Coast. The Irish in California became influential in the politics of their local cities. In the world of politics the Irish were making bigger strides in Boston. The Irish in Boston were fully incorporated in to their identity as Irish Catholic Democrats, as such new arrivals were automatically given the same identity.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the apex of Irish immigration with millions of individuals entering the United States following the Potato Famine, but Irish immigration drastically decreased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of two different events: the Great Depression and changes in immigration policies. The Great Depression decreased all immigration, not simply that of the Irish, while changes in immigration policies directly affected primarily Irish immigrants. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the low point in terms of immigration for Irish, but also the highest point politically for them. The first Irish Catholic President, John F. Kennedy was elected during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1965, the Irish in America could no longer easily enter the United States legally due to the end of national origin quotas that

had favored them. The Irish were able to enter the United States with some ease in the 1980s when they won 40 percent of the diversity visas offered. Furthermore, the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the new Irish immigrants being resentful and arrogant of their status as they viewed the move to the United States as temporary compared to earlier generations who viewed the move as permanent.

There was a dramatic reversal of immigration starting at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as there was now more net immigration *into* Ireland rather than from Ireland to the United States. Irish identity and individuals' sense of "Irishness" was called into question during this time in Ireland as they had more people from different nationalities moving to Ireland and becoming Irish citizens. However, following the 2004 referendum that removed birthright citizenship from non-nationals the degree of "Irishness" became less of an issue. Essentially the Irish in Ireland decided that only people who had current Irish ancestry of at least one grandparent could claim to be Irish. At this time the Irish truly became a transnational population, as people began to travel back to Ireland. Communication between Ireland and the United States was made with ease due to the advances in technology; as such people were able to more freely exchange ideas and beliefs. Ong (2008) notes that as populations become transnational they also begin to be characterized as having one global ethnicity, a characterization that I will argue is problematic. In addition, Ong (2008) illustrates the ways in which the Chinese became the scapegoat for everything wrong in a society. This historical chapter shows how the Irish, similar to the Chinese in Indonesia, have been treated poorly in the past in the United States. I have illustrated that there is no universal Irish ethnicity, but instead there are multiple Irish identities throughout the United States that are largely dependent on

historical, economic, religious, and social context. The theory of symbolic identity in combination with the historical context of Irish Americans acts as a lens through which the significance of Celtic Arts Center can be analyzed.

In general, Irish Americans have become disembedded from previous forms of Irish identity as changes in economy and technology have occurred throughout history. There is some standardization of Irish identity throughout history that relies on two major factors: religion and ancestral location. Outsiders and insiders of the Irish population recognize these traits, in addition to other personality and physical appearance traits of who is the “quintessential” Irish person. The Celtic Arts Center represents one venue in which Irish in Los Angeles have attempted to re-embed themselves into an Irish identity. It is through this process of re-embedding that the Irish at the Celtic Arts Center reclaim power over their identification; it is their way of no longer accepting a category simply of white.

## **An Claidheamh Soluis /Celtic Arts Center**

The Celtic Arts Center has been operating in the greater Los Angeles area for over 25 years. They are currently located at Theater Unlimited Studios in North Hollywood. The organization is also known as *An Claidheamh Soluis*, which means “sword of light” in Irish Gaelic. The Celtic Arts Center’s mission is to

preserve and foster the performing and visual arts, languages, music, folklore and traditions of the seven original Celtic nations — Brittany, Cornwall, Galicia, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales — as well as that of their diaspora who continue to create and perform throughout the world. [CELTIC ARTS CENTER Facebook/ LinkedIn 2013]

The Celtic Arts Center has chosen the moniker *An Claidheamh Soluis* because in ancient Celtic folklore the sword “was a talisman and a rally point used to spread culture and enlightenment among all people” (Celtic Arts Center Facebook 2013), which is the same purpose that the Celtic Arts Center is trying to fulfill. It is the unique interaction with the past and present day concerns that allows the Celtic Arts Center to participate in the “heritageisation” of Irish ethnicity (Harvey 2001). David Harvey uses the term “heritageisation” to describe heritage as part of a long historical narrative in interdisciplinary research (Harvey 2001).

### **Historical Background**

The Celtic Arts Center has both flourished and struggled since its inception in 1985. Throughout the history of the Celtic Arts Center there have been a few specific events that have directly influenced membership and attendance rates. The Celtic Arts Center, like the Irish themselves are not immune to times of struggle when people try to dampen their spirits. For example, in 1992, New Year’s Eve, the Celtic Arts Center was destroyed in an arson fire. According to Sean Walsh and Los Angeles city fire officials

“the blaze started shortly after sundown Dec. 31, when someone set fire to portions of the 68-seat theater and the adjacent Café Beckett, causing more than \$25,000 in damage” (Sengupta 1993). In the weeks following the fire the organizers of the Celtic Arts Center kept the organization in tact, committees were formed, and locations found to carry on their mission.

In addition to being subjected to this catastrophe, at the same time the Celtic Arts Center’s was unable to pay the back rent to the landlord because as the neighborhood (Hollywood Boulevard) got seedier, participation in the Celtic Arts Center decreased, which translated to less money (Rauzi 1996). Sean Walsh speculated that the Celtic Arts Center or the Irish themselves were a threat to someone, based on the “charred remains of a large tricolor Irish flag that, Walsh says, was lifted from a box and torched in a loft office above the stage” (Sengupta 1993). Walsh further speculated that it is possible the Celtic Arts Center was a target because it “promotes Ireland’s native Gaelic roots rather than the British culture that dominates the island state” (Sengupta 1993).

According Brian Oheachtuigheirn the founder of the Celtic Arts Center and its predecessor in New York, “culture gives one a sense of identity, and that sense of identity would inspire one to participate in some sort of Irish politics, rather than English politics. But the English government identifies (Irish) culture with antagonistic Irish politics” (Sengupta 1993). Officials at the Celtic Arts Center are not quick to point the finger at other local British groups, but they are not so naïve to dismiss the possibility of a culprit closer to home. The Celtic Arts Center leaders acknowledge they may have disgruntled members who could have committed the atrocious act as it seems the culprit entered through a locked front door, implying that they had a key (Sengupta 1993).

After the fire at the Hollywood Boulevard location, the Celtic Arts Center “dropped almost completely off the cultural radar for a few years, operating out of the basement of a rectory in Los Feliz” (Rauzi 1996). The Celtic Arts Center began to work their way back into the cultural mind of Los Angeles in 1996, “with monthly concerts and holiday events at the Raven Playhouse” (Rauzi 1996); this theater was also opened for the *seisiúns*. In the *seisiúns*, the musicians all play the melody, as that is typical of traditional Celtic music. According to Rauzi (1996) “the evenings are open to anyone interested in Celtic culture, not just those who can trace their roots to Ireland, Scotland or Wales” aptly put “Celtic culture is infectious.” The Celtic Arts Center draws in people from varying backgrounds, from married with children to young singles. In this setting all can mingle and learn Celtic trivia from each other, from inaccuracies in the historical record to the differences between Irish Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic. (Fischer 1999).

In 2001, the Celtic Arts Center finally had a permanent location in an East Valley Strip Mall on Laurel Canyon Boulevard in Valley Village. While the landlord at the Raven playhouse was very supportive, the Celtic Arts Center could only use the facility when it was not in use by another group. At this Valley Village location, the Celtic Arts Center “has a 61-seat theater—three tiers arranged in a semicircle so you have an unobstructed view from any seat in the small house” (Biederman 2001). According to David McNabb, the organizer of the concert series for the Celtic Arts Center, they “try not to emphasize the differences as much as the similarities of the seven Celtic clans” (Biederman 2001). Emphasizing the similarities is becoming a trend in the Celtic world; instead of narrowing an organization or event into a pigeonhole of interests, this method of branding seems to open more doors in both membership and attendance at festivals. As

of 2002, membership at the Celtic Arts Center had “rebounded from fewer than 70 to more than 300, and it’s still climbing” (Breslaur 2002). According to Barry Lynch, despite the out of the way locale in Valley Village “to attract the community was a little more difficult...but we’ve done it. We have a strong base. We’ve got a lot of spirit. And we’ve got a lot of tradition” (Breslaur 2002). For the Celtic Arts Center it seems to always come down to their strong sense of tradition and spirit; they are not a group easily deterred from accomplishing their goals (Breslaur 2002). These events in the Celtic Arts Center history still influence some of the member’s views that were members during the times of turmoil and transition. In addition to the historical context of the Irish in the United States, the historical context behind the Celtic Arts Center needed to be addressed because of its influence on the organization and by extension the members.

### **Purpose of the Celtic Arts Center**

The Celtic Arts Center accomplishes their purpose of preserving and fostering the culture and traditions of the Celtic nations through presenting concerts and plays, in addition to their free Monday night programs. In an attempt to engender Irish identity, every Monday evening there is a free introductory level Irish Gaelic class, as well as a paid intermediate level class. In addition there is a free *céilí* dance workshop (Irish dance class), as well as the traditional music *seisiún*. The music *seisiún* is where people play traditional Celtic music together and the audience is welcome to participate or just watch and enjoy the music. According to the Celtic Arts Center they have had many musicians grow from the *seisiún* into “accomplished performers who successfully tour and compete both in the U.S. and internationally” (Celtic Arts Center Facebook 2013). The Celtic Arts

Center does have other events and workshops throughout the year that focus on Celtic themes.

At the Celtic Arts Center every Monday night beginning at 7:00 PM people who walk through the doors will be greeted by members of the Celtic Arts Center asking them if they are there for the free Irish Gaelic language workshop. Following this initial introduction in the little lobby of T.U. studios, they will be directed to a room to the left where the free language class occurs. Following, members will enthusiastically inform the individual of the other events occurring at the Celtic Arts Center after the language class. At 8:00 PM, the Irish dance workshop begins and goes for an hour; this class is for beginners to advance. According to Kathee Starr, a journalist, the Irish folk dancing is not the same as what is commonly called to mind when Irish dancing is mentioned, in other words it is not the Riverdance style of dance but a type of Irish step dance. Starr elaborates further that Irish folk dancing is “more like American ‘Square Dancing’ in that the participants, dance in circles and squares, changing partners, [and] holding hands” (Starr 2011). The difference between the two types of dance primarily has to do with the fanciful footwork seen in Irish dancing. Following both the language class and the dance workshop is the music *seisiún*, also known as a Celtic “jam session.” The *seisiún* is not a performance in the traditional sense of the word but instead a group of people joining together to play Celtic music in a non-formal setting. In the *seisiún* anyone is welcome to join in on his or her personal instruments or lend their voice to the mix. In general, there is usually a core of regulars who sit around a table playing songs that strike their fancy; there is no set order and no music sheets to read off of here. Those who do not wish to

join are able to sit off to the side and enjoy the music and socialize with other people in attendance.

### **The Role of Tradition at the Celtic Arts Center**

In order to preserve and foster the Celtic culture the Celtic Arts Center focuses on specific Celtic or in the case of Monday nights, Irish traditions. Tradition is something everyone partakes of and participates in, even if they do not realize this fact. In the past, tradition meant “handing over” from the Latin *tradere* (to transmit) and “gave way to a sense of authority being handed ‘down’ from one generation to another” (Bronner 2000:96; Williams 1983:318-20). Traditions are not static; they evolve and transmute such that the emergence of a “new” tradition does not necessarily mean the “death” of another. Tradition can provide stability in the form of anchoring or rallying points for a society, or in the Celtic Arts Center case an ethnic organization. The Irish traditions expressed at the Celtic Arts Center on Monday nights involve the Irish Gaelic language class, the traditional Irish *céilí* dance class, and a traditional Irish music *seisiún*. While it seems that the Celtic Arts Center is making an effort to engender Irish identity for the members; based on the research conducted I am of the opinion that the end result of the center’s efforts are a superficial symbolic Irish identity for the members involved in the Monday night activities. Perhaps, it is the manner in which the Celtic Arts Center engages in Irish traditions that has resulted in the symbolic expressions of Irish identity.

While Edward Shils (1981), argues that tradition is anything handed down between generations regardless of the validity, the Celtic Arts Center has chosen to focus on the “essential elements [that] are recognizable by an external observer” (1981:14). If it is the goal of the Celtic Arts Center to stimulate an Irish identity within its members, one

explanation for the symbolic identity that is instead produced may be that the traditions they have chosen to utilize are not adequate for producing a full-integrated Irish identity. The question then becomes: why do they continue to utilize the same traditions? The answer seems to lie in Shils' view of tradition as needing elements that are recognized by outsiders. Therefore, the Celtic Arts Center has chosen superficial mechanisms to transmit Irish identity in order to appeal to a larger general audience, instead of, focusing on more in depth expressions of Irish identity for its members.

However, without the Celtic Arts Center there would be noticeably less transmission of Irish traditions in the Los Angeles area. Traditions cannot be passed to future generations without living actors to produce and disseminate them (Cameron 1985). At the Celtic Arts Center, members and non-members alike will find participants engaging in and passing down Celtic traditions from three specific arenas, language, dance, and music. In fact, the *seisiún* at the Celtic Arts Center is the longest running of its kind on the West Coast; there are not many other venues where one may find this particular tradition being transmitted. The tradition of the *seisiún* is what Eric Hobsbawm (2000) would term an invented tradition. The *seisiún* is essentially a way to legitimize the Celtic Arts Center as it calls for a reclaiming of the "traditional" Irish pub music atmosphere, even if this in itself is an exaggeration that borders on a stereotype. The view of the "traditional Irish pub" scene is problematic because it is an essentialized view that does not exist in reality for the Irish people; instead, it is an Irish American construct of the idealized version of the culture of the Irish pub. In a sense, Irish Americans think of an Irish pub as something that is consistent and never changing. As Henry Glassie (2003) notes, tradition should not be confused as occurring in stasis;

instead, it must be realized as a way in which to maintain continuity. Traditions lend “authenticity” for the purposes of individual and social success (Glassie 2003). It is the Center’s preoccupation of having legitimacy and authenticity in the community, rather than a focus on its members that has created a superficial consumption of Irish cultural products. Furthermore, Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin (1984) argue tradition is less about actual material culture than processes of thought. However, at the Celtic Arts Center there is more of a focus on Irish material culture rather than processes of thought. The emphasis on material culture is the result of the symbolic nature of the Celtic Arts Center; it is the material culture that is more tangible for the participants.

### **Cultural Expressions, Experiences, and Practices**

Cultural expressions, experiences, and practices are influenced by the same influences that determine the level of ethnic identity (Alba 1990:105); therefore, these expressions must be analyzed as they relate to the identity-making processes at work at the Celtic Arts Center. For Alba (1990), generational status is one of the most significant forces behind cultural experiences; however, it is not the only force influencing experiences. Alba notes, that modern day “ethnic cultural experience can be seen as a matter of cultural ‘survivals,’ residues of the immigrant culture suitably modified to fit American patterns” (1990:106). This concept of cultural survivals modified for an American audience is at work at the Celtic Arts Center; they chose the three most suitable aspects of the Irish culture in which to focus their efforts. Expanding on this view of ethnic survivals, according to the melting-pot theory, ethnic forms should weaken with each generation. The important distinction here is that they “should” weaken; however, as it has been displayed in the United States this is not the case.

The United States is known for its multicultural standpoint; many still choose to believe in the melting pot theory, however, it has been demonstrated that it does not in actuality exist. Instead, what we have in the United States can be more accurately described as the “martini cocktail.” Edward Griffin (1998) describes the “martini cocktail” of the United States as a theory that stresses dualism, rather than a multicultural blending seen in the melting pot theory or the pluralistic view of the “vegetable soup” metaphor. Griffin, stresses that the dualism seen in the United States is between the dominant and the dominated, it is hegemony, with a powerful ruling class and an oppressed minority.

Many American’s may believe that the United States is more similar to “vegetable soup” rather than the “martini cocktail” however, “vegetable soup” is the ideal and the “martini cocktail” is the reality. According to the “vegetable soup” metaphor “hyphenated Americans claim dual citizenship in their culture group and in the national culture, with both terms considered meaningful” (Griffin 1998); this allows for legitimacy to each group in an attempt to protect legitimacy of all groups. Griffin (1998) notes, that the proportions of the “martini cocktail” as it relates to this metaphor consist of: “three (or more) jolts of raw, powerful, colorless gin drily mingling with, but overcoming, one part vermouth and a little olive for the garnish.” In the case of Irish-Americans, the “American” portion of the hyphenated name has more meaning and power (this would be the gin); the “Irish” portion can be categorized as either the vermouth or the olive garnish. At the Celtic Arts Center, I would categorize the majority of people who view their Irish identity as symbolic as utilizing the Irish portion as the olive garnish. My reason for this categorization is that for those who express a symbolic

identity the olive symbolizes something that makes them unique on occasion; however, a martini cocktail does not always have to have an olive. In contrast, individuals at the Celtic Arts Center who do not view their Irish identity as symbolic, such as, the few members actually born and raised in Ireland; I would categorize their Irish identity as the “vermouth.” For these individuals, the Irish portion of their identity is always present, like the “vermouth” but is overcome by the American “gin.”

Depending on the category of “vermouth” or “olive” that the Irish aspect of identity falls in will influence the extent that the culture is expressed. I think this is a more critical feature in determining the forces behind cultural experiences. While Alba placed emphasis on generational status, I have witnessed the level of participation in cultural experiences at the Celtic Arts Center more directly relates to an individual’s view of their Irish identity as symbolic or not.

For Alba, the elderly have an overall lower level of ethnic experience (Alba 1990:112). One possible explanation is the lack of transportation in order to actively participate in community ethnic events. Without the everyday behaviors of the elderly distinguishing them from other social groups, survival of ethnicity decreases in the population. One outcome may be that the elderly are not able to fully pass down their ethnic traditions to future generations, especially a problem for the survival of mother tongues. For it is with ethnicity that traditions are preserved and passed to the following generations.

While Alba’s (1990) view of the elderly having a lower level of ethnic experience may be true in its most general overarching form for the Irish American population, the Celtic Arts Center and other ethnic organizations such as the St. Andrews Society seem

to have the opposite problem. Recently, at the Welsh Festival at Barnsdall Art Park I spoke with a few members of the Board of Trustees for the St. Andrews Society, which is dedicated to Scottish culture, and they explained that they are having a difficult time attracting a younger crowd of people. They commented the Celtic Arts Center was lucky to have two young females staffing the booth at the Welsh Festival. This was an interesting interaction between the two groups because the St. Andrews people were interested in engaging in a little reciprocity between the groups. They offered to put an advertisement in their monthly newsletter about the Celtic Arts Center free of charge and asked if the Celtic Arts Center would be willing to post a link to their organization's page on the Celtic Arts Center website. Based on my research with the Celtic Arts Center regarding the ages of participants in the Monday night programs and this conversation with the St. Andrews Society members, I am led to believe that the older generations are more involved in ethnic organizations and engaged in ethnic experiences than the younger generations. As such, it will be an interesting process to see how such organizations as the Celtic Arts Center and St. Andrews Society appeal to a younger generation to keep the organizations themselves alive and the traditions they are trying to preserve. With this in mind we refer back to the context in which Alba was writing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on Alba's research, the young ethnics he saw involved in ethnic cultural activities have now become the older adults who are active at organizations such as the Celtic Arts Center and the St. Andrews Society. It is possible that ethnic identification is less important to the younger Irish and Scottish American Angelinos. The other possibility is that the younger generation is expressing their ethnicity online rather than in person.

However, it would be irresponsible to think generational status is the only factor at work in cultural expressions at the Celtic Arts Center and the St. Andrews Society. While both have shown the opposite of what Alba describes, the issue is not necessarily only based on the age of participants. There are other factors at work such as the economy, location of centers, hours of events, and most important the ways in which individuals view their identity. The older, more involved population may do so because they view their identity as part of their everyday life. In contrast, younger individuals may not place as much importance on their identity; instead, their Irish identity may be more symbolic. Therefore, those who view their identity as symbolic may utilize other forms in which to express their identity that does not place importance on participating in cultural expressions, experiences, or practices.

### **Mother Tongues or Ancestral Languages**

Language has always been at the heart of identity and therefore should be the chief concern when reconstructing a national identity. However, in the United States the study of ancestral language illustrates that there is a fundamental lack of involvement in ethnic networks. According to Alba (1990) without the involvement in ethnic networks the study of ancestral languages will have little impact. This has become the case in the United States and as a result the study of these languages has become a “purely academic affair” (Alba 1990). In the past there have been attempts to bring the study of ancestral languages into ethnic networks through the various Gaelic revival movements. Revivalists, Thomas Duddy (2003) notes, are those who call for the revival of Gaelic based on the belief that language was the chief way in which “a national consciousness or personality could be made to discover and celebrate itself” (Duddy 2003:14-15). Duddy

believed in intellectual nationalism as demonstrated in his view that “Irish thought” was born from the unique history of the Irish people. Benedict Anderson’s (2006) belief that language is an important aspect of creating national identity and imagined communities is evidenced in his discussion of print-languages, which created languages of power. Languages of power are the languages spoken by the dominant culture, which becomes the norm for the entire population. The Gaelic Revival movement was an attempt to reclaim their language as a source of power and identity.

Rosemary Henze and Kathryn Davis note that “the imminent loss [of language] is much more personal, for with the language goes the intricacy of culture, worldview, and the indigenous identity that was best expressed through that language” (1999:3). According to Alba (1990) ancestral languages act as a way to create social divides in a community, based on understanding of the language. It may also be said that there is a hierarchy of understanding a language depending on the ethnic language discussed. For example, there is fluency, spoken but not written understanding (or vice versa), and knowing a few phrases or words. The use or disuse of an ethnic language has social implications. There is a list of minority languages in the United States; it is telling that some languages that are clearly a minority and whose survival is endangered, such as Gaelic, are not on the list. Ethnic language is an important source of ethnic cultural knowledge. According to Alba, “culture is embedded in language, thus knowledge of large portions of an ethnic culture is lost to those who do not know the mother tongue” (1990:10). For example, every ethnic language has varying terminology for expressing certain sentiments or words for objects, which tell you a lot about the specific ethnicity.

Ethnic languages mark ethnic boundaries between those who know the language and those who do not (Alba 1990:84). At the Celtic Arts Center there is a division between those who know Irish Gaelic and those who do not. The older members who are more fluent in Irish Gaelic use it more in conversation with each other and with those trying to learn the language. However, it sometimes acts as an excluding factor, that leaves many out of the circle. Essentially it creates a hierarchy of Irish Gaelic speakers; the top of the hierarchy being the instructors followed by those who have been learning for decades or a few years; then the new learners and last would be those who are complete non-speakers. The instructor for the intermediate Irish Gaelic class and one other member at the Celtic Arts Center are native speakers, although from different regions of Ireland. The instructor of the beginning class is not a native speaker; however, she has learned the language as part of her interest in Irish culture over many decades. In all, at the Celtic Arts Center there are only two native speakers; everyone else who knows more Irish Gaelic than a beginner or non-speaker has learned the language based on their interest in the culture. The hierarchy does not seem as an intentional way to exclude people, it is more of a byproduct of trying to speak the language as much as possible. The look on people's faces when they first enter the Celtic Arts Center for the first time portrays a sense of confusion as those in the lobby area are speaking Irish Gaelic. The continuous use of Irish Gaelic is a way for the native speakers to maintain a piece of their Irish identity despite having become immersed into the American culture. The use of Irish Gaelic by those who have learned the language over long periods of time is a way in which they reclaim an identity and a sense of power over simply being American. For them, it lends them an aspect of authenticity and uniqueness, a prized possession in the

American culture. It is through language that native speakers and learners alike have placed importance on language influencing the culture around it. They are no longer standing idly by as the language disappears. Learning the language may be an academic affair but it is better to have some speakers than no speakers.

While Alba (1990) asserts that Gaelic revival movements had no impact, Una Ni Bhromeil (2001) asserts that the Gaelic movement was about more than language; it provided a platform to create a cultural identity for the Irish people. It is this creation of an Irish identity that is at work at the Celtic Arts Center through their Irish Gaelic language courses. For many members, learning the language was a way in which to connect with their Irish ancestry, more so than learning the language in a bubble. Throughout the intermediate class, there is a lot of straying from the book to simply learn in an academic setting; instead, participants ask questions about different sayings that may or may not be used in Irish Gaelic. This structure allows the participants to more fully immerse themselves in the Irish culture by giving them a better understanding of the cultural background of the language.

The Gaelic League, Ni Bhromeil, notes, was founded in 1893 and “by 1916, Irish nationalism had become unthinkable without the Irish language at its core” (Ni Bhromeil 2001:87). According to Michael Logan, founder of the Brooklyn Phino-Celtic Society, “the preservation and cultivation of the Irish language were indispensable to the social status of the Irish people and their descendants, and therefore, of vital importance to Americans of Irish descent” (Ni Bhromeil 2001:89). Ethnic language was essentially a building block for ethnic pride (Ni Bhromeil 2001) and ethnic identity. However, over time dance has taken the place of language in ethnic identity formation (Ni Bhromeil

2001). The emergence of dance as a building block for identity formation seems to be the case at the Celtic Arts Center, as there are more people who participate in the dance than the language class.

Even those with the best intentions of learning Gaelic to further improve relations of ethnic identity cannot do so because it remains an academic pursuit with no one to have conversations with in Gaelic. It is possible that the shift from language to dance as a building block for identity formation is related to the ease at which someone can participate in the dance and pass it along to others. Dance is traditionally a more open and fluid discipline in which to share with others, while language is very strict in the rules and needs constant practice in order to continue use in conversations. Therefore, the pursuit of learning ancestral languages, such as Gaelic, does not add substance to an ethnic community. However, it is important to note that this observation primarily is relevant to those ethnic populations who have been in the United States for centuries. Ethnic groups whose arrival is more recent have an increased probability of retaining cultural expressions, such as language (Alba 1990). The retention of ancestral languages is influenced by the prestige associated with the ethnic culture and the size of the group present to interact with each other. The implication here is that the larger the group the increased probability of retaining various cultural expressions.

However, in the United States, among European Americans the use of ethnic languages as ethnic boundaries is eroding as only small minorities of those born in the United States use the mother tongues (Alba 1990:93). According to Alba (1990), most native born whites in the United States have little to no knowledge of mother tongues, more so for languages already in danger of becoming extinct. In fact, the further the new

generation is from the immigrant population the larger the move away from mother tongues; the steepest drop-off is between the second and later generations (Alba 1990). It is important to note that there have been language revitalization movements; there was one such movement in the 1970s. Revitalization movements also are telling for an ethnic identity, for “those involved in language revitalization tend to view use and maintenance of heritage language as both a right and a resource” (Henze and Davis 1989:5). Furthermore, it is important that the speakers of the language and not outsiders start any language revitalization movement.

Knowledge of a mother tongue is seen more in individual’s who identify as a single ancestry, more so when both parents are from the same ancestry. Parents of the same ethnic background are more likely to pass down ethnic language to their children because it will be used in the home more. Many with limited knowledge of an ethnic language learned words or phrases in childhood. In addition, the knowledge of mother tongues shows the importance attached to the corresponding background (Alba 1990).

According to Alba (1990) language is declining as the foundation of ethnic identity as the numbers of those who use it, do so as a strictly private affair. Ancestral languages can only persist if there are a large number of speakers; without the retention of speakers the language cannot be passed to the next generation due to the lack of occasions in which to socialize and regularly use it (Alba 1990). This decline in the use of mother tongues may have an impact on the importance placed on ethnic origins for native-born whites (Alba 1990:101). Education has a positive impact on language acquisition which, is shown through the knowledge of more words and phrases. There is a greater knowledge of ancestral languages associated with the highly educated because

they often studied the language formal setting. In other words, education allows people to study the language in depth and gives them a place in which to use it with other people, in essence the education situation creates a “language island.” It is these language islands that carry on the language; however, they only represent a small percentage of the ethnic group. Language islands suffer losses as the group begins to pass away because language retention hinges on use, as the group decreases in size so do the opportunities to use the mother tongue. To generalize, the survival of mother tongues is largely dependent on the size of the group speaking it, prestige associated with the language, and “frequent contact with the generation that still uses mother tongues to any degree” (Alba 1990:122).

The Celtic Arts Center functions as a language island in Los Angeles due in large part to the limited number of people outside of the Center that can speak Irish Gaelic. One possible explanation for the hierarchy of Irish Gaelic speakers seen at the Celtic Arts Center may be attributed to the need to try and preserve the language as much as possible. Language, unlike dance, needs to be spoken continuously in order to remain fluent enough to pass along to future learners. In addition, the Celtic Arts Center participants for the most part do not have children in which to pass down the language. The two native speakers still have family living in Ireland in which they can converse freely and pass down the language to future generations. Instead, for the majority the language is used to converse with other speakers only in the context of the center. Learning Irish Gaelic is a manner in which to obtain cultural capital in which to lend legitimacy to an individual’s symbolic identity. Essentially, knowing the language both on the individual level and for the Center as a whole gives authenticity to the participants, for some it “makes them more Irish” than non-speakers.

## **Ethnic Customs**

Ethnic customs are another avenue in which individuals construct their symbolic ethnicity. Individuals are free to pick and choose which customs or traditions they choose to participate in and pass down to their children. As Alba notes, the customs individuals maintain are usually the same ones their parents maintained. Individuals who place importance on ethnicity are more likely to maintain ethnic customs. However, not all ethnic customs are actually ethnic; some are family or religious customs, which further convolutes the role of ethnic customs when they are largely passed down within a family. (Alba 1990).

St. Patrick's Day is an ethnic custom that many in the United States believe to have always been celebrated. However, St. Patrick's Day was not largely celebrated until the 1800s in the United States. Traditionally, in Ireland, St. Patrick's Day was a holy day that was to be respected; in the United States March 17<sup>th</sup> became a day not for religious observance but a display of ethnic pride. The emergence of this holiday in the United States corresponds to a time in which the Irish in the United States were faced with anti-Irish discrimination. St. Patrick's Day for Irish Americans became a way in which they could reclaim pride in their Irish identity. For some the only Irish custom they maintain is wearing green on St. Patrick's Day. It is possible that this custom is maintained because it has become mainstream; there is no stigma attached to this custom. Currently, St. Patrick's Day has become commodified and extended to everyone regardless of Irish ancestry. Furthermore, many claim to be Irish on this holiday only, including those who have no Irish in their ancestry.

Interestingly, the Celtic Arts Center did not actively celebrate St. Patrick's Day. The Celtic Arts Center did send two musicians to play at the Los Angeles County Irish Fair and Music Festival that took place at the beginning of March at the Pomona Fairplex. In addition, the Celtic Arts Center gave volunteers, who were already planning on attending the fair flyers to pass out during the musician's performance. The Celtic Arts Center did not have a booth this year because it was determined that it was not worth their time and effort. As I was told, by Doug, the President of the Board of Directors for the Celtic Arts Center, since the fair was in Pomona and not Los Angeles in past years he ended up staying at the booth the entire time, and he was commonly given the response by fair participants that the Center was too far away for them to travel to, as the majority lived in the Inland Empire. As one of the volunteers this year at the Irish Fair, armed with a Celtic Arts Center t-shirt and some flyers I can personally attest to Doug's statement. Some who chose to watch the musician's met me with mild curiosity when I explained to them all the Celtic Arts Center had to offer them. However, I too got the response that the Celtic Arts Center was too far away for them to travel to on a weekly basis. I tried to persuade people by telling them that for the cost of gas they would be getting a lot for their money, after all, the Monday night offerings at the center would typically cost a lot more on their own at any other venue.

Besides the Celtic Arts Center musicians, the only other member I saw at the fair was Trisha, who attends the Irish Gaelic class. Before the event, multiple members of the Celtic Arts Center expressed disinterest in the fair because of the image it portrayed. They felt that the commodified view of St. Patrick's Day as a time to drink green beer, wear green, and buy "corny" merchandise was not the way of St. Patrick's Day. In

addition, multiple members utilize public transportation to attend the Celtic Arts Center and it would be more difficult for them to attend the Irish fair. As I was in attendance at the Irish fair, I can say that their view of the festival was accurate. The Pomona Fairplex was decked out for the Irish fair; they had “Irish” phrases posted throughout the venue, many places in which to purchase green beer and Irish food, and multiple stages for performances for both music and dance. In addition they had the “Irish village,” essentially a small scale Renaissance Fair and the obligatory green water in fountains and other water ways. Perhaps, if there were an Irish Fair closer to the Celtic Arts Center they would be more involved. In addition, the Celtic Arts Center may in the future celebrate St. Patrick’s Day more if the holiday fell on a Monday night, the only time when the center is open.

Another ethnic custom that may be maintained without actively portraying to the world an individual’s Irishness is Samhain (pronounced Sow-In). Samhain is the beginning of the Celtic New Year and corresponds to the more popular holiday known as Halloween. Technically, Samhain begins the first of November, but in the past the Celtic people started their days at sundown, which sets Samhain on October 31<sup>st</sup>. There are not many public Samhain celebrations since most people celebrate Halloween. However, there are some public Samhain celebrations as it has gained in popularity in California. The increase in popularity however is due in large part to the prominence of Samhain in modern Pagan religions, such as Wicca. In these cases Samhain is not being celebrated as a way to reclaim an Irish identity.

Halloween is often associated with aspects of witchcraft in folklore (Edwards 1996). In the United States, the common practice is to not acknowledge the witchcraft

roots of Halloween. Instead it has become a holiday for dressing up in costumes and trick-or-treating. Perhaps, the reason modern Pagans choose to associate with Samhain instead of Halloween is because Halloween no longer contains the spiritual or agricultural aspects in which Samhain was founded. In general, both the spiritual and agricultural aspects of Samhain focus on death and rebirth. The use of the term “Samhain” emphasizes modern Pagans “links with pre-Christian paganism and the old native traditions” (Edwards 1996:225). For the Irish, the myth surrounding “Samhain functions as: a measure of seasonal time, a time for meeting and assembly and the payment of tithes and dues, a time of heightened supernatural activity and contact with the Otherworld when the fairy mounds are open and accessible” (Edwards 1996:225). Halloween focuses on the contact with the Otherworld, whereas, Samhain focuses on the day marking a seasonal change.

Ethnic groups, such as the Celtic Arts Center play an important role in maintaining ethnic customs and expressions. In the case of Samhain, those who participate do so through a specific ethnic group organization. Celtic Rhythms in association with The Celtic Arts Center located in Los Angeles put together a production for Samhain this year; which told the story of Samhain through traditional storytelling, song, and dance. In fact, this event was advertised as “The Story of Halloween and A Celebration of the Celtic New Year.” The majority of those in attendance were members or participants or knew someone who was from one of the two ethnic organizations. In order to illustrate the story of Samhain there were various dance numbers depicting scenes from the story. In addition, there were a few solo song performances of songs in Irish Gaelic revolving around the story of Samhain. I witnessed individuals perceiving

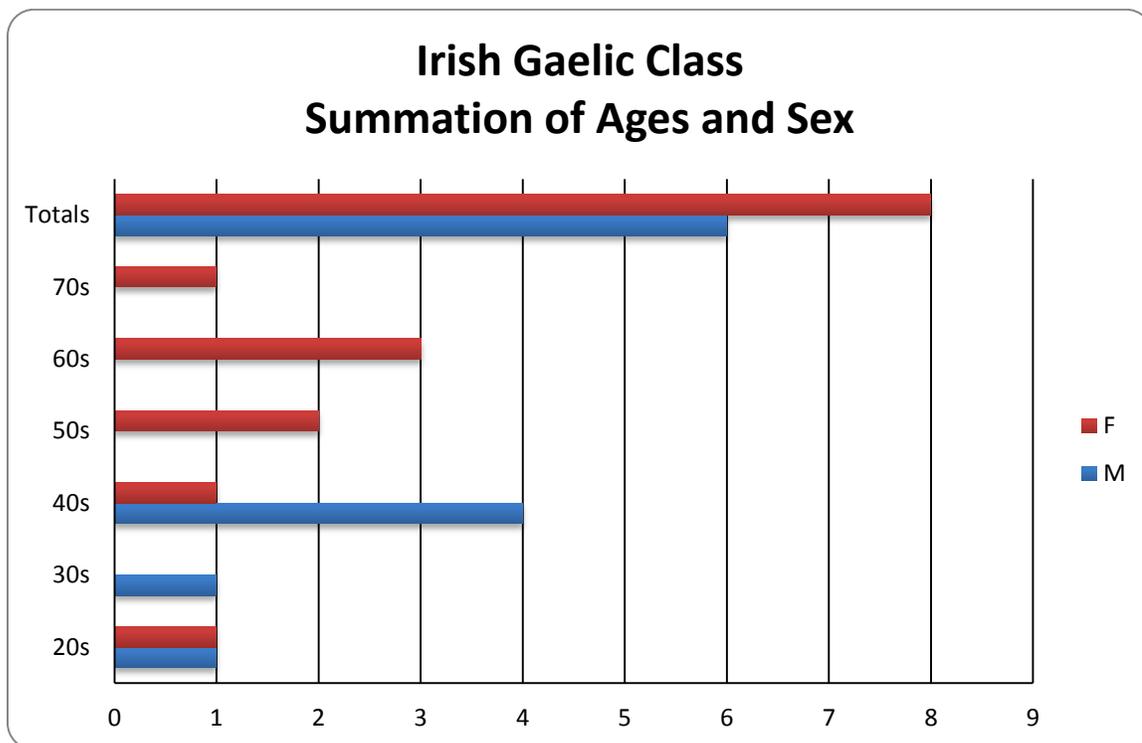
themselves as more ethnic for attending the event. Individuals chose to purchase merchandise to outwardly express their ethnic identity. In addition, the following Monday night at the Celtic Arts Center there was discussion about the Samhain event. The general feeling being that it was unfortunate for those who were unable to attend because it really offered another aspect of the Irishness they are all trying to fulfill. However, the cultural resources available to a group have a direct effect on the ability to maintain a sense of ethnic identity. The Celtic Arts Center, like other similar organizations are dependent on the members and the members are dependent on the organization to nurture and grow a sense of ethnic identity.

## **Personal Identity Making Processes at the Celtic Arts Center**

The Celtic Arts Center located in North Hollywood off of Lankershim Boulevard consists of a diverse group of people. The objective of this study is to analyze the ways in which the Celtic Arts Center affects a multitude of Irish identities. All the data presented here was gathered through the use of surveys and interviews of individuals who attend the Monday night events at the Celtic Arts Center, namely, the Irish Gaelic class, the *céili* dance, and the music *seisiún*.

### **Ages and Sex of Patrons**

I primarily focused my research on the individuals attending the Irish Gaelic Class because of the importance of language in identity making processes. There are many factors influencing an individual's participation in ethnic activities and by extension the degree of which they are engaged in their Irish identity as such it is important to report and analyze these other aspects. The Irish Gaelic class is comprised of eight females and six males. The mode and median age group of this class is people between 40-50 years old. The mean age is 44. While Alba placed importance on generational status, with the view the older individuals were not as active in ethnic activities, the summation of ages from the Irish Gaelic classes proves the opposite to be true. However, one issue with Alba's view is the lack of a definitive age at which he considers people as older. In the Irish Gaelic class, participants on average are in their forties; technically they are considered "older" but not "elderly." Perhaps, Alba meant that the elderly are not as involved in ethnic activities. The following chart represents the summation of ages and sex for the free beginners level class and the paid intermediate conversation class. This chart offers a pictorial representation of the breakdown of age and sex taken together.



To clarify, the two individuals in their twenties are a couple that usually comes together for the free class. However, more recently only the male has been regularly attending the class as the female is preparing her Ph.D. dissertation and has cut back on attendance. In addition, her lack of attendance may stem from relationship trouble as her interest stemmed from her “boyfriend, ample free time, and like of different cultures.” Her boyfriend continues to attend the class on a regular basis based on his “personal interest in heritage. Also, idle curiosity.” For him, the Irish Gaelic class is functioning as an identity making process; it allows him to explore his Irish roots, of which he has 50 percent Irish ancestry. On average the free Irish Gaelic class has a steady attendance of one to three individuals weekly.

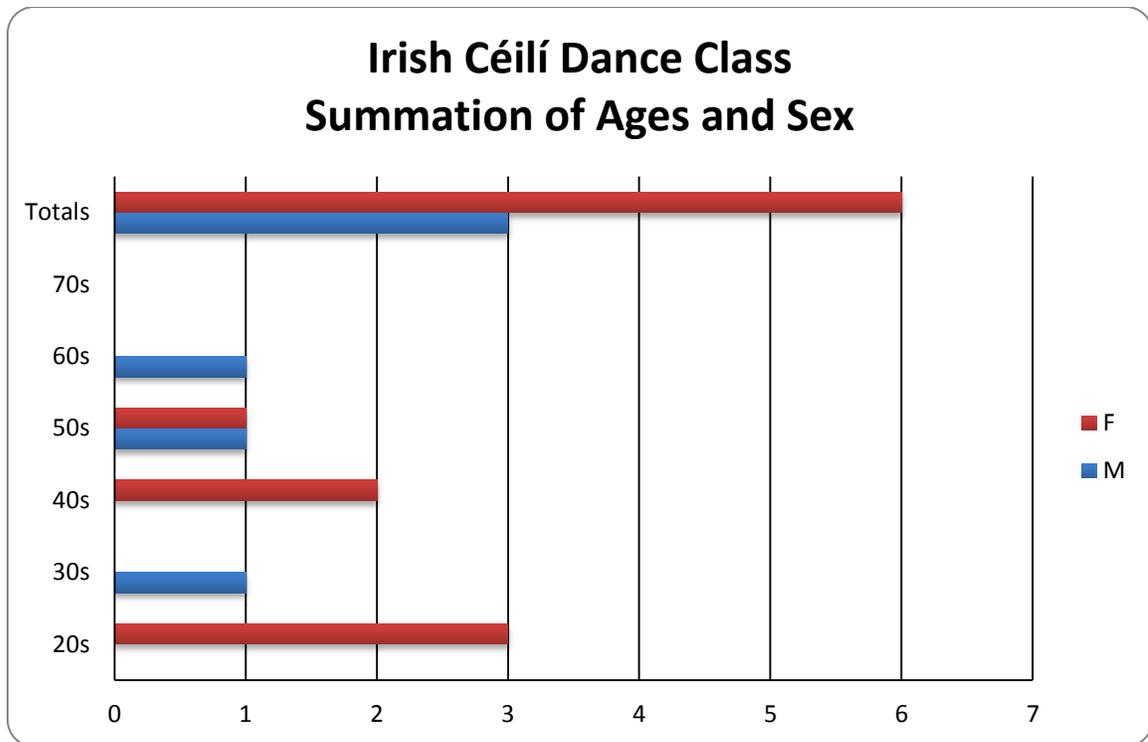
In contrast, the paid class is comprised of all the older individuals who have careers in their chosen fields. I am the youngest person in this class, as was made

abundantly clear one Monday night. On this particular night, the class was discussing “talents and skills” in Irish Gaelic and the topic turned to an old television show “Hogan’s Heroes” and the class had to explain the reference since it was before my time. At this point “Fiona,” an actress in her late sixties asked, what year I was born, at the end of the class, she tried to figure out if I was twenty-six or twenty-seven.<sup>14</sup> I told Fiona that I am twenty-six as my birthday is in a couple of months. Fiona then unilaterally decided in an exuberant tone that we must celebrate my birthday. Confused, I asked her why. In Fiona’s opinion it was important to celebrate my birthday because I was young and she wants the young to keep coming back to the Celtic Arts Center. With the Irish *céilí* dance entering the room after us, Fiona took it upon herself to introduce me to one of the males my age partaking in the dance class. Fiona is one of the more fluent speakers of Irish Gaelic, which is interesting because she has no Irish ancestry. For Fiona, her introduction into the Irish culture was more accidental than on purpose as she was looking for a Welsh teacher.

The Irish *céilí* dance class is comprised of six females and three males. The age characteristic of this group has a mode of individuals between 20-30 years of age and a median of individuals between 40-50 years of age.

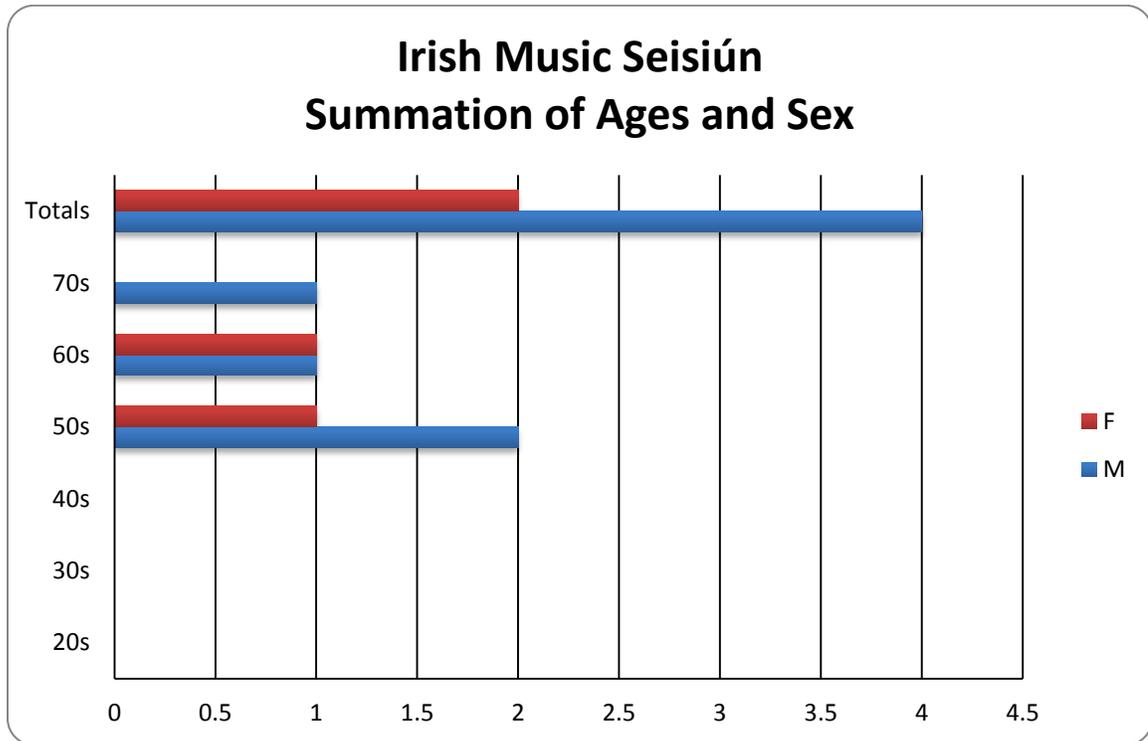
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<sup>14</sup> Fiona is the only pseudonym used in this thesis as she was the only one who elected to remain anonymous.



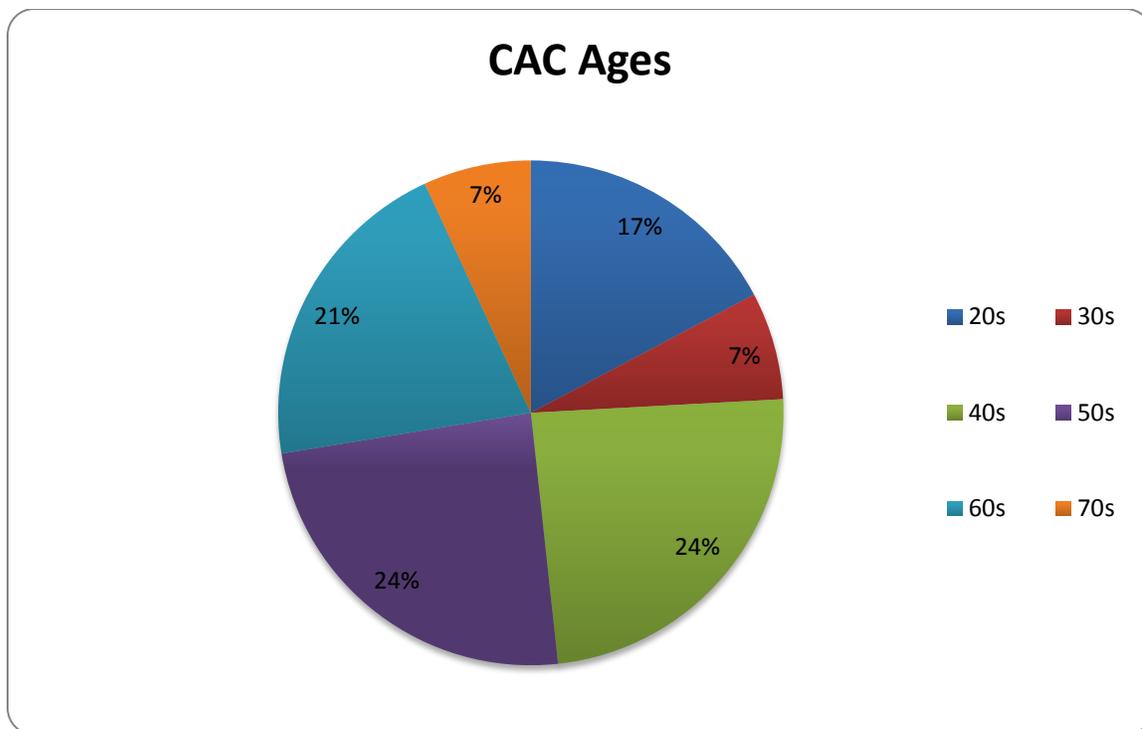
The Irish *céilí* dance class has the youngest demographic of the Monday night programs, with just under half of the participants under 30. In fact, they are actually under a young 30 as the individual in his thirties is exactly 30, who chose to take the class because “I like dancing.” One explanation of the younger demographic for the dance class may be that it does not have the same commitment level as learning a new language or learning to play an instrument. In the dance class anyone can walk in and the instructor will teach the steps from the beginning. According to Elizabeth, “They only go as fast as the slowest person.” The motivations for participating in this class include: “culture and music and exercise,” “I like the dancing, so I wanted to learn,” “my friend,” “I love to dance,” “interested in learning dance, social, exercise,” “exercising, socializing,” and lastly, from Elizabeth, “it was a chance to hear Irish music, exercise, and socialize with other Irish people. The culture.” The common themes among the various motivations are simply likes dancing and exercise.

The Irish music *seisiún* is comprised of four males and two females. The age characteristic of this group has a mode of individuals between 50-60 years of age and a median of those between 50-70 years of age.



The Irish music *seisiún* has the oldest demographic of the Monday night programs compared to the *céilí* dance class' youngest demographic; the Irish Gaelic class seems to fall in the middle. In addition, where the Irish *céilí* dance class has a lot of sporadic attendance those participating in the music *seisiún* are extremely consistent.

Overall, males consist of 45 percent and females 55 percent of those attending the Monday night events at the Celtic Arts Center. Looking at the overall ages of participants in the Monday night programs at the Celtic Arts Center there is more variation than when only looking at the ages within specific classes.



Individuals in their twenties account for 17 percent of participants, and those in their thirties, seven percent of participants. Individuals in their forties account for 24 percent, and those in their fifties, 24 percent of participants. Lastly, individuals in their sixties account for 21 percent, and those in their seventies, seven percent of participants.

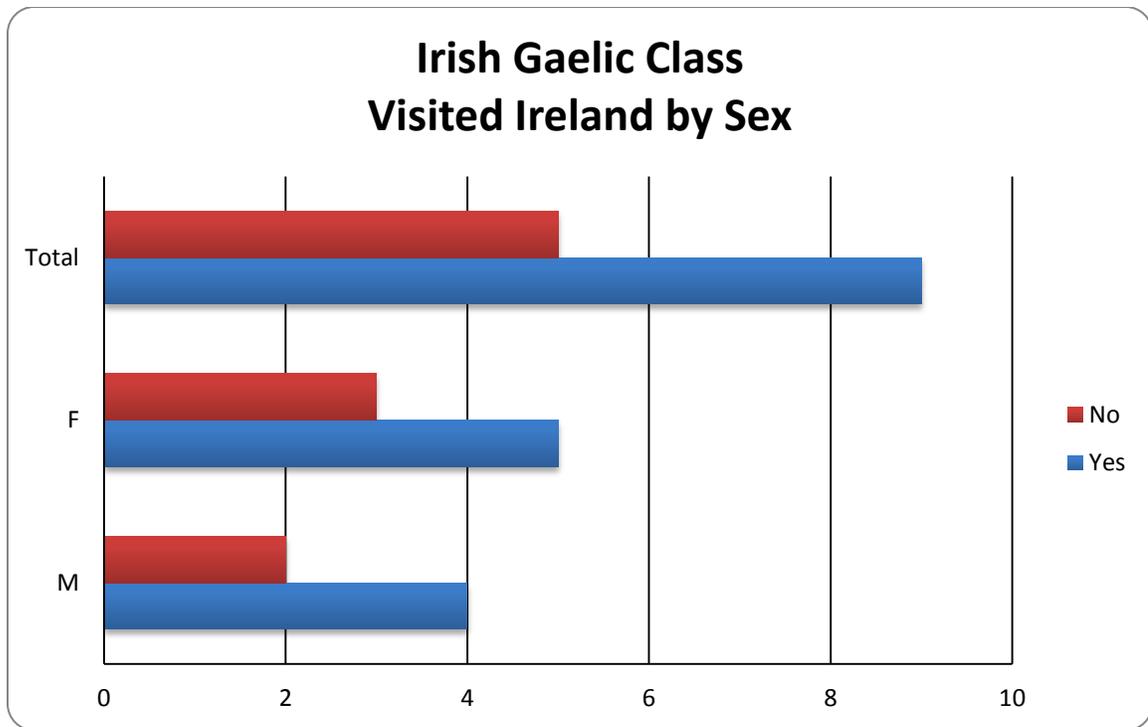
This data set may be skewed because of the inclusion of some first time attendees who were all female and in their twenties. If these first time attendees were to be removed from the data set then males may outnumber the females of those who attend regularly, in addition, the overall age of participants would also increase. Overall, at the Celtic Arts Center there is no dramatic difference between the numbers of males versus females who participate in the ethnicity based social organization; there is a difference when looking at a specific activity.

In addition, the Celtic Arts Center demonstrates that the older generations are more involved in ethnic social organizations. All of the individuals who only attended

once account for the entire group of people twenty to thirty years old. The overwhelming majority of individuals involved at the Celtic Arts Center are over 40 years old. Further elaboration, shows that particularly those who participate in the music *seisiún* are over fifty years old and the youngest people who attended once only participated in dance class. One possible explanation for the age groupings in the different events may be attributable to the effort one must put into learning the activity. The language and music class take the most time in effort. In the Irish Gaelic class, everyone is actually learning Gaelic. It is not a simple, fun class in which one can just sit in and learn a couple of phrases. The instructors expect everyone to join in even if it is your first time visiting. Those interviewed for the music *seisiún* were primarily instrument players who have honed their craft over years. However, the music *seisiún* does allow for observers, and in that respect it is the easiest event in which to partake.

### **Rates of Travel to Ireland**

Another factor at work in the creation of Irish identity is physical connection to the homeland, also known as those who have been to Ireland. Of the individuals participating in the Irish Gaelic class, nine have visited Ireland and five have never visited Ireland. In the category of those who have visited Ireland there are five females and four males; those who have never visited include three females and two males. Some of the members who have visited Ireland did so as a participant in an immersion week sponsored by the Celtic Arts Center, in general these are the members who are the most fluent.



All of the people who have been to Ireland participate in the paid class; four of the five people who have never been to Ireland are from the free class. Of the nine people who have traveled to Ireland, six have Irish ancestry and three have no Irish ancestry. Fiona and Michael from the paid class have both traveled to Ireland for tourism and an immersion class. Interestingly, both Fiona and Michael who participated in an immersion class in Ireland have no Irish ancestry. Everyone else who has traveled to Ireland has done so simply for tourism. In addition to Fiona and Michael, the third person that has been to Ireland with no Irish ancestry is the instructor for beginner's level Irish Gaelic class, Marsha. This is interesting because the three people who have invested the most time and effort into learning the language and traveling to Ireland are the ones with no Irish ancestry. For these three people, travel to Ireland would not act as an identity making process. Their involvement symbolizes more of the academic affair associated with Irish language learning. However, for the other six people who have traveled to

Ireland, their journey directly influenced their Irish identity. For many, it was their initial travel that led them to express further interest in the culture and the language, and as a result led them to the Celtic Arts Center.

Of the individuals who have not traveled to Ireland four of the five are newer participants at the Celtic Arts Center and attend the free Irish Gaelic class. Tess, 61, has been attending the Celtic Arts Center since 1989 and has never been to Ireland. Tess is an African American woman with black curly ringlet hair. While she feels she is Irish in her heart, she is also one of the people who attend the paid Irish Gaelic class sporadically. Based on her response, Tess would be considered a “Cardiac Celt,” a term coined by Marion Bowman in 1996. According to Bowman, a “Cardiac Celt” is someone who “feel[s] in their hearts that they are Celts. For cardiac Celts, spiritual nationality is a matter of elective affinity”(1996:246). The reason she attends irregularly is because she has serious TMJ (lock-jaw) and has an ailing mother “who refuses to go the doctor.” One Monday, she attended despite a flare-up of her TMJ she was in so much pain she could not even open her mouth, she had to talk like a ventriloquist, through her teeth. Therefore, she primarily just listened during the class and did not take her turn with pronunciations. Tess has not returned to the class in a few months and I am unsure if these are still the reasons for her absence or if something else may have happened. Whenever, she did attend she exuded confidence in her regular interactions with people, and was less sure of herself when it came time for pronunciations in class.

In the Irish *céilí* dance class, six have never visited Ireland and three have visited Ireland. The further division of those who have never visited Ireland is comprised of five females and one male; those that have visited include one female and two males.

Interestingly, of those who have visited Ireland, one is 23 and the other two are of the oldest members of the class in their late fifties and early sixties. Also, the 23 year old is the only one of the three who has visited Ireland that has any Irish ancestry. However, the 23 year old female who has been to Ireland only attended the Irish *céilí* dance class once with her two other female friends, also in their twenties.

There is an equal division of those who have visited Ireland compared to those who have never visited Ireland in the Irish music *seisiún*. The three participants who have traveled to Ireland are all males, aged 54, 57, and 63 respectively. Of the three who have never traveled to Ireland, there are two females and one male. Similar to the Irish *céilí* dance class, only one participant in the Irish music *seisiún* who has traveled to Ireland has Irish ancestry; the other two participants who have been to Ireland have no Irish ancestry.

In addition, the percentages of individuals who have travelled to Ireland are split more evenly than the extremes viewed with in each individual Monday night programs. Overall, 52 percent of individuals attending the Celtic Arts Center on Monday nights have been to Ireland and 48 percent have never been to Ireland. When the Celtic Arts Center is viewed as a whole instead of its separate parts the relationship between those who have traveled to Ireland and their amount of Irish ancestry becomes almost equally divided, those with Irish ancestry (8 people) and those without Irish ancestry (7 people).

For Tricia, her travel to Ireland was the starting point for the creation of her Irish identity. Tricia is an interesting case in multiple ethnic identities because her mom is French Canadian “but her father [maternal grandfather] is the one born in Dublin, so it’s like three-fourths Irish and one-fourth French Canadian. The other side they are all American but of Irish descent.” Tricia’s grandfather traveled to Canada when he left

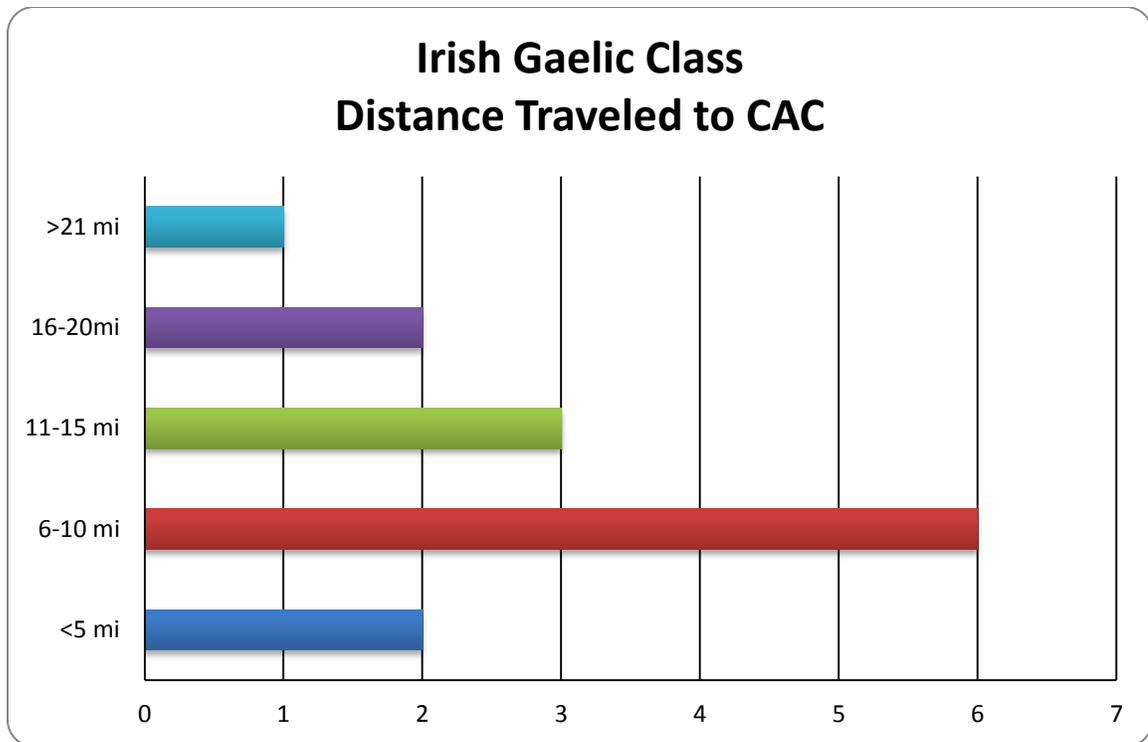
Ireland, instead of the United States, which explains why her Grandfather is Irish but his child is then French Canadian. The French Canadian identity largely comes from where Tricia's mom was born and raised. That is why it took a trip to Ireland to really spark her interest in developing an Irish identity. Despite Tricia's love of Ireland and the Irish culture, she explains, "I would have a hard time saying Ireland over American. My mom came from Canada and she couldn't have dual citizenship when she came over and she took all of her classes and passed them and everything and when it came time to denounce her Canadian citizenship she couldn't. Several times I thought that if I went and did everything to get my Irish citizenship and if I thought I had to give up my American citizenship, I'd probably be in the same jam as my mom and not be able to give it up." Part of the reason she wanted to claim Irish citizenship is not based on ancestry, her ancestry just gives her the legal means to claim citizenship. For Tricia, "she just fell in love with the place" to the point where her "heart just aches to go back." When further questioned, Tricia falls clearly into the category that she chose to claim her Irish ethnicity based on how she feels, as she says "I just love it there. I feel good there."

In contrast, Sean, who was born in Ireland, and traveled to the United States at 26 considers himself "American first," I think this is a testament to the time period in which he first arrived, the eighties, a time when assimilation was considered top priority. Where Tricia would not be able to give up her American born identity, Sean is adamant about claiming is adopted American identity over his Irish born identity.

### **Distance Traveled to the Celtic Arts Center**

Another factor that influences identity making as it relates to attending ethnic activities is the distance required to get to the venue. The location of the Celtic Arts

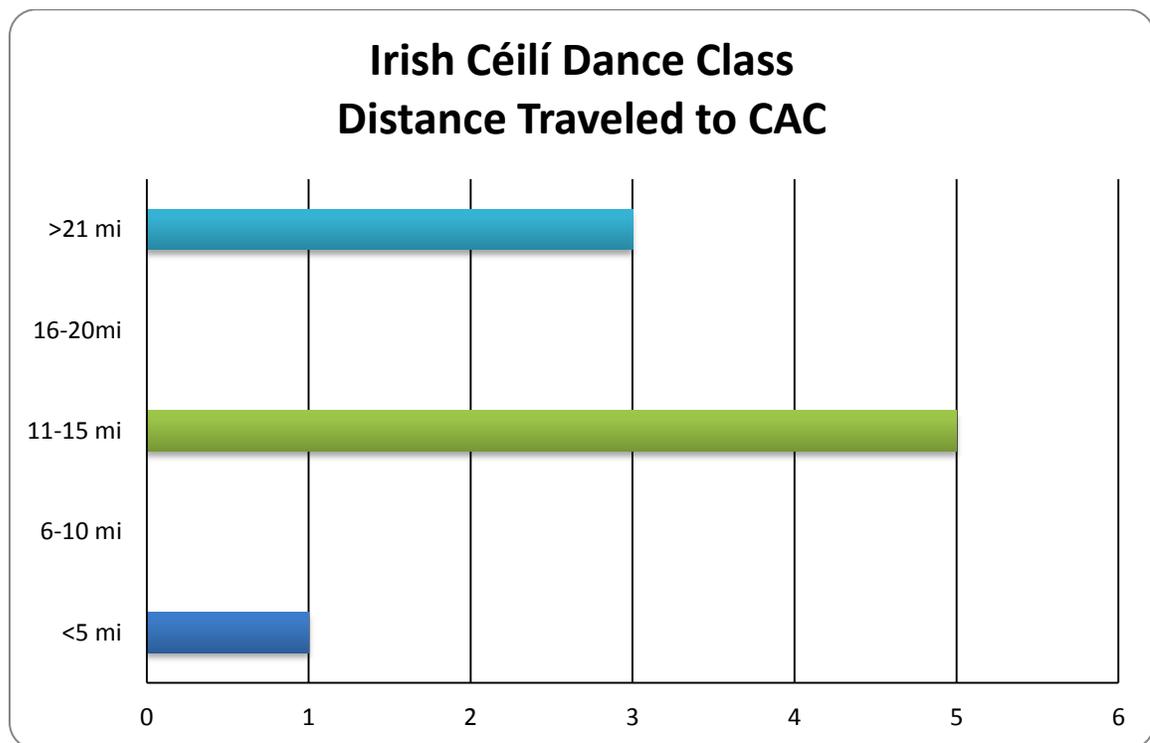
Center has a direct effect on the people willing to put forth the effort to attend the Monday night programs. This begs the question; to what extent does the Celtic Arts Center evoke an imagined community? Are they truly an imagined community if they have face-to-face interactions weekly? In a sense, the Celtic Arts Center operates as an imagined community because members do not know that much detail about other member's personal lives due to the commuter atmosphere of the center. The Celtic Arts Center does not operate as other community centers which are open multiple hours on varying days; this system would allow members to drop-in and hangout and converse with others. Instead, the Celtic Arts Center is only open during the times of the Monday night activities. This leads to the commuter nature because people attend for their specific interest only and then leave. There are some members who stay and converse with others who are still at the Celtic Arts Center after their activity; however, the majority are only present for their specific class and there is not much overlap in attendees between the three activities.



While the overall majority of the Irish Gaelic class (6 people) travels approximately 6-10 miles to the Celtic Arts Center, three of those six are from the free Irish Gaelic class. The other individual from the free Irish Gaelic class travels less than five miles to the Celtic Arts Center. Therefore, it is abundantly clear that those trying out the Irish Gaelic class for free are unwilling to travel further. Every individual who travels over ten miles attends the paid Irish Gaelic class. One possibility is that the paid class is an intermediate level and individuals have already invested a lot of time into learning the language so they willing to travel further distances for the only inexpensive Irish Gaelic class in the area. Tricia is one of the few Irish Gaelic students who attend every week without fail for over a year; she also travels the furthest every week. She is bold, fun loving, easy to smile and laughs at almost anything including her own mistakes. In her early forties she is settled into her career as an aesthetician and is on the board of her condominium complex. She makes the trip weekly to the Celtic Arts Center with her

friend Elizabeth, a mild mannered, petite kindergarten teacher. Elizabeth does not participate in the Irish Gaelic class but the *céilí* dance class. Since they travel a long distance they always arrive in the area approximately an hour early for class and meet at the local Coffee Bean down the street from the center. I would consider Tricia a friend, as she has invited me to meet up with her and Elizabeth at The Coffee Bean before class to go over some of the class material. However, most Mondays when we meet up early, we actually gossip and catch up with each other, and little if any Irish Gaelic is reviewed.

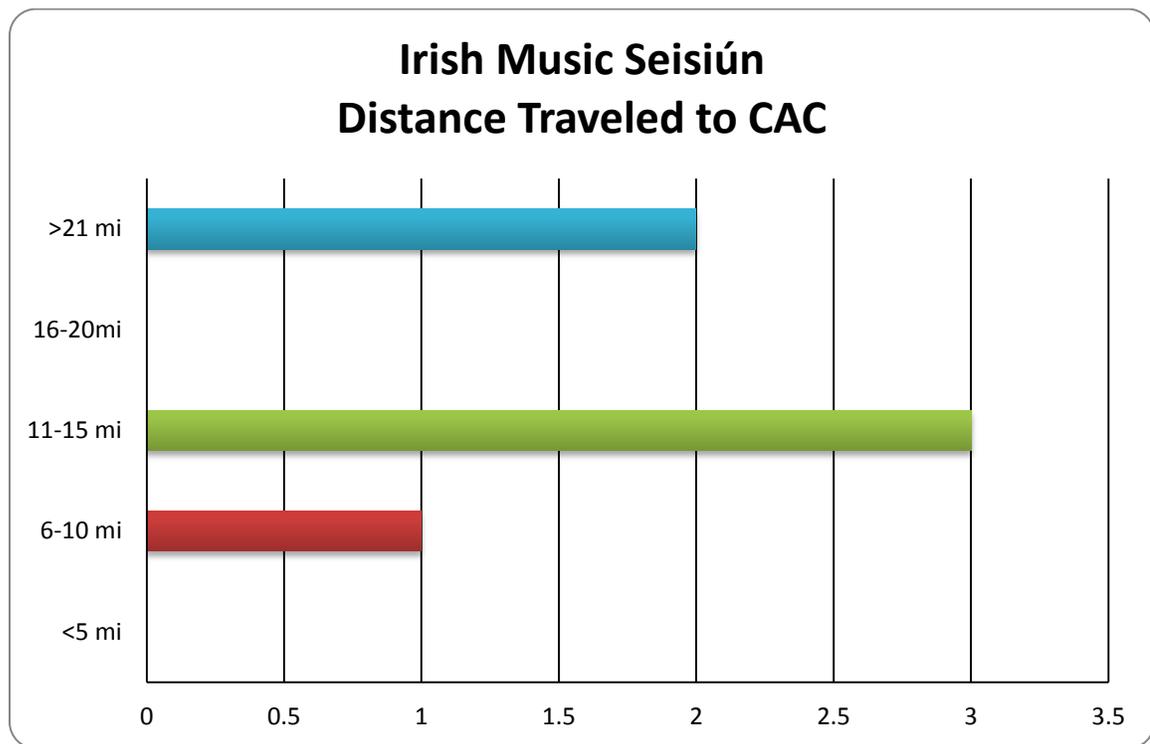
The distance traveled to the Celtic Arts Center for the Irish *céilí* dance class has a mode and median of 11-15 miles.



Participants on average travel further for the Irish *céilí* dance class than the Irish Gaelic class. Five people travel between 11 and 15 miles, one person less than five, and three travel more than 21 miles. Where the participants in the Irish Gaelic class fell into every category of distance traveled those in the Irish *céilí* dance class skip entire

categories; it is almost like their middle ground is 11 to 15 miles and jumps to over 21 miles. The individual who travels less than five miles seems to be an outlier because there is no one in the six to ten miles category. Instead, eight of the nine people travel over eleven miles.

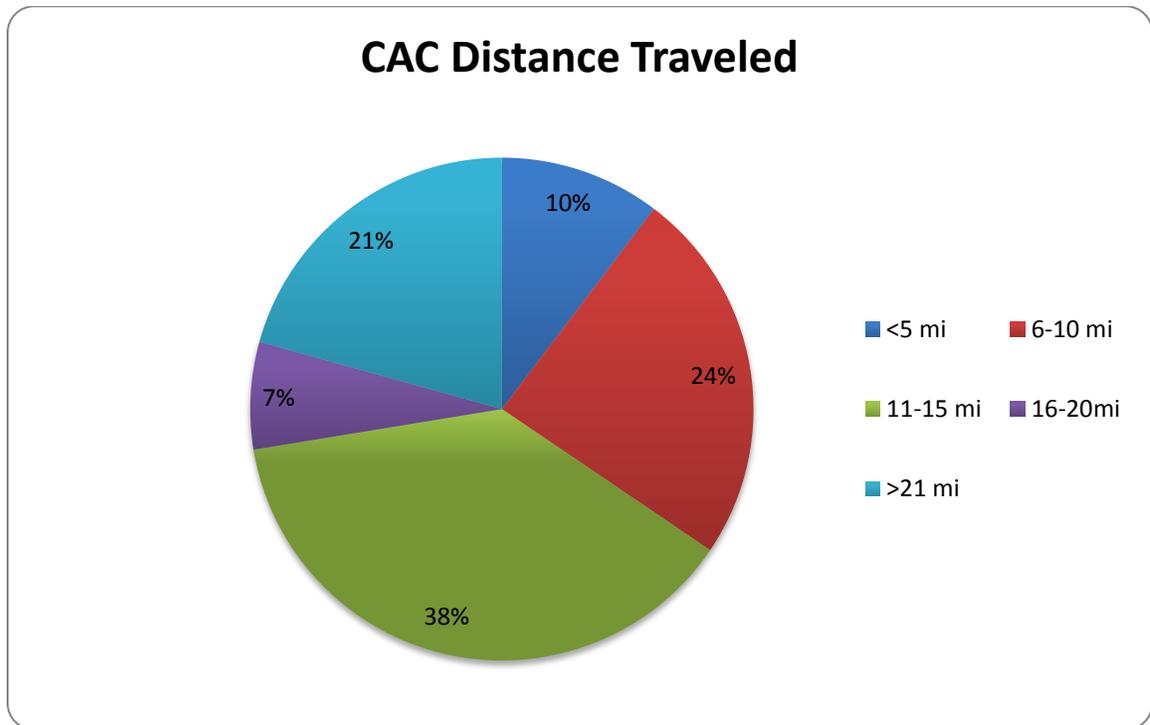
For the Irish music *seisiún*, the distance traveled to the Celtic Arts Center has a mode of 11 to 15 miles and a median between 11 to 15 miles and over 21 miles.



Overall, the participants of the Irish music *seisiún* travel closer to fifteen miles to the Celtic Arts Center, while, the two who travel over 21 miles, each travel thirty miles. Therefore, the distance traveled for the music *seisiún* and the *céilí* dancing more closely resemble each other than either resembles the Irish Gaelic class.

On average, participants from all three Monday night programs travel between 11-15 miles to the Celtic Arts Center. Those who travel between 6-10 miles (24 percent)

followed by people who travel more than 21 miles (21 percent) are the next highest groupings of distance traveled to the Celtic Arts Center.

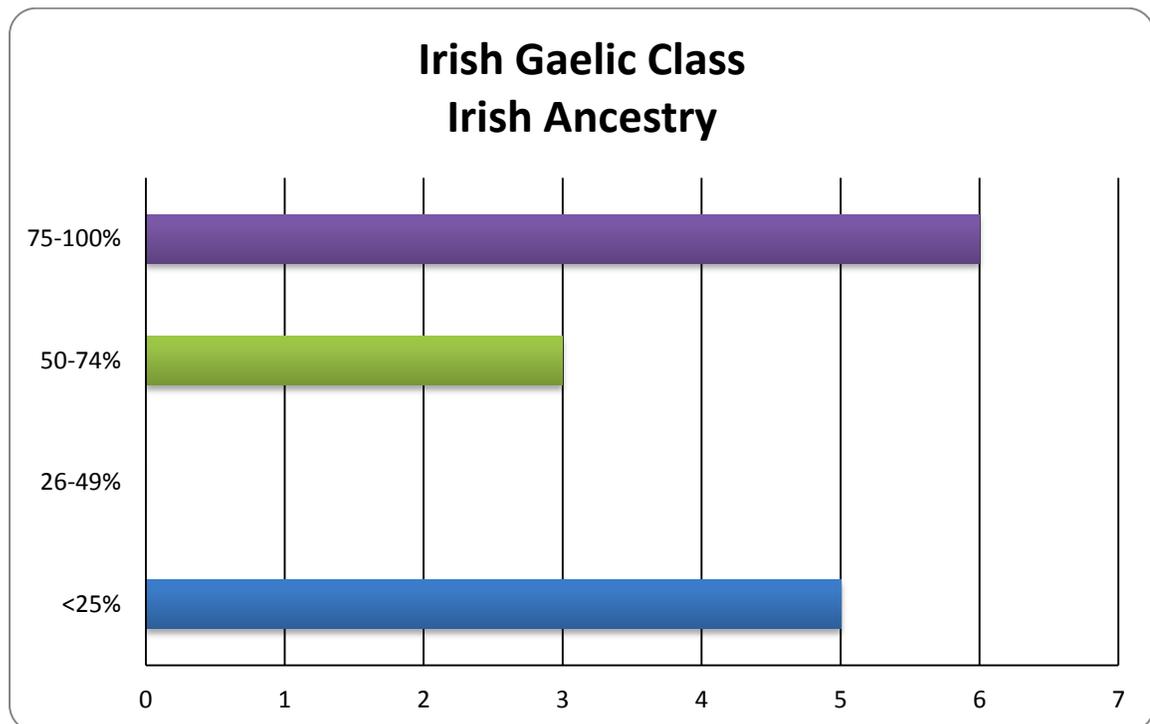


This pie chart demonstrates that the most common distance to travel to the Celtic Arts Center is between 6-15 miles. Therefore, the location of the Celtic Arts Center is extremely important to membership rates because most people primarily travel less than fifteen miles to attend such a cultural center. This information is in line with what the President of the Board of Directors, Doug, told me about fluctuations in membership rates over the years. Doug is shorter, a little overweight, with dark hair, dark eyes, and medium skin complexion. Doug is the one responsible for setting up every Monday night before everyone else arrives. He participates in the intermediate Irish Gaelic class and we have bonded over our lack of skill when it comes to pronunciation and knowing the proper responses. Overall, the Celtic Arts Center acts as focal point for the local Irish

population as demonstrated in the general distance people travel to attend Monday night events.

### **Amount of Irish Ancestry**

Lastly, the amount of real or imagined Irish ancestry of the participants directly influences the majority of members in the creation of their Irish identity. The Irish Gaelic class has a mode and median of 50-74 percent Irish ancestry. The calculation of Irish ancestry was difficult to achieve because many do not know an exact amount, which is why I chose to break up the categorization into twenty-fifth percentiles. The amount of Irish ancestry an individual possesses is self-reported and not confirmed as valid or invalid. The concept of Irish ancestry is more about how an individual perceives and perpetuates their Irish ancestry. In addition, to those who have actual Irish ancestry, there is one member Tess, who has no Irish ancestry but considers herself Irish in her heart; she would be considered a “Cardiac Celt.”



In total, there are only two individuals who claim 100 percent Irish ancestry because for them there is no question as both were born and raised in Ireland. The first is Sean, the instructor for the paid Irish Gaelic class. Sean is tall and thin with short dark hair and a thick Irish accent. He commonly mixes his English and Irish Gaelic while talking. Sean was born in County Kerry in the South West of Ireland. He is child number four in a family of 14 children. He chose to immigrate to the United States when he was 26 years old, approximately 30 years ago. At his time of arrival he had two brothers and two sisters already living in the United States. Olive, the other full Irish individual, is 74, short, light skinned with gray hair. She speaks softly, and is easily frustrated in the Irish Gaelic class when she loses her place or when there is a lack of structure. Olive decided to take a couple months off from the class because she felt she was not learning much because of the lack of structure present. Olive decided to try to learn Irish Gaelic because of “guilt,” stemming from the fact that she knows no Irish Gaelic, yet is from Ireland.

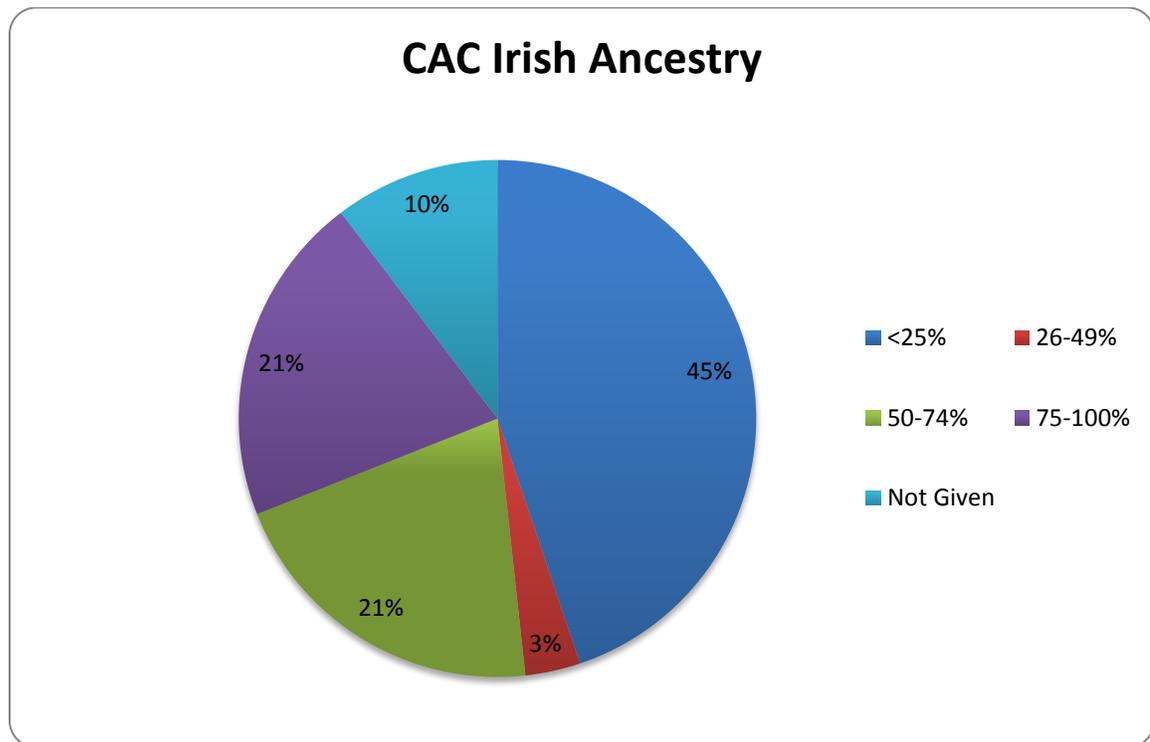
Those attending the *céilí* dance class on average have less than 25 percent Irish ancestry, with the majority having no Irish ancestry. Based on the data it appears that the Irish *céilí* dance class represents the largest number of participants with less than 25 percent Irish ancestry, more specifically, four of the five have no Irish ancestry.<sup>15</sup> An interesting fact is that every individual who reported knowing the specific amount of Irish ancestry they possessed, whether it be 25 percent or 50 percent, have never traveled to Ireland. Therefore, every individual from the Irish *céilí* dance class who has been to Ireland has either no Irish ancestry or no answer was given. In comparison, those

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<sup>15</sup> This number could increase, if those with no answer given in this question are taken into consideration; they did not answer because they did not know any details of their ancestry.

participating in the music *seisiún* have two individuals out of the five who do have Irish ancestry; they have 40 percent and 50 percent respectively.<sup>16</sup>

Overall, 45 percent of individuals at the Celtic Arts Center have less than 25 percent Irish ancestry and 42 percent have 50-100 percent Irish ancestry.



This chart demonstrates that Irish ancestry at the Celtic Arts Center is not necessarily more important than simply enjoying the culture, or as Tess responded, she “feels Irish in her heart.” For those with no Irish ancestry, with the exception of Tess, they did not claim any Irish identity. The Celtic Arts Center is a pan-Celtic organization, as such; many of the people without Irish ancestry have other Celtic ancestry, mostly Scottish or Welsh. Therefore I determined that Tess was the only true “Cardiac Celt” based on Bowman’s (1996) definition of this phenomenon. If those who did not give an answer were

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<sup>16</sup> One individual did not answer the question because they were not sure, whereas, everyone else has no Irish ancestry.

combined with those who have less than 25 percent ancestry they would account for 55 percent of participants. In addition, the categories for 50-74 percent and 75-100 percent have the same percentage of respondents. In the categories of higher degree of Irish ancestry, there were not many in between percentages; the amount was typically 50, 75 or 100 percent Irish ancestry. Based on my observations I did not witness any “Free Range Celts” however it is possible that participants kept this portion of their identity separate from my research since they knew I was focusing on aspects of Irish identity. The Monday night event in which I would expect to find “Free Range Celts” is the music *seisiún* because they play all kinds of Celtic music and are not limited to just one region.

### **Irish Ancestry as a Factor in Creating a Symbolic Identity**

The amount of Irish ancestry seems to be the biggest influence on creating an Irish identity. At the Celtic Arts Center, all of the members who viewed their Irish identity as symbolic had at least some Irish ancestry. Those who did not have any Irish ancestry did not claim any kind of Irish ancestry, not even symbolic through their weekly Celtic Arts Center activities. The exception to this generalization of the Celtic Arts Center is Tess. Tess has no Irish ancestry, and is in fact African American, but she would fall under the category of a Cardiac Celt. For Tess, she feels Irish in her heart and had naturally been drawn to the culture from an early age.

The question then arises, do the members at the Celtic Arts Center feel their ethnicity is symbolic or do they view it as part of their everyday life? When interviewed the majority felt their identity was symbolic. They did not feel it was “really” a part of their everyday work or social life. Upon further elaboration, the majority recognized that they primarily “became” more Irish on Monday nights at the Celtic Arts Center.

When the conversation with Tricia turns to symbolic ethnicity, it becomes clear that she views her Irish ethnicity as symbolic in nature despite her dedicated involvement in the Celtic Arts Center. As Tricia says she “definitely feel[s] like even if I wasn’t doing this that it would still be a part of me, that I would still feel pride,” referring to her participation in the Irish Gaelic class. However, Tricia’s Irish identity is not outwardly a part of her everyday life. In addition, she claims an Irish and French Canadian identity, with emphasis on the Irish.

In contrast, Thomas absolutely views his ethnicity as symbolic in nature. He wears slightly bulky square glasses and is extremely friendly. He always attempts to engage in conversation with me with various Irish Gaelic phrases and questions; he never looks at me like I am slow when I do not know what he is saying but patiently translates for me. There are some occasions when I know what he is saying but am unable to easily translate an answer back to him, so I answer in English. In addition he is the only person in the class, besides Sean, who calls me by the Irish Gaelic pronunciation of my name, Aibreán. Thomas is an interesting case because he claims Irish and Chinese ancestry. He has a receding hairline, and has chosen to shave his head except for one small section in the back, which he places into a small braid as a nod to his Chinese ancestry. Therefore, he has the choice of claiming a white European ethnicity or an Asian ethnicity.

Thomas claims “Irish [more] because I’m half Irish and only a fourth Chinese.” The only time in which he claims Chinese is when he is with his Chinese relatives. In addition, his ethnicity is based on how he “feel[s] because I don’t think anyone else in my immediate family claims Irish.” Thomas does participate in cultural traditions for both sides of his ethnicity; he participates in “Chinese New Year, giving gifts of money to

younger relatives, that's a Chinese thing, and the Irish, I guess music, language, um yeah, yeah, I do both of them." The Irish Gaelic class has changed Thomas's perception of his Irish identity in that "its made me more committed, you have to be committed to learn this."

Thomas represents a clear example of symbolic ethnicity, as he "wouldn't say every day, I'm American but the Irish is never really far away, basically I think if you are taking part of an ethnicity that you were not raised with, as I was not raised with either of these two ethnicities I claim. It's because you want to belong to something." Touching on the stereotypic Irish tradition, for Thomas, "the only part of the Irish that was handed down was the Catholic tradition, and also maybe Democratic Party tradition and also lore, family lore, ancestors, but I'm pretty much the only one in immediate family that participates in the present."

Carl is a forty-five year old music producer and writer who views the most important aspect influencing his identity is that he was adopted, as such the "only one [ethnicity or race] I know for sure is American." However, throughout the interview he refers to being Irish because as he says "my father's family is from Ireland," when referring to his adopted father. Curiosity got the best of Carl and he "did some DNA testing and that's really Irish, kind of specific to Cork area." Carl believes that his Irish identity is an "effect of being adopted," because it's away for him to create and identity for himself.

When asked what he is, Carl always answers American first; if people further clarify where are your people from, he says he probably would tell them Irish. After all, when people ask what you are or where are you from in the United States they often are

referring to one's ancestors no matter how far back in history they may be. However, Carl often does not have to elaborate because "some people just look at me and assume Irish. In that context I just go with it." It is Carl's appearance that transitions his identity into a little bit symbolic and a "a little bit part of my everyday life because people look at me, I've had homeless people on the street say you're Irish aren't you." This touches on the fact that a lot of what people associate with an Irish identity is based on appearance or other social traits. In Carl's life, "there are certain traits people assume with that [Irishness], like if I'm talkative, people assume I'm gregarious because I'm Irish. If I'm drinking it's because I'm Irish. If I'm passionate about a topic it's because I'm Irish." The people who know Carl personally and know that he studies the Irish language consider him "extra Irish."

Carl claims "the Irish more as I get older and learn more about it, although I get the feeling it's more country bumpkinish it's not like a proud, you know, royalty or something." However, earlier in life he "used to say because my adopted dad was Irish and Italian that I was Irish and Italian...my dad was much more proud of his Irish...my mom was Norwegian and German mainly." Carl believes that ethnicity was never considered for his mother because her father was a math professor. Thus alluding to some of the theorists whom believe that ethnic identity is not a major consideration for those with a higher education, especially in the math and sciences.

Sean said he immigrated to the United States because he already had family here, multiple generations, primarily extended family as the majority of his immediate family still resided in Ireland. In addition, Sean elaborated on why he came to the United States, "I really don't know. I remember when I was flying over the Atlantic I was, what am I

doing? Why am I coming over here? It was something to do. Kind of on a whim. Family was here. Right now there are six of us here, six of the fourteen.”

Sean, an Irish man born and raised in Ireland, first arrived in New York, where he lived for five years. He then moved directly to Los Angeles because “I had visited two years before and I decided I am going to come back.” Furthermore, “it had got to the point I didn’t like New York summer, it was too hot and humid and the winters were too cold. California temperature is just right. I wouldn’t have much desire to live anywhere on East Coast.” While he has no plans to go back full time but he would “love to go back for July, August, September, and October to get away from the heat here.” Sean became a paying member of the Celtic Arts Center fifteen years ago, after somebody in his building told him about it. According to Sean “the person that brought me in Martha C. who has been associated with the Celtic Arts Center for a long time, I think when she met me, she said there was a need, I should teach. I came, I saw, I taught.” Sean is the only individual that participates in the Irish Gaelic class who is actually from Ireland and as such he offers an interesting perspective on symbolic ethnicity.

When I asked Sean if he viewed his ethnicity as symbolic he said, “I would say particularly because I am American like everyone else.” Which is an interesting turn, considering most people born and raised in the United States try to claim some form of symbolic ethnicity based on the ancestry even if they have lived in the United States their entire life. Therefore, Sean views his Irish identity as symbolic because he claims American at this point in his life. However, speaking to Sean, the first thing anyone would notice is his very distinct, thick, Irish accent therefore he will never truly be able to

completely assimilate as nothing more than American. Based on his accent alone, I would assume that his Irish identity would be considered part of his everyday life.

My research at the Celtic Arts Center has led to the discovery that while some people would consider their Irish ethnicity symbolic that is not always the case. However, the common link is that the majority has at least a little Irish ancestry. Sometimes it is the opposite people one would expect to consider their identity symbolic versus part of their everyday life. It is my observation that those who look a certain way have a more difficult time considering their ethnicity symbolic because other people constantly remind them of their ethnicity. For example, since Carl and I both look like the stereotypical Irish person we automatically are put into that category. It is through my research that my Irish ethnicity has moved from the realm of symbolic in nature to part of my everyday life.

### **Celtic Themed Attire as a Factor in Promoting Symbolic Identity**

It is common at the Celtic Arts Center to wear Celtic themed attire, whether it be clothing or jewelry. While some wear Celtic themed attire almost exclusively at the Celtic Arts Center others, such as Tricia wear it all the time. Tricia states,

Most [Celtic jewelry] I bought in Ireland. The spiral one I bought in a small town near the Cliffs of Mohr and I love this bracelet so much that when I lost it, I went online and found the place and found it again, and they were so nice that when they found out I lost it they gave me another charm for my charm bracelet. This charm bracelet I bought along the Ring of Kerry and bought some other little charms here and there. They just represent different parts, the triple spiral is very more goddess oriented more from the pre-Christian times...a lot of the triple spirals are new age it illuminates on the winter solstice, even though I was raised Catholic I kind of associate or feel a kinship or connection to the earth religion and the goddess, so I really appreciate that.

Tricia represents one example, in which, specific attire represents an outward projection of their symbolic identity. She does not limit this representation simply to Monday nights

at the Celtic Arts Center. Her charm bracelet has various symbols of Irish culture; some are extremely well known and therefore accessible to the public to recognize and identify. Whereas, other Irish charms are not well known and therefore are more accessible to those on the inside of Irish culture. In this respect, Tricia uses her choice in jewelry to express her symbolic Irish identity, which also acts as a symbol to denote her membership in an imagined community.

Thomas, in contrast to Tricia, wears his Celtic themed shirts “mostly on Mondays, since that’s when I come to the Celtic Arts Center. I wear them on other days; sometimes I wear them as my workout shirts. I have stuff from pubs, one from Target that has Ireland coat of arms on it I wear as a workout shirt, and one from JcPenny’s that I ordered special.” An interesting point that must be mentioned is, Thomas seems to only wear the “authentic” Irish shirts to the Celtic Arts Center and not those mass-produced Target or JcPenny’s. With this in mind, the question then arises; does Thomas feel his attire acts as an outward display of his symbolic Irish identity? For Thomas, “it could be, yeah, could be a display. It’s also a conversation starter.”

Celtic themed jewelry was worn everyday by multiple participants, possibly because it is more discrete in nature. As such, jewelry allows the wearer to claim a unique identity yet remain blended with the general public, as to not become outsiders. The jewelry also acts as an outward symbol for other Irish individuals to recognize and form an imaginary bond with the wearer because they are then ethnically the same. The clothing then acts as a more direct symbol to the world that the wearer is claiming “Irishness” to which they may form closer bonds with other members at the Celtic Arts

Center. For Tricia and Thomas, their Celtic themed attire acts as a symbol to denote their symbolic Irish identity and their membership in the Irish imagined community.

### **Imagined Community**

In general, cultural organizations tend to be utilized by people who have some genetic ancestry with the particular group. The most important aspect of creating an imagined community based on ancestry is belief that one has a particular ancestry; whether this assertion is true or false does not matter. In this way the Celtic Arts Center, aptly demonstrates many believed they had some, even if only a little amount of Irish ancestry somewhere in their lineage. A few respondents responded with the response of zero Irish ancestry. The majority of those surveyed have less than 25 percent Irish ancestry; however, the next leap is in the over 50 percent category. In the case of the Celtic Arts Center the case for Irish ancestry is the least unknown in the 25-49 percent category. This may be the result of respondents no longer knowing about grandparent's backgrounds as the elderly are commonly dismissed in American culture.

In Tricia's case she has created an imagined community with the Irish. She participates in cultural traditions associated with her ethnicity. Primarily, "a little bit around food, around St. Patrick's Day I make corned beef and cabbage, well really corned beef and kale, I don't really like cabbage," she says with a laugh. When cultural festivals are available, Tricia attends them because she "enjoy[s] them quite a lot, and have been interested in the music and musical aspect and thinking of learning the penny whistle to get my feet in and see if I want to explore that. Language is probably the biggest thing right now." This interest in Irish music is a new venture for Tricia, as we have discussed on multiple occasions how much she does not particularly like Irish

music. One evening she mentioned an Irish band she went to watch at a pub and hated it and had to apologize to her friend and explain that it was not usually that bad. For Tricia, her interest in learning the language evolved into an interest in learning to appreciate the music and trying the dancing. When asked, if she felt the Irish Gaelic class has changed her perception of her Irish identity, Tricia responded, “I guess, I realized that a lot of the ways we think and speak in America is influenced by the Irish language and makes me feel culture, knowing the Irish language because of it. I would very much like to go back to Ireland and be able to use it, or at least understand what all the signs say.” In general, Tricia would love to move to Ireland permanently if it was economically feasible. She cheered for Irish teams competing in the Olympics and she feel a level of empathy for the subjects in Irish news stories.

Thomas’s Irish identity has become instrumental in creating an imagined community with all Irish individuals and as a group. To determine the extent of this newly discovered community, Thomas responds when asked if he kept up on Irish news and if he felt empathy for those in the stories:

Oh definitely, I keep up on Irish news and Irish politics, I’ve been to Ireland several times and most recently I made Protestant friends on the ferry from Liverpool, and I got into a little trouble on Facebook, out of all the people I met in Northern Ireland they were the ones who friended me almost immediately and I said a few controversial things on Facebook, like free Marian Price, you know, because at least believe in amnesty and the peace process and got me in things as enemies, they really gave it to me.

Speaking to the global nature of information and the maintenance of friends from all over the world has become much easier with the invention of social media. The trouble for Thomas on Facebook with his Protestant friends arose from the following situation, in which, he explains,

In Northern Ireland since the violence is pretty much over, the previous violence is actually a tourist attraction, and you take the black taxi tours and that's nothing but politics and recent history, you know the history of the last forty years or so, so you can't help but run into it, actually that was the most the most professional day of the whole trip. A trip that included the London Olympics, so, so of course I posted all about that day, and uh, well the Protestant guys said they weren't offended by anything else, except the Marian Price thing.

It is an interesting situation, in which, it is easy to offend some one that you met once in person, through your new friendship on Facebook. While Thomas never does explain the entire situation regarding the phrase "Free Marian Price," based on research Price was a member of the IRA in the 1970s and was responsible for car bombs in London. Eventually she was released from prison on license. The current movement to free her is based on her 2011 revocation of her prison license base on statements she made at an Easter Rising Rally. In addition, a set of charges that she provided a mobile phone that was used for terrorism, in which two soldiers were shout in County Antrim. Officially she was accused of supporting and encouraging others to do so, an illegal organization. The charges were later dismissed in May 2012. However, she remains in prison based on the revocation of the license from the 1970s crime.

According to Thomas, his imagined community of Irish individuals also relates to the ways in which his Irish ethnicity is a form of social solidarity. For Thomas, "you choose your own group those you feel solidarity with." In addition, he feels his Irishness is a form of social solidarity because "well, its definitely helped my social life, you know, uh coming to the Celtic Arts Center, um well, that's where I've started all my bands." Since Thomas believes individuals choose whom they feel solidarity with it is not surprising that he feels identity is a choice,

When you're an adult it's a choice, there is a certain identity that you can't help because you were raised with it. I told you not much Irish was handed down, I wasn't raised with much except family lore, a certain Catholic tradition, but the Chinese goes around a lot more because I have full blooded Chinese relatives, we were always celebrating Chinese New Year, family get together, little envelopes of money and to this day I only give money to my niece and nephew.

However, despite growing up with more Chinese cultural traditions, currently Thomas participates "a lot more in Irish cultural traditions than Chinese; I've been trying to learn Irish for almost ten years." The amount of cultural traditions he participates in for each ethnicity does not discount the other from his claims of race, as on any census form he checks "mixed or biracial or if I can check two. I don't want to be solely one thing."

My research at the Celtic Arts Center has confirmed that individuals tend to create an imagined community through their participation in various events. In actuality, the people who attend the Celtic Arts Center create this imagined community with each other as well as the Irish in Ireland, since they do not really know much about one another outside of Monday nights. The Celtic Arts Center plays into this dynamic as well, because they are only open Monday nights; it is not like other cultural centers that are open most if not every day, where people can come and just hang out with one another. The location of the Celtic Arts Center essentially puts a time limit on the amount of camaraderie and participation in one's Irishness.

## Conclusion

The Celtic Arts Center does play a role in the creation of an Irish identity through their Monday night programs. The Celtic Arts Center focuses their efforts on the three most recognizable aspects of “Irishness”: namely language, dance and music. For any ethnic identity there needs to be shared traits within the group that are recognizable by outsiders. These recognizable traits are what allow the Irish to be universally identified. Participants at the Celtic Arts Center utilize these three aspects to create a symbolic Irish identity, in which they participate only on specific days. In addition, the Celtic Arts Center evokes an imagined community both for the participants and their connection to Ireland, and within the members themselves.

The first step in creating a symbolic ethnicity is to have characteristics that insiders recognize as being part of a specific ethnicity. These recognized aspects are what allow members of the same group to easily identify others like themselves despite being spread across large geographic spaces. One manner in which to create and maintain easily identifiable traits is to perpetuate a shared set of traditions for the group. The Celtic Arts Center, as is the case with any group, has chosen specific traditions that suit their needs. It is their ability to maintain these traditions that make them a unique site in the greater Los Angeles area. They hold the title for longest running music *seisiún* on the West Coast, and paired with language and dance makes them probably one of only a few places where someone can participate in all three events on the same evening.

On the whole, they get a lot of one-time visits from people simply due to curiosity. However, the people that become regulars are very enthusiastic and involved in the Celtic Arts Center. It is the regulars who get the most benefit from the Celtic Arts

Center in the form of constant contact with others with similar interests and backgrounds. One critique when applying theories of symbolic ethnicity is that in order for ethnicity to continue people need to form these imagined links with other people from the same ethnicity and they need to participate in ethnic networks. However, it is individuals who already had a strong sense of their ethnic identity that are initially drawn to such networks and organizations.

The research conducted at the Celtic Arts Center has confirmed that there is no universal Irish identity; instead, there are multiple Irish identities. The Celtic Arts Center offered a view into Irish identity in the present, as opposed to the historical past. The religious differences, while still present, are less pronounced in the United States compared to the religious conflict between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. At the Celtic Arts Center, there is an informal policy that no political or other types of propaganda are allowed in order to avoid alienating anyone. However, in actual conversation it is blatant which attitudes are dominant. In general, individuals at the Celtic Arts Center are liberal in thinking and action. Liberal attitudes are not new to the Irish as the historical chapter illustrated. The political attitudes for the Irish have largely been categorized as liberal or Democratic throughout history. In addition, individuals at the Celtic Arts Center advocate for a united Ireland, both in conversation and on their individual attire.

In this thesis, I have attempted to problematize essentialized views of a universal Irish identity, showing how this represents a false ideal. While stereotypes of the Irish do persist, I have shown that no one fits into the mold of a typical Irish person. There are varying degrees and expressions of Irishness, from the Monday night Irish to the

everyday Irish. Irishness as a form of white ethnicity has given individuals options in choosing their identity. The Irish like other European ancestries have more templates available to them in choosing an identity, and do not have an identity imposed on them based on their skin color. The Irish, who are typically white, are categorized simply as that, white; they are not given an ethnic identity. It is almost like the Irish are not easily identifiable by their skin color like non-European ethnicities in the United States, so their ethnicity is taken away from them. Recall Griffin's (1996) model of the "martini cocktail" to describe processes at work in the United States regarding the claiming of multiple ethnicities. As was demonstrated, for some the Irish portion of their identity is equated as the vermouth in the martini cocktail that is easily overpowered by the American portion that is equated as the gin. While others, may view the Irish portion of their identity as the olive, or a decorative feature, something that is nice to have on occasion but is not necessary. The Irish are an interesting case when it comes to choosing to claim Irishness because in general, even if they have more of another ancestry, they still choose Irish. This is certainly the case at the Celtic Arts Center, where multiple respondents mentioned that they are of mixed ancestry, but primarily claim to be Irish rather than the other options available to them.

The larger issue for the Celtic Arts Center and the Irish American population as a whole is that being Irish is more of a symbolic ethnicity. In today's world, the Irish are not faced with prejudice in the United States, in a sense; Irish people just blend in to the majority population. The question arises then if Irish identity is symbolic why does it persist? The answer is that, in the United States, knowledge of one's ancestors is a prized possession. Participating in Irish activities makes an individual feel different from

everyone else; it acts as a way to reclaim power over one's life and combat the monotonous nature of everyday life. Furthermore, it is because Irish identity is symbolic that individuals feel like they have an extended community, albeit an imagined community. At the Celtic Arts Center, participants can take a free Irish Herald newspaper and discover news and events of other Irish Americans and Irish still living in Ireland.

Through the lens of symbolic identity, it was shown how different members of the Celtic Arts Center constructed and portrayed their Irish identity in varying degrees. The majority of members viewed their Irish identity as symbolic and could be categorized as "Monday Night Irish." For these individuals, they primarily displayed their Irish identity through choices in attire and participation in activities only at the Monday night programs at the Celtic Arts Center and did not take their Irish identity out into the rest of the world. In addition to the "Monday Night Irish" there was one member, Tess, who could be categorized as a "Cardiac Celt." The main difference between the two is that Tess has no Irish ancestry; instead "she feels Irish in her heart." All of the members who claimed their Irish identity as symbolic had at least some Irish ancestry in which to lend them authenticity.

Further compounding the issue of symbolic identity is the role of mixed ancestry present in almost all participants at the Celtic Arts Center. Mixed ancestry is the norm in the United States and the division of ancestry directly relates to how an individual claims their identity. For example, Thomas is of Irish and Chinese ancestry, yet he chooses to highlight his Irish ancestry. However, he is the only one in his family, who does so, the rest primarily claim Chinese. Thomas was not raised with many cultural traditions for either group and decided to claim Irish later in life. If he had been raised with an

emphasis on Chinese ancestry, his ethnic identity may not be the same now. In Los Angeles, many people are mixed with some Hispanic or Mexican ancestry and based on the location many choose to emphasize this portion rather than any other facet of their ethnic identity because this is the dominant form for the area. I have a friend who is both Irish and Mexican, but he claims Mexican, despite his stereotypical Irish appearance as he is white with freckles and red hair.

Further expanding on the multiple Irish identities at work at the Celtic Arts Center, is that of the “Everyday Irish.” The common link between the people who claimed that their Irish identity was part of their everyday life was their physical appearance. This is an interesting issue because multiple theorists have stated that white ethnics have more choices in choosing their identity because of their appearance as they do not easily fall into a specific category based on skin color. However, when you take skin color into consideration with other physical traits such as, red or light hair with blue or green eyes and freckles, the individual is almost always first described as Irish. Therefore, people with these traits do not have much of a choice when it comes to choosing an identity because outsiders prescribe it to them.

In addition, we have to take issues of immigration and historical context into question when analyzing claims of Irish identity. For example, Sean was born in Ireland and immigrated to the United States when he was 26 however, he claims an American identity over an Irish identity. No one can deny he is Irish, but Sean has made a personal choice to place importance on assimilation rather than emphasize his Irish ethnicity. Perhaps if he had arrived in the United States at a different point in history he would emphasize his Irish identity. In the “martini cocktail” metaphor, Sean’s Irish identity

would clearly be the vermouth; his Irish identity is always present but has been overcome by the American gin portion.

In conclusion, through the library research and the ethnographic research conducted at the Celtic Arts Center, I have provided evidence that Irish American identity is symbolic in nature and that it helps create an imagined community. Perhaps, the biggest take away from this research is the idea that there is no universal Irish identity but multiple Irish identities that are always in operation. While Ong showed that multiple ethnic identities were in operation as a result of socio-historical context for the Indonesian Chinese people, at the Celtic Arts Center we see these same factors at play.

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