

## Lived-Experience and the Creation of Opaque Realities: Non-dichronic Methodologies and the Analysis of Diversity and Discourse

Social relationship...demands at least a minimum of mutual orientation of the conduct of each to that of the other.

---Max Weber

(The Concept of Social Relationship –1962)

### Introduction

Ethnographies written by linguistic anthropologists and communication researchers exploring the evolving exchanges of cultural information between people and institutes of higher learning reveal the importance of testimonial evidence. The value of the ethnographic record containing these local accounts is now widely acknowledged by Rosaldo (1999) to be a contextualized representation of the social, political, and economic power dynamics that define the experiences of individuals. In fact, surveys and interviews are now commonly found in the methodological toolboxes of both natural and social scientists. This is especially true when the projects involve cultural and environmental changes in which there is a communications breakdown between the disadvantaged and the dominant sectors of a population. Each Mellon AIS Project scholar is a researcher of the dynamics of cultural change at the University of California Riverside (UCR). Those tasking themselves to ethnographically create a written record of the communications amongst the institute and the public and the complex discourses amidst interethnic and intercultural groups at UCR will struggle to answer the following question: What established research techniques, i.e. surveying and focus groups, will be

the most effective to employ when analyzing the particular diversity present on the campus of the University of California Riverside? The purpose of this paper is to determine the relevance of extant methodological and theoretical frameworks and conclusions found in existing cross-discipline research to determine how these standpoints and approaches may relate to the work being done by Mellon's AIS Project.

### Existing Ethnographies and Related Studies

The first article to consider in this analysis is by communications researcher Rona Tamiko Halualani (2010). Halualani defines the relationships between students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in hegemonic terms or power relations. The institutional context of Halualani's research is a large Western U.S. institute. One important oversight in Halualani's approach is that she does not provide the source of her demographic information. But, she does demographically describe the student body as consisting of a population of 29% White/European-American, 30% Asian/Asian Americans, 18% Latino, 8% Black/African American, 5% Pacific Islander, and 10% multiracial. The short term of immersion on the campus of study for Halualani was only two years – much of that time was devoted to project design and extrapolation. Her research aggregates statistics from large-scale surveys she created with the qualitative data obtained from narrow sampling of less than 100 subjects, extensive interviews of a filtered group of these students, and the creation of a cooperative coding scheme. The coding scheme did not involve the students and was comprised of experts described as academic professionals. The objective of Halualani's research is to allow the testimonies of students to shed light on how diversity works in multicultural institutes of higher learning.

The second ethnography was published a year earlier by linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli. Urciuoli is also concerned with the dynamics of unequal power and her field research at the rural northeastern U.S. campus extended from 1995 to 2006. Demographic data used by Urciuoli reflects the self-identification responses of students to questions on the university's admissions application. Statistically, the student body is 75% white or Caucasian, 20% Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American and/or "other/mixed" race. The sample group of 44 self-identifying students selected by Urciuoli represented a marginalized sector of the student body: 22 Latino, five Asian, 12 Black, 1 Native American, 4 international, 4 gay/lesbian and "a few students identified across categories" (Urciuoli 2009). The sample size limitation is further complicated because Urciuoli provides a generalized and incomplete explanation as to how the students perceive culture. Urciuoli's argument that Latino, Black, and Asian students treat culture as a possession speaks only to the ideas of these individuals in the context of their current experiences – a singular lifetime event that refers to ---but does not explore previous practices or bodies of influential knowledge.

Urciuoli's approach is very much centered in the present and the strength of her research is that it is very comprehensive. The methodology of Urciuoli is to synthesize two dialogues, 1) the testimonies of student in which they identify what they believe to be the power dynamics at an publically defined diverse institution, and 2) the explicit and sometimes ambiguous dialogue used by an institute to describe diversity in terms that fit the overall objectives of the university. The students interviewed by Urciuoli obtained some degree of agency in that the questions they raised about the role of the institute and

their contributions of culture to the identity of the institute directly shaped the project's conclusions.

Unlike Halualani, Urciuoli embraces Bourdieu's (1977) concept habitus to extend the ideas of cultural heritage into the diverse campus environment. By building on the various elements of habitus, Urciuoli is able to introduce the forces of class formation and racial tension that often cause friction and shape interethnic-cultural communication on college campuses. According to Urciuoli, at her institute of study one group shared a habitus and cultural marking, which they designated as "we". The identity "we" is a cultural marker that crosses racial lines and represents a "shared conditions – urban, non-white, largely working class" (Urciuoli 2009). Culturally marked students each bare the habitus-class identity. However, there is dialectical relationship between the "we" group and another class of those who share a lack of the "we" cultural marking. The students in Urciuoli's study – who almost unanimously were members of the "we" class --- identified those without cultural marking as members of the dominant white culture.

Both Urciuoli's and Halualani's work are important because they provide guidelines to future projects exploring the intersection of student worldviews and the communications that exist in the settings of institutes of higher learning. Halualani sheds light on the need to conduct research projects in the educational environment in a way that involves participants of equal status who voluntarily can express their experiences as a member of a cultural group "in their own terms and by their own sense making logics" (Halualani 2010). However, Halualani's short-term field experience and peer-based data extrapolation methods may have compromised the agency of the student participants. Although Urciuoli creates as many questions as she answers, her arguments are

extensively defended from a strong standpoint based on her over ten-year experience in the field. Urciuoli's deep immersion on campus allowed her to expand on Halualani's argument that unequal power distribution exists in intercultural institutions. According to Urciuoli, the reification of these hegemonic conditions is the creation of both a hierarchy of campus politics and a two class social system between two groups of students. The work of both scholars as these relate to class, power and diversity is important to Mellon AIS project scholars who will solicit and extrapolate data at UCR--- a campus in which there is a large population of inter-city, non-white, and working class students (Rankin & Associates 2014).

#### Communications - Branding Principles

There is a developing body of theory and corresponding methodologies that relate to describing and exploring the types of communications occurring between students who attend interethnic and intercultural institutes. The approach of this analysis is to engage leading scholarship about this topic and synthesize it with the advertised public persona of UCR. This article argues it is possible to begin analyses of the relationships between the students, faculty and staff by developing a better understanding of the institute's mission and purpose. For this reason, an exploration of interethnic/cultural communication should begin by carefully examining the claims UCR makes about itself to the public in the form of its advertising campaign.

An abstract is publically accessible on UCR's marketing website that succinctly speaks to the meaning, function, and purpose of the institute in the following branding statement:

A strong and unified brand is invaluable. It significantly enhances the consistency and coordination of our campus communications efforts and conveys a professional and positive image. It allows us the opportunity to attract and retain the best employees, students and faculty, to establish partnerships within the community and to show supporters that our brand equity is a valuable commodity.

Linguistic anthropologist Urciuoli (2009) argues that the promotional images transcend whatever might be the reality by being universally employed with the understanding that the attributes represent the meaning and values of the institute. In other words, branding is a comprehensive marketing strategy employed by universities on their websites, as themes for media releases, and within the narrative context of policies and guidelines for students, faculty and administration.

UCR's marketing website lists the following four concepts as branding attributes or core values: An inclusive community that reflects the modern face of California, excellence, exploration and discovery, and opportunity. The four terms appear on screen as bullet points and each is separated by a considerable amount of space. This visual strategy calls the viewer's attention to the fact that each term is of great importance to the university. For this reason, the next section will analyze these individual core ideas to form a working definition of both UCR's institutional meaning and purpose.

The definition of meritocratic in this article corresponds to the way the adjective is used in the following sentence; a meritocratic society or social system is one that gives people status or rewards because of what they achieve, rather than because of their wealth or social position. UCR is a meritocratic institution because it emphasizes in its

marketing strategies various attributes associated with achievement: excellence, exploration and discovery. The claim of excellence implies there is a drive by the university to produce valuable knowledge. But, what is the source of this knowledge? UCR's branding strategy avoids ownership debates about this particular intellectual property by employing two strategies: the marketing campaign identifies the university as an "inclusive campus", and by closely monitoring its public persona through creative marketing there is little doubt as to who owns the knowledge. But, who or what is the source of the knowledge that is referred to in UCR marketing material?

Communication's professor Yun Kim developed a theoretical framework to analyze ideological systems and intercommunication between racially and culturally different groups in higher education. One of her key premises is that ideas about cultural identity constantly arise from the pool of diverse opinions circulating and intersecting in U.S. society. Yun Kim's ties the development of bodies of knowledge in intercultural environments to the emergence in the U.S. of four interconnected ideological positions. According to Yun Kim, these ideological positions are: assimilation, pluralism, integrationism and separatism. I argue that the two ideas that apply to the particular cultural environment at UCR are integrationalism and pluralism. Pluralism stresses distinctive group identity and integrationalism emphasizes a moderate approach to resolve inter-group conflicts employing tolerance and pragmatic solutions (Yun Kim 2007). Therefore, the "inclusive community that reflects the modern face of California" is arguably an idealistic expression of solidarity that derives its origins from the intersection of the ideologies of pluralism and integrationalism. The multi-faceted and constantly changing relationship between the two social concepts includes particular

exchanges of ideas. Once again returning to the UCR marketing website, we are told in no uncertain terms, “brand consistency begins with you” [students, staff and faculty]. This translates to mean that each member of the student body, faculty, and staff has the responsibility to be involved in these interchanges or communications that add to the university’s pool of intercultural and interethnic information. Because of the restrictive size of this paper, this article’s focus will only be on the relationships and exchanges between students. But, what exactly is the student’s intellectual contribution?

According to Haluanlani, the student’s ethnic backgrounds represent modes of cultural identity reflecting each individual’s personal experiences and aspirations (Halualani 2010). The intersections of these valuable modes of identity ---or intercultural-ethnic exchanges—facilitate the production of whatever is the ultimate contribution each individual makes towards the creation of the institutional identity. In the case of UCR, the marketing attribute of “opportunity” is the implied objective. The next section explores the realm of opportunity by examining extant interdisciplinary scholarship about the function of interethnic and intercultural exchanges specifically between students. The purpose is to identify ways of doing this type of research that may be useful to Mellon AIS scholars at UCR. The best place to begin to explore opportunity at UCR is to establish an interdisciplinary definition of positive and negative intercultural-ethnic exchange in terms that give meaning to the interaction of its various social and cultural elements.

### Opportunism

According to the University of California’s 2014 Campus Systemwide Climate Assessment Project Report, a staggering 72% of participants surveyed indicated



relationships amongst students are best described as exclusionary, intimidating, offensive or hostile (Rankin & Associates 2014). Sixty-four percent of respondents at UCR also cited negative social relationships do exist between students on its southern California campus. Although the entire response rate for the system wide study was 27% and the participation rate at UCR was 18%, 47% of the respondents at UCR were either undergraduate or graduate students. Therefore, the 64% exclusionary indicator on UCR's campus can be considered reflexive of student opinions and indicative that a social condition exists that justifies both concern and investigation.

Much of the body of existing scholarship examining the communication involved in relationships in campus communities approach this issue from the standpoint of interethnic miscommunication. This perspective enables researchers to identify positive and negative elements of verbal exchanges between Whites and a particular non-white ethnic group. The value of this strategy is that the researcher is given the opportunity to observe and interpret shared behaviors, gestures, and semiotic distinctions that constitute a particular ethnic group's communication practices. Needless to say, the subjective nature of this approach opens the door to question to what extent the preexisting ethnocentric ideas or ethnic-racial biases of the research team shaped the project's theoretical and methodological framework. However, this type of research does provide a normative baseline for what is an interdisciplinary, widely accepted, and non-ethnically based definition of what constitutes positive communication between individuals.

Three factors inexplicably tied to individual lived experiences and cultural proclivities impact how individuals determine what is effective interethnic and intercultural communication. First of all, Orbe and Harris reject the popular tendency of

U.S. scholars to synonymously employ interethnic and intercultural to describe exchanges between individuals because “racial difference is perceived as a salient factor by at least one person [involved in a communication exchange]” (Orbe and Harris 2008). The second factor directly relates to Halualani’s argument that the uniqueness of each culturally distinctive group is based on their sharing a particular set of sociopolitical and historical interactions and that these experiences constitute the position from which they evaluate communications with culturally different groups. Finally, the third point is related to the power dynamics that exist between students and how this actually plays out in the classroom, the space in which cross ethnic and racial conversations are more likely to occur.

Philosopher Sandra Harding and Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins define the relationships between racial/ethnic minorities and the dominant White culture as one in which minorities “develop a double vision in terms of seeing both sides (Harding 1991). People of color are relative outsiders within the power structures of the United States. In addition to their own racial location, they must develop the ability to see the world from European American locations in order to function in dominant social structures (i.e. predominately White colleges or universities)” (Collins 1986). All three factors merit consideration by Mellon scholars as they begin to create projects tasked to define the elements they will argue represent effective and non-hostile communications between racially and culturally different groups of students at UCR. The next section examines two case studies in which temporal barriers, i.e. time in the field, and other project restrictions affect the researcher’s collection and interpretation of data. The objective is to once again contrast short-term projects with long term research to evaluate the

effectiveness and potential of both to identify elements of good communication between interethnic and interracial groups on U.S. college campuses.

#### University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)

The UCUES survey is an extensive compilation of response and self-identification based data acquired as part of a continuing project to define and determine the influence of various issues confronting UC's system-wide undergraduate population. This narrowed sampling frame of only undergrads crosses gender, racial, and ethnic boundaries in an attempt to gauge the level of satisfaction of this sector of the student body. Authorship and administration of UCUES are the responsibility of the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Project at the University of Berkeley. The following information about SERU and UCUES are a part of the public domain and available on the SERU website: <http://cshe.berkeley.edu>. The mission of SERU is to provide tools to perform the following tasks: create a fuller understanding of the familial, academic, cultural, ethnic backgrounds and self-identity of the undergraduate population, disaggregate the student experience in terms of their behaviors, expectations, and satisfaction levels, and analyze and use the acquired data to identify systemic weaknesses in order to create appropriate future policies. For the purposes of this paper that began with an analysis of UCR's branding or public image persona, only statistics available to the general public on the UCR or SERU websites about the campus climate will be examined in this paper.

Data acquisition for UCUES every two years since 2003 is a process in which each student logs in using their personal campus identification to participate via the Internet in the survey in which there may be a section or module that contains questions

that specifically pertain to their particular university. The next phase of the acquisition process cross-matches and merges the survey responses with the student's self-identified data about their personal familial ties, racial and cultural background, religious affiliations, etc. that resides in databases at each campus. Another step of the automated process is to strip the student's personal campus ID off the data and replaced with an identifier code unique to the UCUES process. In theory, this method protects the student's privacy even though the assignment of the codes and mapping remains only in the hands of SERU. Each UC campus receives a campus-specific extrapolation of the data and each two-year cache serves as a snapshot of the institute's social climate. UCUES' design strength is that it is a diachronic testing instrument—consecutively capturing waves of student perceptions at two-year intervals of campus life for comparative study. However, UCUES's lack of empirical data and reliance on the aggregation of contributing factors into one particular category has one major drawback; the statistical conclusions drawn from this type of quantitative analysis glosses over complex and multi-faceted issues --- the components that define and drive campus diversity. An example in the published UCUES for UCR is the one question that gauges campus climate as a factor of perceived respect.

Even though the published synopsis of the report does not aggressively probe all the particular elements that comprise a student's perception of campus diversity, the question about respect attempts to gauge experience in every area of campus life based on the student's social class, gender, race/ethnicity, religious beliefs, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and disabilities. In the case of respect, the survey results for UCR are very positive for each group – an overall categorical average of 4.8 out of 6 with a standard

deviation of only 1.06 --- indicating students feel they are respected at UCR regardless of their membership in one of the designated groups. Based on this statistically strong indicator alone, UCR's administration may make the assumption that the institute's current policies are effectively cultivating and supporting campus diversity. But, what does the aggregated claim about perceived respect really mean and is it reflexive of reality? Above all, the most pressing question is; what is involved in assuming one is respected? These questions require a deeper understanding of the meaning of diversity and the function of relationships each student believes they have with other students, faculty and staff from an individual perspective.

The absence of a detailed or disaggregated analysis of the concept of respect does not reduce the value of UCUES. The report's purpose is to both elucidate broad issues and to reveal ambiguous and intersectional areas in which there is a need for a more focused study of these important topics at the micro or individual level. I argue one way to enhance the validity of UCUES is to create a long-term and realistic ethnographic and historical record of the university's interpretation of diversity and support of non-discriminatory practices. The next section takes a closer look at the previously mentioned project of linguistic anthropologist Urciuoli ---- a holistic thirteen-year field study in a diverse northeastern U.S. institute of higher learning. The strategy is to juxtaposition Urciuoli's work next to the UC's UCUES in order to answer the following question: What are some of the advantages of long-term empirical research of campus diversity and intercultural and interethnic communication?

## Racism - A Micro Perspective Reality

Urciuoli's research project in the field working directly with students and university personnel extended from 1995-2006. During the next two years of the data extrapolation and writing, she maintained contact with the institution and included relevant current events on campus as part of the final narrative that was published in 2009. The research sheds light on the socio-historical process of register creation; registers being what is referred to as "the context of language production – a setting, genre, style, or variety" (Baker 2010). The perspective of the researcher is a broad and holistic study of how the word culture is used and understood both within the public domain and between students. Urciuoli's interviews extend over an eleven-year period and the register creation is examined as a process of index ordering or enregisterment that conflates the meaning of culture with prior definitions of race within the context of a dynamic series of institutional and student discourses. The objective is to explain how the newer connotation of culture in the context of a cultural diversity actually employs indexing or stereotypical categorizing indicative of racist environments.

The first discursive area of study investigates the ways individual students of varying ethnic backgrounds speak to and about culture. The second part of the analysis examines the discourse associated with culture creation on campus as it is distributed via the Internet on three particular webpages hosted by the university. Urciuoli's conclusion about the role of the institute regarding cultural creation and implementation coincides with a previous argument in this paper:

Culture thus formulated becomes available for deployment as a form of symbolic capital for the college, and students and faculty enacting that

deployment become available as culture providers. Not only are they culture providers but they are also the preferred providers because they are authenticated by their markedness. Urciuoli 2009

The university's creation of specific departments reflecting cultural diversity, i.e., Black Studies, Chicano Studies, and Ethnic Studies, extends the stratification of students who bear the markedness reflecting their particular self-identified cultural identities. The 44 students who participated in Urciuoli's field work identified themselves as members of one or more category including: Latino (22), Asian (5), Black (12), Native American (1), international (4), gay/lesbian (4). Although the methodology for obtaining class affiliation is not clear in the context of the ethnography, Urciuoli notes that cross-referencing did occur and most of the students were from working-class families – a factor she argues intersects with another element of great importance, race.

Although the sample size of Urciuoli's research is arguably very small in comparison to the institute's gross student population, the participants ethnically and culturally represent groups who each contribute to validating the university's public persona, an identity based on a claim of cultural diversity. The uniqueness of the Urciuoli research is that it reveals that students speak across gender and ethnic/cultural lines about culture as being a possession related to their individual upbringings. However, one exception emerges as a red flag indicating there is strong hegemonic power dynamic on campus favoring and normalizing whiteness. Despite the fact that the sexual preferences of White lesbian and gay participants in many ways marginalizes them from the non-gay white majority, white interviewees "did not talk about having a culture, nor did they generally equate culture with social markedness" (Urciuoli 2009). These

findings by Urciouli reveal that white students speak to and claim a shared power that requires no official label. Therefore, being white secures a membership in a normalized race, a distinct non-marked identity whose values are in sync with those of the institution.

The significance of Urciouli's findings is best illustrated by an example taken from within the context of her work in which she summarizes the responses of White students:

White students interviewed as resident advisors, whose usage reflected that of residential life professionals, talked about school culture, or culture as diversity, or culture as unwanted practices, for example, alcohol culture, hook-up culture, or the culture we're trying to fight. In classroom discussions with white students generally (i.e. not in any specific institutional role) or in interviews with white student tour guides or sorority and fraternity members, I found few references to culture. Those that did occur paralleled references to diversity and ethnicity, sometimes as characteristic of marked persons or groups, sometimes as generic contributions in ways that echoed the admissions diversity web page; as one student put it, "different cultural things that you could bring here other than just your race." Urciouli 2009

Urciouli's research points to a lack of understanding by Whites of the meaning of both culture and diversity. Also, a troubling reality emerges in their testimonies that points to a conflation of culture with danger and exotic behaviors. This idea of danger and abnormality is not shared by the Latino, Asian, and Afro-American interviewees who define culture in personal terms and as something of great



value. The following two testimonies are examples of marked student's speaking to culture that appear in Urcioli's ethnography.

#### Testimony 1

For me I think it's something people seem to categorize, as like backward or indigenous. Something that's kind of rooted toward rituals and obviously not the norm or the white culture. I guess going back to ways of life, family, traditions, different ideologies, like I know we were talking in my class today about how families in the Philippines, you live with your family, you don't move out of your home after college. You go back home and you raise your family with the parent and the grandparent in the house, you don't separate yourself.

#### Testimony 2

Having a culture? It's more so identity (African-American), keeping your identity as a group of people in a certain place. Like at (this school), I feel like I haven't lost my culture, I'm the same person, like cultural identity, the four years I have been here. And I haven't denied any aspect of my culture, or whatever. I haven't made excuses either. I try to explain certain issues to people and they can just take it however they want to take it. . . . I love my culture. I'm not giving it up.

The above excerpts shed light on the objective analysis of the UCUES survey that ignored both the intersectionality of relevant issues and the cross-over reality

involved in querying a diverse group of subjects about the multi-faceted concept of respect. The conclusion of this paper briefly summarizes some of the weaknesses and strengths of Urciouli's work and how future research by Mellon AIS can benefit from creative extrapolations of the UCUES database in combination with an empirical approach such as that taken by Urciouli.

### Conclusion

Even though Urciouli's relationship with the institute was extensive in comparison to most of the other projects about intercultural and interethnic communication ethnographies cited in this paper, her research is still a synchronic study. The life experience of a student at the institute is evaluated by only using the information acquired from that student in one interview and Urciouli does not tie these events together over the term of study to reveal the institutional experience of one particular individual. In fact, the historical context over the term of the research is absent in her work. This omission glosses over an important outside force that also shaped student perspectives and testimonies. However, Urciouli's holistic approach is valuable because it includes a meticulous analysis of the role of the hegemonic institute to reveal how the discourse of the institute lays claim to the identities of marginalized students.

The concept of respect evaluated in UCUES climate survey serves a particular purpose in that it opens the door to question the students directly to obtain in their words how they feel the cultural environment at the university constructs respect. Above all, the student's ideas speak to identity, personal resistance to the institutional claim to their identity, the importance of place, the

necessity of culturally specific rituals, and the lived-reality of a non-white cultural individual –all interrelated components of respect and each involved in the performance of mutual appreciation, admiration, and approval.

Finally, the purpose of this analysis was to point to ways extant approaches investigating interracial and intercultural communication and institutional diversity may relate to Mellon's AIS project. Urcioui's micro-level approach is contextually rich but historically challenged, and UCUES' purely objectified methodology serves as an indicator that there are sensitive issues that require exploration. One conclusion can be drawn from the comparison of the bodies of research: long-term empirical and quantitative projects are both necessary in order to create a body of knowledge about diversity at UCR.

The examples of short-term projects that appear in this article provide evidence that going to the field and interviewing for brief periods of time in most cases only increases the number of questions about diversity and culture. Regarding temporality, it is also true that the impact of the institute's exercise of power over the student's identity is a lifetime experience that will only be revealed within the context of interviews of the student after separation from the institute. Perhaps the greatest challenge to future Mellon AIS researchers will be to design a historical approach that will be capable of focusing on the elements involved in diversity and the complex communications between the marked and non-marked at UCR.

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