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# Visionary Sociology in Action

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# **PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY AS VIDEO ETHNOGRAPHY**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

The Department of Sociology

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purposes of this dissertation are to provide research that will further facilitate an understanding of two matters of sociological interest: public sociology and video ethnography. In order to achieve this overall objective, a video ethnographic case study was conducted with eight undergraduates at an elite southern university. The students in the study self-filmed week-to-week thoughts, feelings, and experiences to provide a methodical comparison of past and current literature of the lifestyles students construct while on campus. A qualitative approach, such as the video diary protocol established for this dissertation, is unlike most research protocols because informants (in this case university students) led themselves through the ethnography rather than being directed by a researcher. As such, one intention of the case study was to observe the phenomenon of student life through the lens of those experiencing it. Recognizing the importance of the interview process in qualitative social science research, after the audiovisual diary footage was thoroughly analyzed, audiovisually recorded interviews were also conducted with the students.

As a qualitative method, audiovisual portrayals accentuate the subjective quality of various human experiences and the interactive production of social processes. Audiovisual data offers a multi-modal means of communication, which should be embraced by sociologists, in general, and by ethnographers, in particular. To appreciate the potential of communicating sociology through audiovisual data, researchers need to recognize the characteristics that envelop its existence. Beyond the fundamental understanding of mainstream sociological theoretical and methodological paradigms, technical film expertise is, of course, necessary - specifically using fitting visuals and sounds to convey both the subject and sociological message. Taken together, the combined methods allow presentation of findings – both visually and in print – in a more

comprehensive and comprehensible way than would have not been possible with just one method in isolation.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In total, three separate articles are included within the dissertation. As this is a methodological dissertation, the Chapter 2 article, “Audiovisual Data Management and Coding: An Analysis to Advance Sociological Research,” establishes the framework for the proceeding two articles. The main purpose of this chapter is to present a set of audiovisual management and coding tools to advance sociological research designs and distribution mechanisms. The advantages of these tools will be presented to make this innovative methodology available to the discipline.

From the advent of the video ethnographic method described in Chapter 2, different themes emerged: (1) “Building an Integrated Self” which is perceptions of social relationship building and student experiences with campus social events, (2) “Acquiring Information” which is students perceptions of and experiences with academic knowledge gathering, and (3) “Career Imperatives” which is the necessary steps the student takes to enhance the effectiveness of their current collegiate efforts to improve success in school and in society. From these themes, two additional articles are included, each detailing separate evaluations of video ethnographic data collection. The thematic representation of the information determined under the Building an Integrated Self paradigm, serves as the basis for the Chapter 3 article, “Visionary Sociology in Action: Building an Integrated Self” and for thematic representation from the remaining two themes serves as the basis for the Chapter 4 article, “Visionary Sociology in Action: Acquiring Information.”

Within the case study, this research strives to answer two important and interrelated methodological issues: (1) successfully provide evidence of implementing audiovisual technologies to communicate sociological understanding to both professional and non-

professional audiences; and (2) the potential of video ethnography to contribute to the awareness of human groups and social issues. The matters above are two of the key foundations of “public sociology”: reaching a public audience and improving the public’s wellbeing (Brady, 2004). By using this methodological approach, this dissertation attempts to provide examples of effective audiovisual communicative and entertainment channels where sociologists can deliver their research to the general public.

Specifically, the following key visions will be revealed through the procedural breakdown: first, without conspicuous distinctions between data analysis, collection, and presentation, research communication is indistinguishable for general observers (e.g. students, colleagues, general publics) and, as such, a stronger mainstream sociological presence will struggle to emerge at the nexus of the public sphere. The emerging complexity of the presentation that most effectively engages publics among individual’s, communities, and societies still demands an adequate communication mechanism. With the advent of social media technologies and visual communications among individuals of all demographic categories (Pew Research, 2015), this dissertations partiality is toward incorporation of audiovisual methodological training into mainstream sociological scholarship.

With video ethnographic methods, sociologists can satisfy the substantive and stylistic requirements of the general public, as well as illustrate our research effectively to the educated public. Through video ethnography we can communicate to the lay public in non-technical language and, more importantly, documentary film is already relevant and accepted by a significant part of the lay populace (Pew Research, 2015). With the advent of audiovisual tools, video ethnography has the potential to carry sociology into the media fascinated consumption



society; rich media presentations have the capability to demonstrate concepts and tell a story in a way that text and still photographs cannot.

It is hard to deny the current popularity and future potential of using audiovisual data both inside and outside the classroom (Shrum and Castle, 2015), but still a number of fundamental methodological questions remain for the interested sociologist who chooses to showcase his research through this means. To advance the methodological discussion, to a widespread acceptance at both institutional and non-institutional levels, the case study will be introduced and assessed. From the contents of the case study, the thesis of this dissertation maintains that many sociologists who have attempted to make the discipline more “public” have overlooked video ethnography as the necessary mechanism to distribute research to the lay public. The analysis of empirical literature regarding public sociology and video ethnography will be presented jointly, because highlighting both issues are important steps towards incorporating these research techniques into future disciplinary foundations.

## **SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

Unlike quantitative research, which traditionally utilizes random samples, which are generalizable to larger populations, video ethnography uses a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling, also known as selective sampling, involves selection of particular characteristics of a population that are of interest which will best enable the scholar to answer their research question(s). Purposive sampling procedures “dictate selecting individuals or cases that provide the information needed to address the purpose of the research” (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, p. 220). Examples of these characteristics can include specific experience

(such as drug use), unique skills (such as a bouncer at a popular nightclub), or specific cultural knowledge (Hurricane Katrina recovery activists).

Unlike most quantitative research designs, informants are interviewed and/or followed repeatedly, on camera, in order to explore issues in-depth. The methodology has been critiqued for lacking scientific rigor and its incapability for reproducibility, but it should be acknowledged that all research depends on collecting detailed categories of data through the prisms of methodological alternatives, each of which has strengths and weaknesses. Video ethnographers experience the behavior and attitudes of social groups from the inside in order to truly understand their everyday lives. The methodology gets below words and surface-level thinking to recognize not what an informant *says* he or she does, but to see what he or she is *actually* doing in the chosen setting. As such, this hermeneutic style to ‘understanding’ the lives of research informants provides purposeful contributions to any extant sociological literature.

Students in the undergraduate case study were selected from a group of Introduction to Sociology students at a public university. Both convenience and purposive sampling were used to select them. Convenience sampling involves the selection of the most accessible subjects. These sampling techniques ensured a selection of individuals that offered the insight needed to address the purpose of the research.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Throughout these past few decades - from the 1990s onwards - sociology has seen a proliferation of advanced statistical modeling, experimental, computer simulation, field-ethnographic, and archival methodologies. Both qualitative and quantitative traditions continue to become highly specialized and, accordingly, several narrowly focused journals and textbooks

have surfaced to institutionalize them (Alastalo, 2010). Likewise, the controversy between qualitative and quantitative methods continues to be the most debated issue (Platt, 1996). This divide has split methodological textbooks - as only a few texts even attempt to cover both methods - and teaching approaches to further specialize the discipline (Alastalo, 2010).

To summarize, the discipline has seen vast changes since its beginnings in The United States of America in the early 20th century. New theories emerged and new methodologies to test those theories were developed. In addition, there have been numerous deliberations within both quantitative (e.g. questionnaire construction, sampling, modeling, and casualty) and qualitative approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Still, despite the polarization of theoretical and methodological developments, as society changed, so did the sociological response to the issues of the time. Nevertheless, sociology has continued to lag behind dominant public changes of the last quarter-century (Smelser, 2003).

*The Information Age* and communication revolutions have transformed larger society and the discipline of the sociology and we will be required to extend our understandings, theories, and methodological research approaches when observing the current and future social world. Partially due to the proliferation of adolescence engagement into electronic media, the need for innovative methods will be more important than ever before. For instance, it is estimated that today's youth spend 7.5 hours per day engrossed in digital media such as smartphones, television, computers, or other electronic devices (Rideout, et al., 2010). As such, sociologists will need to meet the demands of its future learners and modern methodologies will need to be employed.

Nonetheless, sociology does not have one standardized method and, as such, our discipline can still be most productive in the use of multiple practices to strengthen our

knowledge and sharpen our explanations. Likewise, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are equally effective as each portrays society from different, yet authentic perspectives. Public sociology, in the same regard, also does not have one standardized method. However, certain methods may be instrumental to the public sociologist. One of the roles when *doing* public sociology is to get the public to acquire a comprehended foundation of societal happenings. To do so requires innovative yet easily understood and communicative research instruments. As such, a key mechanism to distribute our studies to the non-sociological public is by audiovisual portrayal of research. Through video ethnography, we have the abilities to reach and develop the general public's sociological imaginations more effectively than other methodologies primarily because of the easily understood entertainment value of visual research. To elaborate upon this idea, an outline of the audiovisual data collection method for this dissertation is provided in the next section. The breakdown, which follows, will lay a foundation to advance sociological research through the video ethnographic method.

## **PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY**

Michael Burawoy (2005) recognizes four distinct, but interrelated types of sociology: (1) policy, (2) professional, (3) critical, and (4) public. To be clear, at the onset, despite Burawoy's contention that all four dimensions of sociology are, in fact, "organically" interconnected, informing and supporting one another (Derber, 2004) the associations between the four types of sociology might be less pleasant than described. For this reason, it is important to note that the types of sociology are not mutually exclusive. Burawoy suggests that for the discipline of sociology to reach its full potential there needs to be a healthy balance and interaction between the four.

Policy sociology is the “service of a goal defined by a client” (Burawoy, 2005: 266) whereas professional sociology recognizes the institutional, conceptual frameworks, and methodological approaches to social science research (Lett, Hier, & Walby, 2010). Burawoy asserts that a productive sociology is one that is based in scientific sociology (professional) drawing on both sophisticated quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches (Helmes-Hayes, 2009). Burawoy classifies these two types, professional and policy, as “instrumental” knowledge because they focus on the means of research, rather than the ends (Burawoy, 2005). The instrumental types are oriented towards solving specific issues for academic audiences (Lett, Hier, & Walby, 2010). In professional sociology, the intended audience is other sociologists. Thus, the professional sociologist is primarily concerned with the technical aspects of qualitative or quantitative sociological theorizing and data collection. In policy sociology, the intended audience extends beyond the academy to clients who seek guidance for predefined outcomes. This type of sociology relates more to the problems of social policy making institutions at many stages of organizational hierarchy (Tamdgidi, 2005).

The latter two types, critical and public, are more agenda based and engaged in social change. Burawoy (2005) conceptualizes these two types as of sociology under “reflexive knowledge” because they are more concerned with discerning problems and objectives (Lett, Hier, & Walby, 2010). Critical sociology is also addressed to an academic audience, similar to professional sociology. According to Burawoy (2005), “It is the role of critical sociology...to examine the foundations—both the explicit and the implicit, both normative and descriptive—of the research programs of professional sociology.” In other words, one of the primary purposes of critical sociology is to provide critical assessments and evaluations of professional sociology. Lastly, public sociology is also geared towards a non-academic audience, like policy sociology.

The key difference being that policy sociologists are provided questions and problems from clients that need addressed. Public sociology, alternatively, includes a conversation of working together with non-sociological audiences to solve public issues and contribute to research. Even though most in the discipline accept the premise that public sociology is a worthwhile project, in the following paragraphs, the generally accepted consensus criticisms of public sociology are outlined.

The disciplines “public sociology debate” did not begin with Michael Burawoy, but he revitalized the discussion after his presidential address at the 2004 American Sociological Society (ASA) (Revers, 2009). As such, many hostilities arose from fellow sociologists who claimed public sociology will damage the discipline by threatening its integrity, exposing its credibility, and putting its legitimacy in jeopardy (Burawoy, 2009). Other sociologists, on the contrary, claimed Burawoy’s ideas were notable and good, suggesting that professional sociology is the problem, not public sociology. For them, professional sociology leads to a career devoted to producing and consuming inaccessible science, as well as petty obsessions over methodology, among other trivial rituals. In general, the consensus was that sociology needs to be involved in more public discourse, but the approach in doing so was a matter of controversy.

American sociology has very little impact on the public and policy decisions in both governmental and economic agencies, and it seems to be embarrassed by this fact (Turner, 2005). As such, the discipline is just a marginal player in important community decisions and public debates, but despite this lack of relevancy in the “public sphere” Burawoy’s proposal is still not widely accepted as a form of scholarship (Turner, 2005). In fact, Turner (2005) argues that Burawoy’s ideas, although commendable, will not lead to more open doors for sociology but will otherwise “cause even more doors to be slammed in our faces” (p. 28). Public sociology has

even been criticized for being elitist (Tittle, 2004) Perhaps it is no surprise that there is no consensus over how to place the discipline at the nexus of public discourse. Additionally, sociology, as a whole, enjoys little consensus over its core standards, methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks, or of the role political ascriptions in its product (Davies, 2009). The critics, primarily, are in agreement that the general prospect of public sociology is a good one, but there are still some hesitations. The general disciplinary disinclinations are outlined below.

In the public sociology debates, academic contributions in the press remain a matter of conversation. Stacey (2004) has stated that research presented to a mass public creates a “virtual social science...based on misleading statistical claims” (132). Brady (2004) has argued that sociologists will shortchange their professional, career responsibilities if a more prominent role in the mass media is encouraged; further claiming that working with the media jeopardizes our scholarly integrity and that departments actively avoid hiring “academic celebrities” who desire mainstream publicity. For Brady (2004), “the presentation of research and theory to a broader public often leads to diluted and counterproductive debate” (4).

The common reply to these hostile mass media views is for sociologists to protect and control the products of their research (Mesny, 2009). Good and bad sociology exists and inevitably good and bad public sociology will exist. Turner (2005) makes a clear distinction between the two. For Turner, good public sociology is the presentation of verified facts, which may influence social policy. Bad public sociology is everything else not under these criteria (e.g. moral judgments without evidence) especially in politically charged discussion. Credibility, fears Turner, will be lost for those sociologists who practice the latter (Revers, 2009). While it will be impossible to avoid “bad” public sociology across the discipline, most sociologists who practiced public engagement still be need to be accountable for their scholarship. Burawoy (2005b) writes,

that scholars need to “back-translate” the results of their investigations to the publics they study (77); that is, sociologists must authenticate the information they have collected/created through their engagement with the general public with those general public themselves.

Regardless, media publicity will be largely irrelevant for the academic imperatives of many social scholars. Sociologists will still need to opt-into mass media dialects and public debates, in order for the above resentments to be legitimized. Accordingly many sociologists will have no incentive to devote any significant time to it, because the career imperatives do not demand doing so. The fear of engaging with the mass media therefore will be a non-issue for those who chose to opt-out of media relations and as such academic integrity and solidarity can be maintained. Every sociologist will need to decide how publicly engaged he or she is willing to be. Nevertheless, not everyone will be afforded the opportunity to engage in public discourse even if such engagement is desired. One commentator (Schwartz, 2008) has even suggested that for those who wish to engage with audiences either within or outside the academy to make books shorter, more understandable, and less ideological.

Another primary discussion surrounds the politically progressive, Marxist agenda, which saturates the public sociology debates. Some (Brady, 2004; Tittle, 2004; Nielsen, 2004) have claimed that Burawoy’s ideas for public sociology covertly attempt to endorse his private political agenda, rather than the general advancement of the profession in general or the ASA in particular (Siebel & Smith, 2009). Others (Turner, 2005) have commented that the political disparities between many sociologists, will not “energize” the general public, but turn those who we hope to influence off. Moreover, some critics are skeptical, regarding the program of public sociology, that under the direction of Burawoy, it has been suggested that the discipline will be infected with a Marxist drift (Neilson, 2004). It is argued, that behind Burawoy’s public social



agenda lays the possibility that this is an effort to reposition Marxist sociology. Neilson (2004) writes, "One hears of public sociologies more and more just as one hears of Marxist sociology less and less. Is this a coincidence? There would be an interesting study to be made of the overlap in "personnel" between these two approaches." Later Neilson (2004) suggests that public sociology and professional sociology could co-exist together, despite the political fears associated with the movement and the "awkwardness" of Burawoy's agenda. The awkwardness, it is argued, extends from public sociology endorsing a policy based upon political values and also because of the unanswered matters regarding its relationship with a Marxist program, especially within a discipline geared towards objectivity (Neilson, 2004). This alleged affiliation with sociological Marxism is a liability for public sociology, but not everyone offers a similar point of view.

Others find the Marxist connection a response of paranoia (Paolucci, 2008). Claiming the critic's opinions are puzzling and stating that the notion that Burawoy's public sociology has a Marxist slant as "ultimately groundless." Stoecker (2005) finds it confusing to charge Burawoy with "injecting Marxist thinking into the discipline when Burawoy in fact uses a functionalist argument." The price of this disconnect is of particular concern and a potential problem. According to some you would think Burawoy was trying to terminate the discipline, as we know it. Public sociology must overcome this divide or it threatens to further split an already divided sociology along ideological lines. The Marxist implications of Burawoy's public sociology are problematic both in their efforts to rejuvenate an increasingly specialized and divided sociology, and in their slant towards the historically detested principles of Marxism (Boyns and Fletcher, 2005). Burawoy (2005) has also responded that the Marxism accusations associated with his public sociology programs are "baseless."

Sociology has also been overshadowed by other social science disciplines such as political science and psychology (Boyns and Fletcher, 2005). Moreover since we as a discipline, do not even know who we are it has created a disciplinary identity problem that has yet to be stabilized. And if we as sociologists still suffer with an identity crisis the general public then too will inevitably have a very limited conception of what sociology actually is. Moreover, many authors (see, e.g., Brady 2004; Hays 2007; Tittle 2004; as referenced in Goldeberg & van den Berg, 2009) have noted Burawoy's vague, evasive, and contradictory approach to the notion of public sociology. Likewise, Brady (2004) noted that Burawoy's public sociology model does not counter suggestions for disciplinary change nor does it offer proposals for tangible measures of career achievement.

Because of this disciplinary eclecticism and wide-ranging identity, some scholars have suggested separating sociology between positivism and non-positivisms sects. Turner (2005) has pointed out that he believes sociology should be split apart into a scientific sect and a humanistic/activist sect. He continues that the two different types of sociological personalities just get in each other's way, which challenges the productivity of both frameworks. Noy (2009) further expands on the disciplinary identity discussion. He writes graduate students in sociology have three core priorities: 1) understand what sociology is, 2) understand how to do sociology, and 3) to conduct some type of sociological research. Noy (2009) remarks that the public sociology debates are simply a result of a disciplinary identity problem since there is no clear path about how to conduct public sociology. Moreover, the natural eclecticism of sociology's diversity and sub-disciplines make it even more challenging to train graduate students.

Nonetheless, Boyns and Fletcher (2005) argue that in order for sociology to achieve a greater presence publicly it needs to establish a "disciplinary identity that is based upon a form of

knowledge that can be convincingly presented to those naturally unresponsive to sociological insights.” Later adding that, a push should be made toward theoretically driven research programs, which will “certainly help in the pursuit of disciplinary coherence and facilitate the advancement of the cumulative knowledge of the discipline” (pgs. 20-21). But their solution of a more developed theoretically driven discipline is not a solution. While there is certainly value in theory-driven research and neither topic driven research nor public sociology could exist without it (Gans, 2009), disciplinary coherence can just as easily be secured through disciplinary diversity.

Today, *public* sociology has not been encouraged or even recognized in many sociology departments. As a result there has only been a rudimentary interest in the field, partly because of the challenges reaching the lay or non-sociological public (Gans, 2010). Burawoy, while not the pioneer of this shift in the approach to sociological research, has had a significant impact on the program. Much of the public sociology literature has concentrated on the advantages of Burawoy’s proposal and on the challenges of implementation (Powell, 2012). Burawoy defines public sociology as “a sociology that seeks to bring sociology to publics beyond the academy, promoting dialogue about issues that affect the fate of society.” Burawoy (2005) suggests that one of the largest failures of sociology is the lack of public visibility; as such Burawoy contends that is highly problematic for sociology to not develop a stronger public presence. Most sociologists would agree with Burawoy’s assertions that sociology should play a larger role in society. Realizing this issue, public sociology is the disciplines effort to establish a greater visibility to maintain its social relevance.

Currently, the research value of video ethnography is the combined result of a valid and representative objective for a given purpose, a particular research question, and a sound process

of going from visual observations to a reasoned and substantiated set of interpretations. Although video-data is gaining relevance for qualitative studies, the development of adequate and convenient methods still remains in its initial phase (Knoblauch and Schnettler, 2012). With that noted, there has been a push by social science departments to make sociology, geography, and similar disciplines more publicly engaged and available (Kowalchuk & McLaughin, 2009). As such, academics can make a difference via their contributions to public discourse. Moreover, it is essential to consider how public engagements in mass media could be more effective while maintaining discipline-wide legitimacy and credibility. In time, we can safely assume academics will be increasingly required by institutions and funding agencies to make their knowledge widely accessible. Internet availability will be a key part of future movements and a necessary foundation of information transfer. Above all, the public sociologist must recognize that he or she will be addressing various publics and, as such, will need to be prepared to do so in multi-modal ways.

Early 19<sup>th</sup> century sociologists developed ideas and theoretical approaches to meet public needs of the time (Kalekin-Fishman and Denis, 2012). With the remarkable growth and popularity of accessible internet streaming sites such as YouTube, Netflix, and Vimeo, alongside availability of inexpensive digital video recording software and hardware, we are now at an ideal time for sociologists to satisfy the general public's practical, verbal, and stylistic requirements. Video ethnography is naturally endowed with said characteristics as it represents a distribution mode that can thrive in the era of diverse popular media. Not only does video ethnographic research deliver useful information to the general public, but it also satiates the entertainment desire. As such, video ethnography has the ability to transcend the text-based academic world and thrive in advanced communication modes such as digital media and audiovisual recordings.

In the next section, a discussion will be offered suggesting video ethnography represents an untapped boon for sociologists to increase public perceptions of the discipline, engage in public affairs, and to appeal to popular culture. Video ethnographies have potential to be the most effective mode of communication due to their appeal to not only sociologists, but also the lay public. Technological advancements have caused media options to expand rapidly. Digital technologies offer a boundless resource of media that compete for public attention (Webster, 2011). Despite the United States experiencing a “digital divide”— access to certain media, related to differences in socioeconomic status, race, and gender – most young people still spend time using a computer, smartphone, television or another electronic device (Roberts and Foehrd, 2008). Television has penetrated 99 percent of households with children and 68 percent of those children age eight-to-eighteen have a TV in their bedroom. Ninety-one percent of children of the same age, whose parents completed college, had access to an in-home personal computer compared to 82 percent of those who had completed no more than high school (Roberts and Foehrd, 2008). The practice of knowledge production continues to evolve across universities and research institutions. And although typically discussed in term of entertainment, one form of media consumption, the process of documentary (video ethnography<sup>1</sup>), holds significant implications for the future of sociological research. Digital video, in particular, is changing the way academics can present and practice field research (Shrum, et, al., 2005).

According to Pink (2007), video is ideal for showing tales of “symbolic representations, evocative of (for instance) emotions, experiences, power, and those stories thrive in videographic representations, whether or not we deem these to depictions to be ‘truthful’ or ‘accurate’”. The

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<sup>1</sup> Has also been referred to as “digital video,” “ethnographic film,” “audiovisual ethnography,” and “visual ethnography.” For consistency throughout the article I use the term “video ethnography.”

method uses both audio and images to tell a story where text, numbers, and graphs are the primary social science resources for the transmission of material and production of knowledge (MacDougall, 1969–70).

Historically, sociologists have delivered their research through writing, which made most traditional ethnographies unimodal modes of communication (Vannini and Milne, 2013). As such, traditionally books, journal articles, newspaper articles, dissertations, etc., have been the medium used to communicate sociological research to both academics and non-academics. Writing has been and still is a very valuable approach to communicating research and will continued to be embraced by the discipline. The argument here, to be certain, is not suggesting otherwise, as textual approaches to research are still very valuable. As such, this dissertation will not overlook the importance of a positivist text-based approach to research but, in tandem with a textual document, a sociological movie (or documentary) will be forthcoming.

For video ethnographic audiovisual data presentations (often documentaries), the selection and design of the collected footage is persistently customized, based on ongoing analysis. This allows for presentation of significant findings and issues as they arise, and eliminates unproductive pieces of audiovisual data from an original research “script.” As such, this research will be relevant to both the academy as well as the non-sociological public.

## **CONCEPTUAL & OPERATIONAL DEFINITONS**

Research gathering via video can be used in a number of ways for including informant interviews, direct observation (fieldwork), participatory video (video diary), and timeline sequencing. Often, video ethnographers practice a variety of approaches to achieve triangulation – that is, using two or more sources for confirmation of the same information. For example, during a video fieldwork approach the researcher might capture naturally occurring activities of

people in a specific context but then decide to follow-up with those individuals in a video recorded interview for validation of what was recorded in the field. A brief description is presented below of each of the main approaches:

*Informant interviewing* includes both individual interviews (e.g., face-to-face) as well as group interviews (including focus groups). During the interview, an active effort at building rapport with the informant is encouraged. Questions are open-ended and an interview guide can be used as a general summary of the issues to be discussed. *Video elicitation* involves researchers interviewing subjects using a video recording of that interaction as an elicitation tool. Video elicitation is useful because it uses a stimulus, such as previously recorded fieldwork footage, to prompt informants to discuss subjects in greater detail than they would during a standard face-to-face interview. Occasionally, interviews of informants may need to be done more than once for clarity on previous discussed issues.

*Direct observation (fieldwork)* emphasizes observing and video recording naturally occurring behavior, rather than reported or recalled behavior. Possibly the most established technique for audiovisual data collection, video fieldwork typically focuses on the behavioral aspects individuals use in their environment. Observations may also focus on a location (Times Square) or event (Mardi Gras). The video ethnographer records as much action as possible, including behavior, conversations, and portrayals of the location and persons observed.

A *participatory video (video diary)* protocol is unlike most research protocols because informants lead themselves through the ethnography rather than being directed by a researcher. The fundamental purpose of participatory techniques is to allow informants to have control of making their experiences visible. With that noted, a guide can be established to help informants pace themselves and clarify diary expectations. Depending on the length of the project,

informants should be encouraged to engage into deeper reflections into their own behaviors. This might include having individuals meet for personal video reflection sessions where open-ended, individualized questions are asked about the informant's social experiences.

A *timeline* is video ethnographic data collection method for gathering time-related information such as the rebuilding of key events in history or gentrification of a community. Knowledgeable researchers about a topic under evaluation will use appropriate audiovisual data collection materials, such as a camera and tripod, to film the timely progress of the key event. A narration is delivered, while filming, in order to provide significant contextual information as to the location's progress – as such, it is also important to mark the dates and times of the filming session. With this approach the collected footage can introduce, for example, the gentrification of a community to city leaders or local individuals.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **AUDIOVISUAL DATA MANAGEMENT AND CODING: AN ANALYSIS TO ADVANCE SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a set of audiovisual management and coding tools developed to support a methodology to advance sociological research designs and distribution mechanisms. The merits of these tools will be presented to make this innovative methodology available to the discipline. Despite the potential significance of this approach to research production, the exact relationships between data analysis, collection, and presentation still remains insufficiently understood. Coding audiovisual data, from a sociological foundation, is a unique, wide-ranging, and meticulous process and, to the best of the authors' knowledge, has never been elaborated upon systematically. As such, the step-by-step breakdown of this procedure will be invented and serve as the main contribution for this paper. Specifically, the following manuscript provides an informative outline of how one can successfully manage audiovisual technology (video ethnography) to communicate sociological understanding to both professional and non-professional audiences (public sociology). During the analysis of video ethnographic coding designs, an example outline of a case study on undergraduate students will be presented.

Keywords: video ethnography \* methodology \* audiovisual data management \* coding \* public sociology

## INTRODUCTION

Necessary to the social processes of science are the communication and exchange of research findings and results (Fox, 1983). In the 19th century, sociologists developed theoretical approaches on the basis of perceived changes in the public sphere – among them, the development of the factory system, urbanization, and on-going secularization and revisions of family structure (Kalekin-Fishman and Denis, 2012). Consequently, sociological research and ideas were consequently created out of the obligation to meet the public’s needs at the time. With increased accessibility to media and heavier dependence on visual aids, it would be beneficial to incorporate the methodology of video ethnography into mainstream sociological training. Production and conveyance of research continues to evolve across universities and research institutions and technological advancements have caused media options to expand rapidly. Although documentary films are traditionally considered a form of entertainment by the public, the process of documentary film-making (video ethnography<sup>2</sup>), holds significant implications for the future of sociological research (Shrum and Castle, 2014). Digital video, in particular, is changing the way academics can present and practice field research (Shrum et, al., 2005).

To best uncover the value of video ethnography, in particular, broad aspects of the methodology will first be described. One goal of this discussion is to portray the complexity of advancing sociological research to the general public. To engage the public, quantitative sociologists should focus their attention towards making analyses easier to translate and understand (Gans, 2010). Video ethnographic methodologies embrace the presentations that evolve around research dissemination. From a research perspective, the dynamic relationship between data analysis and presentation are prime sociological concerns.

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<sup>2</sup> Has also been referred to as “digital video,” “ethnographic film,” “audiovisual ethnography,” and “visual ethnography.” For consistency throughout the article, I will use the term “video ethnography.”

Moreover, this paper presents an innovative methodological lens through which to view *and* approach sociological research. To determine the value of this approach, a case study on undergraduate students will be introduced and assessed. The video ethnographic project involved eight undergraduate students from an elite Southern university. As part of the project requirements, the students were asked to communicate their weekly thoughts, feelings, and experiences on camera and with a written diary that was submitted bi-weekly. The video diary submissions provided personal observations into the student's life and, consequently, valuable insights into campus experiences and learning. This video ethnographic student-filmmaker approach allowed for candid, intensive research into subject matter that sometimes may have been too intimate for an ethnographer to observe (e.g., sorority member group meetings). Following the analyses, the data underwent various levels of coding for the development of major themes and reoccurring trends.

## **PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY**

Burawoy<sup>3</sup> (2005) defines public sociology as “a sociology that seeks to bring sociology to publics beyond the academy, promoting dialogue about issues that affect the fate of society.” Congruently, Brady (2004) notes that public sociology involves two ideas: reaching a public audience and improving the public's well being. These goals are well accepted by sociologists and are key for the discipline to thrive. Social scientists have the capacity to accumulate vast findings and, thus, knowledge of social dynamics and need an outlet to communicate their research openly. The importance of intellectual openness is not limited to sociology, but relevant to the future of science and academia. One of the largest failures of sociology is the lack of

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<sup>3</sup> Former President of the American Sociological Association

public visibility; as such, sociology has not been able to develop a strong public presence (Burawoy, 2005) despite the potential to play a large role in society. Of the various emphases in sociology, public sociology likely has the most potential to establish greater visibility and, as such, maintain the social relevance of sociology.

Unfortunately, public sociology has not been encouraged or recognized in many sociology departments. As a result, there has only been rudimentary interest in the field, partly because of the challenges reaching the lay or non-sociological public (Gans, 2010). Much has changed in the discipline since the 1960s and, today, sociologists are not meeting the demand of public interests (Turner, 2012).

Public sociology in the United States offers a promise of social engagement and stronger public discourse but is still at an inherent disadvantage because of the established settings of the traditional career imperatives (Noy, 2009). If universities recognize video ethnographic film and other means of media usage as capable of satisfying a public relevancy obligation, it would then be reasonable to assume university administrators would be willing to provide academics with more funding for technology resources and, more training in public engagement and communication. A standard methodological procedural document is key to establish discipline relevancy. Research films naturally provide graphical and practical characteristics that are of great appeal to the lay public and public sociology. As detailed in the introduction, electronic media is being increasingly consumed. Social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter) allow for quick, efficient communication and video portrayal satisfies the entertainment demands of our culture.

Gans (2010) highlights the importance of “word of mouth” via blogs and other public media networks. The possibilities of “word of mouth” communication are seemingly endless for

the interested video ethnographer particularly because of the immense popularity of online streaming sites such as Vimeo and Youtube. Today nearly everyone has access to upload, stream, and embed video portrayals and the interested sociologist should take advantage of such communication mechanism. Moreover, video instruction allows academics to be more inclusive and provide knowledge through a more in-depth framework in comparison to other pedagogies (Mattery & Smith, 2006).

Mateer (2011) writes,

The use of media to enhance teaching and learning complements traditional approaches to learning. Effective instruction builds bridges between students' knowledge and the learning objectives of the course. Using media engages students, aids student retention of knowledge, motivates interest in the subject matter, and illustrates the relevance of many concepts.

Utilizing the media of popular culture which is familiar to students is likely to: (a) maintain student interest in the theories and concepts being taught; (b) improve analytical skills by analyzing media using the theories and concepts they are studying; (c) break down the barrier between formal knowledge and understanding, enabling students to see concepts and new examples when they use these same media in their private life (Mateer, 2011).

Accordingly, the general claim proposed is that it should not only be about how to *approach* sociology but also about how to *communicate* sociology. Through video ethnography, sociologists have the abilities to reach and develop the general public's sociological imaginations more effectively than other methodologies primarily because of the easily understood, entertainment value of visual research (Shrum and Castle, 2014). In summary, the proposed paper not only confirms the current advancement of video ethnographic research but also sets the idea into a larger and more comprehensible context. In doing so, this research design aims to



help sociologists better understand the complex dynamics of audiovisual portrayals and the fundamental communalities of their coding developments and production.

## **A METHODOLOGICAL STANDARD FOR VIDEO ETHNOGRAPHY**

The analysis described in this document is grounded exclusively in qualitative research methods, specifically, video ethnography. Before beginning the informative management breakdown of coding video ethnographic data, it is imperative to illustrate the importance of a cohesive and harmonized definition of this term. ‘Ethnography’ is an in-depth study of the way of life of a specific group (e.g., collection of people or small society with similar belief systems, group mores and activities if every day). Video ethnography, then, is documenting one of these defined groups (e.g. undergraduate students) through audio and visual recordings to order to obtain experiential sampling (or in the moment) data about the course of everyday life for this group.

‘In its most characteristic form...[ethnography] involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions- in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research’  
(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:1).

Traditionally, this method has been a useful way to produce richly *written* accounts of research. Portrayals of research in vividly written descriptive detail are possible because of her/his direct participation with, involvement in, and experiences of the object(s) she/he chooses to study. Consider a public university, for example: ethnographically, there are many questions a researcher might want to know about the students being observed. We might wonder how engaged the students are in the classroom, what expectations the instructors have for their pupils, if students are benefiting from their university experiences, etcetera. The use of audiovisual

media, alongside the documentation and expansion of ethnography data collection, can improve sociological analysis. The video ethnographic, then, can chronicle the choices of individual groups and systematically add additional credence and sophistication to data analysis and collection.

Pink (2007) writes, “a video is ‘ethnographic’ when its viewer(s) judge that it represents information of ethnographic interest,” additionally noting that video ethnography is an approach to representing and experiencing social worlds that both informs and is informed by different disciplinary programs and theoretical underpinnings. The video ethnographic method is a process of producing and visually expressing knowledge about culture, society, and individuals that is detailed from the ethnographers interpretations (Pink, 2007). This research strategy permits (rather demands), a flexible and visionary approach.

## **AUDIOVISUAL DATA MANAGEMENT & CODING**

Before the video ethnographic can begin coding the collected files, there are some practical problems, which must need resolved. To analyze audiovisual data, storage is required for equipment and cataloging systems are needed to save the raw footage. In addition, non-linear editing programs - such as Avid Media Composer, Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premier Pro – are also essential to transcribe, analyze, produce, and present research. The rise of these packages over the last decade has brought significant changes to ethnographic filmmaking, as now editing work can be easily adopted for use on a personal computer. As the development of SPSS and SAS influenced the extensive use of statistics for data processing, nonlinear editing programs will influence the frequency of video ethnographic methodology as a research practice (Shrum, et al., 2005). These editing packages are moderately priced, especially for the nonprofessional user, but

are available for purchase at ‘academic pricing’ by the interested sociologist. Managing these programs may require skills that are uncharacteristic to traditional qualitative exploration, but are easily learned with a semester of training (Shrum, et al., 2005).

Compared to other qualitative approaches to research, video ethnography requires much equipment, beyond the nonlinear editing packages (Shrum, et al., 2005). Undeniably, the initial setup equipment costs can be expensive and, as such, video ethnography is one of the more costly ways to approach qualitative research (Schnettler & Raab, 2009). Sociologists interested in pursuing video ethnography will, of course, need to purchase a video camera, lenses, lavalier microphone, shotgun microphone, tripod, batteries, headphone, etcetera, for the purposes of collecting footage. The “prosumer” market, which popularized a little over a decade ago, has now provided professional camera equipment at consumer grade costs. Technology has become so accessible that the cost of your gear may be overlooked in favor of a well-developed sociological story.

With that noted, the technological advancements of the ‘digital era’ have allowed for the creation of high quality films while using smaller, lighter, easily operable, and less costly equipment (Shrum, et al., 2005). Indeed, while the costs associated with this qualitative method are likely greater than other qualitative approaches to research, the video ethnographic method is still more affordable than ever. Furthermore, since video ethnography is reliant on future technological innovations, the cost of equipment has potential to become even more affordable with time.

## **Data Management**

Studying informants in motion requires storage that can handle audiovisual data analytics efficiently. Storing hundreds of terabytes of research footage is not uncommon for the serious video ethnographic. As such, building an effective infrastructure to handle the space needed for video files is of utmost importance.

To get an idea of the storage magnitude required, one must consider the typical audiovisual data they will be recording. Recent video camera models that capture high-definition videos for an hour and photos with 1920 x 1080 resolution typically consume 12 gigabytes of hard drive space. Although this does not seem like an exorbitant amount of space, accumulated data can fill up hard drive capacity quickly, without consideration to the space required to back-up the data in multiple places. Avoid only storing file collections in *just* one place too, in attentiveness of the rare drive failure.

For the beginning video ethnographer, the most effective storage method is to: 1) obtain at least two portable external hard drives; 2) place all video files on both drives, once research footage has been collected; 3) store the drives in separate, secure locations. As of February, 2016, a single drive with 2 terabytes of storage capacity can be purchased for roughly \$80. Although simple, this routine requires continual maintenance to remain updated, especially if the sociologist is collecting and adding videos over time, instead of a single time-point.

Online backup, also known as “cloud backup,” is also recommended as a primary audiovisual data storage technique or in collaboration with storage on an external hard drive. Cloud storage requires registering for an online account from one of the assortment of cloud backup services. This storage options comes at an annual cost, but it is becoming cheaper while storage sizes are getting larger, thus, making it an attractive option for the serious ethnographer. A few recommended cloud providers are Dropbox, Google, Microsoft, and Amazon. Once

registered, the user can set the application preferences to back up files automatically. One of the greatest benefits of this storage option is mobility – files can be accessed on smartphones, tablets, and laptops.

For the more advanced ethnographer, a Drobo server or a RAID (redundant array of independent disks) can be used to store data across multiple drives. This is often the ideal situation as storing audiovisual data across multiple drives will offer more resistance against an unexpected crash. A Drobo is essentially a small server where one can store multiple hard drives; once audiovisual data is uploaded, the system will combine the hard drives into a single drive that can be easily accessed on the computer. Furthermore, the Drobo system automatically assigns one of the drives as a backup. A RAID is the same concept as a Drobo - audiovisual data can be stored across multiple disks so, if any hard drives are lost or incur damage, data is not lost.

To summarize, the management of large audiovisual digital files demands three requirements:

1. Determine the amount of audiovisual data needed to be stored before you begin the research project.
2. Audiovisual data needs to be backed up frequently and in multiple storage locations.
3. If audiovisual data is too large for a single drive, consider options for multiple drives, such as the Drobo or RAID that will keep the files stored in one location securely.

## **Coding**

Transforming 40 hours of raw video ethnographic data into a convincing 10-minute independent scientific work that analyses social reality using sociological understanding can be an

overwhelming task. The abundance of audiovisual files collected during any video ethnographic project can lead to data overload: how can sociologists untangle the accumulation of audiovisual phenomena that video ethnography represents? The range of possible meanings of the collected audiovisual data is endless and, without a predefined methodological coding protocol, a video ethnographic approach can be overwhelming. For novice video ethnographers, this section presents a tool one can both reference and utilize as a tool for organizing collected audiovisual data.

With that noted, it is worth recognizing that this manuscript is not declaring the methods outlined as the *only* way to code video ethnographic data. This guide is intended to develop consistency within the methodology. After reading an assortment of video ethnographic handbooks, it became quite apparent that there is not a satisfactory manuscript (for sociologists) that details coding completely. A technical source that instructors could use as a supplement in a graduate training course in audiovisual methods would be valuable for both students and teachers. The practical knowledge of a coding handbook would be useful alongside the creative sociological tools that could be offered in a graduate seminar (Shrum and Castle, 2014). As such, this section does not address the distinction between video ethnographic data collection and presentation, how to conduct on-camera interviews, or how to conduct participation observation fieldwork. This manual will exclusively focus on coding and its role in the video ethnographic analytic process.

### **What is Coding?**

Coding in video ethnographic inquiry is the process of organizing and sorting your audiovisual data. Coding is the process of attaching markers to pieces of audiovisual portrayals that allows

for comparison, demarcation, and organization of collected data. Codes serve as a way to label and categorize the collected participant observations, interviews, still photographs, and audio files. A “code” allows for synthesizing of what is transpiring in the visuals or being heard in the audio. In the initial coding processes, the audiovisual data to be coded can range from a single spoken word or still photograph to a full interview excerpt. Just as a movie title captures a film's main content, a code represents the primary correspondence of an audiovisual clip. It can be suggested, then, that coding in video ethnography is an analysis stage.

Multiple coding iterations are necessary to identify substantive themes. Extracting meaning from the collected files is not a task that can be completed hastily. The analysis is an extended reflective pursuit and might require assistance from other academic minds. It is important, then, to set aside generous blocks of time to code data. Academic rigor is necessary to identify recurring/captivating themes and portrayals.

Before the ethnographer begins the coding process, it is important to recognize the sociological message one wishes to convey. As such, before beginning video ethnographic analysis, the sociologist needs to construct a script or storyline. The collected shots, scenes, and sequences can all convey sociological and conceptual information – the places, events, people, emotions, and the academics' points of view can then serve as the variables in the project script. The more prepared one is with the background literature of their research, the better prepared they will be to find visuals that serve that story, and consequently, they can avoid spending too much time and money on a project that does not convey a valuable sociological message. Ongoing evaluation of collected data should be integral to all aspects of script planning and implementation. It is best to design the documentary with evaluation in mind, collect data on a continuing basis and then use these data to improve your film. To put it in other words, the

documentary script states the purpose of the research and it is the footage that connects and combines key themes of that evaluation.

The goal of the coding stage is to gather seemingly unconnected stories, sounds, and images and assemble them into themes and patterns and recognize sociological characteristics, which envelop their existence. This takes place in four stages:

1. Daily Fieldwork Reflections
2. Identify a Coding Scheme
3. Coding and Cataloging Audiovisual Files
4. Evaluate The Codes

### ***Stage I: Daily Fieldwork Reflections***

As each filming session concludes, the audiovisual files should be reflected upon while uploading their contents into storage device(s). Fieldwork reflections”, which involve disentangling footage, are the activation stage of coding and reflect the beginning of “research”. A daily reflection of camera fieldwork and file labeling are essential strategies to make sense of the data. A daily fieldwork reflection allows the sociologist to consider what they heard in the field, which could not be captured on camera. If the project involves a crew of multiple individuals, a reflection allows the group to share information with each other. Under this conception, the video ethnographer should maintain field notes about the phenomena they filmed, at or close to the time of filming. This is useful when piecing together the documentary, but it is also valuable if the sociologist decides to publish a text-based article. As maintenance of field notes can be time-consuming, the sociologist should set aside a block of time to write after



filming, if notes cannot be taken at the time/place of filming. Descriptive field notes allow the footage to be coded easier.

In many situations, the sociologist both films and then codes the footage simultaneously. In exceptional situations, however, subjects will be in the field, with cameras, collecting the data themselves, while the sociologist is away. Under these circumstances, the sociologist must ensure the subjects provide written reflections of the data they collected. For example, one recent research project involved university students filming their daily campus lives. Students were provided a camera which allowed the sociologist to get below words and surface-level thinking to recognize not what an student *says* he or she does, but to see what he or she *actually* is doing on university campuses. To be exact, the students acted as participant filmmakers and filmed individual video diaries broadcasting university life from *their own eyes*.

A “hands-off” approach was utilized. Using this style, data collection was monitored weekly while the students were in the “field” collecting data. By equipping each with a camcorder, students were able to record and reflect upon *their* everyday experiences, both inside and outside the classroom. As part of the requested filming requirements, the students were also asked to communicate their week-to-week thoughts, feelings, and experiences on camera *and* with a written diary that was sent bi-weekly. Both the video diary submissions and written diary submissions provided a personal observation into the student’s life and, consequently, valuable insights into campus experiences. At the conclusion, all the video footage and the written diaries were reanalyzed extensively, revisiting particular themes that were previously established. By having students provide their own detailed fieldwork reflections, it allowed for identification of themes and patterns in the audiovisual footage. As such, this technique allowed further

clarification and insight into how the students managed their university experiences, while correspondingly providing a reference point to code the footage in more detail.

At this stage, reflection over the collected footage is necessary. Once an established reflection routine has been achieved, brainstorming of future filming sites or subjects to interview becomes natural. “Where else do we need to film?” “Who else do we need to interview?” “What are we missing?” In this sense, reflecting allows one to begin devising a scene to use for future data collection. At this stage, it is also a great time to incorporate other media sources into the project, such as still photographs for B-roll,<sup>4</sup> or to suggest improvements on previously captured footage.

As the project comes to a close, it is beneficial to have one final fieldwork reflection period. Plan sufficient time to discuss your footage with your crew and/or your colleagues. Categorize and list any common, recurrent observational patterns that surfaced. Following fieldwork reflections, the data will endure various levels of coding for development of major themes and recurring trends before the final codes can be established.

### ***Stage II: Identify a Coding Scheme***

After the sociologist has determined the important elements, events, people, and interviews in the filming reflection period, organizing the collected files is necessary. Before the files can be structured, however, a coding scheme first needs to be identified. The decided scheme can be distinctive to the documentary project or borrowed from existing research. The type of scheme

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<sup>4</sup> In the documentary sense, B-roll offers secondary footage that adds meaning to a sequence. It is audiovisual footage that often plays during a voice over, e.g. a student being interviewed about belonging to a university sorority and how fun it is to live there, and then the video cuts to scenes of her on campus with her friends while she is still talking.

performed influences the evaluation of one's research, so the decision should be programmed around the documentary's investigatory aims. The documentary project cited above, involving students, was geared towards challenging the idea that undergraduates are not benefiting from their experiences at contemporary educational institutions. As such, the initial coding scheme was focused on organizing audiovisual examples into four previously established core categories from *Academically Adrift* (Arum and Roksa, 2011<sup>5</sup>).

Adopting the categorizations from *Academically Adrift* enabled the classification of student's audiovisual portrayals into themes that created initial codes and meanings. Meaningful data emerged both from the frequency of coding examples, as well as their applicability to the research purposes and questions. Focusing the coding on *Academically Adrift* delivered the ability to detach, catalog, compare, and synthesize large amounts of audiovisual data. Moreover, aiding in the interpretation of the students individually while furthering an understanding regarding cultural notions of the purpose of the university.

Adopting a coding scheme from other research can be problematic (Bakeman and Gottman, 1997), but borrowing an existing scheme supports evaluation between studies. While the primary choice of the coding scheme is important, it can be refined after continual screenings of the audiovisual files. Coded datum, like an interview transcript, acts as an intermediary representation of the raw audiovisual files. As with all video ethnographic research tools, coding schemes need be chosen carefully. An initial, thorough research investment prior to selecting a coding scheme ultimately generates efficiency in the documentary production process.

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<sup>5</sup> To be brief, the book cites multi-institutional findings that the general effect of university on student intellectual development is indeed drifting. "How much are students actually learning in contemporary higher education? The answer for many undergraduates, we have concluded, is not much," write the authors Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa.

### ***Stage III: Coding and Cataloging Audiovisual Files***

The initial fieldwork reflections are a solid preparatory foundation, but now is the stage to review the audiovisual files in great detail and code the data of their contents.

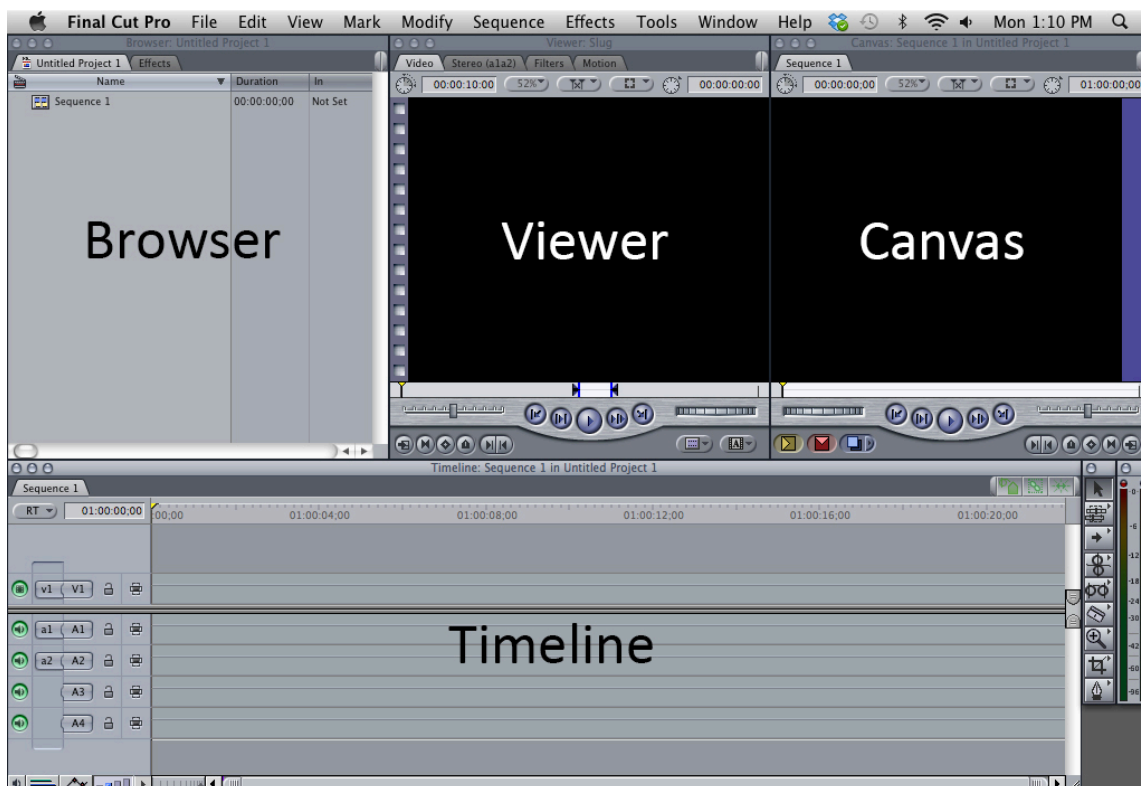
After importing and labeling the audiovisual files, the data elements exist as clips in the library, ready for coding. The coding phase of the documentary creation process involves generating a “theme” from the library clips into a project or timeline. For clarity, a “theme” is a result of coding and cataloging the data. Although a difference exists between a code and a theme, it is a relatively trivial distinction. Codes tend to be shorter, more concise, explicit analytic units, whereas themes may be expressed in longer expressions or sentences.

Coding audiovisual files apportions the data into items of thought by applying labels to the selected units. Simply, coding is a procedure to categorize collected data. While evaluating footage contents, a systematic way to code is to consider the following while watching:

- What is happening? What are the subjects saying?
- How do the interactions between subjects take place? Where do they take place?
- What does this scene represent? What is this scene an example of? What can be conveyed from this scene?
- What types of issues are visible here?
- What are key events? What activities are the subjects participating in? And then evaluate the perceptions, which accompany them.

The initial impressions of the audiovisual data are a valuable starting point, but now is the stage to review the footage in greater detail and code the information within. Coding can be conducted under a variety of guises, but typically involves assigning words, phrases, and timecodes to the audiovisual data by answering questions such as those above. The coding

procedure of the audiovisuals in the following example used the software system, Final Cut Pro X (FCPX).<sup>6</sup> In order to edit audiovisual data effectively, familiarize oneself with the layout of the basic windows in FCPX. These windows can be repositioned, although this is the customary layout. The **Browser** is where the media, i.e., video, audio, and still images are organized. The editing decisions about specific media are concentrated in the **Viewer**. The **Canvas** is where the edited footage can be previewed. And the **Timeline** is where decisions are made about incorporating clips into sequential themes.



There are a lot of advance features available within the software, but only the basics are needed for coding. The following is a customary procedure to code audiovisual footage in FCPX.

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<sup>6</sup> There are several very good video making software packages available – for ease of use Final Cut Pro X is recommended.

*A step-by-step tutorial on coding audiovisual data:*

1. To code data from the fieldwork footage open FCPX in one window and a coding sheet<sup>7</sup> in a second window on the computer monitor; on the coding sheet make a note of the name of the subject being observed. A coding sheet example is below.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Filename	Who/what	Code	TC: Start	TC: End	Observation	B-roll?	Additional Notes
Taylor0923.mov	Taylor	Acquiring Info	00:01:14:10	00:01:27:22	Studying alone in dorm	x	
Heidi1011.mov	Heidi	Acquiring Info	00:00:12:24	00:00:43:43	Heidi and her friends studying math/doing hw Socializing Frustrated		Multiple codes, great clip
Anna1012.mov	Anna	Career/Peers	00:07:03:01	00:07:33:34	At work, laughing with coworkers		Multiple codes
Jordan0927.mov	Jordan	Building a Self	00:22:42:42	00:22:42:58	Tailgaiting. "We are ready, I predict a win"		Bad audio

2. In the FCPX window, start the footage by pressing the spacebar. When a significant scene is observed or a valuable quote is spoken, pause the footage with the spacebar. Spacebar to start, spacebar to stop.
3. Note the footage start and stop at the bottom of the ‘Viewer’ window. These points of reference are referred to as the timecodes<sup>8</sup>. Make a note on the coding sheet with each start and stop time.

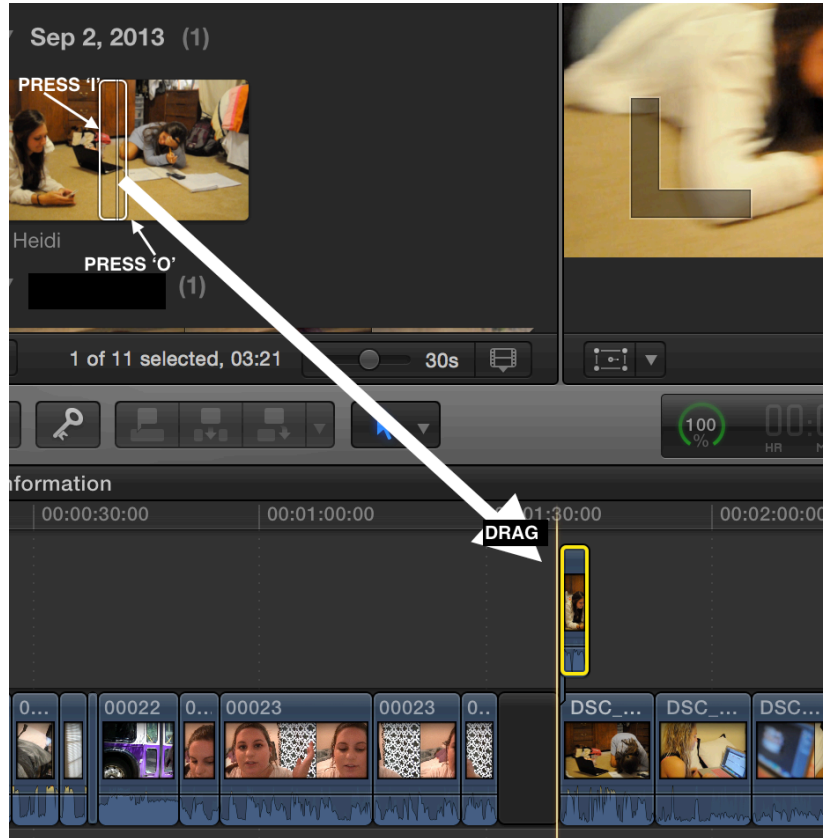
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<sup>7</sup> Microsoft Excel is recommended. A Word document can serve as an Excel spreadsheet replacement if one is not comfortable working with the latter.

<sup>8</sup> A “timecode” is an eight-digit code recorded from the video camera that provides a precise identifier for every potential video and audio frame on a file by creating a timestamp in hours, minutes, seconds and frames. Although a string of eight numbers (i.e., 04:55:38:07) might seem imposing, the meaning is simple: 4 hours, 55 minutes, 38 seconds, and 7 frames. A timecode is an essential part of coding audiovisual data. By referencing the timecode, specific frames of the audiovisual files can be accessed. Taking advantage of this audiovisual feature makes it easier to relocate key quotes or substantial pieces of data.

- Capture the starting and ending point of the great observation or quote in the 'Browser' window by marking the clip.

Press 'I' on the keyboard to mark the start of the clip and press 'O' to mark the end. Look closely at the upper left quadrant of the figure.



- Drag the captured selection from the 'Browser' into the 'Timeline'. The accumulated clips come together to develop the theme. The figure on this page highlights the click and drag process.
- Use the coding sheet to write down reflections or viewpoints that might be relevant as the footage is being observed (see Column H, "Notes" in the example coding sheet figure above). Be as exact as possible. Include codes about any ideas, concepts, or themes that surface.

These initial codes will develop the conceptual framework of the documentary. While it may be useful to reference a previously established coding scheme to derive the early codes, another set of codes will likely emerge from watching and analyzing the audiovisual data.

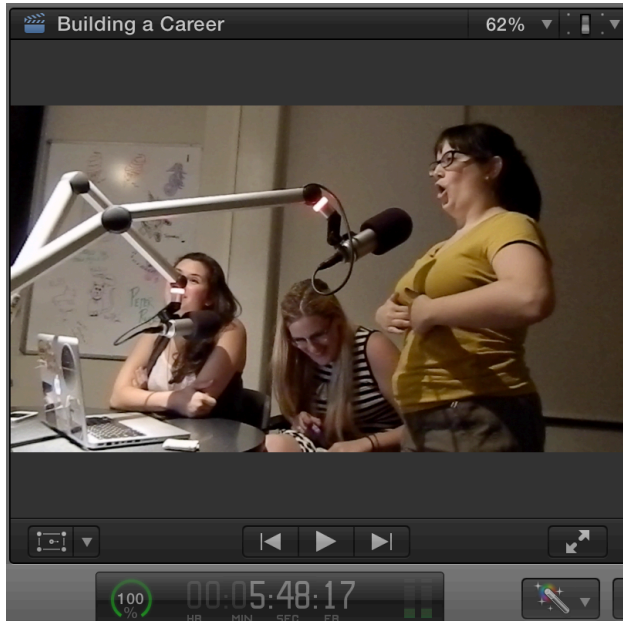
A screenshot of the coded example scene from above appears to the right. The scene involved Heidi and her two friends doing math homework in Heidi's sorority room. This coded piece of audiovisual data was just 30 seconds long, but several significant themes were present. For graphical purposes, the code sheet is modified, but the important coding information is listed in the textbox below the shot. This piece of footage was coded as "Acquiring information," "Group studying," and "Peer networks;" the three separate codes synthesize the 30 seconds of data presented here. The students name is listed in the coding sheet along with a concise description. The name of the file and timecode are also identified so the footage can be accessed when referencing the coding sheet.



**Who:** Heidi  
**Codes:** "Acquiring information", "Group studying"  
 "Peer Networks"  
**Observation:** Late at night, Heidi (not pictured) and her two friends do homework. One student is visibly frustrated with her hand on head. Another is on her cellular phone procrastinating.  
**Timecode:** 00:00:18:12  
**File Name:** Heidi1011.mov

The screenshot on the next page is illustrative of several codes applied to audiovisual data footage when taken from a junior undergraduate student named Anna while she works part-time at the campus radio station. The "observation" in the coding sheet, is based on the complex, sensory emotional feelings that the student is experiencing but also on what is being heard verbally when she speaks - the code of Anna speaking is placed in quotation marks. In this example, her exact words are irrelevant, but since she was laughing with her *peers*, the quote was





**Who:** Anna

**Codes:** Building a Career, “Peer Networks”, Extracurricular Activities

**Observation:** After a rough day of school, Anna is at the radio station working on an upcoming radio promotion. Her peers in the background make Anna laugh, which in turn, brightens up her mood.

**Timecode:** 00:05:48:17

**File Name:** Anna1012.mov

coded as “Peer Networks”. The footage in this scene was also coded as “Building a Career” and “Extracurricular Activities”, as the student was working after school.

As we can see, coding audiovisual data offers an extension over textual-based field notes by deepening the understanding human experiences through a visual indulgence. As a qualitative method, audiovisual portrayals

highlight the subjective quality of various human experiences, such as studying with friends. The screenshots offered here are the initial codes as the footage was scrubbed. As coding is an interpretative act (Saldaña,

2009), it is a good idea to have another person or persons watch the audiovisual clips. The final codes differed from the ones provided – the final codes were determined after re-watching the footage *and* also having a colleague interpret the scenes. It is important to note that coding audiovisual data summarizes the scene, but it is not the final edit of your documentary. The vast majority of coded datum will not make the final script. The examples outlined above are basic and straightforward. But depending on the sociologist’s choice of coding method, certain codes can involve more elaborate connotations of the footage.

One objective of coding is to establish and identify the amount of recurring segments of footage. Importantly, a segment of audiovisual data might contain more than one code associated

with it. While the project of undergraduate students was being screened, it became apparent that many pieces of footage contained two or more dedicated codes. For example, a couple students set up “homework dates” at each other’s homes on various weekday nights. The footage showed both students studying collaboratively for academic development, but also bonding as friends for emotional support. The two were clearly mixing academic preparations, with peer communications. As such, this simple scene was coded as both “Acquiring Information” (for academic knowledge gathering) and “Peer Effects” (for social relationship building). This sorting and combining strategy of video ethnographic analysis allows the sociologist to cluster the audiovisual files to allow key pieces of information (or themes) to surface. Coding in this manner allows organization and grouping into catalogs or patterns because the data shares some distinguishing feature.

As such, as the datum is coded, the coding scheme is continuously developed. Accordingly, this means that the sociologist will likely add, remove, expand, and revise coding strategies and categories. This mainly happens if the coding scheme has been borrowed from a previously established design. As stated previously, the undergraduate video diary project borrowed a coding scheme from the quantitative research founded in *Academically Adrift*. One of the purposes of this coding adoption was to assess the methodology of university life in the book. Although categorizing into the thematic determinations established in *Academically Adrift* was beneficial, the coding results still needed evaluation. As a process of gathering academic feedback, advice from both peers and advisors were then sought. The research interpretations and findings were discussed with academic advisors and others within and outside the sociology department. The requested criticism/feedback contributed to identifying possible misinterpretations and/or recognizing inconsistent coding patterns. After deliberation, it was

decided it would be beneficial to re-comb through the collected audiovisual data to determine if any new or supplemental theories emerged - a lengthy but necessary process.

Many times, sociologists will code the dialogue of their research subjects. For example, in the project concerning undergraduates discussed previously, each student, at some point, shared their personal perceptions of university tailgating<sup>9</sup> on campus. While every student held an opinion of the tailgating experience, their individual values, attitudes, and belief systems about the event in particular, or sports in general, varied greatly from being described as a nuisance or an annoyance to it being described, as enthusiastic or passionate spectacle all should enjoy. As such, when combing through patterns in audiovisual data to catalogue them, researchers should recognize that groupings might occur not just because they are exactly or very similar, but also because the subject matter of the data might have something in common, even if that commonality involves varying anecdotes.

Once significant, recurring themes have emerged, it is now time to begin comparison between them and integrating them. At this stage, quantitative analysis is useful to develop patterns, themes, or conceptual frameworks. The goal of the evaluation stage is pattern recognition and to synthesize the audiovisual data (Neuwirth, Price, and Bellows, 2010). To accomplish this task most efficiently, a frequency table is suggested (Neuwirth, Price, and Bellows, 2010) to further categorize the most common occurrences of social life in the footage. Adding the patterns in the audiovisual data to the frequency table is a simple, but lengthy task. A sample frequency table from the student video diaries is diagramed below (Table A). The number of codes in the data will accumulate rapidly, but the final number of major concepts or

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<sup>9</sup> Tailgating is a pre-game gathering, which occurs in the parking lots, and outside of university stadiums; it often involves consuming alcoholic beverages and grilling food.

theories should be kept to a minimum to maintain a coherent analysis. With that noted, there is not a numerical standard to attain (Saldaña, 2009)

Sorting codes from the video ethnographic data allows the sociologist to develop and establish a theory; this progress is similar to the research strategies used in other qualitative methodologies (Saldaña, 2009). The sociologist’s ability to systematically demonstrate themes and concepts leads to advancement towards theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, as cited in

<b>Table A: Frequency Table</b>			
<b>Instances observed</b>	<b>Initial Theme</b>	<b>Established theme</b>	<b># of observations</b>
Professor Recommendation letter Studying Work	Career	Acquiring information	171
Attending Class Studying Scheduling Professor	Academics		
Work Hobbies Partying/socializing Groups/clubs	Extracurricular	Building an integrated self	380
Work Studying/class Groups/clubs/hobbies Communication	Peer Networks		
<i>There is considerable overlap between the categories.</i>			

Saldaña, 2009). Alternatively Layder, (1998, as cited in Saldaña, 2009), argues that an established sociological theory can inspire the initial coding procedure itself. That is to say, founded research can encourage the coding progress (similar to how the quantitative research concepts in *Academically Adrift* assisted in the theoretical establishment acquired from coding the students audiovisual data).

Furthermore, it might be necessary to tackle the audiovisual data entirely from the beginning, even after the initial coding procedure has been completed. The previous

categorizations should be considered in the reevaluation process, while remaining neutral during the cogitation of emerging themes and ideas. Starting “fresh” allows for the expansion of novel categories along with the combination of complementary theories and literature. This integration allows for greater descriptions, evaluations, and breakdowns of the audiovisual data. Note taking (on paper and computer media software) should also be chronicled during this data reflection phase – to mitigate disagreement in thought and to develop emerging theoretical concepts.

After detailed re-analysis of the video diary project, three newly established categories materialized from the collected student data. The new categories were then compared to the first, to create new theoretical distinctions of the concept. The purpose of comparison was to determine the most fitting audiovisual data from an arrangement of indicators. Then, correspondingly, an integration of that data will develop into hypotheses between the themes, which establish the theory.

## **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

This working article has mapped the scope of audiovisual data management and coding to advance sociological research dissemination mechanisms. Traditionally, sociologists have delivered their research through writing, which made most traditional ethnographies unimodal modes of communication (Vannini and Milne, 2013). Video ethnographic filmmaking captures an assessment that is different from that of written ethnography and as such represents a potentially significant research medium. With the launch of the example audiovisual coding procedure this article will contribute to advancing visionary sociological insights, and, particularly, public sociology.

Audiovisual analysis requires meaningful consideration to both the portrayals of research subjects and verbal dialogue of their correspondence. Furthermore, as we can see, coding is a cyclic activity – meaning seldom will the first coding phase be considered complete. The second phase and any subsequent coding phase further cultivates, describes, highlights, categorizes, and enables a more nuanced and fine-grained analysis that coincidentally is one of the specialties of video ethnographic methodology.

Upon the completion of the audiovisual coding stage, a documentary movie can now be created from the established themes. An academic movie, of course, will differ from other traditional forms of documentary filmmaking, as the production will be based on the themes established under a sociological perspective. Still, it is important to find a balance between a compelling storyline and a descriptive sociological portrayal. It is essential to deliver the most fitting message for the chosen audience that will portray the prevailing research takeaways.

The case study was elaborated upon to showcase the demanding and evocative analysis needed when coding audiovisual data. As a qualitative methodology, video ethnography, specifically the participant filmmaking described here, accentuates the subjective quality of different campus experiences, the contextual nature of life and learning, the portrayal of social involvements, and the interactive character of student agency. Since film allows the capture of small campus details, the results of this project were rich. These details may be overlooked, or missed, in quantitative measures; statistical power is achieved, but of course, depth is lost.

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### CHAPTER 3

## VISIONARY SOCIOLOGY IN ACTION: BUILDING AN INTEGRATED SELF

### ABSTRACT

This study, using a video ethnographic lens, challenges the idea that undergraduate students are not benefiting from their experiences at contemporary educational institutions. The analysis reveals that *social* learning and self-development are important benefits of their experiences at the institution; these benefits extend beyond the confines of *academic* learning. Using participant-collected, semester-long audiovisual diary footage of eight undergraduate students attending a large flagship public university, alongside in-depth interviews, individual experiences were analyzed to that discourse. The categories and patterns indicated that the students' experiences were often two-fold: the perception of the campus experience as well as the implications of that experience were a manifestation of the student's relationships with significant others. The analysis consistently revealed, through both student-collected audiovisual diary footage and interview data, that the character of each student developed through participation in campus events, extracurricular activities, and in university settings with peers. As such, this discourse encourages students to organize their undergraduate experience around a development of strong peer relationships and social events as they embark on their individualist pathway.

**Keywords:** Higher education \* video ethnography \* peer influence \* collegiate tailgating

*Learning how to think is only the beginning, though. There's something in particular you need to think about: building a self. The notion may sound strange. "We've taught them," David Foster Wallace once said, "that a self is something you just have." But it is only through the act of establishing communication between the mind and the heart, the mind and experience, that you become an individual, a unique being—a soul. The job of college is to assist you to begin to do that.*

- William Deresiewicz. Author of *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*

## INTRODUCTION

Today's university system pressures students to be academically excellent (Brooks, 2014) and devote four years of that experience becoming absorbed into bettering a career (Deresiewicz, 2014). Despite the pressures to be successful, across a variety of measures, many students are still falling behind (Arum and Roksa, 2011; Babcock and Marks, 2011; Bok, 2005; Grigsby, 2009; Brint, Cantwell, & Saxena, 2011). Justifiably, the university system is viewed primarily to advance the intellectual core of students while preparing them for a career after graduation. This careerist pursuit is undeniably valuable, but often the moral purpose of the university gets overlooked (Brooks, 2014; Deresiewicz, 2014). As such, one of the distinct purposes of the university, it is maintained, should be to build a students' integrated self (Brooks, 2014).

The 'self' is a reasonably consistent set of perceptions of who we are in relation to ourselves, our interactions with others, our responses to others' opinions, and to socialization agents. From a classical sociological perspective, it is common to argue that the self is both a social product and a social force (Rosenberg, 1981). That is, one's self, is socially constructed in through interactions with others. As such, the concept of 'self' involves a conscious actor within. This "actor" initiates action (behavior) and awareness about his or her manners, individualities,

and feelings - both present and past. To the extent the self develops and social identities cohere around our relationships with significant others, categorization, is also important for traditional undergraduate students<sup>10</sup> because it helps shape their identities and social involvements.

Likewise, sociologists have revealed, personal relationships play a remarkably decisive role in shaping, positive college experiences (Chambliss and Tacaks, 2014). It is widely observed in both empirical and ethnographic research that peer networks affect behavior of individuals. This is particularly true in education, criminal activity, and welfare programs (Akerlof, 1997).

With the above acknowledged, the questions raised by this study revolve around the objective(s) of postsecondary education. First, the research seeks to use a video ethnographic protocol to demonstrate the functions that revolve around the purpose of a university, paying specific attention to the ways in which these meanings benefit the individual students interests. Second, guided by the first objective, the research seeks to reveal the significance of recreational, occupational, and social events within the university environment. Paying particular attention to the meaning students offer of their university experiences while they build integrated selves. Lastly, through the advent of an audiovisual student diary portrayal, this article seeks to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a video ethnographic methodological design.

To answer these questions, the following sociological research design advances a more nuanced method, to contribute to the already important extant literature on college students. This study presents a novel lens through which to view *and* approach sociological research.

Specifically, by using a video ethnographic approach, a fine-grained analysis of student life,

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<sup>10</sup> A traditional undergraduate student is one who enrolls in university immediately after graduation from high school, pursues university studies on a continuous full-time basis, and finishes a bachelor's degree program in four or five years.

from the perspective of traditional university students is demonstrated. This methodological approach positions the student, as both the collector of data and the object of researcher analysis.

The novelty of this study is three-fold. First, from a methodological point of view, the role of audiovisual participant-recorded portrayals is emphasized in explaining a more nuanced approach to student interactions on university campuses. Second, conceptually, the idea of building an integrated self is stressed through utilizing the research design to aggregate influences between the student and the university. Third, from a research communication standpoint, a documentary film can be produced from the audiovisual data. Using a multimodal method of communication, which transcends beyond communication results through writing, satisfies the substantive and stylistic requirements of the general public, while effectively illustrating research to the educated public. Above all, sociologists can use this knowledge to more effectively communicate their scholarly interests to a wider audience beyond the confines of the academy.

## **BUILDING A SELF**

George Herbert Mead is well known for his theory of the social self, which defines the development of self as warmly entwined to communication with significant others (Mead, 1930). To Mead, one's identity develops through interactions with significant others and cultural agents in the present, and through others of the past. As such, we have the capacity to view ourselves in the situations of others, and to anticipate their reactions, with regard to our own social selves. He suggests that the self is constructed from imitative practices, actions, and exchanges over the individual's life course. One forms an introspective conception of his/her self that stems from modeling and engagement with other individuals within their collective space. To be exact,

Mead believes the self advances as a process and is created in social phenomena rather than within individual.

Under this guise, symbolic interactionism is an approach to sociology that focuses on interpreting the meanings that individuals develop through their interaction with others. Blumer (1969) was a huge believer that individuals create their own social reality through collective and individual action. The core of Blumer's approach is usually summarized in terms of three propositions. First, humans act toward people and things based upon the *meanings* that they have given to those people or things. As such, the same thing can mean different things to different people, or even to the same people at different times and in different environments or circumstances. An example of this would be a student who views sorority/fraternity (Greek) membership on campus as one of university student's main purposes. Their perspectives of people, things, and ideologies are based upon supporting this belief. They may view other students, who are not part of the culture, as less remarkable and may view people who did not attend university as lazy or even detrimental to society.

Second, *language* gives humans a process by which to assign meaning through symbols. As such, these meanings are consequent from the social interaction one has with other individuals. An example of this would be the United States collegiate sports culture. Students across many large universities, especially in the southern region of the country, enjoy the sport competitions their athletes participate in – particularly those involving football players and coaches. This typically involves full day celebrations, called tailgates, where individuals consume large quantities of food and binge drink. In the Fall semester, campus life itself centers on not just going to games but lining up and camping out to get into them. The reasons behind these behaviors are because society and our peers, at larger universities, encourage strong

support of university athletic competitions. Conversely, if a student were to attend a smaller university, or in a different region, or even in another country the sports “things” wouldn’t be as significant to their experiences or at least be very different.

Third, *thought* modifies each individual's interpretation of symbols. In other words, the individual handles meanings differently, depending on how they are interpreted, in dealing with the daily things he or she encounters. An example of this would be a student who is a non-conformist, such as an artist who spends the majority of her weekends painting and shaping pottery. This individual, who chose to go down the road less travelled, decides to work on her artistic talents on the weekends instead of attending football events. When faced with an encounter with a student football fan (or conformist) who questions her weekend decisions, she may have to run through multiple questions to support her choices, before she can arrive at a confident answer, “I do not like the thought of having to watch football games every Saturday, and that is okay, I'd rather spend my time in the art workroom.”

The conception one forms are consequent from the social interaction he/she has with other individuals. An example of this would be the United States collegiate sports culture. Students across many large universities, especially in the southern region of the country, enjoy sport competitions athletes participate in – particularly those involving football players and coaches. This typically involves full day celebrations, called tailgates, where individuals consume large quantities of food and binge drink. In the fall, campus life centers on not just going to games but lining up and camping out to get into them. The reasons behind these behaviors are because culture strongly encourages supporting athletic competitions. But if one were to attend university at smaller university, or in a different region, or even in another country

the sports “things” wouldn’t be as significant or at least very different to the social life of a university.

The above is an interpretive process that we all go through in our interactions with others – it is an active development. We create our identities, then, in relation to others. We do not simply conform to the appropriate, or required, behavior; we need to take into account the individuality of the person before a response can be determined. Within these general limits, there is a process of negotiation that is an attempt to bring the exact situation an improved description of its importance. There is obviously some flexibility behind any negotiation. Consider a university, in this institution, professors and administration will determine the learning parameters and needs of all concerned students. This social order is not rigid, but continually changing, as both student’s desires and leadership policies evolve to meet the demands of society and the economy.

The university experience is often the first time a student is away from a family and a career. Considering this time of freedom, the student pursuit of building an integrated self and character development should be valuable purposes of today’s universities (Brooks, 2014; Deresiewicz, 2014). The manifestations of both personal and emotional growth often begin during the period (Brooks, 2014). Generally speaking, a university environment is really conducive to building friendships. Students are surrounded by thousands of peers with similar ages and backgrounds, most of who are also willing to meet other like-minded individuals. The article here will demonstrate how video ethnography progresses beyond surface level thinking to see what the student is really experiencing socially and emotionally.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

According to Alvarado and Turley (2012), the structure of peer networks and the relationships within them, are strong determinants of individual behavior. Peer influences during formative teenage years are among the most influential societal forces affecting adolescent performance, including educational outcomes. Adolescent friendships influence routine decisions (i.e., fashion, entertainment, and hairstyle), as well as important decisions (i.e., short- and long-term education ideas).

As cited in Alvarado and Turley (2012), amongst a wide-range of school levels, sociological research reliably finds that associating with higher-achieving peers is related to improved educational outcomes. Pre-school pupils were found to have advanced cognitive, pre-reading, and language skills, when they associate with higher achieving peers (Henry and Rickman 2007). Similarly, improved learning in third graders (Hanushek et al. 2003), less grade repetition and better math scores in middle schoolers (Goux and Maurin 2007; Kang 2007), improved high school achievement (Ding and Lehrer 2007; Schneeweis and Winter-Ebmer 2007), and higher grade point averages in first-year college students (Sacerdote 2001; Zimmerman, 2003).

According to Chambliss and Takacs (2014), incoming students are more likely to succeed under certain situations than others. Residing in a dormitory hall freshman year, registering in courses with large enrollments, and joining high activity clubs all seem to be choices students can make to ensure the development of peer networks. Chambliss and Takacs (2014), argue that the choices university students make during the first year (and even the first week) are of significant importance. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodology, Chambliss and Takacs (2014) conclude it was the *people*, not the academic programs, which proved to be



crucial at each meaningful point in the student's lives. Great teachers and even friendships, proved to be socially and academically imperative. Takacs and Chambliss (2014) noted that even one great professor could send students into positive trajectories and since it can be challenging to make friends in the classroom, it is valuable to join a high-communication activity (i.e., sorority or theatre group) where students are in contact at least twice per week

Once students have established their social network(s), they are less likely to consider turning new contacts into new friendships. (Chambliss and Taracks, 2014). Moreover, it has been proposed that the plans of one's peers shape ambitions more directly and with greater impact than other sources (Davies and Kandal, 1981). The trust shared between peers is believed to be the principal bond that influences student decisions (Hallinan and Williams, 1990).

Scant ethnographic literature exists on peer culture on university campuses, but the research is still noteworthy. Nathan (2006) lived as freshman in a dormitory and took a full load of college courses. She noted that most professors and university administrators overvalue the role that academics play across campus, and as a result overestimate the influence of instructors and coursework on student life (p. 140). She writes that students viewed "social activities and interpersonal relationships as the main context for learning" (p. 101). Moffat (1989) performed participant observation while 'passing' as a student living in a men's dormitory; he described how peer influences are powerful, but not always for the better, as certain behaviors (such as fraternity membership) can promote an anti-academic student culture. With the above acknowledged, as noted previously, this research seeks to determine any contribution video ethnography can offer toward an analysis of students' university experiences.

## DATA & METHODS

The participant-driven video ethnographic diary project involved eight undergraduate students from an elite southern university. A *participatory video (video diary)* procedure is unlike most research procedures because informants lead themselves through the ethnography rather than being directed by a researcher. The ultimate purpose of participatory techniques is to allow informants to have complete control of the data collection. Convenience and purposive sampling were used to select research participants. These sampling techniques ensured a selection of individuals that offered the insight needed to address the purpose of the research. These students originated from a group of approximately 200 undergraduates. Although a gender/racial sampling criterion was not stated, my sample was primarily White females. Overall, seven participants were female and one was male.

The recruited students were required to film their social and learning experiences weekly. Students used a personal camera or filming device (i.e., cellular phone) to participate in the course. One student utilized a camcorder from the departmental Video Ethnography Lab. Prior to recording their personal video diaries; the students were required to read effective filmmaking techniques and strategies. As part of the course requirements, the students were also asked to communicate their week-to-week thoughts, feelings, and experiences on camera and with a written diary that was sent bi-weekly. The students were instructed to film what they “believed was important.” This filming autonomy evolved as the semester unfolded, as students sought to capture their most captivating experiences. The video diary submissions provided a personal observation into the student’s life and, consequently, valuable insights into campus experiences and learning. This video ethnographic participant-filmmaker approach allowed for candid,

intensive research into subject matter that sometimes may have been too sensitive for an ethnographer to observe otherwise (e.g., sorority member group meetings).

The video diary protocol is unlike most research protocols as university students lead themselves through the ethnography, without researcher direction. However, a guide was established to help students pace themselves and to clarify diary expectations. Throughout the course, students were encouraged to engage into deeper reflections within their own behaviors; this included in-person one-on-one personal video reflection sessions where open-ended, individualized questions were asked about his or her campus learning and social experiences. Bi-weekly, and parallel to the student's video diary submission process, each video *and* written submission was analyzed to ensure the students were on task. Students were required to submit at least an hour of footage per week alongside the written diary. Each student submitted over 15 hours of footage before the end of the course; as such, totaling to approximately 120 hours of audiovisual diary data.

At the conclusion of the project, all footage was reanalyzed, revisiting particular themes that were previously established. This technique allowed further clarification and insight into how the students managed college experiences and campus cultures. Following the audiovisual analyses, the data underwent various levels of coding for the development of major themes and reoccurring trends.<sup>11</sup> In what follows, a textual portrayal of peer effects is described from the contents of the empirical analysis of the collected video ethnographic data; it is presented to the reader in an unscientific format, with the objective of delivering a visually accentuating experience – similar to one offered by some documentaries.

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<sup>11</sup> The full scope of the methodological coding process can be viewed in Chapter 2: “Audiovisual Data Management and Coding”

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Organizing, managing, and coding the student audiovisual diary data advanced the results into comprehensive qualitative analysis, while producing generalizable findings. From the corpus of several hours of audiovisual footage, individual segments were isolated for evaluation, which had a significant impact on the study findings. Further, synthesizing copious amounts of audiovisual data allowed insights into a wide range of possible student experiences. Systematic analysis also drew attention to the students building of an integrated self. Such microanalysis emphasizes a particular nuanced interpretation that would be overlooked in more traditional qualitative approaches.

The audiovisual data determined that each student, in their own way, showed a convincing desire to surround themselves within their peer relationships; this was noticeable in their determination to embrace extracurricular activities, bond with co-workers, and establish study sessions alongside peers. In the audiovisual diary portrayals, it became apparent that student life outside the classroom is just as important as life inside it.

The audiovisual findings were robust, but the challenge now was presenting the data: how do you go from the audiovisual visual portrayals to a text-based written description? Presenting audiovisual data, on paper, is a unique process and, to the best of the authors' knowledge, has never been elaborated upon analytically; as such, there was not a previously determined formula or a written script to follow. One of the primary challenges is because the "richness" of audiovisual data carries with it a concern of "sensory overload" (Snell, 2011; pg. 253). There is so much going on, even within a few seconds of footage that describing all of audiovisual detail through text seemed poses a challenge.

Assortments of presentation styles were considered, but in the end, the most productive style was a reduction of textual, technical language in favor of a more creative, visual indulgence. After all, the data is based upon video observations. As such, the audiovisual data is written in a timeline-formatted style to allow the reader an opportunity to *visualize* a typical evening on campus. The documented stories were written in effort to view the students from their experiences and perspectives in “real-time.” Some of the following insights are fairly straightforward while others are less obvious, but to be certain, all the written descriptions were observed or inferred from actual student footage.

The students were willing to share their campus experiences on video, but pseudonyms are used for each. The stories contain quoted information from both the diaries and the private interviews. In the following, university life is presented as expressed and videotaped by the students. The research findings are divided into two main subcategories, “An evening on campus” and “A gameday portrayal”

### ***An evening on campus: Wednesday, 5:30 PM***

The sun begins to set as the campus starts to wind down. It’s the beginning of October and university demands are now in full swing. The campus landscape this time of year is well-groomed and absolutely stunning – a beauty that often goes unappreciated as many students are tiredly leaving their last lecture, glued to their cell phones, anxiously attempting to make evening plans. There is a swarm of students leaving the campuses contemporary facilities, modern technologies, and historic buildings. Each one will now attempt to strike a balance between the academic, the professional, the social, and the self. Life at a large university is typically fast-paced. Part of this, is the aggressive semester course-loads and part is the students desire to

experience everything. While the students have plentiful free time at the university, they also have many options of how to fill their free time.

A couple students who finished class earlier are already resting peacefully in the middle ground, quietly reflecting, while they listen to music in their headphones. For the students they are now faced with the decision to spend the evening becoming more academically competent or engage in a social situation. This decision is common amongst undergraduates, and of course many will choose, or at least attempt, to balance both. Some students choose the third option and decide to relax alone, around campus, replacing those listening to music and reflecting before them. And finally, for a few, being at an evening job on time takes precedence above all else – these students are rushing back home to their apartments to begin preparation for their work-related duties.

Anna, who is currently feeling down as she attempts to tackle both school demands and the obligations of two occupations, needs to make it to her first job at the radio station, where she is the music director. She is required to be there by 6:00 PM to begin prepping for the nightly show. As many other students, her final class ended a few minutes ago. After snacking, Anna heads home, quickly changes her clothes, and then contacts her second job, at the downtown record store, to see where she fits into the weekend schedule.

With her video camera in-tow, appetite satiated, she is now on her way to the station. She gets into her vehicle, hits the camera's power button, positions it into the dashboard, and begins filming. The scene moves forward and Anna reveals, candidly, a recent development with the status of her second occupation,

I just got laid off from my second job at the record store downtown. But I'm not fired; I'm just off the schedule – that's the words they used. Because I have not been able to fully dedicate myself to the job. I haven't been giving my all, one hundred

percent, because I have been depressed, struggling with my clinical depression and anxiety... I'm struggling in all aspects really. I'm struggling at my job at (radio station) as well, not getting my work done in a timely manner, getting backed up. I am sad that I am going through this. I am sad that I can't give my all and I can't juggle all the things I want to juggle. Ideally, my ideal thing would be to have 18 hours of school, work at the radio station, and work at the record store and be a top employee.

As Anna is cathartically releasing her emotions on camera, Taylor, a junior anthropology student and resident advisor at the university, is busy washing her uniform for the night shift she will be working at the dormitory later on. For now, her and her two closest friends are heading to the African American Cultural Center to rehearse for a singing and dancing performance that the group will present at the end of the semester. One of her friends has volunteered to film while Taylor and the other students in the group practice. Her friend begins recording and the room is full of raw emotion, as over 30 people sing and dance to the choreographed routine. Two individuals, one female and one male, lead the crowd, as they all clap and sing collectively. Taylor is the focal point of the film and she is full of smiles, but so is everyone else in her group. The routine will last another hour and with the smiles on their faces we see that every student has been looking forward to the practice.

*5:45 PM*

Every year the university hosts an annual step show between the sororities. The performance is created to bring all Greek life together and to showcase the Greek unity of the university. Heidi, a sophomore communications major, and her team, consisting of nearly 30 women at different stages of their undergraduate education, have been practicing every week since the beginning of the semester. Each year, Heidi's sorority has enhanced the quality and the quantity of their dance routines and this year is no different. The group is busy gathering together to choreograph their

latest routine to one of their favorite electronic dance music songs. As the film rolls we have the pleasure of not only watching the group practice but we can also listen to the cadenced pattering of the students steps. The chosen song features quick synth sounds that are similar to that of the beat of a drum set but at the same time very rhythmic. Perhaps the most striking visuals are the scenes that depict the level of collaboration and fine-tuning that goes into each and every dance track. Week after week, repetition after repetition, we can see Heidi's step squad improve their muscle memory, which over the course of the semester, enables them to progress onto more challenging routines. With this group collaboration Heidi still finds a way to bring her individual personality into the routine, by incorporating a bit of her individual flair and infectious spirit into the mix. As the film rolls, we can see her other friends finding joy in the exercise and in the movements that the dance practice provides.

Just a few blocks away from campus sorority row, Jackson, a sophomore business major, is exercising. He is at the university recreational center with his lifting buddy Charles. Located inside of the facility the campus exercise programs and kinesiology classes are housed. This complex is equipped with state of the art fitness equipment including free weights, cardiovascular machines, strength training machines, and functional training equipment. Jackson and Charles chat between lifting sets, it's a great bonding experience and stress reliever. Other students share similar routines to Jordan and his friend. The recreational center is typically packed until closing time, as routinely students at the university embrace a healthier lifestyle in their spare time. Research supports that regular exercise improves physiological and psychological health and for Jackson that was one of prime exercise motivations. In his follow-up interview he states, "Physical activity is one of the most important things to me, I try to dedicate as much time as I can to going to the gym. He helps me focus too; it's a great stress reliever as well"



*6:00 PM*

A half-hour later and Anna is still upset as she continues to divulge her current life struggles. She arrives at the station, parks her car, and turns off her camera - still visibly upset. Once inside, she begins filming again (one of her video diary goals this week was to film her workplace).

Anna gives a tour of her office, the offices of her fellow co-workers, and the surrounding broadcast area. As she shoots her video diary footage, commentary is provided on both her job responsibilities and the duties of the other employees. Despite her current frustrations, Anna has a lot of positive emotions towards both her job and her coworkers. We can hear the upbeat tonality in her voice as she describes each section of the campus radio station. Eventually, as she is opening various doors around the studio, she surprisingly bumps into one of her fellow coworkers who is preparing to leave for the day. Laughing, she excitedly comments as the camera is focused on the get-together, “That’s, that’s Chad!” He replies, “Hi, I work with Anna,” waving into the camera. Still laughing, Anna responds, “He’s the prod. director. His job is intricate. He edits and puts music into our system, as well as our underwriting and promos!” Being at the radio station and bumping into one of her friends / coworkers, has seemingly altered Anna’s mood. Tonight her and her fellow coworkers are cutting a commercial promo to play during music breaks – she puts the camera down and begins preparations.

*6:30 PM*

Just outside campus at the most popular student coffee shop, Raven and Misty are taking a cigarette break. Today, the video diary depicts Misty ranting about her current coursework struggles, while Raven listens attentively. Other days, the roles are reversed and Raven is the one

venting to Misty. Both students relied on each other for support during rough situations. With an ear to lean on, it was easier for the two to cope when school or relationships stressors arose.

Throughout the semester, the audiovisual data revealed that both females would give each other life advices ranging from laundry and boys to inner serenity and academic support; the two had a visible trust between each other that influenced their decision-making and academic engagement.

*7:00 PM*

Taylor is working front desk at her residential hall – at a university this mean cramped living quarters (usually with bunk beds), a communal kitchen, and a shared bathroom down the hall. Taylor lived in this dormitory setting all four years. As a director of residence life, this position provides Taylor not only a modest salary but also a free place live on campus. From the audiovisual portrayals, this position appears to be ideal for Taylor’s high-energy personality. Taylor’s confidence shined throughout the semester, she explains on video, “I have a vibrant personality and interactions with people is a strong point for me.” The data provided several observations of her strong desire to be around and work with other students. Additionally, she exhibited a concern to foster a positive living and learning environment. Considering this was Taylor’s third year of resident advising, she was familiar with the requirements of what constituted a successful student employee. In one of her video diaries she is seen speaking into the camera about the end of semester evaluation process; resident advisors get reviewed similarly to professors at the university. She describes her aspiration to improve on her performance and to become the best advisor she can possibly be,

We did our evaluations Friday and it went very well. Of course there are some things that I could have done a lot better on; two of my scores actually went down from my evaluation from last year. In Creative Programming my score went from a 3 to a 2 out of a 4.

A 3 is where I need to be, especially as a returning RA. I can do that. I have lots of ideas of how I want to challenge our residents and provide them with diverse experiences especially since most of my girls are very similar.

Taylor consistently showcased self-discipline and control, a strong work ethic, flexibility, effective communication, and leadership skills. Her quality sense of humor also appeared to be a critical asset towards her success as a resident advisor. The friendships she had with both her co-workers and the dormitory students she advised appeared to be of paramount importance in Taylor's daily campus interactions.

*8:00 PM*

Alexis, sophomore international studies major, has a huge geography exam tomorrow but she finds exercise "to be yet another way to procrastinate and avoid studying." Alexis sets up her camera and her and her best friend Carly begin their abdominal workout inside her sorority bedroom while music blasts in the background.

*9:00 PM*

In our technologically fascinated culture, multitasking is the norm; but it is more prominent among college students (Carrier, et al., 2009). And tonight, like many nights, Jackson is studying while listening to music with a few of his good friends. At times, it was quite impressive to see Jackson (and the other students) multitask in the video diaries. In fact, multitasking while studying seemed to be an inevitable part of the college experience. For instance, Jackson in particular, could be studying for a test while talking on the phone, watching television, eating

dinner, listening to music, checking his e-mail, making sure his video camera is still recording and simultaneously uploading an Instagram photograph.

*9:30 PM*

At around the same time Jackson and his friends are jamming to some smooth R&B jams from their favorite artist, The Weeknd, while studying for their chemistry exam, Heidi is busy multitasking herself. Tonight she has a “date” to watch Netflix and study with her roommate. Dealing with interruptions is obviously not a problem for the participants in the project as there were instances of each student studying or writing while listening to a song or watching a show.

*11:00 PM*

Raven and Misty are still together late into the evening. Little actual schoolwork was completed earlier, so now the duo is set on finishing their daily studies. They work together at Ravens house, but not collaboratively, as their school missions are very different. Raven needs to finish an art project that is due by Friday and Misty has an economics test tomorrow that is sure to be a doozy. Many students had late night study sessions, which sometimes lasted into the next day.

In summary, as a qualitative method, audiovisual portrayals can accentuate the subjective quality of various human experiences and the interactive production of social processes. As described above, the data reduction procedure was intense<sup>12</sup>. From analyzing and re-analyzing the collected student audiovisual diary data, patterns were discovered and significant themes began to emerge. By making everyday campus life *visual*, analyses revealed social structures and

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<sup>12</sup> The 120 hours of collected student footage will be pared down into a 10-minute documentary short film to present to professional and non-professional audiences.

processes that shaped the diversity of both student and campus life. Just as above, the stories, which unfold below, are written in a vivid descriptive style, which allow the readers an opportunity to fully submerge themselves into a university-tailgating environment.

There are limitless factors that play a role in selecting a university including cost of tuition, location, educational reputation, and specific academic programs. One that could be overlooked in the decision process, but is rarely unnoticed once students are enrolled, selecting a university that is well known for its athletic program and events. Football games on Saturdays, in particular, are a major part of the large state school, university experience at campuses nationwide (Grigbsy, 2009).

Every Saturday in the Fall countless university students wake up overflowing with a contagious kind of optimism and enthusiasm, prepared for their universities game. Few other events in the country combine the camaraderie of evening tailgates and the rush of a victory in a long-standing rivalry. Half of these students finish the day in joyous celebration, and the other half in abject despair (and not necessarily because of losing the game)<sup>13</sup>, but *all* of them must be prepared for the experience next weekend. College football and student tailgating have become so intertwined that it is difficult to visualize one without the other. Students have as many different stories about tailgating experiences as there are assigned pages to read, but regardless of how spends their Saturday, it clearly will be impacted by the roar of the tailgate.

As such, sports have become the public face of many large universities nationwide. Generally speaking, the perception many have of college football is an enjoyable one – a positive experience that can be shared among undergraduates regardless of academic year or major. For some students in the project, however, their experiences during game days were more of a

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<sup>13</sup> The next section reveals that some students in the project did not actually enjoy football game days.

nuisance than a pleasurable. Outside the academy, few may even recognize that school fandom can affect academic performance. Not only are fans of all ages and demographics present on campus during a home game weekend, but also it can *feel* like the entire town is consumed by the fanfare<sup>14</sup>. Were the dispassionate students in this research just deviant voices that held opposite opinions? Possibly, but the voices spoke volumes about the significance of the academic / athletic conundrum some students might face during the fall.

### ***A gameday portrayal***

For most, it appears to be a great Fall Saturday to be a university student. The summer humidity has finally lifted and there is a slight breeze in the air. Anticipation and excitement of the first football game has met excitement are boiling over at the end of the long academic week. Enthusiasm has spread across campus like a wildfire—a particularly averting wildfire. The university has closed the library to accommodate the national television broadcast schedule – it would be quite the challenge to study over the deafening sounds of the tailgating fans, anyhow. Outside dorm rooms halls are rumblings of fellow students “pre-gaming<sup>15</sup>” with their peers while getting ready for the main tailgate. One is surrounded by the atmosphere, it is undoubtedly infectious, and near impossible to avoid even for the staunchest academic.

In the southeast corner of campus, sorority row is in high preparations for today’s big event. At the Sigma Kappa house, food is being arranged alongside elaborately decorated hallways. The girls have replaced their everyday gear of oversized t-shirts, Nike shorts, and Tory Burch sandals with sundresses, pearls, and cowboy boots, (because it obviously *hurts* to wear stilettos for an entire football game). This is not a fancy event or church service but fashion is

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<sup>14</sup> Typically, a university will have 6 home games on campus during the Fall semester.

<sup>15</sup> A gathering, using involving food and alcohol, were fans meet before game-time.

still taken seriously. Heidi, an undeniably charismatic student, is busy getting ready in the sorority house. She screams into the camera, “Today’s game day!” as her other peers are also busy getting ready in their respective rooms. She continues, “We are about to leave in 30 minutes to go down to the parade grounds where all the tents and fraternities are.” The parade grounds are one of the more popular pregame campus locations for eating and drinking before the game.

Anticipation is in the air and the fervor is growing. Heidi is now dressed to the nines so she has time to gather her filming gear while everyone else is getting ready. Her camera rolls while she opens the bathroom door: five of her peers are gathered around one mirror doing their hair and makeup. Without any script or prompt, they all scream in unison, “It’s game day, ayyy!” as the room fills with smiles and laughter. Heidi shuts the camera down as the noise intensifies. She walks into the hallway, presses record again, and opens the bedroom door of two of her other sorority sisters, “Woo, happy game day,” she screams, halfheartedly, as she notices one of the girls is still asleep from the night before. “I’m tired,” the sleepy girl mumbles from her bed as she rubs her eyes. Quickly, Heidi pans to the other girl, who is also busy doing her hair and makeup. On cue, this girl yells, “Happy game day!” Heidi is again reenergized.

While the rest of Heidi’s peers are making final fashion arrangements, she notices her elderly housemother, who is busy putting away what is left from the pre-game breakfast. The camera is recording as the housemother introduces herself, “I am Carolyn, housemother at Sigma Kappa sorority,” as she points to the emblem on her outfit (a t-shirt dawning the official university colors), “and as you can see I am all ready for game day,” as she closes her sentence with an excited smile. Sorority row is not the only campus clique who will be celebrating today; everyone associated with the school is seemingly embracing the big event.

The sorority house is now styled and primed to tailgate. The girls are all dressed in white sundresses. Hailey grabs her recording device again, as two of her best peers pose with her one final time before heading out the door. They all look into the camera together, as Hailey captions the visuals, “We’re ready to head out!” Her scream is followed by laughs, smiles, and excitement as the girls raise their arms above their heads in unity. The girls have all been here before; this will be a day full of memories.

On the other side of campus, beneath the school flags and pop-up tents, Jackson, a sophomore business major, has just finished his first plate of jambalaya and crunchy okra. His tailgate is equipped with all the comforts of home. Multiple TVs hooked up with cable programming and a dozen or so folding chairs surrounding them. There are large picnic tables decorated with fresh flowers, chips and salsa, pasta salad, and fruit plates- it is not only stunning but also incredibly practical. Jackson is able to watch four games at once, but he also has his choice of beverage – a Solo cup of Natural Light<sup>16</sup> is his selection for now, as he appears visibly nervous in anticipation of today’s game.

Before the event, he turns on the camera, sits down alone, and lets out an exasperated ‘sigh’, “It is game day, we are ready,” he murmurs, as he fixes his fitted cap and shows off the school logo on his shirt, visibly nervous, “Prediction,” he hesitates, “I say we are going to drop at least 40 points... just saying” with an uncertain confidence. As he makes his way to the tailgate, while his friend holds the camera, he screams, “Tigerbait! Tigerbait!” at opposing fans, a chant popularized by the schools supporters. Jackson has followed the accepted campus social script – he is now part of the team *and* the university.

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<sup>16</sup> An inexpensive beer.



Meanwhile, outside the confines of the increasingly congested campus, Raven, a sophomore art major, who lives at home with her great Aunt, just woke up from a festive night of partying. She is one student with zero interest in attending today's game. Her mind is consumed by the big art project that she desperately needs completed. She gets in her car, hesitantly prepared to brave the congested game day traffic. Her first goal, before the schoolwork can begin, is to find a parking spot so she can access the art lab. She turns on her dashboard camera and confesses, "I am so stressed out. I have to finish my printmaking project this week. I only have one layer printed, so I have to print two more layers and try a few different color combinations so it's going to take me awhile. I'm just freaking out about that." Later, in a private interview, Raven stated that she "didn't have a lot of free time because of school demands" so her weekends were important dates for her school productivity. She eventually finds a parking spot, one hour after leaving her home, on an off-campus residential street. She walks over a mile to the art lab, frustrated, but she will finally be able to get some work done.

By the time Raven arrived to campus, the game is just about to kickoff. The campus is buzzing, visibly and literally. Similar to the peak of a compelling movie, the tailgate has now reached its climax. Fans throughout the campus are feeling suspenseful as they await the opening whistle. While an intense enthusiasm for today's game action is readily obvious, Jackson is on his second plate of food, and by now, considering the aggressiveness in his voice, has lost track of his beverage consumption – regardless, his adrenaline is riding high in anticipation. He and the other fans have been awaiting this game all week.

Back at the parade grounds, another sorority student, Alexis, a junior business major, is also enjoying today's tailgating fun. Alexis is not in the same sorority as Heidi, but today, they share similar experiences. Like most other tailgaters today the girls are spending valuable time

studying the effects of Bud Light on the bloodstream. The two students did not plan beforehand to meet up with one another, but they end up bumping into each other at the Kappa Sig house. Heidi, who has a particularly strong eye for shooting captivating scenes, orders one of her peers to begin filming as she captures the meeting with Alexis on camera. We hear her friend bark “it’s recording” as Heidi gets in position beside Alexis. Once positioned she happily shouts into the camera, “Hey! It’s me and Alexis – we are the Kappa Sig house, whoo!” She continues, “it’s homecoming weekend, we are here” as the camera zooms in on their excitement.

Long after the game has concluded, the party continues. The team was victorious and there are many reasons to celebrate and many students do so well into the night. Anna, a junior broadcast journalism major, who also holds a full-time job at the local campus radio station, has to work in the morning. She turns on her camera and struggles to get it focused, half-asleep she half-whispers, “It is 12:30 in the morning and there is a bar that is about a street over that is playing their music so loud that it is shaking our house. “ She endures now with the camera firmly focused, “I am not happy about this. 12:30 in the morning and I have to feel like I am at a bar.” Ana shakes her head and rolls her eyes, visibly upset; she talks into the camera again, almost in a plea for the noise to stop, “It really sounds like there is a bar in my backyard.” She pauses, “sounds like the concert started up again.” Looking into the camera now, Anna moves her eyes and ears beyond her head, listening, she continues, “I guess this is the main act? The first one was probably the opener. Regardless, sounds like they are both cover bands. Not much difference between an opener and a main act if you are covering other people’s songs” as she gives an irritated smirk. Anna will attempt to get some sleep now.

## **DISCUSSION**

By advent of the case study, one of the goals of the research was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a video ethnographic methodological design. In this design, the observations of the students' audiovisual diaries helped create a comprehensive interview guide. For example, after observing the students' audiovisual diaries, it was clear that the students were impacted in some form by game day. The dominant sports culture at large public flagship research universities plays a important role as the heart of social life (Grigsby, 2009), but to the high degree it was mentioned in the audiovisual diaries was unexpected.

Another advantage of analyzing the audiovisuals in this comprehensive format is because quantitative results are created that can be subjected to statistical assessment. Even small segments of diary data presented numerous interpretations that provided countless detail about student experiences. As such, the microanalysis facilitates in the identification of reoccurring patterns across the university. A frequency table was constructed from the observations to sort the audiovisual data and the interview data, which can be utilized to probe for patterns in a more quantitative organization. Under this guise, video ethnography can help build upon both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Considering the portrayals, one interview question centered on the athletic influence on everyday university routines; the following was asked: "How do you think the campus sports culture influences student life?" There were an assortment of comments generated just by this question, but repeatedly, the students responded that the sports culture had a "huge" impact on student living and academic engagement. In some cases, students revealed that football games were tremendously positive experiences. In other cases, the students disclosed less than pleasurable commentary. The students implied that the choice to avoid sports culture, particularly football games, was not really an option.

Heidi, who obviously embraced the student pregame camaraderie to the fullest, replied with the following:

It (sports culture) has a huge impact. During football season everyone's grades drop. You don't study on the weekends... you may study on Sunday or during the week. You don't study on Saturdays because you go to the games. I am not into many sports but I do enjoy the social aspect – going to, like, tailgating and stuff.

Mason continued in that same vein:

I feel like I've really gotten to experience LSU and the culture through tailgating, through football season. Because I got to learn all the traditions and all the foods and I didn't even know what jambalaya was – but I do now!

Generally, Heidi was passionate about her game day experiences, but she wanted to avoid grouping *all* students into her Saturday ritual. She commented, “But there are a lot of people who do not participate in that so I do not want to group it like that.” It was no secret that Raven did enjoy football game day. In the same interview, she was asked about how sports culture contributes to student life. She remarked,

I think it's huge. It really gets in my way a lot because I need to come to school and work on the weekends. I am not even allowed to park in most areas so, I mean, this should be a school first of all, but I can't come here.

Like Raven, other students voiced their displeasure for the campus sporting experience.

Taylor, a charismatic outspoken Anthropology major, had this to say:

I have become sort of jaded. It was more of an annoyance for me, honestly. So I have lived on campus all four years and so for a whole semester, every Saturday, I had to lock myself in my room and make sure I would go grocery shopping ahead of time because I couldn't leave when I wanted to, because all of (the state) was on campus (sighs).

Unprompted, Anna brought up her experiences with football games when posed with the open-ended question: “What is your least favorite part of the college experience?”

She responded:

I am not the biggest sports fan (laughs)... So some of the culture that exists in a school where football, you know, sports, is a big part of it was unsettling and I kind of had a hard time fitting into that mold... So I am going to go on a little rant... There is like a structural system that kind of comes from the patriarchy, it comes from entitlement, it comes from like aggressive masculinity and it's not just a man thing, it's a woman thing as well. We are all conditioned with these certain norms and you see that a lot in athletics, you see that a lot in the Greek system, which are two major institutions at (university). And I found it very oppressive at times and very hard to navigate.

Anna's comments illustrate how the influence of specific university institutions, such as their sports culture, can lead students away from offering them an opportunity of equal representation. Thus, some students who wish to avoid the game day scene in favor of schoolwork cannot do so.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sociological literature on university happenings is vast and complex. This video ethnographic exploration does not cover all of the possibilities. The novelty here, in this nuanced methodological research approach, however, lies in the fact that students provided their own audiovisual data. This methodological approach allowed students to conduct a full-fledged portrayal of their university activities. The gathered audiovisual diary data, then, guides the empirical analysis while demonstrating, albeit in a limited way, a supplementary method to explain student experiences at university. In other words, the existential conclusions were determined from my observations of the audiovisual portrayals. To be exact, this project details

one possible methodological approach toward the importance of building an integrated self at the university level.

To answer the first research question, we turn to the contributions of the video ethnographic model of data gathering. The diary microanalysis suggests that the moral importance of students building their integrated selves is prominent among the flagship university. As demonstrated in the portrayal of “An evening on campus”, campus extracurricular activities, such as being a part of sorority or having an after school job, exist to foster those relationships among acquaintances and peers, primarily from the amount of time spent together. In other situations, extracurricular activities exist to professional experiences and career networks

The audiovisual data revealed that the students only needed two or three friends to have a satisfying, college experience. The portrayals detailed here supports the observation by Chambliss and Takacs, (2014) “Friendships are crucial for incoming students, but having a large number of friends is not” (21). There were a variety of ways those friendships were presented. The students chose their friends from a pool of roommates, neighbors, classmates, and coworkers. The students would regularly spend their free time with the same handful of peers, even when involved in larger social circles, i.e., a sorority. In other words, typically, when a student filmed themselves with other individuals, it was the same few peers that repeatedly appeared in the footage.

From the video portrayals, it was clear the two-sorority member participants (Heidi and Alexis) maximized their opportunities for developing close friendships with fellow members, which is in line with the statement, “Where fraternities and sororities are prominent – at large state universities, for instance – they may be the single most-used institution for meeting other

students” (Chambliss and Takacs, 2014; 26). Beyond the friendship benefits, these students’ video diaries displayed images of sorority life offering other endless positives, including leadership development and growth, mentorship programs, campus and community involvement, philanthropic opportunities. With the pressure to conform and attend group meetings, orientations, and football tailgates, it was seemingly easy for the girls to develop tight-knit connections.

Lead by the first research objective, the second question was answered by utilizing both the students’ audiovisual diary footage and the transcriptions from the interview data. Particular attention was given to social events particularly those involving the universities football team. The students disclosed mixed reactions to this mainstream campus activity. Although many students appear to have overwhelmingly positive sentiments towards university gameday, others who desired complete avoidance, in favor of schoolwork, could not do so.

The final research question was geared toward determining the methodological value of a video ethnographic approach. The case study allowed for the formulation of specific patterns to synthesize the overall interpretations. One of the main advantages was the ability for students to film their university experiences over an extended period of time. This material then was used to supplement the students written accounts of their experiences while also providing a context for follow-up interview questions. The audiovisual data also delivered a microanalysis that synthesized the observations into a frequency table, which then allowed the data to be used as a generalizable quantitative measure.

Presenting audiovisual data on a visual platform, such as a documentary film, is valuable (Shrum & Castle, 2014), but the difficulty of portraying different visual senses in writing needs to be elaborated upon systemically. The results of the case study were complex and because of

this, the intangible aspects of the scenes were challenging to put down accurately in text.

Another important issue facing video ethnography is access. Students expressed privately that they sometimes felt uncomfortable bringing their camera into certain situations, such as in the classroom. This also could explain why the same two or three friends repeatedly appeared in the most of the students' footage; these friends might have been the most comfortable on camera.

There are important limitations in this study. First, replicating the study would be difficult, due to reliability issues. The problem of video ethnographic research with reliability is caused by the fact that it occurs in natural settings, which is challenging to reproduce. To address this problem comprehensive description of the methodological procedure was provided. This description was purposeful so the next potential audiovisual researcher can reconstruct the original analysis strategy. Another study limitation lies within the generalizability of the sample. The research was conducted at a single university with a small number of students (n=8) and unintentional gender under/over representation only applicable for that particular setting and not the general population. This limitation can be overcome using multi-site universities and a larger, more varied sample population. Video ethnographic explorations have been criticized for lacking scientific rigor and their incapability to be reproduced, but it should be acknowledged that all research depends on gathering specific categories of data through the prisms of methodological alternatives, each of which has strengths and weaknesses.

As the audiovisual data has portrayed in this paper, a university provides an influential experience on the individual – at times even a transforming one – enhancing the possibilities of new friendships and opening them to fresh possibilities of individual growth. This video ethnographic project revealed that the university contributes to the social development of



students even when it seems unmindful to that objective. It is, however, only one influence among many.

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## CHAPTER 4

### VISIONARY SOCIOLOGY IN ACTION: ACQUIRING INFORMATION

#### ABSTRACT

In an environment of increased sociological interest toward making academic research public, this case study provides a video ethnographic methodological strategy for doing so. The video ethnographic data in the study is comprised of student -collected, audiovisual diary footage of eight undergraduates attending a large flagship public university. At the conclusion of the audiovisual diary collections, these records were then supported by audiovisually recorded face-to-face interviews. Many researchers of the United States undergraduate education consistently note the underperformance of students and this methodological design offers an alternative approach to discuss the evidence of these assessments. The goal of this research is not to generalize results with confidence of large samples of undergraduate students; the value lies in its capacity to provide an *all-access* ethnographic portrayal of campus environments. Many college happenings are inaccessible to a research team so this approach of collecting data delivers access into the private lives of students; access that would otherwise take years of traditional ethnographic participant-observation and trust-building to create.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research study is to examine undergraduate perceptions and experiences through a video ethnographic portrayal. The research findings this article reports are based on the analysis of the following sources: student collected audiovisual diary data; student collected written diary data; semi-structured interviews; and my personal observations of the data sets. The students campus involvements are collected through audiovisual equipment and analyzed to determine the value of this approach to research dissemination. Specifically, the following two research questions informed the study: (a) to what extent does video ethnography contribute to an understanding of the pathways students use to acquire information while involved in academic or careerist orientations?<sup>17</sup> And (b) to what extent has the case study determined the effectiveness of conducting research through a video ethnographic portrayal?

Communicating sociological understanding to both professional and non-professional audiences are primary foundations of “public sociology” (Brady, 2004). For public sociology, the general claim proposed is that it should not only be about how to *approach* sociology but also about how to *communicate* sociology. With the methodology, sociologists have the abilities to reach and develop the general public’s sociological imaginations more effectively than other methodologies primarily because of the easily understood, entertainment value of visual research (Shrum and Castle, 2014). In essence, this article will provide a broader view of the video ethnographic research dissemination process and its potential usefulness for public sociology.

By using video ethnographic methodology, this paper also provides illustrations of effective communicative channels where both researchers and the students can deliver their story

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<sup>17</sup> Orientations are similar to subcultures but do not necessarily require the consistent communications of group life or transmission of social norms and values (Kuh, 1990; as borrowed from Brint, 2011).

to the general public. Most ethnography's done by those with a social science background emphasize insider-written documents as the way to communicate their observations and interpretations to the public. The field notes are then transcribed and eventually made into a scholarly journal or book to showcase the ethnographic findings. Audiovisual data provides an alternative, multimodal<sup>18</sup> approach to communicating research results where the findings can be shown textually, auditorily, and visually.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Moffatt's (1989) and Nathan (2005) provide traditional ethnographic information about student orientations in separate settings. The results of these two projects, and essentially, all traditional ethnographies focus on college students and highlight the significance of social life over academic engagement (London, 1978; Katchadourian and Boli, 1985; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; Astin, 1993; Kuh Hu and Vesper, 2000). Taking these traditional ethnographic approaches one step further with the advent of audiovisual technologies, the process of student learning and transitioning into adulthood, and the way these two interact are addressed through an interpretative sociological lens.

One foundation of this paper is to provide evidence of the potential of visual sociology (i.e., video ethnography) in contributing to the analysis of undergraduate academic engagement - a social issue propagated by the book *Academically Adrift* (Arum and Roksa, 2011). Other research has confirmed the results from the two prominent sociologists. Bok (2006) paints the pictures of student life as profoundly anti-intellectual. Adding that colleges are failing to pay as much attention to teaching and learning as they do to recruiting students or building state-of-the-

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<sup>18</sup> Multimodality is a systematic approach for analyzing audiovisual data as it focuses interpretation on a variety of communication forms (visual, speech, action, events).

art dormitories and recreation centers. Similarly, Babcock and Marks (2010) found that the average college student spends 40 or more hours per week on social and recreational activities. Others suggest that undemanding learning environments contribute the reputations of university underachievement (Brint, Cantwell, & 1, 2011). Additionally, suggesting that university instructors can put forth a stronger effort in making “meaningful and challenging assignments requiring serious individual effort” to achieve a more demand learning environment. Grigsby (2009) notes that 70 percent of her subjects said social learning was more important than academic learning and most of the others said the two were of roughly equal importance. Further adding that the prevalent undergraduate culture encourages partying, athletics, and fraternity and sorority life; especially in large flagship public research universities, mainly in conservative parts of the United States, whose prominent athletic teams receive nationwide exposure (Grigsby, 2009). Claims made Arum, Roksa (2011), and others were evaluated in regard to the “troubles” of academia. Then, an application of an alternative research design that emphasizes student data collection is delivered, through an interpretive sociological lens.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

Socialization is a dynamic process of learning and self-development that occurs as individuals interact with each other within social settings and interpret the world in which they live. The basis of sociology and all of science is interpretation; viewing recurring events on campus, uncovering relationships between two students, or any other empirical observation requires *interpretation*. Within the discipline of sociology the word *interpretive* refers to a specific group of sociologies, which have as their basis the interpretation of human meaning and motivations. Johnson writes:

A sociological understanding of behavior must include the meaning that social actors give to what they and others do. When people interact, they interpret what is going on from the meanings of symbols to the attribution of motives to others (1995: 146).

Interpretive sociology supports an understanding behind actions in a social setting, through an emphasis of a person's unique perspective. The dominant venture in an interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective individual experience. As such, the paradigm focuses on the way in which the social world is not just something to be encountered by participants, but something that is constantly being created and redeveloped by the individuals. Thus, the observed facts can take on an entirely alternative meaning depending on the different perspectives of different individuals. Consider a public university; for example, ethnographically there are many questions a researcher might want to know about the orientation of the students being observed. We might wonder how engaged the students are in the classroom, what expectations the instructors have for their pupils, if students are benefiting from their college experiences, etcetera.

## **DATA & METHODS**

The novelty of the student audiovisual diary project cannot be overstated. Despite the originality, the semester long investigation of video ethnography as a method of sociological research produced several emerging records. A *participatory video (video diary)* practice is different from most research practices because informants lead themselves through the ethnography rather than being directed by a researcher. The fundamental purposefulness of participatory methods is to allow informants to have control of their data collection. The semesters' exploration produced rich audiovisual data, which includes recorded, in-depth

interviews with the 8 students after their fieldwork was completed. The interview sessions elicit authentic stories about the perceptions and experiences for both the video ethnography project and higher education. The students were all undergraduates, mostly female, and involved in different academic programs and extracurricular activities.

During the in-depth interviewing process, students described their diary experiences (both audiovisual and written) and perceptions of the collected data; they also answered additional open-ended questions. The students were free to express their opinions, knowledge, and experiences about academic culture and student lifestyle. An interview guide was established, which was based on the analysis of the video diaries and themes from the extant literature.

Both convenience and purposive sampling were used to select research participants. These sampling techniques ensure a selection of individuals to address the purpose of the research. The 8 students who volunteered for the project came from a group of approximately 200 undergraduates. The students used their individual cameras and/or filming devices (such as a cellular phone) to participate in the course. One student borrowed a video camcorder from the departments Video Ethnography Lab. Before the project began, the students were required to read effective filmmaking techniques and strategies. As part of the video diary requirements, the students were also asked to communicate their week-to-week thoughts, feelings, and experiences on camera and with a *written* diary that was sent bi-weekly. The students were instructed to provide at least an hour of footage per week alongside the written diary (which was often between a half page and a full page). Additionally, they were given complete autonomy to film what each “believed was important.” This freedom allowed for unbiased data collection. In sum,



each undergraduate submitted over 15 hours of recorded material before the end of the project. In total, then, over 120 hours of audiovisual diary data was amassed among the contributors.

Alongside the diaries, at different intervals throughout the semester, the 8 students and would come together in the evenings for “focus group” discussions with the project leader. These discussions consisted of assessing each student’s work both individually and collectively as a group - as well as breakdown of the audiovisual footage being collected. Both during and after the project, student’s audiovisual footage was actively analyzed. The data was analyzed several times comprehensively, reassessing established themes and various levels of coding. In reporting the data each student has been given a pseudonym.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The variety of datum contributed differing amounts of information to answer the research questions that comprised the narrative. To determine the effectiveness of students acquiring academic information a video ethnographic portrayal was presented. While one goal of this article was to determine student approaches to academic and careerist pursuits, the second goal was to determine the value of video ethnography in doing so. With the above noted, the observations established three themes:

1. Many students study in groups, which are less effective approaches for exam preparation than studying alone, but more effective for the social collaboration that is college.
2. Student perceptions of and experiences of undergraduate career preparation are positive, by providing opportunities for success after graduation.

3. The student's distinctive priorities and their experiences within, to either engage in social or careerist orientations, may change as their academic lives are further established.

While the themes are stated as discrete, there are commonalities among them. The students' audiovisual data reactions often address more than one thematic distinction. In those cases, the datum is described where it appears to fit most applicably. These themes of the student audiovisual research portrayals consistently connect video ethnographic analysis that in turn allows for a multimodal dissemination of research and alternative prospects for communicating sociology to the general public.

**Theme 1: Many students study in groups, which are less effective for exam preparation than studying alone, but more effective for the social collaboration that is college.**

The discussion of this theme is addressed in two sections: (1) collection of the student audiovisual diary data, and (2) analysis of the audiovisual diary data. Each section is divided into segments. As such, utilizing video ethnography as the collection mechanism, perceptions and experiences of acquiring academic information will be detailed below. The following section describes the portrayals of student diary data collected over the semester long project. Furthermore, it discusses the procedures to document and analyze the audiovisuals regarding the theme.

***Audiovisual data collection***

The best sociological research methodology is recursive, where both quantitative and qualitative tools are combined to gather data that encompasses depth as well as breadth. To be

certain, both traditional strategies have garnered national visibility for their contributions towards university happenings. Further multivariate analysis where student performance and life-course outcomes are controlled for with prior individual level differences will be expected and needed. With that recognized, a more intuitive approach, specifically a video ethnographic one, could provide further understanding through “all-access” portrayal of university students. Video ethnography provides a visual experience from students and their behaviors and attitudes from the inside – to truly understand their everyday lives.

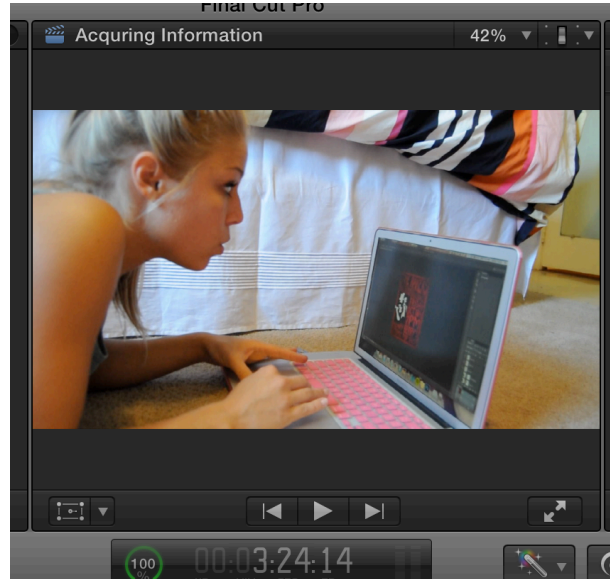
To appreciate the potential of video ethnography, one needs to recognize the characteristics, which envelop its existence. In other words, ethnography allows a researcher to get below words and surface-level thinking to recognize not what an individual *says* he or she does, but to see what he or she *actually* is doing on college campuses. Thus, a hermeneutic approach to ‘understanding’ the lives of students would be a purposeful contribution to the extant literature.

Before the video ethnography project began, a guide was established to clarify expectations, but the students had complete autonomy over their video diaries. As such, during the semester, the students had absolute freedom of what they filmed, where they filmed, and whom they filmed. Giving students autonomy allows for more authentic data collections. It also allows avenues for creativity, which closely connects to student’s social and academic interests.

The students acquire information in a variety of ways. Some study alone at the library, some study while they are at work, some study in groups, and others prefer to be alone. And then there are a couple students that meet with professors and other advisors for guidance. In general, students most often study with a partner or in groups. Seven of the eight students participated in group-studying sessions on an almost weekly basis.

### *Audiovisual data analysis*

The audiovisuals were analyzed under a wide range of strategies. The video diary portrayals can be divided into two parts: (a) how those audiovisual scenes are analyzed, and (b) how often the students exhibit information-gathering behaviors (e.g. study sessions). First,



analysis varies from being informal and loosely apportioned to highly formal with planned intervals. That is, in the beginning all student footage was casually viewed for general themes and then re-watched more carefully, stopping and starting, at certain intervals to take notes or make timestamps of significant happenings. The frequency of analysis ranges from recording how many minutes/hours the student spends studying to how often he or she was alone or in a group when doing so. Notes are made on the beginnings of each new study session. That is, notes are taken on the total minutes/hours logged studying and the amount of times each student decides to begin a new study and/or homework session.

<b>Who:</b> Heidi
<b>Code:</b> Acquiring Information
<b>Observation:</b> Studying the night before her exam
<b>Timecode:</b> 00:03:24:14
<b>File Name:</b> Heidi1021.mov

A screenshot of a coded piece of audiovisual diary data appears at the top right. It was captured from footage involving Heidi, a sophomore undergraduate student, while she studies on the floor of her sorority bedroom. For graphical purposes, the code sheet below the screenshot is modified, but the important coding information is listed in the textbox below the shot. This selection of footage was coded as “Acquiring Information” because it summarizes the few

important seconds of footage presented here. The student's name is also listed along with a brief observational description. The file name and timecode<sup>19</sup> is also identified so the clip can be accessed for easy reference. This piece of data only contained one code, primarily because the subject was not speaking and the scene was clearly depicting the student studying, or “Acquiring Information”.

Other audiovisual diary observations include, anthropology major, Taylor. She studies alone, nightly, in her private dorm room on a consistent basis. Taylor logs considerable hours of reading, writing, and cramming for upcoming exams. Audiovisual diary portrayals such as Heidi's and Taylor's serve as valuable supplements to the research process in many ways. One way, in particular is assisting in the development of a comprehensive interview questionnaire. In other words, audiovisual portrayals may elicit alternative question(s) worth consideration and/or clarify previously established ones. The frequent study sessions, for example, prompts the question during the face-to-face interview, “How much time do you spend studying?”

This simple question elicits an audible sigh from Taylor – the relief that her time as an undergraduate was coming to a close and her study efforts are finally being rewarded. She describes all the energy she devotes to her schoolwork, “Oh, I worked really hard, really hard (laughing). Last semester I didn't really have to study much because there was a lot of writing, but for the class I did have to study for, I busted my booty.”

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<sup>19</sup> A “timecode” is an eight-digit code recorded from the video camera that provides a precise identifier for every potential video and audio frame on a file by creating a timestamp in hours, minutes, seconds and frames. Although a string of eight numbers (i.e., 04:55:38:07) might seem imposing, the meaning is simple: 4 hours, 55 minutes, 38 seconds, and 7 frames. A timecode is an essential part of coding audiovisual data. By referencing the timecode, specific frames of the audiovisual files can be accessed. Taking advantage of this audiovisual feature makes it easier to relocate key quotes or substantial pieces of data.

In the audiovisual diaries, Taylor spends a lot of time talking with her family – it is clear that they are very important to her. At the same time, even though her family provides emotional support, Taylor is still a very autonomous student. She is able to take care of herself, both emotionally and practically, skills she later credits, in the interview, from her experiences as an undergraduate.

Other students imitate Taylor and Heidi's solo approaches to studying. Jackson (a business major) and Misty (a business major), for example, also record isolated study sessions. Typically before exam time, the two are glued to their computers and/or textbooks, alone, conquering the test material. With that said, the two prefer to study with partners and/or with groups of other students – as more audiovisual diary data is logged under these conditions.

Misty prefers to do homework with her friend Raven. Raven is a studio art major, with a focus in printmaking. Although the two students are involved in different career paths, they spend a lot of their free time together. The duo assembles at coffee shops and/or Raven's house to work on their individual assignments, but it is never collaborative undertakings. Raven's schoolwork consisted of mostly project-based art requirements instead of the characteristic examination studying that most undergraduates endure. As a business major, most of Misty's study sessions are examination based.

Observations of Raven consistently working on her art projects were consistently noted, in her audiovisual diaries. In the interview she clarifies the observations, "My art classes I am working on stuff constantly." Raven's art is central to her identity. Art brings her both joy and sometimes-even pain – on multiple occasions breaking art pieces is observed, apparently of the pieces she is dissatisfied with.

Similarly to Raven, Heidi recognizes that her undergraduate duties consist primarily of projects rather than examinations. Heidi is a mass communications major with a concentration in advertising - she strives to someday work for an advertisement agency. In the interview she explains, “A lot of my course work is more project based, which I am a lot better at. So I am actually graded for the effort I put out.” Heidi is not a big proponent of studying and she admits as much in the interview, although it is evident in the audiovisual diary footage – much of Heidi’s study sessions, turn into being get-togethers with other students and friends.

From analysis, quantifiably, group study is favored over individual study approaches. To be exact, all the students combine to film nearly twice as many sessions studying in groups than they do studying solo.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, however, studying alone appears to be more productive than studying with additional persons, as these sessions most often resemble social and/or gossip gatherings.



While watching and listening to the group studying sessions, more than half of the footage contains conversations, unrelated to school and/or coursework. An overlooked advantage of video ethnographic analysis is that can *also* produce quantitative results that can be subjected to

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<sup>20</sup> For clarity, every time a student began a study and/or homework session a tally was recorded. Some students filmed considerable more hours studying alone, but the focused was on each new *study session* that began. Taylor, for example, logged considerable more hours studying than any other student (and most of her study sessions were alone). If only total minutes/hours were recorded to reach a conclusion, Taylor’s portrayals would have skewed the data in favor of the alone method of studying.

statistical evaluation.<sup>21</sup> Even small segments of audiovisual data can produce several observations that can provide great detail about the frequency and duration of certain actions/behaviors.

With that said, while group sessions are largely filled with casual conversations, they also encourage an exchange of ideas and schedule planning. An example of one of the group study sessions appears to the left. In this clip, observations were made of some students providing consultations to others who struggle with assignments or class projects. Later, a student who was struggling to select which professors to schedule for next semesters classes was given advice. At times, it appears that some students in this 30-minute clip just want to be involved with the group. That is, they are not there to actually ‘study’ but to interact with others and to even teach them the material they already mastered.

Video ethnographic analysis delivers an overview of the audiovisuals and facilitates in the identification of patterns across the university, in particular student patterns of acquiring information. Video ethnography allows the researcher to conduct in-depth analysis of small sections of audiovisual data. Such microanalysis might emphasize a particular nuanced interpretation that would be overlooked in more traditional qualitative approaches.

The students, in the audiovisual diaries, appear to become more distracted within groups. Private sessions, alternatively, seem to increase focus and efficiency. Individual studying allows the students to advance at their own pace. For example, Meg, who is a public relations major, with plans to attend graduate school recognizes that her studying productivity is best targeted while alone with the TV on, “I cannot study with a group of people, because I cannot just focus. So I study, and I actually turn on the TV, and I put the volume down. Then I study, and every ten

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 2: *Audiovisual Data Management and Coding: An Analysis to Advance Sociological Research*



minutes I look up at the TV to give myself that break and I have found that is what works with me.”

This explains why Jackson and Misty prefer to study alone whenever a big exam is looming, as efficiency is a priority that goes unsatisfied when studying with friends or classmates. The two are often seen studying in groups, however, many of these sessions appear to be mostly just “catching up with friends.” Before exam time, however, the need for systematic studying practices take precedent and the two are observed studying alone.

The social nature of collaborative learning has not been ignored by social scientists, which today’s research has yielded some interesting insights. Today’s social scientists (Babcock and Marks, 2011) cite the decrease in the average amount of time students report attending class or studying out of class. Additionally, primary school students believed group studying allowed them to be more active learners, more engaged with the material, cultivated peer relationships, and improved attitudes towards collaborating (Gökçe (2011). Some scholars (Gardner and Jewler, 2004) argue that group studying provides emotional support while also encouraging motivation and organization. It is further suggests that students can learn alternative study strategies from others while in the group. Lastly, it is maintained that students in a collaborative study environment can develop a sense of companionship that increases confidence (Gardner and Jewler, 2004).

Rajaram (2011) maintains that there is evidence that memory cues are disrupted during group collaboration. To be exact, information that is recalled during a group session may get disorganized or stored elsewhere, when the individual is going over the material alone. Based on her experiences, Heidi realizes the need to focus on studying alone, “I study best whenever I speak it out loud and I am explaining it to someone. But I really don’t like to study with people

because sometimes I feel like they are holding me back. I just never know where I am going to be after.”

**Theme 2: Student perceptions of and experiences of undergraduate career preparation are positive, by providing opportunities for success after graduation.**

A synthesis of the students’ university academic experiences result in a three fundamental assumptions: (a) identification of positive occurrence patterns within the university, (b) identification of personal development and interpersonal relationships, and (c) development of appropriate contacts – including professor recommendations – aimed at advancing the students career.

A limitation of video ethnographic analysis is access. That is, some individuals might feel uncomfortable being filmed and some locations might feel uncomfortable allowing video recordings at their establishment. If one cannot gain access, audiovisual data cannot be collected. In the weekly meetings, some students expressed concerns about access. Specifically, the students worried about bringing their cameras into the classroom as some students and professors would feel uncomfortable under those circumstances. For this primary reason, classroom activity and private meetings with professors were not included in many audiovisual diary collections. As such, face-to-face interviews served as a valuable secondary data collection source. The primary application of this theme is audiovisual interview data.

Some students report the use of student services to advance their career opportunities, while others primarily focus on coursework, which prepares them for life after university. A good majority of the students undergo interpersonal development, whereas university provides an alternative way to look at the world. Certain scholars also make contacts with their professors;

the students seeking to enroll into professional or graduate schools, in particular, had strong incentives to study and develop appropriate contacts. While the three assumptions are described in separate sections, there is considerable overlap among them. Further, students' replies often spoke to more than one of the three. In those instances, the data are portrayed where they appear to fit most appropriately.

Several students recognize the value of the education they are receiving. When the students are asked if they believe university experiences prepare them for the next stage after graduation, their responses are overwhelmingly positive. Heidi, for example, remarks:

Absolutely! I have been blown away with the preparation I have gone through, really. And I am big on, you know, 'why am I taking this class it has nothing to do with what I want to do when I grow up,' I mean, all the classes I have taken, I have learned so much. They have a variety of amazing teachers, and I have really appreciated it and just great connections – very willing to help and get you to the next place you want to be.

Heidi is unmistakably happy throughout her audiovisual diary catalogs, while another student, Anna, experiences bouts with depression during the semester. Despite the differences in emotion, both share positive feedback about the university. Anna manages a heavy course load while working two part-time jobs. This balancing act is incredibly difficult, as one might imagine. Despite the obstacles, Anna graduates from university and lands a great job! When probed with the same question, she responds:

Yes, it was a good experience overall. It gave me a chance to learn what it is to be independent or to work hard for yourself. I mean, when you are in college it is different than high school you are not required to go to your classes – if you do not go, you fail, you know, and that is how it works. So it kind of taught me how to stay motivated and stay focused on a goal, and to complete a task, like a long-term project. Because it is, it is a four-year thing that you complete, which definitely helps me now with my job.

The responses connect to the larger purpose of the university – to encourage an upward academic trajectory while making the students career-ready. Professors, of course, play a major role in this. For example, Misty appreciates the influences her printmaking professors provide. “The professors were biggest influence at school and they have given me a lot of drive.” Another student, Taylor, who plans to graduate with a 3.2 GPA, also credits the her professors for certain skills, particularly when it comes to writing, “Academically I think the writing skills are valuable to me and I am realizing that now. And I had to do a lot of writing with Anthropology, more than I anticipated, and I am thankful for that because now I can write if I need too.”

Beyond the academic benefits of university, students also develop attitudes and behaviors to gain confidence and understand not only themselves, but also the world around them. In other words, the college experiences, and the people within, provide channels for students to become more knowledgeable and worldly. Anna, who had graduated by the time of her interview, recognizes the value of not only her degree, but also the personal growth a university experiences offers. She remarks, “I hoped to get a degree, something that would help me get a full time job and be successful in life because it is kind of a necessity at this point. And, I did that - I got that. College provided ways for me to be passionate and to not be apathetic, and I gained that for sure.”

Taylor also acknowledges the importance of managing oneself. She interviews during her senior year, after already acquiring and accepting a graduate school position. In her words:

I have gained independence; I have gained insight - if I can sum it up in one word. I have also learned that I know nothing; I am dumb as dirt (smiles). You know what, I would not say I am dumb, but I was on a mighty high horse whenever I came to college and then when I actually started learning things, I realized my opinion is not always right and I do not know everything. I am thankful for the formal education that I have gotten. And I am thankful for the

theories I have learned and the types of concepts, and schools of thoughts that I am familiar with now.

Taylor later adds that her favorite part of university was the stimulation she felt from feeling “uncomfortable.” She explains, “My favorite part of college is the uncomfortableness (sic). Yeah, just being uncomfortable and getting kicked out into the waters.” Stimulation, in this sense, indicates that the student may still satisfaction from the struggle of the student experience, even though university involvement can be difficult at times.

As mentioned above, Anna experience moments of unhappiness both inside and outside the classroom. Still, she learns a lot about her university experiences. She explains, “I learned to be lot to be more effective, to be efficient, and I am definitely smarter. I am more knowledged (sic) for sure, about myself and about the world. Higher education is important.”

During their interviews, students’ also discuss a third way university life prepares them for success after school; namely, to develop appropriate contacts. For example, Taylor talks about the importance of making a good impression with her professor’s during her senior year as she is applying for graduate programs. She expresses, “The connections that I made with my professors have sort of catalyzed my transition from undergraduate to graduate school”

Another student, Meg, shared similar desires, “I do typically meet with every professor now just because now that I am getting older and am needing recommendation letters. And I went into this semester knowing that, so I have got to know all my professors this semester.” Taylor’s and Meg’s testimonies show some students are more likely to develop contacts with their professors, only because there is a stronger incentive to do so with graduation looming.

In their responses to interview questions, students identify a number of positive attributes of the university and its career preparations. The three identified assumptions fit within two main classifications: (1) to prepare students for success in school and in society (2) to identify how

audiovisual data analysis contributes to undergraduate career preparations. And as declared above, this article predominantly concerns itself with the latter purpose. All eight students who participated in the study, to some degree, consistently portray desirable student behavior. In other words, they recognize the importance of studying, and other behavior expectations, consistent with developing positive outcomes post-college.

**Theme 3: The student's distinctive priorities and their experiences within, to either engage in social or careerist orientations, may change as their academic lives are further established.**

The daily lives of each student in the project varied considerably but certain behaviors emerged that are worth emphasizing. The theme in this section describes the variations in student experiences based on their academic development. It focuses on the rich audiovisual observations of the student's interests in both social living and academic/career involvements, which seems to evolve as the student's life advances/matures. In describing the experiences of this final theme both audiovisual diary observations and audiovisually recorded interviews are sourced. Accounts are revealed to show readers the behaviors of the students in the project.

The eagerness with which each student decides how to spend his or her time and energy are essential in determining their experiences. For example, during the beginning years of university, students primary orientations may be social, but then eventually switch to careerist later on, once nearer to graduation (Grigbsy, 2009). One explanation to explain the changes in student orientation could simply be maturity. Raven connects to the core of this philosophy with the following simple statement, " My first year and a half, I was like, really wild but then I took a semester off and came back and actually "did school."

Heidi reinforces Raven's experiences, recognizing that orientations change as the student matures, "My sorority used to be a big part of my life (as I said) and as I have grown up now, I have focused more on schoolwork." Heidi filmed her audiovisual diaries during her sophomore year. During the time, her sorority and the sisters she surrounded herself with, contributed greatly to her audiovisual portrayals. While observing her footage, the interval of freedom Heidi experiences during her sophomore year was immensely valuable. Heidi was happy, energetic, she had a vibrant social life but yet she still carried a 3.5 GPA.

Heidi plans to move out of the sorority house and live on her own during her senior year. Despite the ideas to leave the house, she continually recognizes the value of the friendships and experiences she had during her freshman and sophomore year. At the same time, she is ready to "move-on to the next phase" of her life. Heidi, discusses in her junior year interview, how she was more responsible now. Heidi acknowledges, "From sophomore year to junior year I feel like I've really grown up. I just feel a lot older and more mature."

Similarly, Meg discusses how she transitions from a partier to an academic, as she is "getting older". Meg was asked if she believes her school has a party atmosphere, Meg responds, "I really thought it was my first year because I think I was partying more than I am now. I guess, now, that maybe I am getting older and I have more friends with the same aspirations. I mean, we study a lot more now, we do a lot of work, but there is a party aspect that is huge."

The testimonies of Heidi and Meg show students used appropriate interventions as they develop as people and students. Establishing a strong peer network was an important recognition that students shared. Seemingly, once these friendships were established, the academic side of the spectrum was also fulfilled. In that regard, the two orientations, academic and social, are closely related. It is also conceivable students shift orientations during their academic careers.

That is, the main emphasis during the first couple years of school is their social lives and, closer to graduation, shifts towards a more academic/careerist pattern.

The student experiences various degrees of redevelopment during the short four-to-five year period they are in undergraduate school (Grigsby, 2009). Another possible explanation for this phenomenon is because the student may feel academic demands increase as they structurally advance through university. Interpretive analysis focuses on the way the social world is continually being created and redeveloped by individuals. As such, it could be reasonable to conclude that one possible explanation for student development of a more careerist orientation in the latter part of their undergraduate careers is because of the increase in achievement standards. That is, as a function of professors increasing academic rigor the student, then, may experience deeper motivation to succeed.

For example, Meg who was largely still finding her identity and “establishing herself” during the time of her audiovisual diary filming, which took place during her sophomore year of college. She carries a 3.8 GPA, but often seems disconnected from other students and even the university as a whole during the audiovisual diaries. The personality we see during the interview, is much different than the one which was observed during her semester long audiovisual diary collection. At the time of the interview session, which took place during her senior year of university, there was a noticeably positive difference in Meg’s demeanor. By this time, Meg’s social life flourishing, but she also is more satisfied academically – despite the coursework demands being the hardest she has experienced in her entire undergraduate career. In Meg’s words, “It has been the hardest year of my life, but it has also been the best year.”

Meg explains how her first semester, senior year was the most challenging she had experienced. When asked how much time she spent studying, she replies, “ This semester?



Probably, more than my whole life total! This semester I have had to study so much; I mean doing homework was an everyday thing.” Meg later adds she has established more peer relationships since the initial audiovisual diary filming’s. In the interview, she comments, “I have a lot more opportunity here now. When we did the original footage I was still establishing myself and now that I have grown and developed a little bit more I have meant more friends through that – it helps when you have friends with similar interests.”

A third, final explanation for shifting student orientations could be merely be experience. As with any profession, the more training one undertakes, typically the more improved he or she’s becomes. The skills of being a proficient college student are often overlooked and the transition from high school to university can be challenging. Perhaps, student engagement is just a matter of an evolving definition of what that the best practices for college success might be? In other words, possibly, some students take a little more time “to get it right.”

Anna, mass communications and public relations majors, whom graduated at the time of the video interview, discussed finding a balance between work and school. In her words, “I was so active in my job ...so I went through cycles, one would falter while the other got better. So sometimes Id really put myself into school and into classes but my work at the radio station suffered. And then it would switch. Id be doing really awesome work at the station and then not too hot in my classes. And then finally, by my last year, I found a balance and really successfully did that!”

To summarize the final theme, three primary explanations were identified, by which students might shift orientations during university: (1) the student simply “growing up” or maturing, (2) an increase in academic rigor by the professor leading to an increase in academic engagement from the student, and (3) acquiring more experience within the university, which

enables the student to eventually learn a balance between social, work, and school demands. In other words, *practice makes perfect*.

## **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

Two fundamental questions framed this article; (a) to what extent does video ethnography contribute to an understanding of the pathways students use to acquire information while involved in academic or careerist orientations? And (b) to what extent has the case study determined the effectiveness of conducting research through a video ethnographic portrayal?

Opinions and research on student lives varies and this nuanced methodology is just another way to approach the subject matter. The conclusions drawn from the analysis were existential, primarily determined from my observations of the audiovisual portrayals. For this reason, it might be difficult to evaluate the appropriateness of a video ethnographic portrayal. Regardless, progress was made to further envelop its existence within the sociological discipline. In addition to the examples of students' experiences in the audiovisual diary data, interview data is also assessed to determine whether a relationship existed between the two. By comparing both streams of data, with respect to traditional interview data, utilizing the audiovisual diary data provides evidence of a wider range of analysis. This multimodal dimension to research gathering allows for more significant understanding of student experiences.

Audiovisual data has specific features that separate it significantly from other approaches of collecting data. As such, the value of the video ethnographic method of data gathering can be summarized under a number of different characteristics: 1) its capacity to produce quantitative results that can later be accessed under a statistical evaluation. For example, even the smallest segments of student footage produced several observations about the frequency and duration of

certain activities. This information was then implemented into a frequency table for a more wide-ranging analysis. 2) A preservation of records that can be continually reevaluated. For instance, reexamination and reconsideration of the students' audiovisual data was immensely valuable. Recombining through the footage allowed for new insights that were not previously considered under the initial evaluation. Under other approaches, such as a traditional ethnography, this reassessment process would be impossible. 3) Audiovisuals deliver a microanalysis that may accentuate a nuanced interpretation of the subject's expressions, mood, body language and so on. This type of sensory evaluation would be unobserved in more traditional qualitative approaches. And 4) a The student audiovisual research portrayals consistently connect video ethnographic analysis that in turn allows for a multimodal dissemination of research and alternative prospects for communicating sociology to the general public.

The public sociological angle to this research, ideally, enhances the effectiveness of current efforts to determine students' success in school and society. There are three primary purposes by which the audiovisual findings presented here are useful towards communicating sociology: (a) to display findings in a multimodal manner, in order to attract the widest audience possible, (b) to bridge the obstacles between the general public and sociology; the method can effectively connect the disciplines accumulated knowledge by helping lay people understand significant social problems in our society, and (c) to increase the relevancy of public sociology. Audiovisual data naturally offers graphical characteristics that are of great appeal to public sociology. Video ethnography allows sociologists to reach the general public more successfully than other methodological approaches largely because of the easily understand value of audiovisual portrayals (Shrum and Castle, 2014) To that end, the following section discusses the potential constraints of video ethnographic research.

Despite the significance of video ethnography, it is like all other methods, limited. One limitation of video ethnographic analysis is, of course, access. That is, some individuals might feel uncomfortable being filmed and some locations might be uncomfortable allowing video recordings at their establishment. To be precise, video ethnography includes and excludes some features; if one cannot gain access, audiovisual data cannot be collected. Other potential drawbacks are that collecting, reviewing, and analyzing audiovisual data can be time consuming. Along similar lines, collecting audiovisuals leads to sizeable storage of data, which might be overwhelming if not managed properly. Another challenge is that the “richness” of audiovisual data carries with it a concern of “sensory overload” (Snell, 2011; pg. 253). While on this surface this might not seem like a setback but since audiovisual data involves a lot of complex imagery, even within a few seconds of footage, describing all of the detail in a textual manuscript poses a unique challenge.

The findings are based primarily on analysis and observations of audiovisual diary data, and are supported by audiovisually recorded interview sessions. Findings, for this article, are discussed in two parts, which correspond with the major themes emerging from the data. The audiovisuals in the first theme focused on students’ and experiences of studying behaviors, while preparing for everyday coursework and examinations. For the theme, a description of (a) the type of data collected and how the students collected it, (b) how often the students collected the data, and (c) how the data was analyzed was provided. It is determined, that many students choose to study in groups, which is a less effective approach for exam preparation than studying alone, but a more effective approach for the social collaboration that is college.

The second theme focused on how audiovisual interview data is utilized to determine learning and potential career success for undergraduate students while in school. While the

audiovisual diary observations contributed to the final interview questionnaire, the data for this theme primarily focused on the interview sessions. Together with this interview data, the students' diary footage portrays a selection of students utilizing resources to advance their careers after university. In the interviews, the students described a variety of positive attributes of university career preparation. This theme established that the student perceptions of career preparation are positive and many opportunities for success after graduation are available within the university.

The third theme established that a student's priorities to either engage in social or careerist orientations might change as their academic lives develop. For this theme the combination of both diary observations and audiovisually recorded interviews are utilized. The combination of the two data sources allowed for: (a) identification of student perceptions toward university career preparations, (b) identification of student academic experiences, (c) a systematic collection of student behavior across audiovisual data sets, and (d) a multimodal approach to analyze social phenomena (e.g. university happenings).

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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINAL CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this project is to observe perceptions and experiences of university students through a video ethnographic lens. To determine the value of this methodology, a student audiovisual data case study is analyzed and assessed. Further research is conducted, through semi-structured face-to-face video recorded interviews; these interviews are administered, with the students, at the conclusion of the video diary collections.

A promising potential research approach is presented here, operating under an angle of interpretive sociology. This section reviews, evaluates, and discusses (in light of the applicable literature) the findings of the research. This section also outlines the implications of using this methodological approach and illustrates its potential for public sociology, by identifying issues in and challenges to setting standards of evidence for sociological researchers in video ethnography. The section concludes with questions for supplementary research.

The comprehensive video ethnographic framework design in this study offers an alternative and innovative approach to examine the claims made in extant literature suggesting that student life is noticeably anti-intellectual (Arum and Roksa, 2011). Arum and Roksa supply critical evidence of not just limited learning but limited effort by undergraduate students on college campuses today. While their contributions are significant, the video ethnographic experience provided here, allows the students to participate in their own research gathering, which consequently allows a deeper understanding of student behavior.

One of the most purposeful applications of audiovisual data is in its ability to catalog on-going events in a very in-depth way that preserves its sequential organization (Knoblauch and Schnettler, 2012). Audiovisual data requires sequential features than need to be interpreted. As such, the recordings can be repeated which enables close analyses of students' behaviors and



actions, moment-by-moment. By using this novel approach to research, the exchange of the methodological process offered, addresses the vexed question between sociological research and public research dissemination.

All eight of the students portray studying practices in their diaries, to some degree, which are documented and then followed-up with an interview. Both data sources are used to identify portrayals of individual student routines and/or portrayals of routines of multiple students in certain situations. As patterns develop, the audiovisuals were utilized to develop applicable themes aiming for an observation of student learning behaviors.

As stated, the students in this study collected the data themselves and then it was delegated over to myself for analysis. As reported in the Chapter 2 article entitled, “*Audiovisual Data Management and Coding: An Analysis to Advance Sociological Research*” the practices by which to analyze are meticulous; as such, assembling and reviewing audiovisual data is a lengthy process. Regardless, this presented data is useful as a springboard discussion into the academic standards we place onto student learning and career requirements. While the students in the data did naturally engage in a variety of social activities – friends, tailgating, exercising, parties, drinking – they also were keenly interesting in learning and advancing their careers.

On one hand, this study finds many positive instances of student academic and knowledge gathering data, which is in opposition to many sociological observers of undergraduate educational institutions. That is, audiovisual analysis of campus-wide and individual student behavior can be of direct and immediate value for potential research designs. On the other hand, while findings demonstrate students do spend sufficient time studying, one question remains to be discussed: to what degree does the evidence in the audiovisuals contribute to university support academic engagement and student learning?

Albeit in a limited respect, the collected and analyzed audiovisual data portray conflicting results from past quantitative social science evaluations (Arum and Roksa, 2011; Babcock and Marks, 2011; Bok, 2005; Grigsby, 2009; Brint, Cantwell, & Saxena, 2011) and past ethnographical evaluations (London, 1978; Katchadourian and Boli, 1985; Moffatt, 1989; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; Astin, 1993; Kuh Hu and Vesper, 2000; Nathan, 2005). It is important to recognize that video ethnography is useful as a complementary method on the extant literature; it provides one possible, alternative, approach toward identifying university happenings.

While Chapter 3, “*Visionary Sociology in Action: Building an Integrated Self*”, lays the foundation for the acknowledgement of interpersonal social networks and peer relationships, Chapter 4, “*Visionary Sociology in Action: Acquiring Information.*” suggests that academic gains are of equal importance. Indeed, it may be reasonable to conclude that making academic progress would be short-lived if the students did not reasonably develop their social skills and networks while on campuses. In that sense, the two (academic and social development) intertwine while building upon and off each other. It is also possible that students shift orientations during their academic careers. That is, the primary focus during the first couple years of school is social and, nearer to graduation, shifts towards a more academic/careerist paradigm.

Thus, while education researchers acknowledge an “unattractive” representation of academic life today, these narratives and statistics might be overstated. For example, Arum and Roksa (2011) based their exploration on a single test of critical thinking given in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> year of college – half of the students in the sample made significant improvements, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years, while the other half did not. With this noted, revealing the prosperity of the

students social lives who did and did not succeed on the test could provide thought-provoking support into the importance of the social aspect of college.

Regardless of whether the university academic portrayals here are legitimate or not, audiovisual data collection does serve the important, potential long-term commitment of facilitating research and sociological understanding to the general public (i.e., improving communication between the academy and the lay populace). Specifically, a comprehensive data management procedure, as detailed in Chapter 2, *“Audiovisual Data Management and Coding: An Analysis to Advance Sociological Research,”* makes it easier for potential sociologists to manage video ethnographic data and complete public sociology projects. As noted, the audiovisual data is collected and reviewed under various extents. Individually, this can potentially be a time-consuming assignment, and a more concise research protocol would be beneficial. A recommendation from this research may suggest the need for a more systematic, further established procedure of audiovisual data analysis.

Recognizing that academics, graduate students, and professor’s face of variety of career issues, including multiple expectations of academic accomplishment, the challenge of undertaking research through audiovisual initiatives needs to be addressed (Shrum and Castle, 2014). While it is unlikely that our university standards and the traditional career imperatives (teaching and publication), which follow them will change structurally, training the future generations of sociologists in a single graduate seminar in video ethnography is a valuable step into the right direction. This graduate seminar is a significant answer to the problem of public sociology (Shrum and Castle, 2014).

In order to advance the methodological tool further, a professional and departmental legitimated application of this research mechanism is required. And although audiovisual data is

gaining relevance for qualitative studies, the development of adequate and convenient methods remains in its initial phase (Knoblauch and Schnettler, 2012). The value of video ethnography, as demonstrated here, is the combined result of a valid and representative objective for a given purposes, answering particular research questions, and the sound process of going from visual observations to a reasoned and substantiated set of interpretations. With the above recognized, this article provides more momentum towards legitimatizing the method across the sociological discipline.

If sociology wishes to progress the method toward a more robust framework we need to address several key questions: Does film have the potential to be seen in the same way we see scholarly resources such as books or journal articles? Can video ethnography disseminate research to both the general public and professional audiences, while assisting in an understanding of significant social problems? What opportunities for the public to learn from social scientific research are made possible by communicating knowledge through audiovisual data?

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## **THE VITA**

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