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Jose Marichal

California Lutheran University, [jfmarichal@gmail.com](mailto:jfmarichal@gmail.com)

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# Diversity for What?: The Paradox of University Diversity and the New Civic Rationale

## **Abstract**

This article examines the underlying logic behind what I call the new civic rationale for university diversity. I draw on a diverse literature to explore the varying ways in which diversity could be connected to democratic participation. I argue that the prevailing conception of diversity, what I call the contact thesis is inadequate preparation for democratic participation in a diverse society because it does not challenge the “underlying liberal architecture” that shapes both the practice and scholarship of college diversity. I make the case for emphasizing a participatory culture that favors multiple and intersectional identities over fixed identities, public work over understanding, and participatory democracy over pluralist democracy. The challenge for colleges and universities in the coming years is to design curriculum and pedagogy that emphasizes diversity as a fluid, adaptable and emerging phenomenon while simultaneously grounding it within fixed ethnic and cultural identities.

## **Keywords**

diversity, civic engagement, race

## ***Diversity for What? The Paradox of University Diversity and the New Civic Rationale***

This article examines the underlying logic behind what I call the *new civic rationale* for university diversity. I draw on a diverse literature to explore the varying ways in which diversity could be connected to democratic participation. I argue that the prevailing conception of diversity, what I call the *contact thesis* is inadequate preparation for democratic participation in a diverse society because it does not challenge the “underlying liberal architecture” that shapes both the practice and scholarship of college diversity. I make the case for emphasizing a *participatory culture* that favors multiple and intersectional identities over fixed identities, public work over dialogue, and participatory democracy over pluralist democracy. The challenge for colleges and universities in the coming years is to design curriculum and pedagogy that emphasizes diversity as a fluid, adaptable and emerging phenomenon while simultaneously grounding it within fixed ethnic and cultural identities.

### **The Paradox of Diversity and Civic Engagement**

The five-decade journey of university diversity policy in the United States has taken a number of rhetorical turns. During its onset in the 1960’s, the rationale for greater, primarily race-based, access to higher education had an explicit political component in that it called for rectifying past race-based inequalities (Skrenty 2002). However, a mixture of pragmatic political and legal calculation and changing attitudes towards the benefits of multiculturalism led to a shift in the diversity rationale away from an overtly political rationale to one that favors the educational benefits of diversity (Guinier 2003, Moses and Chang 2006, Hurtado 2006).

This rhetorical shift has been substantiated by scholarship. An overwhelming body of evidence points to the educational benefits to diversity in higher education. In this essay, I refer to diversity as the broad set of university policies aimed at providing exposure to otherness. Such policies include, but are not limited to, admissions, faculty/staff recruitment, and curricular/co-curricular reforms. Exposure to diversity serves to enhance cognitive complexity among those exposed to “diverse courses” (Antonio et. al. 2004), increase levels of empathy and openness to other views (Astin 1993), and increase satisfaction with college (Tanaka

1996), and provide students with the *cultural competency* needed to function in a diverse workforce (Carnevale 1999).

However the legal arguments presented in the 2003 Michigan affirmative action cases (*Gratz vs. Bollinger* (02-516) 539 U.S. 244 (2003); *Grutter vs. Bollinger* (02-241) 539 U.S. 306) reintroduced a political element to the diversity rationale. A *new civic rationale* for diversity emerged from these cases that emphasized relationship between exposure to diversity in college and democratic health as one of the compelling governmental interests that legitimates the use of preferential admissions policies. Justice O'Connor's rationale in her *Grutter* opinion directly linked the importance of educating citizens in an increasingly diverse society as the "compelling governmental interest" needed to justify race based remedies (Guinier 2003).

This *new civic rationale* is underscored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities statement on diversity -- one that is typical of college and university statements on diversity. Their statement calls on universities to "deploy diversity as an educational asset for all students, and prepare future graduates for socially responsible engagement in a diverse democracy and interdependent world" (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2006).

Universities often speak of *diversity* and *civic engagement* almost interchangeably. Universities, so the familiar trope goes, must create "diverse learning environments" for the challenges facing an increasingly multicultural society. Conversely, institutional efforts to promote a more robust civic sphere must take the nation's changing demographics into account.

The rhetorical interdependence between these two efforts, however, is seldom reflected in campus practice. As Musil (2005) observes, the explosion of civic engagement initiatives on college campuses has occurred without a serious discussion of how diversity and otherness relate to civics education. In her view, "the language of diversity has been decoupled from the language of civic engagement" at college and universities (18).

This decoupling is troublesome for a few reasons. First, although diversity and civic engagement efforts at colleges and universities are though to compliment each other, both terms elude precise definition. Seldom are these phrases clearly defined in the public sphere. The flexibility of the term *diversity* allows both proponents and opponents of flexible admissions policies to claim support for a broader, popular principle of inclusiveness in a liberal democratic society. Similarly, the looseness of the term *civic engagement* allows broad-based adherence to

the received wisdom that democratic societies require knowledgeable and active citizens. The result is that we have little understanding of how diversity should be deployed to enhance civic engagement. Nor do we understand how civic engagement efforts on college campuses should incorporate diversity to optimize their effectiveness.

From a scholarly perspective, the purported link between diversity and civic engagement is tenuous at best. The preponderance of the social science literature suggests that, there is an inverse relationship between diversity and the social trust necessary to sustain civic engagement (Saguaro Seminar 2001, Alessina and La Ferrara 2005, Costa and Kahn 2004).

This article examines the underlying logic behind the *new civic rationale* for university diversity. I draw on a diverse literature to explore the varying ways in which diversity could be connected to democratic participation. I argue that the prevailing conception of diversity as it relates to civic engagement is inadequate preparation for democratic participation in a diverse society because it does not challenge the “underlying liberal architecture” that shapes both the practice and scholarship of college diversity. Diversity, as it is practiced on many college campuses, emphasizes what I call *menagerie diversity* or an examination of difference that stresses appreciation and tolerance over the messy, collaborative and potentially controversial work of democratic citizenship.

To address this quandary requires a reconsideration of diversity practice in ways consistent with complex adaptive systems and an emerging participatory culture. I make the case for emphasizing a *participatory culture* that favors multiple and intersectional identities over fixed identities, public work over dialogue and participatory democracy over pluralist democracy. The challenge for colleges and universities in the coming years is to design curriculum and pedagogy that emphasizes diversity as a fluid, adaptable and emerging phenomenon while simultaneously grounding it within fixed ethnic and cultural identities.

This paper will proceed in five stages. First, I will review the literature connecting diversity to civic engagement. Second, I will offer a critique of this literature, emphasizing the lack of a coherent theory for how diversity and civic engagement are linked. Next I review alternative mechanisms for linking the two concepts: a thin-tie rationale and a strong-tie rationale. I conclude by arguing for an emphasis on a participatory culture that emphasizes using otherness to enhance public work through re-articulation rather than using otherness solely to enhance educational development.

### **Diversity and Civic Engagement: The Contact Thesis**

While the connection between diversity and education has always existed, modern day efforts to diversify college campuses emerged as part of the larger drive to provide access to underrepresented minority groups. Skrenty (2002) notes that initial diversity programs in the 1960's were implemented as a selective institutional response to the urban crisis of that decade. The emphasis for universities was to play a role in remedying past instances of discrimination by taking affirmative measures to integrate African-Americans and other underrepresented groups into mainstream society. These early initiatives resulted in student protests in the late 1960's that further ingrained the diversity rationale as explicitly political. In this particular instance, political meant proclaiming common cause with the anti-colonial movements at home and throughout the world.

By the 1970's the educational rationale was gaining traction as a method for legally and politically justifying the practice of preferential admissions for under-represented minorities. Amicus briefs in support of *diversity*, as opposed to affirmative action, appeared as early as the 1978 *Bakke vs. California* case (Skrenty 2002). This strand of thought isolated racial and ethnic identity from the larger society in which it exists and upheld these characteristics as valuable to the university learning environment in and of themselves.

The "educational turn" in the diversity rationale was instrumental in the legal defense of preferential admissions policies. Justice Powell's famous "plus factor" opinion in the *Bakke* case clung to the notion that using race-based admissions criterion to craft a diverse university class served as a compelling state interest test because it enhanced the learning environment. He rejected more explicit "societal discrimination" arguments as legitimate grounds for preferential policies. Noting the discrimination suffered by white ethnics in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Powell noted the difficulties in difficulty in adjudicating between competing group claims for college access (Skrenty 2002).

An "educational benefits industry" emerged in the 1990's in response to the challenge to affirmative-action from the 1995 *Hopwood vs. Texas* fifth federal circuit court of appeal's decision that challenged the constitutionality of the University's of Texas admissions plan. The prospect that this decision could be upheld by the Supreme Court fueled an increase in scholarship designed to illustrate the educational benefits of diversity (Astin, 1993; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang, 1999; Gurin, 1999; Milem & Hakuta, 2000).

As a result of legal challenges to affirmative-action, much of the scholarship in the last decade emphasized the link between diversity and

educational outcomes. What has emerged is what Allport (1954) called a *contact thesis* that connects diversity to educational excellence through exposure to otherness. While the literature has largely moved beyond naïve “add diversity and stir” perspectives (Smith et. al. 1997, Hutado 1999), the core belief remains that as students come in contact with individuals from diverse backgrounds, they will develop greater empathy and understanding of the views of others. In the parlance of social science, students will be less likely to commit ecological fallacies about individuals from different racial and ethnic groups as they come into contact with a greater and greater number of them.

Hence, the task of universities from this perspective is to increase the quality and quantity of contact with diverse students. As a result, recent work has emphasized fomenting institutional transformation to facilitate the quantity and quality of inter-group contact (Smith et. al 1997, 2006). Duster (1992) lays out a three stage model for diversity whereby institutions move from simply admitting diverse students in the first stage (structural diversity), to a second stage of reconciling dissonance, to a final, transformative stage in which the individual student reflects on and is able to accept diversity as a societal positive. Much of the current foundation and scholarly emphasis has been on bringing about this third stage by linking diversity to the culture of institutional assessment (Smith 2004).

### **The New Civic Rationale**

The *new civic rationale* introduced in the Graatz and Grutter cases poses challenge to diversity scholars. Does the contact thesis provide civic benefits in the same way that it provides educational benefits? Is learning about and being tolerant towards out-groups provide the citizenship benefits espoused in university mission statements. Answering this question requires exploring the link between diversity and civic engagement.

Extending the contact thesis to civic engagement leads to an emphasis on inter-group trust bonds formed through extended contact. These trust bonds are essential to the development of the social capital needed for meaningful democratic participation (Putnam 1995, 2000). Thus the new civic rationale suggests that as students move through their college career and gain more quality exposure to diversity experiences, they will form stronger cross-cultural trust bonds and will become more democratically competent and hence more civically engaged (Gurin 1999). This is because universities are uniquely suited to provide contexts where

persons from diverse backgrounds can engage in equal-status interactions, something Allport (1954) noted was essential for positive contact to occur.

Indeed, Gurin (1999) found students at the University of Michigan were more likely to have close friendships outside of their reference group at the end of four years than at the start of their college experience. From findings of this nature, the presumption is that the development of cross-cultural social friendship networks will translate into Aristotelian political friendships. Hence, at least one aspect of the new civic rationale is explicitly communitarian: “the very act of experiencing diversity during college helps students develop the habits of the mind and heart that enlarge their capacity for doing so after college” (Umbach and Kuh, 2006).

Another related strand supporting the new civic rationale is the leveraging of pre-existing in-group, or strong-ties (Krackhardt 1992). Perhaps the most-cited instance of this strand of scholarship is Bok and Bowen’s (1998) highly influential study, *The Shape of the River*. In this work, the authors found increased civic-participation on the part of students of color admitted to elite, mostly Ivy-league, universities when compared to their white counterparts. What was most notable for the authors was that students of color admitted to these elite institutions were more likely to return to their neighborhoods (places in the greatest need of civic leadership) and become community leaders.

### **The Problem with the New Civic Rationale**

The trouble with extending the contact thesis to the new civic rationale is that the link between engagement with otherness and the development of civic habits is tenuous at best. It is not entirely obvious that prolonged inter-group contact necessarily leads to civic and political engagement. Inter-group contact through student clubs or through athletic teams may not necessarily provide strong training in the messy business of democratic negotiation and deliberation. In fact cross-cultural friendship networks may inhibit political skill development. Antonio (2001) found that students with racially homogeneous friendship networks exhibited greater leadership abilities than students with heterogeneous networks.

It is altogether possible that inter-group contact has a more significant impact on attitudes toward diversity than it does on *diversity praxis*, or sustained engagement with diversity. We have undoubtedly become significantly more tolerant as a nation in the last four decades. Younger Americans, bred in the era of multicultural education, have much more tolerant attitudes than their parents and grandparents on a number of social issues (Keeter et. al. 2002, Saguaro Seminar 2001). Similarly as a

society, we appear to be more tolerant towards out-groups. The 2001 Social Capital Benchmark Survey found that 22% of Whites and 18% of Hispanics expressed any opposition to a close relative of their marrying an African-American. This reflects a significant decline from just three decades earlier (Saguaro Seminar 2001).

However, when it comes to *diversity praxis*, the story is not as sanguine. Residential segregation patterns across the United States have changed incrementally since the 1960's (Adelman 2005). According to Gary Orfield (1999, 2001) the public schools system in the United-States is currently in a pattern of re-segregation as courts vacate desegregation orders in school systems throughout the country.

Recent scholarship suggests that introducing racial and ethnic diversity into a neighborhood has deleterious effects on trust bonds. The Social Capital Benchmark survey found that persons living in close proximity to diversity were less trusting of others, more personally isolated, had lower levels of political efficacy, and had fewer acquaintances across class lines (Saguaro Seminar 2001). After reviewing the literature on diversity, Costa and Kahn (2004) suggest that "all of these studies have the same punch line: heterogeneity reduces civic engagement. In more-diverse communities, people participate less as measured by how they allocate their time, their money, their voting and their willingness to take risks to help others" (104).

Despite the rhetoric and good intentions, colleges and universities are not immune to the challenges of diversity praxis. Maramos and Sacerdote (2006) found in their study of social networks at a small-liberal arts college in the Northeast that race was greater determinant of social interaction than common interests, majors, or family background. Rothman et. al. (2003) suggest that student's exposure to greater levels of racial and ethnic diversity on their campus was negatively associated with respondent satisfaction with the university experience, assessment of educational quality, and perceived peer work effort.

This finding is nothing new to diversity scholars. As Chang (2002) points out:

current research consistently shows that enrolling underrepresented students of color will succeed in limited ways and, at worst, exacerbate inter-group tension and conflict if those institutions are not prepared to educate them successfully or have not identified and removed hostile conditions that impede education (131).

However knowing the challenges to realizing civic benefits from diversity does not simplify the task. Creating strong inter-group ties is a tougher task than exposing students to diversity. If the goal of diversity is mere exposure to difference, then diversity becomes detached from the political, social and economic realities that underlie systems of oppression.

Benn-Michaels (2007) takes university diversity efforts to task for focusing on cultural difference at the expense of highlighting more pressing, and politically problematic, class-based inequalities. His core argument is that diversity's embrace of cultural difference undermines claims for remedying income inequality by treating poverty as culture. The emphasis for political action is thus put upon recognizing the cultural value of "the poor" rather than working to better their condition. Thus, Benn-Michaels views current diversity efforts as little more than "a kind of collective bribe rich people pay themselves for ignoring economic inequality" (2007, 86).

Similarly, Fraser (2000) challenges an identity-politics based approach to diversity. She suggests that identity politics as currently practiced creates a "problem of displacement" by elevating cultural claims of, what Taylor (1997) calls *mis-recognition*, or the problem of not being seen by others in society as one wishes to be seen because of group stereotypes (negative portrayals of Latinos in films as an example), over claims of material or resource inequality. This problem of displacement is evident in the way universities do diversity, focusing mainly on addressing mis-recognition through the creating of cultural centers or by expanding course offerings to address cultural stigma. What receives less attention, Fraser would argue, is a discussion of how cultural mis-recognition is connected to material and structural inequality.

This emphasis on diversity as cultural recognition, detached from political and social systems of oppression, reinforces what I call *menagerie diversity* that focuses on "appreciating" and "understanding" diversity through structured contact and engagement with otherness within the safe confines of a college campus. Indeed a conception of diversity based solely on cultural recognition and absent a thorough analysis of the material conditions from which culture is produced is of limited civic value.

Benn-Michaels is correct that a strict identity politics view of diversity strengthens the case for increased tolerance in society but probably does little to get students to confront structural inequality. However, Benn-Michaels critique of cultural diversity pits identity politics against the politics of resource distribution. Rather than see them in

opposition, we should be more intentional in thinking about how engaging with otherness helps civil society address trenchant social issues like income inequality. We must be more intentional in our efforts to build in the cross-cultural *diversity praxis* students need to produce optimal common good solutions rather than creating simplistic dualisms between cultural and economic strands of multiculturalism.

A true realization of the new civic rationale as it relates to diversity requires a re-thinking of the diversity's purpose in public higher education. Guinier (2003) makes a compelling argument against a diversity rationale grounded in notions of what she calls *contest mobility*. Guinier claims that current admissions practices admit a handful of students-of-color while legitimating a flawed system that apportions college access based on flawed neo-liberal assumptions about individual merit (*contest mobility*). The practice of using diversity as a plus-factor treats diversity as an "add-on" to the prevailing system of contest mobility (what she calls *structured mobility*).

Guinier (2003) argues that the process of designing an admissions class based on modified notions of contest mobility (i.e. structured mobility) undermines notions of civic engagement because it fails to produce a "public-minded set of winners." Those admitted based on "skinny" notions of merit reinforce the belief that their admission is due to innate qualities and not due to social privilege. As a result, graduates of elite colleges feel less of an obligation to work in the public interest.

Macedo (2003, 14-16) takes this argument a step further by arguing that multiculturalism as a principle is often hostile to civic education. Macedo challenges Young's (1990) notion of *cultural pluralism*, where institutions actively seek to encourage pluralistic difference. Macedo notes that an emphasis on maintaining cultural distinctiveness stymies efforts to create the underlying civic culture that supports the peaceful and tolerant embodiment of difference multiculturalists seek.

Instead, Macedo (2003) calls for a *civic liberalism* that seeks to preserve individual freedoms while providing citizens with the shared civic framework needed to maintain a vibrant democratic society. Macedo (2003, 145), for instance, highlights the importance of compulsory public education in creating a shared set of national values. He calls for the development of a civil society that encourages a "liberal public reasonableness" over one in which members of civil society have no responsibility to seek common good solutions.

### Theorizing the New Civic Rationale

As with Benn-Michael's critique of diversity, a key problem with Macedo's (2003) argument is his dualistic positioning of multiculturalism as opposed to civic education. To Macedo, the multicultural project in general, is an impediment rather than an aid to the formation of effective citizens in a democratic society. The extent to which this viewpoint is prevalent seriously impacts the range of arguments diversity advocates can make in support of their policy aims. It is more instructive, however, to think about how an emphasis on cultural distinctiveness can contribute to civic health rather than how to subjugate it to achieve civic ends.

The lack of development of a *civic rationale* for diversity is understandable in today's political climate. The educational rationale for diversity is well established in the research literature but, more importantly, it is a more digestible rationale for instituting controversial admissions policies. Additionally, being more tolerant and better able to work with diversity populations is entirely consistent with the underlying liberal architecture of American society. An educational rationale for diversity does not ask questions regarding the fundamental structure of the polity. An emphasis on personal cognitive development through exposure to diversity might make individual better able to navigate the global marketplace or to work for a multi-national corporation, but it does not necessarily make them a better citizen.

A number of higher education scholars have been troubled by the over-emphasis on an educational rationale in the past few years, noting that it subverts transformational political and social appeals (Chang 2002, Guinier 2003, Bell 2003, Benn-Michaels 2007, Wise 2005). Lost in the rhetoric of moral and cognitive development, these scholars argue, are the larger racial, gender, sex, and class based inequities. Chang (2002) critiques the educational rationale, noting that scholarship and legal arguments have been focused on a *discourse of preservation* of current affirmative-action policies and calls on scholars and practitioners to construct a *discourse of transformation* that uses diversity as a vehicle to further the good society.

But what should this discourse of transformation look like? As any undergraduate political science major knows, the good society is a contested concept. University administrators are wary of politicizing diversity by connecting its practice to a particular social agenda. It is more politically expedient to use vague language about global citizenship that the majority of the public finds innocuous. However, without some clarity as to what type of civic culture diversity strategies should be aimed

at enhancing, diversity efforts run the risk of either being completely ineffective in preparing citizens for an increasingly complex world or legitimating existing structures of inequality. The rest of this article addresses this question of how the *civic* in the new civic rationale should be defined. I explore three options: a thin-tie notion of the civic engagement, a strong-tie notion of civic engagement, and what I call a thick-tie notion of the civic engagement.

### **Option A: Thin-Tie Rationale**

One approach to linking diversity to civic engagement is to tie our notions of the civic to cosmopolitan notions of global citizenship. Globalization theorists suggest that the process of globalization “lifts out” social relationships from local contexts of interaction and compels their restructuring across time and space (Giddens 1990). As such, citizens are subjected to a de-territorialized network of global flows of money, ideas, images, technologies and people (Appaduri 1996).

Citizenship in this global world is largely a process of managing a “culture of endless possibilities.” Diversity practice would then be oriented towards training students to navigate this de-territorialized, de-contextualized world in which the search for identity becomes “the fundamental source of social meaning” (Castells 1998, 223). From this perspective, the citizen is not bound by the strong-ties of nation or tribe, but rather is obligated to be a citizen of the world. Nussbaum (1997) lays out three values that liberal education should espouse in an increasingly diversity society. They are: (a) the ability to conduct critical self-examination; (b) the ability to participate as a citizen of the world; and (c) the ability to develop narrative imagination.

The new civic rationale from this perspective is not to strengthen national or local identities, but rather it is to regard all humans as worthy of concern and attention. As Nussbaum argues:

We do not fully respect the humanity of our fellow citizens—or cultivate our own—if we do not wish to learn about them, to understand their history, to appreciate the differences between their lives and ours” (1997, 295).

From the institutional perspective, the objective should be to introduce students to as wide an array of global experiences as possible. Anderson (2006) notes that this global engagement is possible because

advances in micro-processing technology makes possible a “long tail” or power curve of almost unlimited consumer choices, as opposed to a “bell curve” that restricts choice to a handful of issues. Applied to politics, individuals in a “long tail” society have the ability to create weak-tie communities with people half-way across the globe to help address small-scale, local issues.

Benkler (2006) argues that the emergence of social networking websites that facilitate transactions between groups reduces transaction costs associated with collaboration and hence reduces the need to develop strong trust bonds to collaborate. Benkler (2006) argues that information has become radically decentralized because of the advent of cheap high speed processors, the proliferation of high-speed internet access, and the explosion of social networking sites (often referred to as Web 2.0). This decentralization creates a “networked information economy” that allows people to quickly seek out each other based on shared interests and collaborative. Examples of this are the communities that collaborate on Wikipedia entries, a social networking encyclopedia.

A thin-tie approach to the civic-education is appealing because it exposes students to the world in its entirety, both the broad range of injustices in the world and the varying perspectives on the nature of being. A global citizen approach forces students to confront essential truths about their role in human suffering and the legitimacy of their own identity constructs and value systems.

### *The Problem with a Thin Tie Rationale*

This is an attractive, but problematic, framing of the new civic rationale for diversity. Many globalization scholars (Giddens 1990, Castells 1998) posit a weakening of the nation state as they become increasingly unable to control this unadulterated flow of ideas, images and information. Castells (1998) suggests that the identity of citizens in nation states become less connected to nationalism and develop instead as a response to globalization.

Nationalist identities however have proven to be more resilient than globalization theorists presumed in the 1990’s. Recent efforts by the Chinese government to control the flow of content through the Web suggest that the state is more powerful in controlling global flows than globalization theorists presume.

The fundamental problem with a thin-tie approach is that the culture of endless possibilities does not allow communities of interest to form the strong-ties required to address issues pertaining to the common good. Despite Benkler’s (2006) optimism regarding the power of web-

based social networking to lower transaction costs and facilitate collaboration, a global-citizen approach to diversity does not comport with lived reality for the five-sixths of the world's population that is not "on-line." For the time being, there are more internet connections in London than in all of Africa.

The reality is that most people, even in the Internet age, derive meaning from place. Place, culture and tradition are key components of individual identity systems for most people in the world and must be reconciled even in liberal democratic societies (Kymlica 1995). For most, ethnic, national or religious identity provides a sense of a sense of differentiation and solidarity that is not replaceable by a global citizen identity and is something that needs to be accounted for in the public sphere (Young 1990).

### **Option B: Strong-tie Rationale**

Another approach to defining the *new civic rationale* is to work to preserve existing social and cultural identities. A strong-tie rationale stresses boundary maintenance based on the maxim that "good fences make good neighbors" (Young 1990). Recent scholarship has linked the formation of strong in-group ties to the ability to work cross culturally to address common problems (Cashin 2004). Garcia-Bedolla (2005) found that Latinos with a strong sense of ethnic identity were more likely to be politically active than Latinos who did not have this strong sense of in-group affinity. A strong ethnic self-concept is also associated with higher levels of self esteem (Phinney et. al 1997) and immigrant cultural adaptation (Phinney et. al. 2001).

From this perspective, diversity should serve civic engagement by providing opportunities to strengthen racial or ethnic ties. This approach to diversity takes culture seriously and stresses the importance of cultural maintenance. Campus efforts from a strong-tie perspective would work to reinforce the unique cultural and historical attributes of core identity groups. This project would be determined by the racial and ethnic mix in a local context, but would largely track what Hollinger (2006) referred to as the *ethno-racial pentagram* (African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, Native-Americans and White Anglos). The creation of ethnic studies departments and the construction of monuments and cultural centers serve as the most visible example of using institutional resources to preserve cultural identity.

The role of the citizen in a strong-tie framing of the new civic rationale for diversity is to actively engage in strengthening one's community. Bok and Bowen's (1998) finding that African-American

students admitted to elite universities under affirmative action returned to their communities to serve as civic leaders is a prime example of a strong tie approach to diversity.

A second role is to be an advocate for one's group interests. A strong-tie perspective fits with Young's (1990) notion of "differentiated citizenship" in which group differences are recognized and part of the deliberation and decision-making processes in a democratic society. Citizenship in a strong-tie framing of the new civic rationale for diversity requires individuals, particularly from under-represented racial and ethnic groups, to serve as political advocates for their community's interests.

### *The Problem with a Strong-Tie Rationale*

The drawback to a strong-tie new civic rationale is that, if not carefully managed, strong in-group ties can create a resistance to change and innovation. Allen (1977) suggests that strong-ties are built on the concept of *propinquity*, or shared likeness. The scholarship on strong-ties suggests that shared social experiences are indeed an effective means of forging solidarity.

However, propinquity can also lead to a tendency to keep out innovation. Granovetter's (1983) seminar work in social networks finds that while strong-ties are necessary for social action, weak-ties provide avenues for new information. Social network theorists find that hierarchies can lead to rigid bureaucratization without effective mechanisms for bringing new information into the organization. The same dynamic holds true for societies. The resistance on the part of some Americans to immigration by persons from developing nations to the United States and Europe has a basis in strong-tie national identity. However, immigrants provide a source of dynamism, new ideas and access to new transnational networks of customers and suppliers that promote economic development (Light and Gold 2000).

Aside from the benefits to innovation, a thick-tie perspective is also morally problematic. Kant's (2000) categorical imperative forces us to confront the ethics of treating those in your in-group with more care than those not in your in-group. We might have a moral justification to develop strong ties, but does that justification extend to treating the human dignity claims of others with less importance if they are not part of our in-group?

### **Option C: Participatory Culture**

The great challenge for connecting diversity to a broader new civic rationale is balancing the comfort, meaning-making and basis for action of

strong-ties and the dynamism, innovation and moral rectitude of weak-ties. Both approaches by themselves are problematic for civic engagement. By itself, a culture of endless possibilities, as it currently stands, does not have the strong ties necessary to sustain civic action. A new civic rationale based primarily on strong-ties does not have the mechanisms to protect essential liberties or to produce the innovation needed to confront pressing social problems.

Put another way, without the cultural mooring brought about by strong ties, individuals cannot develop the transformational identities sought by diversity scholars. A thin-tie framing of the new civic rationale runs the risk of producing aimless citizens who drift from cause to cause, product to product, in the search for fixed identity. While this view of diversity is consistent with a neo-liberal emphasis on individuality and consumption, it does not provide civic space for sustained involvement in addressing issues pertaining to the commons.

A strong-tie new civic rationale makes it difficult to develop what Castells (1998) calls *project identities* that seek transformational change on a particular social issue. Instead, strong-ties without supplementation by weak-ties can create an identity dissonance when social conditions change rapidly.

Organizational theorists find that effective companies are able to maintain a fixed structure around work responsibilities and tasks while simultaneously providing opportunities for communication and creative play (Brown and Eisenhardt 1997). From this perspective, managing diversity and channeling it in ways that produce effective civic outcomes requires developing systems and pedagogies that capture the *complexity* and interconnectedness of individual and group identity while still being *adaptive* enough to respond to changing circumstances and learn from experience (Argyris and Schon 1978).

A new civic rationale for diversity that emphasizes a *participatory culture* that leverages both strong and weak ties is best suited to link both diversity and civic engagement in effective ways. A *participatory culture* emphasizes users generating their own content over passive consumption of content.

Benkler (2006) argues that the rise of social networking has spurred a *participatory information environment* where people are encouraged to be active producers and critics of knowledge rather than just passive consumers. This participatory and decentralized environment facilitates the emergence of “nonmarket, nonproprietary, motivations and organizational forms” (Benkler 2006, 4). The motivations for collective

action in these arrangements are not based on monetary exchange, but rather on social cues.

The emphasis on participation, however, is not detached from the past. Lessig's (2004) describes the current on-line participatory era as a *remix* or *free* culture where existing elements (art, music, literature, code) are reconstituted to create a new medium. Remix, Lessig argues, is the language of contemporary youth culture.

A participatory culture has promising implications for democratic society. Fung (2004) argues that more participatory decision making in local government allows for more flexibility and "local knowledge," increased civic engagement, and more governmental responsiveness. However, these benefits accrue if participation is structured and participants are accountable to pre-set goals.

A participatory culture as it relates to diversity on college campuses emphasizes actively engaging in the development of how and when diversity is employed. It requires thinking of *diversity as taxonomy* rather than *diversity as modality*. An emphasis on *taxonomic diversity* recognizes both the multiplicity of identity and its intersectionality, unlike *modal diversity* which isolates primary, or modal, aspects of identity (race, class, gender).

Taxonomic diversity regards individual identity as part of a complex adaptive system, requiring an interchangeable set of core identities (race, gender, class, religion) and peripheral identities (student, athlete, employee) that can be drawn upon to provide useful information depending on the needs of the context. Viewing diversity as a taxonomy requires looking at identity as part of a toolkit that students become more adept at employing with practice.

Taxonomic diversity emphasizes what Bailey (1999) referred to as "identity multiplexing" or the "layering and ranking by individuals of their different identities in different arenas" (31). In the civic sphere, taxonomic diversity requires citizens to ask "which of my varying diversities can be of use in addressing a common problem?"

One dimension of taxonomic diversity is to become adept at identity multiplexing through structured discussions in diverse groups. Schoem and Hurtado (2001a, 2001b) proposed the use of facilitated, inter-group dialogues on diversity as a means for developing student's critical thinking skills and their appreciation of difference and otherness.

Discussion, however, is only one dimension of effective citizenship. Taxonomic diversity also requires citizens to participate in the creation of public work (Boyte 2004). Public work is defined as:

a sustained effort by a mix of citizens whose collective labors produce things of common and lasting civic value. Public work solves common problems and creates common things. -- It is also cooperative work by “a public,” a mix of people whose interests, backgrounds and resources may be quite different. And it is work that creates “public goods,” things of general benefit and use (Boyte 2004, 7).

Taxonomic diversity links to *public work* by aiding the polity’s ability to produce “public goods” in ways that both recognize complexity and group difference while at the same time acknowledging the need to reconstitute past ways of doing things. The relevant question with respect to public work is “how can you use aspects of your history to help in reconstituting the present?” What is it in the unique experience of a second generation Mexican American from Los Angeles that can contribute to the dialogue on health care policy? Or a fourth generation Swede from Tacoma, Washington? For that individual participant it might be ethnicity, or it might be another aspect of his/her identity. However the point is that each is engaged and aware of how his/her multiple and overlapping identities can contribute to the task at hand.

### **Conclusion: Developing Participatory Habits**

The development of a *new civic rationale* for diversity requires a more praxis-based application of diversity on college campuses. Rather than deal in sweeping assertions about diversity’s educational value, educators need to be more reflective about how cross-group and inter-group interactions play out in student’s civic lives. A critical component of the *new civic rationale* identified in this article is the ability for students to engage in peer production without others *misrecognizing* their selves and their potential civic contributions. As Taylor (1997, 6) suggests:

misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.

Misrecognition in society is harmful to individuals from discriminated minority groups because we as humans make constant

assessments of our own self worth. But it is harmful to civic life because it silences the potential contributions discriminated groups can make to collective decision-making. The ethical reality of misrecognition has led democratic societies to actively seek to address misrecognition. However, a traditionally liberal solution to the *misrecognition* problem has been to recognize our commonality, what Rawls (1993) refers to as the search for an *overlapping consensus*. The idea that we are all worth of equal dignity and thus basic rights has undergirded global efforts to create a more just social order.

The problem for a new civic rationale is that an emphasis on commonality as critical to civic health provides little justification for doing multicultural education. A civic rationale for diversity needs to theorize how a *politics of difference* contributes to civic life. As Taylor (1994) points out:

with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctiveness from everyone else. The idea is that it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity (6).

If a politics of commonality is vital to civic life, then there would appear to be little room for notions of difference and authenticity in our political culture. Indeed, in the United States, the balance is tipped towards a politics of universality. This is problematic for a *new civic rationale*. If the solution to the misrecognition problem is only achieved through a search for commonality, then Macedo (2003) is correct and teaching about cultural difference is more of a help than a hindrance to the development of a shared civic life.

A critical challenge for proponents of multicultural education is to articulate how the university as an institutional actor can promote individual *authenticity* in ways that contribute to, not distract from, a more vibrant civic life. A *new civic rationale* moves beyond the dilemma of how to construct a civic justification for a politics of difference by emphasizing how diversity can inform civic peer-production and co-creation by constructing situations where students are asked to draw from their *cultural palate* to add to a civic product. An example might be coming up with a campus master plan in an urban design course where

each student is asked to explicitly draw upon different aspects of their lived experience to contribute to the project.

Rather than prescribe a “thin” diversity where difference as an abstract concept is celebrated as an end in itself, a new civic rationale avoids disembodiment of beings from their particular experience by asking them to intentionally reflect upon the full *taxonomy* of experience to contribute to a whole rather than simply look to modal or primary markers of identity. At the same time, we must also mitigate against advocating “thicker” notions of justice that asks students to highlight their cultural distinctiveness while ignoring the real need for individuals to make collective decisions in a democratic society (Young 1990). Assignments that look to integrate distinct experiences into a *civic gestalt* rather than produce patchwork solutions will create products that can be used to make civic-based claims for diversity’s effectiveness.

Translating cultural diversity into civic products requires using existing social networking tools to engage students in diversity praxis. One example is allowing students to create a class or campus diversity statement through Wikipedia. Another might be using a collaborative on-line text editor to rewrite the U.S. Constitution to better reflect your historical and cultural preferences. The aim with participatory projects is to develop habits of diversity praxis rather than relying on contact to provide civic benefits from diversity.

Creating civic work that integrates diversity is a difficult task. The educational rationale is an easier rhetorical path for justifying university diversity policy. Court decisions, pressure from regents, donors and the business community all compel institutions to frame diversity in a less controversial language of diversity as a “educational competence” or a “skill set” that individuals need to be competitive in a global marketplace. This approach suggests that diversity is reducible to a uniform set of tools that can be applied to any context. This idea of “plug and play” diversity (apologies to Richard Florida) ignores the idiosyncratic and ad hoc nature of dealing with others.

Instead of teaching students to be deductively “culturally competent,” we should be teaching students to cultivate a sense of individual authenticity by being inductive, integrative learners by building up their base of knowledge from experience and opening themselves to the ad-hoc and contingent nature of different interactions, what Taylor (1994) refers to as *adhockishness*. *Adhockishness* as applied to diversity serves as an essential attribute of effective democratic citizenship by granting them the habits of deliberation, accommodation, and cooperation needed to address common concerns.

However, this too is challenging work. A key to the success of a new civic rationale for diversity is to lay the groundwork for a *praxis based* approach to diversity policy that helps students develop authentic selves through project-based interaction with diverse others. Rather than view diversity policy as “one size fits all,” we must strive to simultaneously hold both “thin” and “thick” notions of diversity in mind when formulating and applying policy. An effective civic rationale for diversity recognizes provides a space for student’s distinct cultural identities while at the same time creating spaces for student identities to evolve as they reflect on their contribution to civic work and engage in future projects. A *new civic rationale* thinks about how *cultural identity* interacts with *civic identity* to construct a more integrated self.

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