The Appropriation of University Symbols by Local Businesses
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EVOKE

About the Ethnographer
I'm an undergrad in anthropology originally from Chicago. I hope focus on a career as a museum technician or becoming involved in other areas of museum work.

EXPLORE

Question
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?
It of course comes as no surprise that to any of us as members of this university in realizing that the University of Illinois itself is a very important and integral part of the entire Champaign/Urbana community. Its influence can be seen in many different facets of local life from media, to sports, politics and especially business. And as such, it is with this focus on local business in mind that I intend to take a deeper look at some of the businesses here in this community that choose to informally invoke select attributes or characteristics of the university (school colors, symbols, or even the term “Illini”) in their business’ name or advertising, in order find out what motivates these business owners in choosing to associate themselves with the university in such a way, as well as attempting to find out what the overall reaction or acception to this is from the point of view of university students and officials.

Plan
How will you go about answering your inquiry?
Looking deeper into the intentions and effects that such a common local business practice as informal university association has on here on campus.

Looking deeper into how this relationship came about and what the university seeks to gain with such an exclusive partnership.

OBSERVE

What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?
Perhaps one of the most significant entries in my fieldnotes would be the ones revolving around a particular moment in my first interview with Clark. The notes that I refer to dealt with a portion of our interview in which I had asked Clark if he felt as though the name "Illini Apple Store" offered up an informal university endorsement. It is in this instance that he ultimately refuted this notion by comparing it to the many other buisnesses that similairly choose to use university names or imagery in their practices. It was in observing and further exploring this unexpected response durinn the interview that caused me to change my own perspective of my research by as Anderson and Jack state, making a "shift in methodology from information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process." (p.21)

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS:
After reading over the guidelines of our current assignment, which encourages us as students to explore and analyze any university document that we find particularly intriguing, I had initially thought of our own student-run newspaper The Daily Illini as perhaps being a strong natural source of interesting university issues. However, after going through many issues over the course of a few days, I had still yet to really find any one article that had really peaked my interest enough for me to personally want to further delve into it’s underlying incarnation or implications. It was with this in mind that I had instead figured that although I could not find what I was looking for in the reported articles, I may have better luck if I placed more attention on the published advertisements. It was then that my interest was finally peaked when I came across an add for the Illini Apple Center, which ultimately led me to the stores website.

My initial interest in the Illini Apple Center was related to finding out why the university would go about making such a partnership with Apple, what the university intends to gain through this partnership, what the overall implications of this partnership are, who it is that actually runs and owns this campus store, and through what means does this store try to appeal to campus students. It was when I had visited their official website (http://www.illiniapplecenter.com/) that I was able to observe a few key aspects of that text that may prove to be quite significant in understanding some of the initial questions I have raised. Especially after reading the Fairclough piece, I feel that I was really able to get a better and more refined sense of the overall implications and assumptions present in the text.

Now, as I arrive to the site’s homepage, I already notice a number of assumptions or “triggers” as Fairclough put them (p.56) that are certainly intended for and geared toward university students and staff. This can be seen both through the sites use of propositional and value assumptions. Propositional assumptions arise in a statement like “College students buy a Mac” since this statement assumes that purchasing a Mac computer is essential or even a certainty. This type of assumption can also be seen in the Apple logo and use of the title “Illini Apple Center” itself in that it implies both an assumption that students already know of Apple, and further more that this particular Apple store is endorsed by the university.

Now with reference to Fairclough’s notion of value assumptions, I was able to notice even more emphasis paid in presenting the store and it’s products as particularly valuable to university life. This is specifically exemplified by the “5 things you should know” section, which illustrates the specific university related functions that a Mac can perform. Also, value can be assumed when taking into consideration that this is an “Authorized Campus Store” which implies endorsement by the university and even perhaps validates purchasing Apple products.

So, it is with these initial assessments in mind that I intend to find out the overall implications and goals of such a partnership between a major university like the Uof I and a such a large and well known technology and media corporation, and how this partnership affects the students as well as the university.
INTERVIEW 1:

The person of which I had chosen to interview first is an employee for both the Illini Apple Center and the U of I, as well as also being a recent Uof I graduate (May ’06). In accordance with the confidentiality policy, I will be omitting his positions at both places of employment as well as using the pseudonym “Clark” in place of his real name. My interview with Clark was held in the Vending Room of the Illini Union.

This interview in particular mainly revolved around finding out why Clark had initially chosen to attend the U of I, as well as gathering some of his own insights towards various aspects of the Illini Apple Center(this is where the bulk of the interview is focused).

Before I had even started asking questions, I was certainly able to notice a bit of tension between ourselves perhaps stemming from the fact that we had never met before (with the exception of me asking if he would be willing to participate) and we both seemed a bit uncertain of how this interview would be conducted and in what kind of direction it would ultimately head. In my case, most of my nervousness came from wondering if I would be asking the right questions and using the right techniques, whereas Clark seemed to be more apprehensive about what he would actually be stating and how he would go about answering my questions (this was made easily apparent when he had explicitly reminded me that all of his answers and statements were his own and not that of the Illini Apple Center or the Illini Media Co.). As the interview progressed, the uneasiness on both our parts slightly diminished and at the end we were even able to have a bit of a friendlier and more casual dialog as we were both leaving.

Looking back on it all, I feel that I was successful in making him more comfortable as the interview wore on and I do feel that this was important since presumably it allowed me to gain some more genuine information through this. However, after reviewing the taped interview again, I did on occasion find myself attempting to lead my interviewee into presenting some other answers that I would have wanted to hear by rewording questions or even asking for more specific responses. And, although these instances were very limited, it did teach me to refrain from doing this in future interviews on this subject.

DISCUSS

Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data
Over the course of this project, I have gradually become more and more aware of just what is meant when ethnography is referred to as a “process”. I realize now at the end of my preliminary efforts that this process of ethnography encompasses many different facets such as people, place, theory, participation, engagement, interaction, and analysis; all of which are constantly in flux and ever evolving. This was all first and best exemplified in my very first interview in which I came to realize that as important and vital as gathering as much information as possible from my participant was, being open
to new ideas or previously overlooked points of view brought up in the ethnographer/participant exchange is equally as important if not more so. It is in keeping with this frame of thought that ultimately allowed me to question the initial direction of my ethnographic study and thereby alter my overall question, plan and focus of observation to where it is now. I would need to gain more access to university officials in order to gauge a response from actual university members and professionals.

During my interview with Clark, I was also able to not only take away some valuable points of experience towards the process of interviewing itself, but I also am now able to look back and reflect on some of the more intriguing points that were raised through his responses and through that, begin to gain a more focused view of were I would want this project to go. For instance when I had asked if the location of the store being directly here on campus was significant or just arbitrary, he responded by saying, “I think it really does matter that it is on campus because I think that the primary target is college students and professors.” Here I was able to gauge a response that is significant in helping me shape my research by lending toward my own initial assumption of the store as more than just a regular shopping space, and rather being a significant element of our campus that seeks to appeal directly to our community patrons. However on the other side of things, there were also responses that I was not expecting, and in turn point me in a direction of which I had previously not thought of.

**REFLECT**

**Link**

Connect with other resources and materials.

Investigation of Coke's sponsorship at the University of Illinois. ([http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/bin/update_unit.cgi?command=select&xmlfile=u14059.xml](http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/bin/update_unit.cgi?command=select&xmlfile=u14059.xml))

**Implications**

*Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?*

This study is ultimately intended to examine just how a large public institution like the University of Illinois, deals with local commercial practices (both official and unofficial) and how the surrounding community and its members both react to this trend and ultimately continue to shape it.

**OTHER**

*A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.*

**Files:**

- **anth411_prop.doc** (Mon 12/04/2006 21:53)
- **anth411_prop.doc** (Tue 12/05/2006 14:58)
- **anth411_prop.doc** (Tue 12/05/2006 14:59)
- **anth411_prop.doc** (Wed 12/13/2006 21:38)