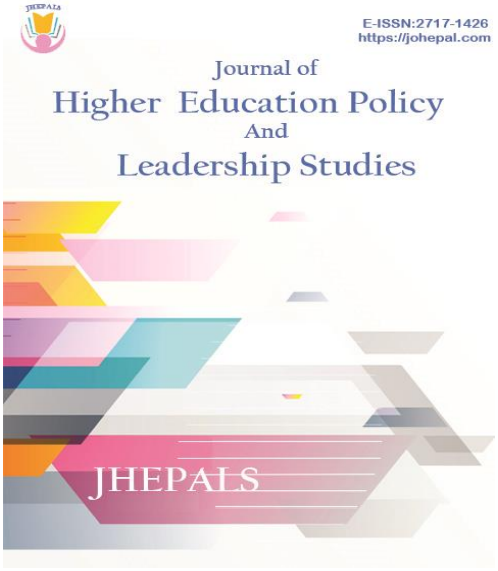
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Transforming Organizational Culture and Enacting Social Justice in Praxis Through Decolonization of Cultural Artifacts at a U.S. University



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Abstract

Organizational cultures and the resulting manifestations of cultural artifacts on many campuses continue to contribute to the perpetuation of elitism and ideologies deeply entrenched in the undercurrent of colonial legacies. This study presents an analysis of an initiative at one university in the United States for decolonizing practices through the transformation of cultural artifacts that reproduce colonial ideologies and the alignment of them with values of diversity, community, social justice, and scholarly excellence. Data were gathered through a qualitative survey submitted to faculty, students, and staff, and 4 months of ethnographic work seeking to understand how stakeholders interpret the cultural artifacts in the school and ways in which these cultural artifacts influence their behaviors. Data revealed a perception of a lack of diversity of cultural artifacts and a need for building community among respondents. Besides, these cultural artifacts influenced people, pushing them to be silent and to work individually rather than collectively. Finally, data showed that changing some cultural artifacts and introducing new ones produced desired effects among the stakeholders. More research around organizational and cultural change and the alignment with cultural artifacts can shed light on transforming cultures within organizations toward more inclusive and socially just spaces.

Keywords: Organizational Culture; Artifacts; Change; Leadership; Higher Education; Decolonial Spaces

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Introduction

Since the police killing in the United States (U.S.) of George Floyd in May 2020, protesters nationwide rallied against police brutality and systemic racism inherited from colonial times. Additionally, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students from different U.S. campuses organized several protests to demand institutional change and faculty development, particularly an audit of the syllabi for courses in their programs. These BIPOC students did not feel represented in class because knowledge created by BIPOC scholars and practitioners was often nonexistent in most courses, where seminal authors represented Euro-centric worldviews (Grosfoguel, 2013). In addition, BIPOC students raised critical awareness about the organizational culture and the cultural artifacts on many campuses that contributed to the reproduction of elitism and colonial ideologies of the past. This paper aims to describe an initiative at the School of Leadership Studies and Education Sciences (SOLES) at the University of San Diego (USD, n.d.) in California, United States, to decolonize pedagogies and practices in the school and learn how cultural artifacts of the organization either contribute to facilitate or hinder this process of organizational change and systemic decolonization. More specifically, two questions guided this study:

1. How do individuals interpret the cultural artifacts of the school?
2. How do these cultural artifacts shape their behaviors and interactions?

In the following sections, we provide a brief overview of the literature regarding the structure of knowledge in Westernized universities and previous research on organizational change through the lens of cultural artifacts. Then, we provide a description of initiatives undertaken in SOLES aimed at decolonizing pedagogies and practices within its system and consider the alignment of these values with the cultural artifacts of the school. Last, we present findings from a survey questionnaire and ethnographic data to consider potential directions for institutions of higher education (HE) working toward decolonizing their pedagogies and practices to embrace a broader diversity of wisdom and onto-epistemologies that transcend the Western canon.

Literature Review

HE in the Western world has been founded on the quest for truth. However, the very foundation of truth has been met with extreme scrutiny, where questions surrounding what constitutes knowledge and whose knowledge is considered legitimate have often been debated and argued. Onto-epistemology is a field of study that considers both *ontology*, the study of the nature of being, existence, and reality, and *epistemology*, the study of how people come to understand the nature of being, existence, and reality. In this literature review, we provide a historical understanding of how onto-epistemologies in Westernized universities have shaped, monopolized, and colonized the world's understanding of reality and how we come to understand this reality. In our efforts to decolonize our pedagogies and practices within our institution of higher learning in the US., we use the lens of cultural artifacts to analyze what was valued, how stakeholders interpreted these values, and what changes we can consider in transforming organizational culture. In the second part of this

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literature review, we present the facets of cultural artifacts that also serve to guide our data analysis.

Foundations of Onto-Epistemologies in Western Universities

The canon of thought in the social sciences and humanities in Western universities is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries: Italy, France, England, Germany, and the U.S. (Grosfoguel, 2013). Through the devastating harm caused by colonization, this knowledge has been deemed superior to the knowledge systems and Indigenous wisdom traditions of the colonized world. Over time, the imposition of Eurocentric onto-epistemologies monopolized global knowledge authority as it imposed itself onto the minds and the hearts of the colonized. In social science or humanities disciplines, the construction and consideration of knowledge are based on the Western canon inherited historically from these five countries (de Sousa Santos, 2010). However, because theory emerges from the conceptualization based on the social and historical experiences, sensibilities, and world views of particular spaces and bodies, these theories—limited to knowledge as deemed legitimate by the Western world—are essentially provincialism disguised under a discourse of universality. Grosfoguel (2013) argued,

> The pretension is that the knowledge produced by men of these five countries has the magical effect of universal capacity, that is, their theories are supposed to be sufficient to explain the social/historical realities of the rest of the world. (p. 74)

Consequently,

> Our job in the Westernized university is reduced to that of learning these theories born from the experience and problems of a particular region of the world (five countries in Western Europe) with its own particular time/space dimensions and "applying" them to other geographical locations even if the experience and time/space of the former are quite different from the latter. (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 74)

These social theories based on Italian, French, English, German, and U.S. men's sociohistorical experiences constitute the foundation and canon of the social sciences and the humanities in many Westernized universities today, thus garnering epistemic privilege. Unfortunately, the counterpart of this epistemic privilege is the imposition of epistemic inferiority on those wisdom traditions not considered part of the privileged canon. As such, it is important to recognize that epistemic privilege and epistemic inferiority are two sides of the same coin, which Grosfoguel (2012) argued is a form of epistemic racism and sexism.

BIPOC students experience this convergence of epistemic privilege and epistemic inferiority in HE through the hidden curriculum, where they predominantly engage with what are considered legitimate authors and "giants" in the field who do not necessarily represent their histories and lived experiences. In this way, their onto-epistemologies based on their sociopolitical histories, sensibilities, and world views influenced by their particular spaces and bodies are othered in these spaces.

In our efforts to decolonize our pedagogies and practices within our institutions of higher learning in the U.S., besides the hidden curriculum, it will also be important to analyze the tangible and intangible cultural artifacts that comprise the school's ethos. Through the

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lens of these cultural artifacts, HE leaders can better understand what—consciously or unconsciously—is valued, how stakeholders interpret these values, and what changes can be considered in transforming organizational cultures to better address the needs of the students.

Organizational Culture, Cultural Artifacts, and Strategies for Change

Organizational culture is the pattern of shared values, norms, and practices that help distinguish one organization from another. These values, norms, and practices define "what is important around here" and "how we do things around here" (Higgins et al., 2006, pp. 401–402). Cultural artifacts are significant interpersonal activities, physical objects, and the use of physical space that define an organization's culture. Thus, for a vision to be fully realized within an organization and not to remain performative, the change should permeate all aspects of the organization's culture or face almost certain strategic failure (Higgins et al., 2006). Here, we outline six main cultural artifacts as conceptualized by Higgins et al. (2006): (a) value systems and behavioral norms; (b) language and metaphors; (c) myths and sagas; (d) rewards and reward systems; (e) symbols, ceremonies, and rituals; and (f) physical surroundings (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Cultural Artifacts and Definitions

Cultural artifact	Definition
Value systems and behavioral norms	At the heart of any organization's culture, by definition, are its values. Identifiable value systems, behavioral norms, and practices are reflected in an organization's strategy, structure, systems and processes, leadership style, staffing, and resources; and in its rules, policies, and procedures (Higgins et al., 2006, p. 403).
Language and metaphors	The language systems and metaphors used in organizations portray the organization's values. Organizations develop their own language for expressing who they are and what they are about (Higgins & Mcallaster, 2004, p. 70).
Myths and sagas	Corporate myths and sagas are stories about the key players and events in the organization's history. These stories relate exploits of early pioneers and visionaries, those who have transformed the organization, and other significant contributors to the organization (Higgins & Mcallaster, 2004, pp. 69–70).
Rewards and reward systems	Rewards drive behavior in some way in most organizations (Hawk, 1995; Kerr & Slocum, 2005; Mike & Slocum, 2003;). Sometimes these rewards are organizational in nature – compensation, promotions, satisfying work, verbal recognition, and so on. Rewards may also be provided by peers, persons external to the organization, other organizations, and even society as a whole (Higgins et al., 2006, p. 404).
Symbols, ceremonies, and rituals	Symbols, ceremonies, and rituals may also be used to demonstrate what is important in a particular organization (Lange, 1991). Some symbols are physical in nature, such as a coat of arms or a value statement. Others are behavioral, such as rewarding certain kinds of behaviors (Higgins & Mcallaster, 2004, p. 71).
Physical surroundings	Physical surroundings including plant and equipment, and design and decoration convey important messages to those who work in an organization. As a cultural artifact, physical surroundings reveal the values of the organization related to

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> such factors as innovation, the importance of employees, the degree of cost consciousness, and so on (Higgins & Mcallaster, 2004, p. 72).

Building a successful organization requires a culture based on a strongly held and widely shared set of beliefs supported by strategy and structure. The role of cultural artifacts as such is key because these artifacts must be aligned with these beliefs, working as a glue that holds together the organizational culture; otherwise, the organization will fail. Therefore, a vision of a decolonial organizational culture or HE institution needs to be complemented with a change of culture in general and particularly the cultural artifacts that reproduce the former assumptions, values, and beliefs of a Westernized organization based on Western onto-epistemologies.

Since the 1990s, HE scholars have increasingly applied such notions to the educational field, considering culture as a fundamental attribute for organizations (Chafee & Tierney, 1988; Kuh & Whitt, 1988) because the concept of culture contributes to explaining organizational behaviors and policies. However, organizational culture involves more than policies, practices, and behavior, as has already been proved in previous research (Hofstede, 1991; Smart & Hamm, 1993; Smart et al., 1997). Thus, leaders and reformers within HE must look beyond managerial studies toward the shared values and beliefs that drive college academic behavior. In other words, a deep change is needed—starting with the Westernized onto-epistemologies that dominate HE institutions and are manifested through different cultural artifacts. Otherwise, a narrow approach to understanding organizational culture as just issues of workload and effectiveness will hinder all initiatives, strategies, and leadership visions to address HE's challenges (Chafee & Tierney, 1988).

In this study, culture is approached symbolically as a context of meaning-making and interpretation within organizations. As "cultural understandings permit you to know an organization and the various uses made of its physical, behavioral, and verbal symbols" (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013, p. 192), leaders need to understand first what the culture of the organization is, and then how it is represented and manifested through different cultural artifacts. When it comes to cultural change within organizations, cultural artifacts are central because they help understand an organization's culture. At the same time, they function as resources for changing values and assumptions about the organization, eventually resulting in the change of its culture.

For example, Lee (2007) demonstrates the extent to which different aspects of the culture of schools and departments in HE can be attributed to the influence of institutional and disciplinary cultures that are internalized and reproduced unconsciously. Therefore, it would be key to understand the culture, the main artifacts of the organization, and the processes of sense and meaning-making that are transmitted to everybody involved. In another key study about organizational culture and change, Phillips and Snodgrass (2022) examined the experiences of six senior-level administrators at U.S. HE institutions during periods of internal and external change. The participants described how internal and external factors impacted their perceived influence in implementing and leading structural and cultural change at various levels within the field. Similarly, de Freitas and Oliver (2005) studied structural change within organizations delivering e-content through five ways in which change is understood (i.e., Fordist, evolutionary, ecological, community of practice,

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and discourse-oriented) and then using this range of perspectives to explore how e-learning policy drives change (e.g., organizational and educational) within a selected university. Some of the implications of this work is that understanding change within HE organizations through a perspective of a community of practice meaning is not universal but transmitted through cultural artifacts and constructed anew as the relationship between these artifacts and existing practice is considered.

When it comes to the literature of HE leadership connected to a decolonial lens, Heleta and Chasi (2023) emphasized the need for rethinking and redefining the internationalization of HE in South Africa (SA) using a decolonial approach to bring new values and assumptions to an organization. In their work, they demonstrate how Eurocentric definitions of HE and internationalization influence strategic directions, policies, and priorities of HE systems and institutions. Thus, they propose a new definition more relevant to the SA context and the need for epistemic decolonization. Finally, in terms of issues of diversity and social justice, Olmos et al. (2023) demonstrated with their research how U.S. colleges and universities have become a site of struggle for reclaiming HE as a democratic public sphere for social justice. Thus, they reflect on the institutional articulation of social justice in HE by examining a multi-year effort by faculty in various departments to promote social justice education and activism across a large regional public Hispanic-serving institution in Southern California. One implication of this work is the need for coalitions of interdisciplinary faculty who can effectively push universities to embrace social justice education and activism meaningfully.

Research Methodology

Ethnography is a qualitative research design that aims to explore cultural interactions and meanings of a group of people (Barbour, 2010), exploring feelings, beliefs, and meanings resulting from relationships between people's interactions within their culture or reactions to encountering different ones. This ethnographic approach is pertinent to understanding this study's topics of organizational culture, change, and leadership as a process of sense- and meaning-making.

Wolcott (1999) provided a list of advantages for conducting ethnographic research over other methodological approaches used in this study. For example, an ethnographic research perspective allows researchers to conduct the study independently and does not require expensive tools or equipment. Moreover, researchers can implement a longitudinal approach to observe and record changes while collecting data in a natural setting, focusing on verbal and nonverbal behaviors. In addition, with an ethnographic research perspective, participants are considered subjects and not objects, and we had an insider's view of their reality while conducting the study.

This ethnographic study was approached from a conceptual framework of decolonial studies (Dussel, 2009; Grosfoguel, 2012, 2013) and organizational theory (Higgins & Mcallaster, 2004). More specifically within the literature of organizational theory, the research was centered on studies around organizational culture and change and the alignment of cultural artifacts with strategies and initiatives for change (Hawk, 1995; Higgins et al., 2006; Higgins & Mcallaster, 2004; Kerr & Slocum, 2005; Lange, 1991; Mike & Slocum, 2003).

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Setting and Study Context

This study took place in the SOLES at USD. SOLES has four departments: Counseling and Marital and Family Therapy, Learning and Teaching, Leadership Studies, and the Naval ROTC program (USD, n.d.). There are about 150 full-time faculty, staff, and administrators.

SOLES serves over 750 students; most are graduate students, except for some undergraduate offerings such as the credential program, leadership minor, and Army ROTC. The designated SOLES building is Mother Rosalie Hill Hall (MRH) on the west end of the campus. Built in 2006, MRH houses all SOLES administrative offices and academic departments and six centers and institutes (USD, n.d.).

Vision of Decolonizing Pedagogies and Practices

In the summer of 2020, in response to protests and feedback from many BIPOC students, the SOLES Multicultural and Social Justice Task Force, with faculty representation from the three departments and the dean's office, designed a series of workshops on race for faculty. Some examples of initiatives included having difficult conversations about race and racism with students, understanding student racial identity development, and decolonizing pedagogies and practices. This section describes the strategy and initiatives on Decolonizing Pedagogies and Practices, which were aimed to begin a dialogue in our school and to create synergies with faculty working in each of the departments using decolonial and critical approaches in their research and instructional practice.

A total of 17 faculty members joined our workshop, consisting of 13 full-time faculty and four part-time faculty. Six faculty members from the Department of Learning and Teaching, seven from the Department of Leadership Studies, and four from the Department of Counseling and Marital and Family Therapy attended this introductory session. The purpose of the session was to provide an overview of the research and practice around decolonizing pedagogies and practices, share our research and syllabi from the lens of decoloniality, and invite our faculty to analyze and share their research and syllabi with the intention of generating synergies among the various disciplines represented.

Land Acknowledgement

We opened our session with a land acknowledgment. Our university sits on the unceded territory of the Kumeyaay nation, and this ritual helps us to remember the histories and honor the people of this land. The session was held on Zoom on November 2, 2020, as our university moved to remote modality due to COVID-19 in March 2020. As such, we asked for participants to locate their place and honor the peoples of the lands in which they reside.

Defining Decolonization

After the land acknowledgment and a moment of silence, we began our session by operationalizing what we mean by decolonization. Sefa Dei and Jaimungal (2018) defined decolonization from an anticolonial lens, which takes an unapologetic and critical stance toward colonialism and demands challenging the status quo within all spaces where white power and privilege are systemically reinforced. Sefa Dei and Jaimungal further articulated

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decolonization is about: (a) bringing back the body, mind, soul, and spirit, and the transformation both within and outside; (b) developing and sharpening our thinking process and pursuing politics for transformative change; (c) breaking with dominant practices and resisting subordination in all its forms; and (d) defining one's own agenda for a new future and to relate our endeavors to a collective future.

Integrating Decolonial Pedagogies and Practices

Grande (2004) asserted pedagogy should be revolutionary in that it seeks to anchor the process in Indigenous epistemologies and practices that employ processes that are collective, critical, systematic, participatory and creative to balance the excesses of dominant power. In SOLES, there was a demand from students and faculty for programs to review curriculum and syllabi, for faculty training on issues on race, particularly noticing their roles in centering and decentering particular voices as they manifest in the classroom, and for students to have a voice in enacting systemic changes.

Including Decolonial Methodologies

In this section, we consider the lens of decolonization in our scholarship. Chilisa (2020) argued,

> Decolonization is a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference. It is a process that involves "researching back" to question how the disciplines—psychology, education, history, anthropology, sociology, or science—through an ideology of Othering have described and theorized about the colonized Other and refused to let the colonized Other name and know from their frame of reference. (pp. 11–12)

In essence, decolonizing is to center what has been decentered. It is not about marginalizing what has been the dominant approaches since this moment but to recenter and to establish a dialogue of ways of being, doing, and knowing without oppressive asymmetries of power and hierarchies.

Reviewing the Syllabi and Our Scholarship

Next, we shared our research and scholarship in the area and artifacts from our teaching (e.g., our course syllabi for the purpose of this session). One of this paper's authors shared his course entitled, Global Leadership Challenges of Cognitive and Social Justice. In this course, he brings the concept of cognitive justice to the conversation and the idea that without it, achieving social justice is impossible. Indian scholar Shiv Visvanathan coined this concept in 1997 and advocates for the recognition of alternative sciences or non-Western forms of knowledge as different knowledges relate to different livelihoods and lifestyles. Therefore, all knowledges should be treated equally.

Another author of this paper shared her course on education and globalization. This course introduces students to an analysis of the postcolonial impact of globalization on education, with particular reference to international development and the international aid agenda. Key themes such as world culture theory, knowledge economy, and the role of English are considered from the framework of globalization. In addition, students examine

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the geopolitical hegemony of the Global North on the Global South through policies and practices in education, such as Education for All, inclusive education, and school assessment standards.

In our second session on decolonizing pedagogies and practices, we focused on analyzing our school's tangible and intangible cultural artifacts. We invited several faculty members steeped in this work to join us in presenting some of their work in this area, followed by a faculty small group discussion on their perceptions of the tangible and intangible cultural artifacts of our school. Three main themes emerged from this discussion, where faculty believed it was important to (a) understand the developmental nature of this work, (b) amplify student voices and center the positionalities and epistemologies they bring, and (c) identify and redesign structures of power in the academy.

For some students, it is about "starting with beginner's knowledge when it comes to privilege, microaggressions, and colonization." Other students may have already engaged in deep thinking on these notions for some time due to their own lived experiences and opportunities to reflect on their racial identities. Faculty found that because students' academic journeys have been grounded in Western epistemological understandings, they often are "focused on trying to figure out what the professor wants and are hesitant to approach this work with their own ideas and frameworks." A faculty member explained that she engages her students in the study of what constitutes "normal," where she has students consider the acculturation paradox in which, "folx are hunting for strengths of their own culture and the new culture and bringing those together." It is critical to recognize that in our efforts to encourage our students to recognize their strengths and wisdom and have them challenge Western "academic" norms (e.g., talking circles as a written document), we also recognize they may encounter "barriers in publishing since the format is so different from the 'norm'" of Western academia.

Methods of Data Collection

The inquiry guiding this study focused on understanding two research questions:

1. How do individuals interpret the cultural artifacts of the school?
2. How do these cultural artifacts shape their behaviors and interactions?

This research included two main methods for collecting the data to answer these questions: First, findings from a survey sent to students, faculty, and staff in the school and four months of participant observations in different spaces of the school. The ethnographic piece was added to test data from the survey as a form of triangulation of methods of collecting data and findings.

Qualitative Survey

Qualitative surveys attempt to elicit detailed responses to open-ended questions in the participant's own words (Hancock et al., 2009; Jansen, 2010). These questions aim to reveal opinions, experiences, narratives, or accounts. For this study, we employed online surveys, which facilitated the collection of more responses in a set period. When compared to other methods, it could be delivered broadly across a larger number of participants (e.g., students, faculty, and staff) and help researchers identify participants' critical experiences to further explore in the ethnographic phase of this study.

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The qualitative survey focused on understanding the cultural artifacts of SOLES and soliciting feedback on ways in which to make our school a more inviting and inclusive space. The survey comprised two sections with a total of 12 questions. The initial six questions centered around the identification of various tangible and intangible cultural artifacts within the school. The latter six questions were drawn from the disciplines of organizational studies and leadership and literature on decoloniality. These questions delved into how participants experienced issues of organizational change and social justice within this context. The total number of responses was 51, with 53% of the participants identifying themselves as people of color and 47% as white. Of the total, 25% were faculty, 8% administration/staff, and 67% students (i.e., 80% on-site students vs. 20% online students).

Participant Observations

Observation is a method employed in qualitative research to discover and explain complex and unique interactions in social contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). With this study, the qualitative survey informed the focus of our participant observations, which we implemented over a four-month period within the school. We made careful, objective notes in a field notebook about what we observed based on participants' experiences described in the survey. The interactions and informal conversations were also documented in the field notes as they pertained to this study. Finally, to try to avoid personal biases, we wrote objective observations of a given event on the left column of the notebook and our personal inferences on the right side (Mack et al., 2005).

For this study, we focused on the analysis of these visual representations of SOLES's organizational culture, connected with deeper layers of the culture of the organization, such as beliefs, values, and assumptions to contribute to consolidating the particular worldview of this school: Architecture, artistic creations, style (e.g., clothes, manners, emotional displays), documents, rituals and ceremonies, or myths and stories portraying the organization, among others (see Table 2).

Field observations were conducted either weekly or biweekly, depending on the activity of the semester. Initial observations were more structured to get a sense of various settings within the building. One researcher would sit in one location for an hour and record their observations while keeping interactions minimal to none. As the semester progressed, we struck a balance between participant and observer when we specifically targeted events and locations that would yield richer data regarding interactions and behavior.

Additionally, we would note any unscheduled participant observation if it was pertinent to the topic of cultural artifacts and inclusion at SOLES. All data were recorded in a cloud-based Word document using either a laptop or smartphone and stored in a password-protected account only the researchers can access.

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Table 2.
Participant Observation Matrix

Category	Includes	Researchers noted
Appearance	Clothing, age, gender, physical appearance	Anything that might indicate membership in groups or in subpopulations of interest to the study, such as profession, social status, socioeconomic class, religion, or ethnicity
Verbal behavior and interactions	Who speaks to whom and for how long; who initiates interaction; languages or dialects spoken; tone of voice	Gender, age, ethnicity, and profession of speakers; dynamics of interaction
Physical behavior and gestures	What people do, who does what, who interacts with whom, who is not interacting	How people use their bodies and voices to communicate different emotions; what individuals' behaviors indicate about their feelings toward one another, their social rank, or their profession
Personal space concerning personal space suggest about their relationships	How close people stand to one another	What individuals' preferences concerning personal space suggest about their relationships
Traffic and duration	People who enter, leave, and spend time at the observation site	Where people enter and exit; how long they stay; who they are (ethnicity, age, gender); whether they are alone or accompanied; number of people
People who stand out	Identification of people who receive a lot of attention from others	The characteristics of these individuals; what differentiates them from others; whether people consult them, or they approach other people; whether they seem to be strangers or well known by others present

Data Analysis

We employed two analytic methods of coding analysis for the survey: open coding and axial coding. Segmenting information and developing codes to describe the phenomenon of the research as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and from where we categorized codes and generated themes as recommended by Saldaña (2013). We assembled data in new ways and identified core categories and subcategories as proposed by Creswell (2013). Thus, we identified "the interrelationship of causal conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions and consequences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 434).

The analysis of ethnographic data involved one cycle of deductive coding using the six types of cultural artifacts as predetermined categories: "myths and sagas; language systems and metaphors; symbols, ceremonies, and rituals; identifiable value systems and behavioral norms; the physical surroundings characterizing the particular culture; and organizational rewards and reward systems" (as cited in Higgins et al., 2006, p. 398). In the second data analysis cycle, subcodes were generated from the main codes with recurring categories.

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Through this inductive coding process, we generated novel codes from recurring instances in the data.

After analyzing the collected data, we interpreted the data and wrote the findings through a philosophical approach of decolonial studies and a theoretical perspective of cultural artifacts, strategy, and change. We then compared the findings with theories and literature on the decolonial field and theoretical research approaches to organizational culture and change.

Findings

In this section, we present the intersecting themes that emerged from the data in response to the two lines of inquiry that guided this study. Mainly, we wanted to understand (a) how individuals within our school interpret the cultural artifacts of the school and (b) how these cultural artifacts shape their behaviors and interactions.

Lack of Diversity, Silence, and Asymmetries of Power

Respondents indicated a need for centering/recentering voices, backgrounds, and cultures. A dominant culture hinders attention to issues of diversity, and a prevailing silence in the building communicates messages that are unwelcoming of voices and sounds that can signal community and joy. Furthermore, a visual scan of the tangible artifacts also contributes to a form of silence, where there is a lack of representation, or a form of silencing, of the many cultural knowledge systems individuals bring to this space. In addition, an embedded hierarchical structure results in the concentration of power at the top and the resulting disempowerment of the rest.

Lack of Diversity

Many survey respondents referenced the school building; they viewed it as "a white castle on the top of the hill" and "Spanish colonial, beautiful, but a bit imposing." Interestingly, the campus of this university has been voted one of the most beautiful campuses in the country several times and once won the first position award. However, beauty standards can be relative and have different effects on different people. Photos, artwork, and the whole physical surroundings were problematic for many respondents, as there was not much diversity, and the school's architecture has been based on colonial styles. Related to the absence of diversity, one participant said the building transmitted:

> Beauty and grandeur. For the fact that it is located in San Diego, and in Linda Vista too, there is very little of the vibrant color that belongs to the local Chicano culture (think Chicano Park murals, for instance) and absolutely no representation of the Kumeyaay people, whose unceded land we stand on. It embodies the concept of the ivory tower on the top of the hill.

Notably, an Indigenous tribal flag has been on display in the SOLES building that includes a land acknowledgment to pay homage to the Kumeyaay people. However, this participant's remarks illuminate how these tangible artifacts are relatively unknown among some members of the SOLES community. Housed in a stairwell that may not be well-frequented, the physical location of cultural artifacts requires increased efforts of promotion and celebration to ensure they are seen.

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Another participant argued the space is:

> Very uniform and cohesive outside. Inside it looks cold, the artifacts on display are very old, misogynistic, and not warm/welcoming/inclusive/reflective of current students or where SOLES (& USD) is trying to go in terms of being diverse and inclusive (with hopes of being a Hispanic serving institution).

Finally, one more central demand was to include more diversity of food within the school and even some suggestions for music within a quiet space.

Additionally, among the participants, there is an urge to interrogate the curriculum/pedagogy/syllabi because many did not feel represented or did not resonate with some of the pedagogies and practices implemented in classes. They pointed to a need for changing physical artifacts within classes and in the school in general. Thus, respondents argued for a transformation of the traditional curriculum, pedagogies, and syllabi, interrupting and disrupting structures (e.g., process, hierarchical system, scholarships), and a change in the physical and semiotic artifacts (e.g., photos, artwork, showcase, building, food, and music). One survey respondent stated, "For a school dedicated to social justice, I would hope to see much more space and time dedicated to activism, activists, people of color who are known in our fields, celebrations of important events like Indigenous Peoples Day, etc."

When it comes to the discussion of suggestions for changes extrapolated from the data for creating a more diverse and welcoming space, one respondent said:

> For me, the most immediate and impactful symbols would be the inclusion of art or other physical items to represent the diversity of SOLES. For minoritized students to walk into the space and see themselves represented, while nonminoritized students can be educated.

Additionally, one participant argued that though "statues and symbols that represent the Catholic institution are important . . . it would be valuable to add some of Indigenous individuals." Another respondent proposed, "Make spaces, like the student lounge, to be more colorful, and provide imagery and messaging that centers multiple cultures and narratives on ways of being." Last, another participant summarized the need for us to:

> rethink the cultural artifacts from a perspective of diversity. . . What is at the center and what needs to be recentered. . . Change the decoration of the school . . . it needs to be a happy place of leadership and education! Too much austerity, silence, and darkness!

Overall, data revealed a demand for leadership work that disrupts dominant structures and relationships through recentering voices and cultures that have been decentered within Western universities.

Silence

The second emerging theme was silence. This emerging category was tested through ethnographic participant observations for four months. As a behavioral norm, the building is extremely quiet on ordinary days when only classes and meetings occur there. It is important to note that the main entrance leads into the Bishop Buddy Sala, a large room

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where the combination of tile and high ceilings causes any sound to echo and reverberate throughout the building. As such, it was common to observe individuals lower their voices as soon as they entered, whether they were talking to another person with them or on a phone call. The quiet is honored in this way. Also, it was observed that someone was taking a seat in the first-floor living room when a loud conversation suddenly erupted from the second floor. The person seated looked in the direction of the sound, shook their head, and got up and walked down the hall. It appears silence is the expectation, and a deviation from that was met with distaste.

Interestingly, silence seems like a mechanism for control, even unconsciously. There was an instance in the reading room when one researcher was sitting with a classmate, and she wrote,

> We were talking at full volume when we were the only ones in the room. As soon as someone walked in, we instinctively lowered our voices even though neither had explicitly said to do so. Not only that, but we went from speaking more quietly to whispering to ending the conversation altogether so we could go back to working in silence.

In another situation, the researcher was walking through the building and crossed paths with a colleague when we unexpectedly heard a loud noise and had a brief exchange reacting to it. Though it was likely nothing more than construction work in the building, silence was so common that any noise seemed mutually worth commenting on.

Ironically, one big characteristic of a space designed to bring people together for an exchange and discussion of ideas is silence. As one participant in the survey argued, the school "feels a bit academic and sterile." More specifically, another participant said, "The lobby feels open and empty, the student lounges are rarely occupied, and when they are, it is super quiet." In essence, participants interpreted and experienced the school as "sleek and clean, but low energy and rather stale; slightly uninviting."

Asymmetries of Power

Another key element that emerged through the survey was the asymmetries of power and hierarchies. Current structures tend to keep a hierarchy and legitimize the accumulation of power at the top. There are resistances claiming more horizontal structures and distributed power. One participant in the survey said: "Overall, symbols, ceremonies, and rituals reproduce hierarchy and individualism," and another, regarding the difference between senior and junior faculty, argued that "I see junior faculty carrying a lot of the load for senior faculty. Some senior faculty are hardly ever around. The push to more administrators (POPs with administrative roles) and fewer tenure line faculty is highly disconcerting".

Besides, junior faculty expressed recognition of the disempowered sentiments (e.g., imposter syndrome, weight of tenure track structures, ranks). For example, one participant said: "Tenure, the most important and possibly most harmful ritual! Faculty currently get to vote on their peers, without having to explain why they might have voted a certain way." Another key element is service, particularly for junior faculty, with one sharing: "An unspoken ritual/rule in SOLES is that while you are told you can say no to service, you really can't (or shouldn't). You'll be seen as a complainer or poor team player" and "Service is not

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rewarded much, it seems (but still expected). This has given me conflicting messages about the time I can give in service".

Isolation, Separation, and Lack of Community

In this section, we focus on a recurring theme that revealed a sense of isolation, separation, and lack of community experienced by the constituents in this school. It is important to bear in mind that community constitutes one of the four values espoused by the school, alongside diversity, social justice, and scholarly excellence.

Isolation

Participants collectively shared a sense of isolation while in the building. As one respondent shared, "[I feel] like I have been swallowed by a great power." Isolation between senior and junior professors on one side and professors in general, staff, and students on the other seems evident. One participant stated what is rewarded in the school:

> Status quo seems to prevail. I don't know that this has so much to do with the space but more the faculty who tend to represent older generations of education (still outstanding humans but may not be as informed/experienced with new ideas).

It appears there is a separation of ideas and ways of understanding education between senior and junior faculty, and younger professors feel a bit isolated from their senior colleagues.

Another example of isolation is when, during the participant observations, one person pushed another individual in a wheelchair. The person pushing stops at the main entrance to awkwardly open the doors and help the person in the wheelchair exit the building. This observation stood out because the push button for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance is around the corner from the main entrance and is not easy to locate. As it relates to the organizational culture, this reflects a need for more attention on the inclusion of folks who require mobility support in the building; otherwise, there is a contribution to the isolation of people with disabilities that eventually results in exclusion and lack of belonging.

A third example of isolation from different positions from participant observations was during a SOLES photoshoot. One staff member took up the persona of a student, and he changed into jeans, a t-shirt, and sneakers. For administrators who wanted to appear as administrators, they remained dressed in business casual attire (e.g., suits, ties, high heels, and blazers). The embodiment of what a graduate student looks like compared to an administrator implies distinct perceptions of professionalism. It can contribute to isolating students and maintaining a sense of hierarchy between administrators and students.

Separation

Regarding separation, according to the survey and the ethnographic data, overwhelmingly, the cultural artifacts contributed to shaping individualist behaviors. One of the participants argued, "[the school] is very dark . . . it transmits the tradition of knowledge and the academy but at the same time austerity and individualism since the environment does not invite people to talk, laugh, etc." Another participant similarly stated that the school "seems a little

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to feel more like a museum" or "like a church," while a third one said that they "tend to feel intimidated and tentative and . . . worry about 'spoiling' the space".

These spaces and physical surroundings influence the behavior and interactions of the people within the school. As an international student described, "compared to my undergrad university in China, when walking into this space I can't help but to stay quiet and get to my destination quickly, such as a classroom or office." Thus, people are not motivated to engage in conversations and build community. Instead, a participant shared they feel more "like I shouldn't make noise. I don't know where I can go or what I can do there. Confused. Like I don't really belong." In essence, the university should be a place that—rather than separating—unites people for dialogue, discussion, and exchange of ideas. When asked how the university as a decolonial space would look, one participant put it eloquently:

> [It should be] People from all around the world bringing their knowledge to the university. . . All these different knowledges valued and situated at the center of the conversation. . . This is what the university is about: People from all around the world bringing different perspectives and ideas and trying to collaborate for the common good.

Building Community

When it comes to building community, participants strongly expressed through survey responses a need for building more community in the school. This theme from the survey was evident after four months of ethnographic research conducted in the school. There is a need for connecting and establishing an intercultural dialogue because structures and cultural artifacts within the school seem to promote individualism and isolation. This process of building community is expressed at two different levels: internal (i.e., within the school) and external (i.e., outside with the community).

At an internal level, participants demanded more events to mingle and network, and the creation of spaces for intercultural dialogue. For example, one participant argued: "There is no communication. SOLES feels like a building where classes are taken, and professors' offices are located." And at an external level, there are many petitions for classes off campus and more work with the community, and a desire to learn from knowledge built outside the university. Otherwise, the university can be seen as the ivory tower isolated from the community and the real problems of society. As one participant shared: "It is a beautiful space, but it feels less than approachable and comfortable. It has a definite ivory tower sensibility." Thus, the school's social justice work needs to connect the university with the community. One participant stated: "We need more spaces for engaging with students and the community." Another one shared: "More engagement with the community because the knowledge that we create at the university needs to be useful for the communities and not just for sharing it at conferences and publications."

Challenges, Successes, and . . . Toward Decolonial Spaces?

Decolonizing HE appears to be an insurmountable task as we confront 100s of years of tradition. One main challenge identified through the data is the fact that this process is not fast enough. As one respondent stated: "SOLES seems to reward diversity but does not seem to reward it enough." Another participant argued:

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> The ideology behind SOLES is something that I feel good about, but students strongly feel that there is a disconnect between pattern, practice, and policy. The intention is there but staff and faculty may need time and development to truly follow the institutional intentions.

Another important challenge that emerged through data analysis is the concern with reverse discrimination. There is a risk of changing the subjects at the top of the hierarchy but keeping the hierarchy. One participant argued: "Being part of a minority is rewarded, especially race, gender, or another group that is historically excluded. To me, this has created a sense of reverse discrimination." This risk of retro-oppression, where the oppressed oppress the oppressors as an act of resistance rather than working toward collective freedom and liberation for all, was described by a respondent: "[It is needed] Less emphasis with race as a subject and more encompassing spirit that does not divide by race but views all with the same goals and purpose." Thus, an emerging idea is focusing on social justice in a transversal way. For example, one participant asked for recognition "that social justice also includes people who may not appear to be in the minority. Everyone has a story." Another participant asked for recognizing "the intersectionality culture that is purposely being overlooked".

Events like Conversations of Color with faculty, staff, and students of color are recent successes and newly created artifacts and have started what can be considered decolonial spaces in the school. As one participant shared: "The Conversations of Color events are becoming an important ritual to create a sense of belonging for BIPOC students and to introduce them to BIPOC faculty." Relatedly, the Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice Excellence Showcase epitomizes this language system of social justice and diversity because this event spotlights research related to diversity, inclusion, and social justice conducted by SOLES students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Another new cultural artifact in the school is the All Hands meetings implemented by the new dean upon her arrival. Though new, it still demonstrates some key features of the culture at SOLES, such as being in community and celebrating key accomplishments related to academics, scholarship, and social justice. Interestingly, there was an instance where something novel occurred during an All Hands meeting. We were engaged in a facilitated activity calling for us to stand up and toss around a ball of yarn. The behavioral norm in the auditorium is usually to remain quietly seated as an audience member, so deviating from this momentarily was a refreshing change that might indicate culture shifting.

One more new cultural artifact contributing to inclusion, connection, and building community is the hybrid environment. Navigating HE institutions after experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic has called for increased flexibility with learning modalities and event offerings. As a result, one emerging category from exploring cultural artifacts is the hybrid environment. During a dissertation proposal defense, half of the audience was in the room and the other half was on Zoom. In another instance, the presentation forums, as part of the job interview process for certain roles within SOLES, were converted into a hybrid modality. Striking the balance between in-person and virtual engagement was a notable aspect of these examples.

Part of navigating the hybrid environment is renegotiating physical space. When USD shifted to remote learning during COVID-19, each classroom had to be outfitted with the

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technology to make that possible. The juxtaposition of the newly installed cameras and microphones in the room with the hand-painted crosses by the doors and donor names further illustrates what it means to be in a hybrid environment.

Recognizing the need to align the new initiatives and strategies in the school with the organizational culture and cultural artifacts that surround us in our daily routines is central to any process of decolonizing practices on U.S. campuses. The leadership and collective commitment of the whole community required to transform organizational culture and broaden the space for new cultural artifacts that unfold is the challenge of any Westernized university today that aims to educate interculturally conscious citizens committed to creating a more just and better world for all.

Discussion and Conclusion

The work of the leadership at SOLES values diversity, community, social justice, and scholarly excellence. It is apparent among each of the six primary types of cultural artifacts—especially through work that is displayed or rewarded, the language used, and the rituals of celebration. However, considering people's perceptions and ways of making sense and meaning of these cultural artifacts through the survey and some observations, instances from the data also deviate from these values. Respondents shared concerns about separation, lack of diversity when it comes to some cultural artifacts, and a need for community, which could be tested through different observations. For example, the dichotomous perception of how a graduate student dressed compared to an administrator could lead to assumptions that betray the values of diversity and inclusion. The observation regarding the ADA push button for people with mobility issues and the cacophony in the Sala during the showcase that could be challenging for neurodivergent individuals are issues that could be ameliorated by additional signage and making different entertainment arrangements for the showcase.

The main practical application of the preliminary findings is being intentional about what is said and experienced in the organization: "Cultural artifacts have . . . been found to be quite effective in the reinforcement of existing values, norms, and practices" (Higgins et al., 2006, p. 397). Although the school's leadership has more power than the rest of the employees and students, they are not the only ones who enable and implement leadership. It is key to involve everybody in the organization at different levels, as "values and particularly norms are often passed on in informal communication between employees, rather than through the formal organization's communication channels" (Higgins et al., 2006, p. 403). All community members experience and shape the culture, and, as such, every behavior, decision, and utterance matters. Another implication for practice involves leaders with clearly defined organizational values. Although diversity and inclusion are commonly selected, it is important to be clear about what areas of diversity or inclusion are valued and ensure the cultural artifacts reflect that specificity. For example, the SOLES Book Club selections focused on racial and ethnic diversity, whereas the issue of the ADA push button reveals an oversight related to inclusivity.

Creating an inviting and inclusive environment in HE becomes increasingly important as institutions continue to increase their diversity. Observing how individuals interact with each other and the environment provides clues as to how the culture is reflected in the

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manifestation of cultural artifacts. This observation serves as a way to identify opportunities to remain aligned or become realigned with values that drive inclusive environments. When it comes to organizational culture, Higgins et al. (2006) made the following point: "Keep in mind that an organization's values tend to remain somewhat stable over time. The behavioral norms and organizational practices really indicate whether these values have been accepted or are just meaningless statements" (p. 403). The resulting alignment between the organizational culture at SOLES and its cultural artifacts demonstrates that the values are not superficial but enacted and embodied in the building. Notwithstanding, resultant deviations need to be addressed through corrective efforts. Doing so will continue to create a radical welcome for all who come to SOLES.

Today, the Westernized university still operates under the assumption of universalism. Thus, if our goal is to educate global citizens who understand a more diverse, interconnected, and interdependent world, focusing only on teaching them mainstream knowledge can be valid but insufficient. More critical to this discussion is the point that by focusing on the canon representing a few voices and local areas of the world, we create intangible and tangible spaces in our educational spaces where BIPOC students do not feel represented. This point sends another layer of messaging that conveys that to belong, students need to accept that their histories, their presence, their experiences, and their epistemologies are not welcomed or valued in this space.

Decolonizing pedagogies and practices has become a priority in our universities, and our work moving forward will be centered on (a) acknowledging the limitations of Western knowledge to understand the world; (b) recognizing that knowledge is not neutral and the implicit exclusion and the epistemic racism/sexism of the dominant knowledge takes a painful and long-standing toll on BIPOC students; (c) establishing a dialogue between knowledges in the classroom, auditing syllabi, and including more BIPOC authors and voices; and (d) cocreating in class a pluriverse of meanings and concepts and new redefinitions of old concepts as a foundation for creating more inclusive and intercultural classrooms and societies in the future. This study reveals the necessity of uncovering these challenges that can easily be identified and corrected through additional participant observation and leadership work focused on changing organizational culture and cultural artifacts.

Limitations

It is important to recognize that these professional development sessions and the survey administration took place during the pandemic when we transitioned to remote learning. The pandemic may have influenced the data we collected during this particular space and time. We also had a new interim dean and associate dean move into the leadership position in 2020 and welcomed a new dean in 2022. There were ongoing systemic changes as leadership shifted and new visions were adopted for the school. When conducting this study, we saw several changes that reflected decolonial moves occur in tandem, such as syllabus audits, changes in hiring practices, inclusion of all stakeholders in what we call All Hands meetings, and engagement in cross-sectional group discussions to inform our strategic planning and priorities. Additionally, since the 2022–2023 academic year, SOLES has engaged in envisioning our strategic initiatives as a community across and within

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stakeholder groups through the Dreaming and Learning Groups initiative led by the Dean. Data were analyzed to inform our strategic priorities and initiatives for the upcoming year.

Future research can focus exclusively on each specific type of cultural artifact to examine each one further and their influence in changing the organization's culture. Another study can also examine the emerging categories of sound and silence and the hybrid environment to further explore their effects on organizational culture. The latter is particularly important as HE institutions continue to navigate delivery methods for classes and events, especially if inclusion is one of the values. This study was an ethnography, so the expansion of any finding in this paper is both welcome and necessary. These are possibilities for any Westernized university today that aims to educate global citizens committed to creating a more socially just world for all.

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Human Participants

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Originality Note

The authors confirm that the manuscript is their original work, and if others' works are used, they are properly cited/quoted.

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