THE NAVAJO/HOPI LAND DISPUTE AND THE BOUNDARIES OF METHODOLOGY[1]

Frederic I. Solop, Northern Arizona University
Department of Political Science, P.O. Box 15036, NAU,
Flagstaff, Arizona 86011; SOLOP@NAUVAX.UCC.NAU.EDU

KEY WORDS: Native Americans, Navajo, Hopi, Cross-cultural, Methodology

Gaming, Water Rights, Fishing Rights, Tribal Sovereignty, Land Claims, Treaty Rights, Religious Freedom. Issues directly relevant to Native American communities are constantly in the news; yet, very little survey research has been conducted on these issues (Hill, 1984). The Social Research Laboratory at Northern Arizona University (NAU) regularly includes Native American issues on THE NAU POLL,[2] a biannual, public affairs survey of Arizona residents. In 1992 and 1993, the Arizona media was buzzing with recent news of the Navajo/Hopi land dispute. This issue involved competing land claims from two of the more prominent tribes in the United States. As a prominent public affairs issue in Arizona, this Navajo/Hopi land dispute was ripe for inclusion on the Spring 1993 NAU POLL.

This paper is about contested boundaries: the geographical boundaries contested by the Navajo and Hopi tribes and the methodological boundaries contested by conducting effective survey research on Native American issues. When THE NAU POLL research team began to plan and implement a survey research module on the Navajo/Hopi land dispute, both types of contested boundaries had to be understood.

GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES

The Navajo/Hopi land dispute is a century-old controversy over tribal control of large tracts of land in northern Arizona. In October, 1993, a proposed settlement to this dispute was leaked to the *Arizona Republic*. This settlement would allow the Navajo resisters to remain on the Hopi Partition Land with 75 year leases controlled by the Hopi tribe. In return for past and future losses, the Hopi tribe would be given nearly 500,000 acres of private and public land in Arizona and nearly $15 million dollars by the federal government. It was within this context that the Social Research Laboratory at Northern Arizona University polled Arizonan's toward the framework for settlement.

The Navajo/Hopi land dispute issue was one of three modules appearing in the Spring 1993 NAU POLL. This poll was conducted by the Social Research Laboratory at Northern Arizona University between February 22 and February 27 with a random sample of 402 statewide residents and a comparative sample of 387 Arizona residents living in the five northern Arizona counties of Mohave, Yavapai, Coconino, Apache and Navaho. Phone exchanges were geographically stratified to reflect the distribution of population in Arizona and phone numbers were generated through random digit dialing. The two samples allow for the comparison of statewide and northern Arizona results at a 5% margin of error.

There were three significant findings in THE NAU POLL data: First, a large number of people were unfamiliar with the Navajo/Hopi land dispute issue: only about half of Arizona adult population said they were familiar with this issue; second, there appeared to be no consensus in the state as to the fairness of the settlement terms; third, in northern Arizona, the area most affected by the dispute, there was consensus opposition to transferring public and private lands to tribal control.

In thinking about these results, it became disturbing clear that the voice of Native Americans had been diluted within the methodology of surveying a cross-section of the adult Arizona population about an issue which emerged directly from Native American communities. One facet of the problem was that Native Americans constitute only five percent of the Arizona population. Ninety five percent of the population always dilutes the voice of the other five percent. The second facet of the problem of the problem is that Native Americans were proportionately underrepresented among survey respondents. Native Americans constituted only 2.1% of survey respondents.

Problems with Native American representation in statewide Arizona surveys stems from the rural nature of the Native American population, the low telephone household rate among Native Americans, and reticence about participating in survey research projects. It is important to note that these difficulties are not unique to survey research in Arizona. Similar difficulties affect the validity of state polling throughout the United States. Other states

suffer from problems with small Native American populations dispersed across rural settings, language barriers and low telephone household rates. According to the 1990 U.S. census,[3] Native Americans are more than 10 percent of the population of 113 counties containing approximately 3.4 million people. Also, at least half of the population of two-thirds of all counties live in rural areas and one-third of all counties in the United States have a telephone household rate below 90 percent.

The boundaries of survey research methodology for studying Native American issues and possible solutions to these problems are addressed more fully in the next section.

METHODOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

Research on issues emerging from Native American communities is still in its infancy. Given the breadth of federal, state and local government involvement in Native American affairs, it is inevitable that Native American issues will continue to affect non-Native American people and be a source of interest for public opinion researchers. It is at this point that researchers must consider the methodological boundaries of traditional social science research strategies and contest these boundaries by creatively developing methodologies that insure adequate representation of Native Americans in survey research projects. Researchers can contest the boundaries of traditional methodology by addressing six areas of concern: history, sampling, telephone household rates, access, language barriers, and understanding the Native American world-view.

1) History and Context

If researchers are interested in understanding Native American issues from the vantage point of the communities which produce these issues, it is important to take a historical approach to the planning process. While planning the Navajo/Hopi land dispute module, it became apparent that this dispute is not simply a conflict between American Indian tribes which only now is important to non-Native Americans who may lose private and public land holdings, the issue has a long history that has involved non-Native American intervention since the 19th century.

The federal government stepped into this dispute in the 1970's by arbitrarily drawing boundaries delineating portions of the contested territory to be controlled by each tribe. About 300 Hopis living on the newly determined Navajo Partition Land (NPL) were told to relocate to the other side of the border as were nearly 10,000 Navajo now living on the Hopi Partition Land (HPL) (Benedeck, 1992). All but a few hundred Navajos relocated to their tribe's respective land, but in 1988 a group of traditional Navajos resisting relocation sued the federal government to stay where they were. This federal lawsuit led directly to eighteen months of negotiations between the federal government, the President of the Navajo nation, the Chairman of the Hopi tribe, and the attorney for the plaintiffs.

To honestly assess attitudes toward complex issues, history needs to be considered in the research planning process. It was important to know that the Navajo/Hopi land dispute is an incredibly complex issue that involves federal government intervention as well as concern for religious freedom. This complex understanding stands in contrast to the rather simplified understanding of the issue held by many non-Native Americans.

2) Identifying and Sampling Native Americans

Western researchers often lump all Native Americans together. Each of the more than 200 recognized tribes in the United States, however, possesses unique historical, language, religious, and cultural characteristics. While some characteristics of Native Americans are trans-tribal (language-family characteristics, for example) other characteristics differ between Native American tribes.

Additionally, people within tribes may differ by clan lineage and residence. Native Americans within the same tribe may also vary by degree of acculturation. While some resist acculturation and may be identified as "traditional", others succumb to acculturation and are known as "progressives," still others exist simultaneously between these two worlds (Lonner and Berry, 1986). These differences complicate the difficulty of researchers finding "representative" Native Americans.

If one were able to reasonably identify a Native American population representative of the culture one wishes to study, certain accepted practices such as random sampling procedures may need to be modified to insure that cultural and behavioral characteristics of the community are fairly represented within the study. This concern has led many anthropologists to avoid random sampling procedures and to rely upon "key informants" in the research process (Lonner and Berry, 1986).

However, "creative" random sampling can take place with reasonable success. The Navajo Health Authority working with the Navajo Area Indian Health Service regularly uses a random area sampling procedure for drawing accurate samples of

people from the Navajo reservation. This procedure involves overlaying a grid of 36 cells on top of a map of the reservation and assigning a unique number to each cell. Each cell is referred to as an "interview sector" and each set of 36 cells is labeled a "township." Interview sectors are randomly drawn until a preset maximum number of housing units is selected (Hubbard, el. al., 1979).

Awareness of the differences within Native American communities needs to be integrated into survey practices such as sampling procedures.

3) Telephone Household Coverage

Telephone surveys have experienced enormous growth since the 1960's. Some counties in Arizona, especially in rural northern Arizona, have astonishingly low telephone household rates, however. 1990 Census statistics indicate that the telephone household rates dip as low as 40% in northern Arizona. According to 1990 U.S. Census figures, one-third of all counties in the United States have a telephone household rate below 90%.

Telephone ownership is most closely correlated with family income, and family income is highly correlated with age and race. Households in the United States with unemployed persons, African Americans and Hispanics, single persons and large households, low income groups and households with young heads are more likely to experience noncoverage (Thornberry and Massey, 1988). One could easily add Native Americans to this list. In Arizona, the counties with the largest Native American populations also have low telephone household rates. According to tribal officials, 79% of homes on the Navajo reservation do not have telephones (Donovan, 1993).

This problem raises the possibility of having to supplement telephone interviews with a more qualitative research methodology such as personal interviews. When working with Native Americans, especially in areas with low telephone coverage, it is incumbent upon research teams to develop alternative methodological arrangements which supplement surveys with qualitative work.

4) Gaining Access to Native Americans

It is increasingly more difficult for majority culture researchers to gain access to people in Native American communities (McDonald, 1990). This comes out of the minority culture perception that their communities have been overstudied by government agencies, academics, and other institutions which hold power over them. Also, there is resentment within Native American communities for research projects that provide career benefits to researchers without providing benefits directly to the communities being studied. In the words of Robert Munroe and Ruth Munroe (1986), "social scientists have taken much material away and given little of use in return" (p. 116).

Refusal rates can be reduced if researchers go through proper channels for receiving permission to conduct research within Native American communities. If a researcher is able to gain permission to research a community, the gap of cultural distance requires researchers to hire interviewers from the communities being studied, or from adjacent communities. Ideally, one looks for and trains interviewers with good bilingual skills, people who are known and respected within the community, and adults who are dependable (Biglin, 1971; Trimble, 1977). Access to Native American communities can be greatly improved if researchers meet with community leaders and members prior to initiating the research (Trimble, 1977) and by setting up advisory boards with community representation (Josephson, 1970; Trimble, 1977).

Majority culture researchers must tread lightly in Native American communities and they must be willing to negotiate their goals, methods and procedures throughout the research process. This all takes time and it is imperative that researchers allot extra time for completion of such projects (John, 1990).

5) Instrument Translation/Language

When conducting cross-cultural research, researchers must be sensitive to translating survey instruments into the preferred language of the respondent if the respondent is bilingual, or if the respondents first language is other than English. This is important to researchers in Arizona because, according to 1990 census statistics, English speaking households dip below a third of the population of some counties. Nationwide, eleven percent or more of the population in fifteen percent of all counties do not speak English in the household.

A technique called "back-translation" can help insure the similarity of instruments across two or more languages. Back-translation essentially refers to having one bilingual translator translate the survey instrument into a different language, while the second translator translates the instrument back to English. If both English documents look alike, then the second language instrument can reliably be considered a faithful copy of the English language instrument (Brislin, 1986; Segall, 1986).

Proper question wording is also a key

ingredient to obtaining mirror-like translations of survey instruments.

6) Understanding the American Indian World View

The goal of social science research is to understand the nature of relationships between conditions existing in a known universe. The task is to create knowledge from comparisons across members of the same universe. When working with issues concerning minority cultures, it is important to consider which elements of the selected universe are common to all members and which elements of the common universe are different for the members of the minority culture (Poortinga & Malpass, 1986). Cultures differ in history, customs, language, behaviors, and traditions. Each of these factors affects the world-view of cultural members.

In The Primal Mind, Jamake Highwater (1981) provides detailed insight into the contrasting world-view of a western scientific, objectivist orientation versus the aboriginal communal, subjectivist world-view. This clash of contrasting world-views has several implications for the success of research projects. First, Native Americans are rarely empowered to conduct their own research projects. Research projects conducted among Native American populations therefore tend to reflect the research interests and the western values of the researchers, not of the communities that are the subjects of study. Second, research findings are typically not interpreted from a native point of view (Trimble, 1977). Third, non-Native Americans react to Native Americans through their own cultural lenses. These lenses are clouded by misperceptions of the Native American way of life.

Non-Native Americans often respond to Native American issues from their own perspectives and interests. At times, these perceptions are covertly or overtly "racist" (Peroff, 1992). There is a tendency to lump all Native Americans together. Native American interests are placed in a zero-sum game with non-Native American interests. "They" can only gain, if "we" lose something and "we" are going to do all we can to protect what "we" have against "them." This was certainly true when a consensus seemed to emerge in THE NAU POLL in opposition to private and public land transfers to Native American control. This clash of world-views overtly and covertly victimizes the validity of even the most well-intentioned, well-planned research projects.

CONCLUSION

The Navajo/Hopi land dispute forced those of us working with THE NAU POLL to confront two boundary-related issues. We had to understand the politics of the Navajo/Hopi land dispute and we had to come to grips with the boundaries of traditional survey research methodology. In the course of confronting these boundary issues, it became evident that the methodological issues encountered in this project are not particular to the Arizona context. The 1990 census data indicates that many of the conditions creating these concerns are also present in other states.

The range of concerns one needs to consider when conducting survey research with Native American issues is daunting; yet, in the pursuit of ever more valid results, researchers should heed the advice raised in these pages. While not all problems are solvable, researchers can push the boundaries of western research methodology further by being sensitive to the social and cultural contexts within which they work.

ENDNOTES

[1] I wish to thank Sandra L. Demoruelle, Elaine Rodriquez, and Robert Dean for their research assistance, and Nancy A. Wonders for her editorial comments.

[2] The Spring 1993 NAU POLL was Co-directed by Drs. Frederic I. Solop and Mary Ann E. Steger. As of Fall 1993, THE NAU POLL has been renamed THE ARIZONA POLL.

[3] All 1990 Census statistics used in this paper are drawn from 1990 STF3 Extract for Counties.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benedek, Emily (1992) The Wind Won't Know Me: A History of the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Biglin, James E., (1971) Cultural Values in Indian Education: A study of Parental Attituedes and Value Towards Education on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations. Flagstaff, AZ: Southwestern Behavioral Institute (October).

Brislin, Richard W. (1986) "the Wording and Translation of Research Instruments." in Walter J. Lonner and John W. Berry (eds.), Field Methods in Cross-Cultural Research. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications. pp.137-164.

Donovan, Bill (1993) "Phones on Navajo Reservation Few and Far Between, Users Find," The Arizona Republic. April 11, p. B-1.

Highwater, Jamake (1981) The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America. New York: New American Library.

Hill, Robert B. (1984) "The Polls and Ethnic Minorities," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences. Vol. 472 (March). pp. 155-166.

Hubbard, John, Anita Muneta and Thomas J. Stewart (1979) "Survey Sampling on the Navajo Reservation," Human Organization. Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer). pp. 187-189.

John, Robert (1990) "The Uninvited Researcher in Indian Country: Problems of Process and Product Conducting Research Among Native Americans," Mid-American Review of Sociology, Vol. 14, No. 1-2. pp. 113-133.

Josephson, Eric (1970) "Resistance to Community Surveys," Social Forces, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Summer) pp. 117-129.

Lonner, Walter J., and Berry, John W. (1986) "Sampling and Surveying," in Walter J. Lonner and John W. Berry (eds.), Field Methods in Cross-Cultural Research. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 265-290.

McDonald, Audrey (1990) "Native American Data Collection: Problems and Solutions in Surveying Native Americans," unpublished paper presented at the national conference of the American Association of Public Opinion Research (May).

Munroe, Robert L. and Ruth H. Munroe (1986) "Field Work In Cross Cultural Psychology," in Walter J. Lonner and John W. Berry (eds.), Field Methods in Cross-Cultural Research. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 111-136.

Peroff, Nicholas, C. (1992) "Policy Research in Indian Affairs: Old Problems and a new Perspective," in Fremont J. Lyden and Lyman H. Legters (eds.) Native Americans and Public Policy. Pittsburgh: Univeristy of Pittsburgh Press. pp. 265-284.

Poortinga, Ype H. and Malpass, Roy S. (1986) "Making Inferences from Cross-Cultural Data," in Walter J. Lonner and John W. Berry (eds.), Field Methods in Cross-Cultural Research. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 265-290.

Segall, Marshall H. (1986) "Assessment of Social Behavior," in Walter J. Lonner and John W. Berry (eds.), Field Methods in Cross-Cultural Research. Beverley Hills: Sage Publications. pp. 265-290.

Thornberry, Owen T., Jr. and James T. Massey (1988) "Trends in United States Telephone Coverage Across Time and Subgroups," in Robert M. Groves, et. al. (eds), Telephone Survey Methodology. New York: Hohn Wiley & Sons. pp. 25-49.

Trimble, Joseph E. (1977) "The Sojourner in the American Indian Community: Methodological Issues and Concerns," Journal of Social Issues. Vol. 33, No. 4. pp. 159-174.