

# UCSB McNair Scholars Research Journal



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2011

Volume 1

# **The UCSB McNair Scholars Research Journal**

**University of California, Santa Barbara  
2011 • Volume 1**



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**THE UCSB MCNAIR SCHOLARS**  
**RESEARCH JOURNAL**

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## **Letter from Executive Vice Chancellor Gene Lucas**

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this inaugural issue of the UCSB McNair Scholars Journal. This journal recognizes the research accomplishments of a select group of eight undergraduate scholars from a variety of disciplines. These students have successfully completed our McNair Scholars Program. Their contributions to this journal represent the hard work and intellectual creativity of students that we anticipate will ultimately be leaders in their respective fields, and faculty mentors who exemplify the dedication of our campus to undergraduate success.

The McNair Scholars Program is a federally funded program geared to provide research opportunities for first-generation college, low-income, and underrepresented undergraduates as a means of preparing them for graduate school. Our McNair Scholars Program aligns with our campus goals of improving both the diversity and quality of our students, and preparing them for success beyond their undergraduate experience. By combining undergraduate research with faculty mentoring and academic support services, the McNair Scholars Program opens the way to graduate school for students from families that have not traditionally considered even a college education.

We're very proud of the success of our McNair Scholars Program and the students that have completed it. I congratulate the McNair Scholars, applaud the faculty mentors, and extend my appreciation to the staff of the McNair Scholars Program for their dedication and work in helping these students achieve success.

With warm regards,

Gene Lucas  
Executive Vice Chancellor

## **Letter from Dean Melvin L. Oliver**

Welcome to the first issue of the UCSB McNair Scholars Journal. The young scholars whose work appears here have worked with a faculty mentor to better understand and learn to carry out research in their respective fields of specialization. The research they have produced represents the result of applying creative ideas to research questions using systematic and rigorous methods of established research protocols in several areas, ranging from the social sciences to the biological sciences to the humanities. I'm sure you will agree with me that this research is both impressive and engaging.

As McNair Scholars these students are being encouraged to advance their education in hopes that they will become the next generation of college and university professors. We have seen scholars in previous cohorts go on to prestigious graduate and professional schools and we have no doubt that, as a consequence of their McNair experience, these scholars are ready, and will, excel in their graduate program. As first generation, and often underrepresented minorities, they will become an important resource for higher education as our student population becomes more diverse and our nation's productivity becomes increasingly reliant on the academic, economic and social success of this multiethnic mosaic.

The UCSB McNair Scholars program is uniquely situated in the College of Letters and Sciences, indicating the importance of this effort as part of the College's core belief that diversity and excellence are both necessary to advance knowledge in the 21st century. I salute the Director, Dr. Beth Schneider, the Assistant Director, Monique Limon, staff, graduate mentors, and the array of faculty mentors who

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have selflessly given of their time, for creating the kind of supportive and nurturing environment that has made the production of this journal possible. And finally, I want to salute the McNair scholar authors who, I hope, will one day look fondly upon this publication as one of their first in a long line of publications in a significant academic career!

Sincerely,

Melvin L. Oliver

SAGE Sara Miller McCune Dean of Social Sciences

Principal Investigator, UCSB McNair Scholars Program

## **Letter from McNair Program Director, Beth Schneider**

Here, at last, is the University of California, Santa Barbara McNair Scholars Journal. As the Director of the McNair Scholars Program since its inception, it is a pleasure to deliver the first volume to our students, alumni, faculty mentors, campus allies, and McNair colleagues in California and around the country. As a new McNair program, Assistant Director Monique Limon and I imagined producing just such a volume, but actually making it happen is, like all other aspects of new program implementation, full of setbacks, distractions, surprises, pleasures, and many new learning experiences.

Most of our student scholars spend two years with the UCSB McNair Scholars Program. Our aim is to have all our students apply to graduate school in their senior year and to get accepted within one to two years of completion of their undergraduate education. The expectations have been high and for the most part, they have been met. Our students are required to offer at least one oral presentation on their research as well as two or three poster sessions.

The papers published in Volume 1 are the final versions of manuscripts by some of our recent graduates. These students were willing to go the extra mile, continue to rewrite their research papers in response to a steady stream of comments from their mentors and the journal editors. All but one completed final revisions during their first term of graduate education, a sacrifice reflecting a serious labor of love. These are undergraduate research papers, the first of many we hope these eight students will publish during their graduate training and in their first positions. The papers reflect research in a range of disciplines, including many interdisciplinary fields unique to UCSB: Aquatic Biology, Black Studies, Brain and Psychological Sciences, Chicana and Chicano Studies, Communication, Counseling Psychology, Film and Media Studies, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology, and Sociology.

The perseverance, patience, and diligence displayed by the eight scholars included in this issue will serve them well as they seek doctoral training in their respective fields. We know that our current senior scholars will soon follow in the path of this first published cohort. For all first-generation, low income, and underrepresented undergraduates, I hope the existence of the journal and the labor it represents will be an inspiration to seek research opportunities, develop successful mentorships, and take seriously a future in which McNair Scholars will be key academic and professional players in college and university life around the nation.

Special thanks to the UCSB McNair Scholars staff, and congratulations to the scholars.

In pride,

Professor Beth E. Schneider

## **Letter from the Editors, Drs. Ellen Broidy and Beth E. Schneider**

The McNair Scholars Program at UCSB is pleased to bring you the inaugural issue of the UCSB McNair Scholars Research Journal. A cooperative effort of faculty mentors, McNair staff, and most especially a dedicated cadre of student scholars, the journal represents months of research, writing, editing and reviewing on the part of all the participants.

For our scholars, preparation of their manuscripts for publication in the Journal was alternately a challenging and a rewarding experience. Novices when they began the process, the scholars embarked on a year-long adventure in what it takes to produce academic work suitable for publication. With good humor and extraordinary patience and fortitude, they experienced the frustration of being asked to revise and revise again and then the feeling of elation that comes with a final acceptance. The McNair staff used this opportunity to provide scholars with a practical hands-on introduction to the types of writing and revision expected of graduate students and academics.

Submission to the Journal was never a requirement of participation in the UCSB McNair Scholars Program so we were enormously gratified that a number of our students decided to submit their work. Some scholars were unable to participate due to previous publications arrangement with faculty mentors while others, having left UCSB to start their graduate programs, were simply not able to take on the additional tasks involved in manuscript revision. The scholars who did submit worked diligently on their papers, rethinking, rewriting, reorganizing, and in some instances, reconceptualizing core ideas. We applaud them all for their hard work and commitment.

We trust that you will enjoy reading the work of the UCSB McNair Scholars represented in this inaugural issue of the Journal. We look forward to bringing you the voices of new generations of scholars in

subsequent issues and thank you on behalf of the authors, mentors, and editors who made this publication possible.

Best,

Ellen Broidy, Ph.D.

Librarian Emerita and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Women's Studies,  
UCLA

Beth E. Schneider

Professor, Department of Sociology

Director, UCSB McNair Scholars Program

# **Effects of pH and temperature on fertilization and early development in the sea urchin, *Lytechinus pictus***

**Brianna Jones**

Mentor: Dr. Pauline Yu  
Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology

## **Abstract**

*Increasingly high levels of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> are quickly dissolving into the ocean and altering its chemistry. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates for near-future temperature and pH levels in our oceans are of great concern. Current research has focused on assessing how organisms will respond to the acidification and warming temperatures. Some marine invertebrates that spawn their gametes into the ocean have shown vulnerability to these changes resulting in decreased fertilization success. This paper examines the effects of these variables on fertilization success and early development of the sea urchin, *Lytechinus pictus*. Spawning was induced under multiple combinations of temperatures and pCO<sub>2</sub>. Fertilization success was determined by the proportion of eggs that showed successful early development. While later development of *L. pictus* has been previously investigated, this is the first study to investigate their fertilization success with increased ocean temperature and acidification. Fertilization success increased with rising temperatures although aberrant development also increased with temperature over time. If the expected future ocean conditions are capable of affecting early development, urchin populations may show a decline, potentially causing ecological problems.*

## Introduction

Increasing levels of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> are altering the chemistry of the oceans. It is estimated that pH levels have decreased 0.1 units since preindustrial times (IPCC 2007). By the year 2100, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are predicted to increase by up to 620 ppm with a corresponding decrease in ocean pH by 0.4 units (IPCC 2007). Reduced pH levels and the resulting hypercapnia (elevated internal CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations) have negative impacts on reproduction and development of some marine invertebrates (Michaelidis *et al.* 2005). Many of these marine invertebrates have biphasic life histories including a planktonic life stage and a benthic adult life stage, with the early planktonic stage being the most vulnerable (Byrne *et al.* 2009).

Sea surface temperatures are rising as a result of global warming. Projections for sea surface temperature in the Eastern Pacific indicate an increase of 2-3°C by 2100 (IPCC 2007). Physiological processes and marine faunal distributions are heavily influenced by water temperature (Richardson & Poloczanska 2008). Organisms may not even survive to adulthood since early developmental mechanisms may be harmed by increasing water temperatures (Byrne *et al.* 2008).

Fertilization and early development of the sea urchin *Heliocidaris erythrogramma* has been shown to be affected under warmer temperatures but not under decreased pH levels. This suggests pH may have more effect on larval calcification (Byrne *et al.* 2009), a research focus in ocean acidification. The brittlestar, *Ophiothrix fragilis*, shows high mortality and abnormal development due to acidification (Dupont *et al.* 2008). The sea urchins, *Hemicentrotus pulcherrimus* and *Echinometra mathaei*, show decreased fertilization rate, cleavage rate, developmental speed and pluteus larval size with increasing concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> (Kurihara & Shirayama 2004).

*Lytechinus pictus* is an Eastern Pacific coast urchin species. Spawning usually takes place in summer months (Morris *et al.* 1980). High CO<sub>2</sub> conditions have been shown to have significant effects on the size and shape of *L. pictus* larvae, as well as causing the down-regulation of genes essential to biomineralization (O'Donnell *et al.* 2010). In this experiment, our research team examined how warmer water temperatures and lower pH levels, due to increased atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, could affect reproductive success in this sea urchin. We hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in fertilization success and early larval development when gametes are placed under different temperature and pH levels; specifically we predicted lower fertilization rates and increased aberrant development as a result of both increased water temperatures and decreased pH levels.

## Methods

### *Study Organism*

Adult *Lytechinus pictus* were collected using SCUBA (self contained underwater breathing apparatus) from a depth of 12-15 meters at Pelican Bay, Santa Cruz Island (34.02.150N 119.42.162W) and Anacapa West Island (34.00.173N 119.25.512W) between November 2008 and March 2010. Urchins were held in a flow through seawater system at the University of California, Santa Barbara at ambient temperature (14-15°C) and fed *Macrocystis pyrifera ad libitum* up until the time of the experiment. Spawning was induced by an injection of 0.5M KCl into the coelomic cavity of one male and one female. Sperm was collected dry from the aboral surface, and eggs were collected into a beaker full of seawater. Gametes were inspected for viability prior to use.

## *CO<sub>2</sub> System*

Three treatment levels of CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations were dissolved into multiple larval buckets as described by Fangue *et al.* in 2010. The concentrations: 380, 550 and 990 parts per million (ppm) *p*CO<sub>2</sub> were chosen based on a control (380 ppm) and two IPCC 2007 predicted scenarios for the year 2100 (“B1” and “A1FI”).

pH was measured with a spectrophotometer using the indicator dye m-crestol purple (Sigma) following the procedures explained in Standard Operating Procedure 6b (Dickson *et al.* 2007). Total alkalinity was measured by open-cell titration in accordance to Standard Operating Procedure 3b (Dickson *et al.* 2007). pH, total alkalinity, salinity and in-situ temperature in buckets were used to calculate the *p*CO<sub>2</sub> in each treatment using the Excel program spreadsheet CO2SYS v.12 (Pierrot *et al.* 2006). The ambient temperature experiments were maintained in the larval culture buckets. Temperature baths and incubators were used to control two elevated temperatures (18.5°C and 23.0°C). Water quality measurements were taken two days prior to the experiment, before spawning and the day following the spawn.

## *Fertilization & Larval Development*

Treatment water was poured into 50 ml centrifuge tubes and placed in corresponding temperature baths (3 pH x 3 temperatures = 9 trials). Two 50 ml tubes were utilized per trial for inspection at 1 hour and again at 24 hours (9 trials x 2 developmental stage sampling time points = 18 falcon tubes). Eggs were stocked in each tube at a concentration of 5 eggs/ml. Sperm was diluted to a final concentration of 1:10,000 in each tube. Sperm-egg contact time lasted 1 hour. At 1 hour the embryos were rinsed through a 35 µm mesh filter to eliminate excess sperm. The embryos from the 1 hour batch were collected in a 2 ml tube and fixed with 2% formalin (final concentration) for later examination. The embryos

for the inspection at 24 hours were re-suspended in fresh treatment water and placed back into their respective temperature treatments until 24 hours post-fertilization when they were re-filtered, collected and fixed (as above). Fertilization success at 1 hour was determined in fixed embryos (n= 93-387) by visual inspection using an Olympus BX50 microscope and scored by the presence of a fertilization envelope (Photo 1) compared to the absence of the fertilization envelope (Photo 2). Early development was similarly inspected at 1 hour and at 24 hours and scored by the number of embryos (1 hour, n= 93-387; 24 hours, n= 108-289) showing unsuccessful embryonic development (Photo 3) measured against successful development (Photo 4).

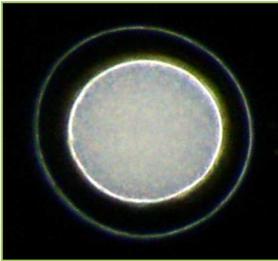


Photo 1. Fertilized egg of *Lytechinus pictus* with fertilization envelope

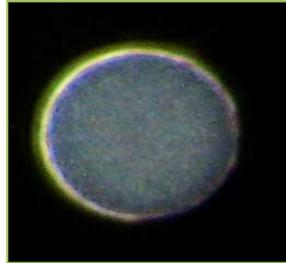


Photo 2. Unfertilized egg of *Lytechinus pictus*

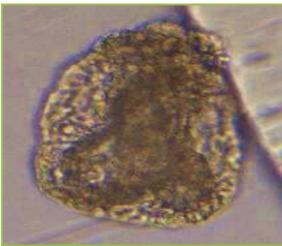


Photo 3. Aberrant *Lytechinus pictus* gastrula at 24 hours. 990 ppm treatment at 18.5°C.



Photo 4. Normal *Lytechinus pictus* gastrula at 24 hours. 990ppm treatment at 18.5°C.

## Analysis/Results

Initial water conditions were taken the day prior to spawning. Ambient water temperature was measured at  $14.0 \pm 0.5$  °C from the inflow system previously mentioned. After the 24 hour culture period, water temperatures were  $14.0 \pm 0.2$ ,  $18.5 \pm 2.2$ , and  $23 \pm 0.3$  due to incubator variation. Targeted CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations were dissolved in at 380 ppm, 550 ppm, and 990 ppm however, actual *p*CO<sub>2</sub> levels in seawater fluctuated between temperature baths (Table 1).

Table 1. Water quality measurements taken at 24 hours post fertilization

Temperature	pH	<i>p</i> CO <sub>2</sub>
14.2	8.031	418.0
20.6	7.936	545.5
23.3	7.899	606.9
14.0	7.942	527.6
20.7	7.840	704.6
23.2	7.801	784.5
14.2	7.640	1130.3
20.6	7.611	1255.4
23.3	7.580	1377.7

An overall increase in fertilization with increasing temperature was observed. The 990 ppm treatment showed a 41% increase in fertilization over temperature (Figure 1).

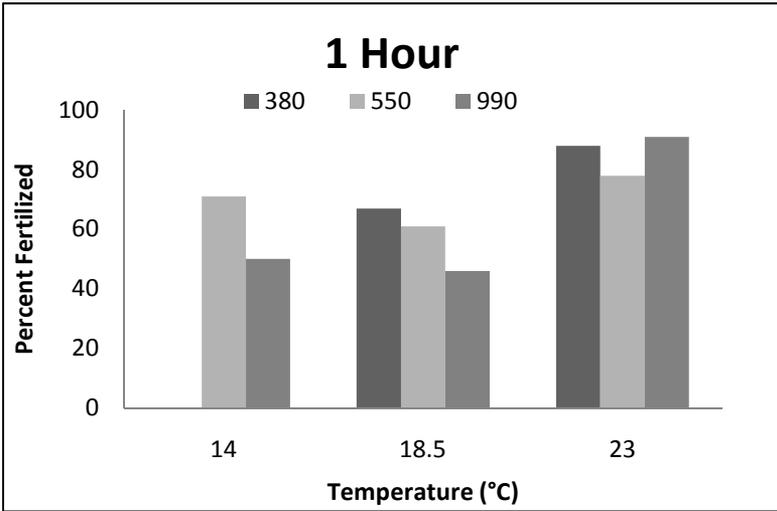


Figure 1. Percent of eggs fertilized at 1 hour post fertilization by temperature over treatments

Chi-squared ( $\chi^2$ ) statistics were used to determine if the probability of fertilization success and irregular development under each treatment and temperature combination was greater than by chance. Chi-squared analysis revealed significant treatment and temperature effects on fertilization except in the 550 ppm treatment (Table 2).

Table 2. Chi squared statistical results for fertilization success and irregularities at 1 hour and 24 hours across treatment and temperature

	Fertilization		Irregular 1 hour		Irregular 24 hours	
	X <sup>2</sup>	p value	X <sup>2</sup>	p value	X <sup>2</sup>	p value
<i>Comparison by temperature across treatment</i>						
<b>14</b>	7.69	<0.01*	3.63	<0.1	6.41	<0.05*
<b>18.5</b>	7.63	<0.025*	7.69	<0.025*	11.28	<0.005*
<b>23</b>	7.9	<0.025*	18.12	<0.001*	1.62	<0.5
<i>Comparison by treatment across temperature</i>						
<b>380</b>	5.86	<0.005*	8.57	<0.005*	17.41	<0.001*
<b>550</b>	4.97	<0.1	4.86	<0.1	9.66	<0.01*
<b>990</b>	79.46	<0.001*	3.75	<0.5	11.95	<0.005*

Temperature effects were most pronounced on development after 24 hours. Visual inspection of aberrant development showed lower percentages at 1 hour (Figure 2) compared to 24 hours where it reached a high of 92% (Figure 3). Differences in frequency of observed abnormalities at 1 hour were generally greater between treatments than within treatments.

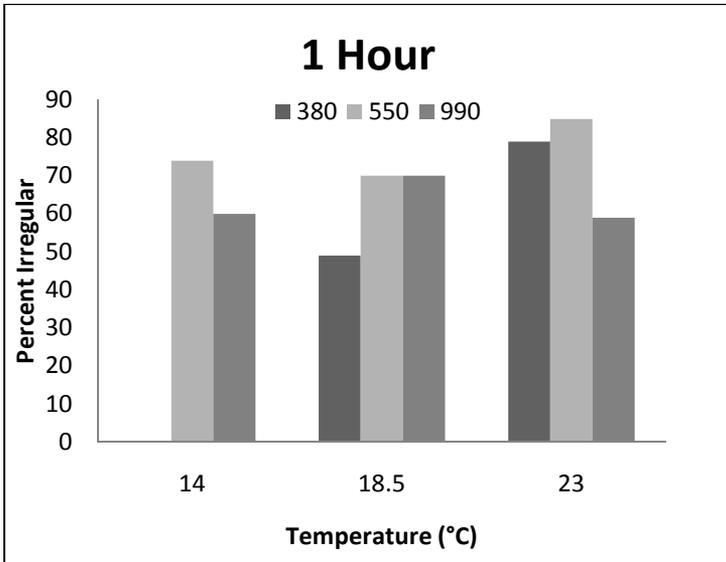


Figure 2. Percent of irregular development at 1 hour post fertilization by temperature over treatments

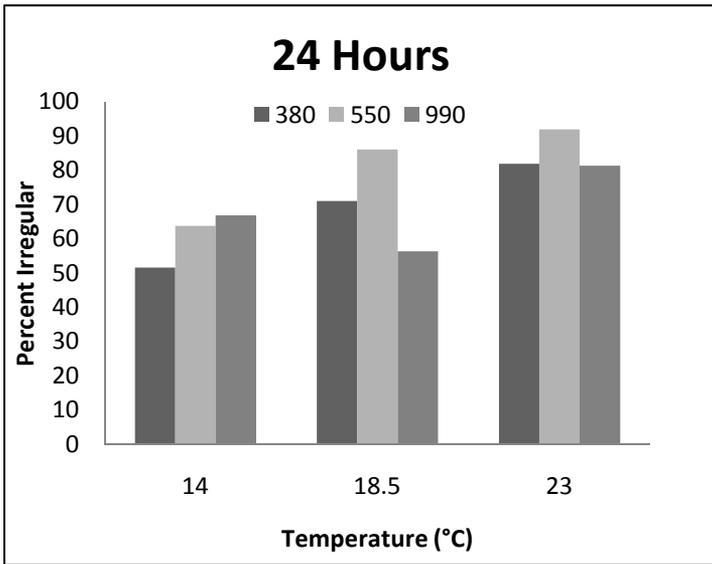


Figure 3. Percent of irregular development at 24 hours post fertilization by temperature over treatments

## Discussion

### *CO<sub>2</sub> Levels*

The experimental water quality measurements were not as consistent with the targeted values and were considerably higher than expected. Theoretical values are provided (Table 3) to show where the experimental values should have remained throughout the experiment.

Table 3. Theoretical pH levels and CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations for incubated temperatures

Temperature	pH	pCO <sub>2</sub>
14.2	8.025	424.7
20.6	8.026	428.1
23.3	8.026	429.9
14.0	7.936	535.9
20.7	7.940	540.4
23.2	7.941	542.6
14.2	7.633	1148.3
20.6	7.644	1157.5
23.3	7.648	1162.5

The increased pCO<sub>2</sub> is likely due to the small volume of the tubes and the higher respiration rates of the embryos and microbes at higher temperatures. Temperature also has a large effect on pCO<sub>2</sub> in a water body due to the thermodynamics of CO<sub>2</sub> hydration (Dickson *et al.* 2007); pCO<sub>2</sub> will increase regardless of animal and microbial respiration in warmer water. In this experiment, the control for the increase in pCO<sub>2</sub> due to limitation of the CO<sub>2</sub> gas-reactor system was not possible. Individual pCO<sub>2</sub> reservoirs at each temperature would improve the control over pCO<sub>2</sub> levels. Though the water quality measurements are elevated compared to the predicted scenarios from IPCC, they could possibly still be within reasonable range of future ocean measurements as anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continue to increase, given naturally elevated levels of pCO<sub>2</sub> in Easter Pacific upwelling zones (Yu *et al.* 2011).

The inflow system generally had a higher pCO<sub>2</sub> (~550 ppm pCO<sub>2</sub>) than what was chosen for the control (P. Yu, pers. obs.) and therefore does not represent average global surface ocean

conditions currently; though, as a deeper water sea urchin species (Morris *et al.* 1980) the incoming seawater measurements may be closer to its natural environment, especially during upwelling.

### *Fertilization & Larval Development*

Increased temperatures may have provided increased fertilization success in *L. pictus*. Increasing sea surface temperatures may enhance sea urchin fertilization as a result of increased sperm swimming speeds and sperm-egg collisions (Hagström & Hagström 1959). Another potential aid in echinoderm fertilization is the ability of maternal acclimatization which influences thermal tolerance and development (Bingham *et al.* 1997). However, the concurrent increase in aberrant development with rising temperatures will likely reduce the chances of survival into metamorphosis and adulthood.

Internal pH levels (pHi) of sperm are near 6.8 to reduce respiration while in the gonads (Mita & Nakamura 2001). Sperm release into low pH seawater can be inhibitory to swimming activity, though it may be over-ridden by the respiratory dilution effect of seawater and by egg jelly peptides, which improve sperm motility at such low pH levels (Darszon *et al.* 2008). Fertilization success was significant (Table 2) across all CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations (even in the abnormally high treatments) suggesting this inhibition may be reversed by increasing temperatures or by high dilution.

Examination at 1 hour revealed that some embryos in the high CO<sub>2</sub> concentration and high temperature had begun cleavage but had lost their fertilization envelopes. The fertilization envelope is meant to prevent polyspermy and protect the embryo (Mozingo *et al.* 1993). A separation of the embryo from its fertilization envelope may have contributed to some confusion in visual inspection for scoring of fertilization success. Embryos that showed cleavage but did not have an envelope were considered

fertilized, whereas those that did not have an envelope and did not show any cleavage were considered unfertilized. The removal of the fertilization envelope suggests that high CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations may cause it to weaken and fall away from the embryo, a sublethal negative effect as a result of ocean acidification.

The expected biological risks due to seawater changes could have their greatest effects during the broadcast spawning of some invertebrates. Gamete interactions have evolved to increase fertilization success; changes in the seawater chemistry may have the ability to alter the physiology of these gametes and embryos. Non-lethal effects of ocean acidification may slow the potential for the co-evolution between gametes reducing fertilization. Reproductive failure in response to climate change reveals the potential for major anthropogenic alteration of marine ecosystems (Richardson & Poloczanska 2008).

Further experimentation is needed to increase the understanding of the mechanisms that result in aberrant development due to ocean chemistry changes, specifically the loss of the fertilization envelope. Ocean acidification research will be continuously important especially if temperature and pH levels surpass current estimates.

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# **Point Mutations in mGluR5 Produce Abnormalities in Accumbens Glutamate *in vivo*: Link to Cocaine Sensitivity**

**Racquel Domingo**

Mentor: Dr. Karen K. Szumlinski  
Department of Psychology

## **Abstract**

*Previous research has indicated that the interactions between group I metabotropic glutamate receptors, specifically mGluR5, and Homer proteins may be involved in neuropsychiatric disorders, including psychosis and addiction. To further investigate the mGluR5-Homer interaction in the regulation of brain and behavior, transgenic mice with T1123A and S1126A point mutations of important phosphorylation sites on the mGluR5 subtype of glutamate receptor (TS) were investigated. This mGluR5 mutant mouse exhibits a 50% reduction in Homer binding to the receptor. This study used various *in vivo* microdialysis approaches to compare the accumbens glutamate phenotype of wild-type (WT) and TS mice. The data support the hypothesis that the increased behavioral sensitivity to cocaine exhibited by TS mice is related to anomalies in accumbens glutamate and further the role for mGluR5-Homer interactions in regulating glutamate transmission *in vivo*.*

## Introduction

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health revealed that 5.3 million Americans aged 12 and older reported having used cocaine in any form and about 1.1 million had abused crack at least once in the year prior to the survey [National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2009]. Cocaine is a potent brain stimulant that can result in adverse psychological and physiological effects (NIDA). While significant research is being conducted to understand the regulatory pathways involved in the addictive properties of cocaine, much remains unclear. Metabotropic glutamate receptors (mGluRs) have been found to be implicated in the behavioral effects induced by psychostimulants [Chiamulera et al. 2001; Swanson et al. 2001]. Furthermore, abnormalities in mGluR5 and Homer interactions are theorized to be involved in neuropsychiatric diseases including addiction, psychosis and affective disorders [Szumlinski et al. 2006]. Recent studies have demonstrated that both mGluR1 and mGluR5 are involved in cocaine-induced lethality, as well as cocaine-seeking behavior in mice [Kotlinska et al. 2009]. Moreover, members of the Homer family of proteins have also been implicated as they regulate signal transduction through glutamate receptors [Szumlinski et al. 2007].

This research focuses on the group 1 metabotropic glutamate receptor (mGluR5) and its interaction with Homer proteins in the nucleus accumbens (NAC) region responsible for reward, learning, and motivation. Homers are important proteins that contain an EVH1 domain that recognizes and interacts with proline rich motifs found on a number of molecules within the excitatory synapse of the brain, including group 1 metabotropic glutamate receptors of which mGluR5 is a member [Szumlinski et al. 2008]. Through the recognition of proline rich motifs by the EVH1 domain, Homers are able to bind directly to the receptors, as well as other molecules downstream to mGluR5s that also contain

these proline rich motifs. These downstream molecules include: IP3 (inositol triphosphate) receptors that regulate  $Ca^{2+}$ , diacylglycerol lipase-2, and PIKE (PI3 kinase enhancer) which activates PI3 (phosphoinositide 3) kinase. Essentially, Homer-mGluR interactions regulate various cellular effects (Figure 1).

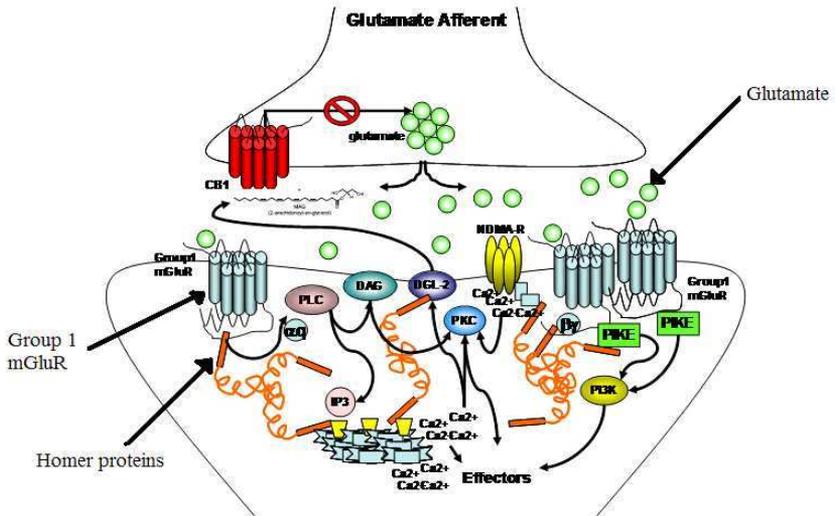


Figure 1. Synapse of the brain: depicts an overall picture or idea of the various interactions between Homer proteins and various cellular molecules like mGluRs, IP3, PIKE, etc.

A unique feature of Homer proteins is its coiled coil domain, which includes two leucine zippers (Figure 2).

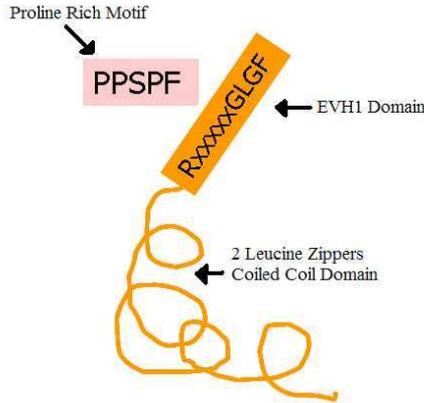


Figure 2. EVH1 domain recognizes proline rich motifs. This figure illustrates the two components of Homers: (1) EVH1 domain and (2) Coiled coil domain. It also depicts the recognition of proline rich motifs by the EVH1 domain.

These domains allow Homer proteins to interact with each other. This characteristic is important in Homer's ability to regulate signaling efficiency of mGluR5. By being able to interact with each other through this coiled coil domain, Homers are able to physically link mGluR5s to various signaling molecules, bringing them closer together and making a more efficient signaling complex. In this way, Homers are important regulatory proteins of mGluRs as they are important mediators of the signaling complex [Szumlinski et al. 2008].

This research explores the possibility that mGluR5's ability to signal through Homer proteins may be critical for the normal functioning of the NAC and for cocaine-induced abnormalities. To address this hypothesis, mice with point mutations on the mGluR5 receptor were used. Unpublished research from the laboratory of a collaborator, Dr. P.F. Worley, indicates that point mutations of T1123A and S1126A (TS) abolish the phosphorylation of the receptor at these two sites and reduce Homer binding by 50%. Wild-type and TS mice, also known as KI (knock in), were subjected to behavioral and neurochemical testing to assess the function of the NAC and glutamate content. It is predicted that the interaction between mGluR5 and Homer proteins is an important molecular mechanism involved in regulating the normal function of brain regions involved in learning, memory, attention and motivation.

## **Methods**

To assess the impact of a 50% reduction in Homer binding of mGluR5, experiments that tested behavior (cocaine conditioned place preference) and neurochemistry (*in vivo* microdialysis) were implemented.

*Cocaine-Conditioned Place Preference (CPP)* - Conditioned place preference is a behavioral model used to assess the rewarding and aversive effects of drugs [Prus et al. 2009]. An apparatus to measure cocaine reward was used as previously described [Szumlinski et al. 2003]. Place conditioning compartments were constructed using plexiglass (46 cm long x 24 cm high x 22 cm wide). The 2 compartments were separated by a removable divider. One of the compartments contained smooth ground with dark brown walls. The other compartment contained rough ground with white and black marble walls. These compartments were designed to establish an “unbiased” place

conditioning paradigm [Szumlinski et al., 2007, Shimosato and Ohkuma, 2000].

Three sequential phases were followed in place conditioning: preconditioning test, conditioning, and post-conditioning test. The tests of each phase had a 15 minute duration. During the preconditioning test, the mouse's preferred compartment was observed by monitoring the time spent in both compartments accessible through an open gate, where a longer duration established the preferred side.

Cocaine conditioning was performed over an 8-day period. During training, the mice (WT, HET, and KI) were given either a 3 mg/kg (low dose) or a 10 mg/kg (moderate dose) injection of cocaine (NIDA, Bethesda, MD) based on 0.01 ml/g body weight of the mice. They were then placed into the conditioning chamber with a closed divider. In this way, the mice were conditioned to associate that compartment with cocaine. On alternating days, mice were injected with an equivalent dose of saline. When mice were injected with saline, they were placed in their preferred compartment while when injected with cocaine, mice were placed in their nonpreferred compartment. A post-conditioning test was administered the day following that last cocaine injection session and was identical to that of the preconditioning test. The difference in the time spent in the nonpreferred vs preferred compartment on the post-conditioning test served to index conditioned reward [Szumlinski et al., 2006].

*In vivo Microdialysis* - *In vivo* microdialysis is a technique that collects and provides a means of measuring neurotransmitter levels in different regions of the brain. To relate the behavioral phenotype of TS mutant mice to alterations in glutamate, *in vivo* microdialysis was performed prior to and following four injections of 3 mg/kg and 10 mg/kg of cocaine in mice.

*Surgical Procedures* – Under pentobarbital anesthesia, mice were implanted with a 20 gauge stainless steel guide cannula (11 mm long) 3 mm above the nucleus accumbens. The guide cannula was set and stabilized onto the skull using dental resin as previously described [Groseclose et al., 1998]. After a week of recovery, a microdialysis probe was lowered into the guide cannula and perfused with a microdialysis buffer (5 mM glucose, 2.5 mM KCl, 140 mM NaCl, 1.4 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 0.15% phosphate-buffered saline [pH 7.4]) at a rate of 2 µl/min as described previously (Middaugh et al., 2003). Three hours after probe insertion, dialysis samples were collected every 20 min, beginning 60 min prior to an i.p. injection of 3 mg/kg or 10 mg/kg of cocaine. Samples were frozen at -80° C until analysis.

*High-Pressure Liquid Chromatography (HPLC)* – HPLC system with electrochemical detection was used to measure and analyze glutamate and dopamine neurotransmitters in the dialysis samples collected from *in vivo* microdialysis. This process is described elsewhere (Szumlinski et al. 2006, 2007; also see the Supplementary Experimental Procedures [<http://www.neuron.org/cgi/content/full/43/3/401/DC1>]).

## **Results**

*Conditioned Place Preference (CPP)* - TS knock in (KI) and heterozygous (HET) mice examined in a cocaine-conditioned place preference paradigm showed a preference for the cocaine-paired side at a relatively low dose of 3mg/kg of cocaine, while wild type (WT) mice exhibited no significant place- preference at this dose. In contrast, at a moderate dose of 10 mg/kg of cocaine, WT showed a place- preference, while the HET and KI mice displayed place aversion. These findings are summarized in Figure 3 below.

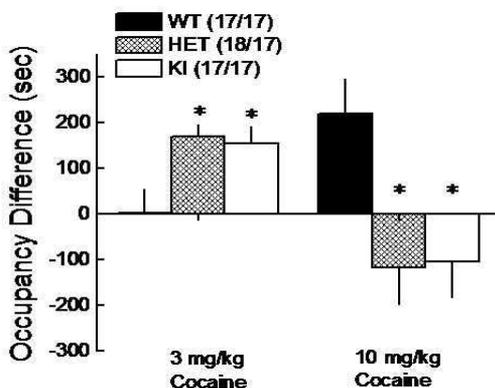


Figure 3. Cocaine Conditioned Place Preference (CPP). This figure shows the results of the CPP experiment with low dose effects seen on the left and moderate dose effects on the right.

Locomotor activity was also monitored during CPP. This was determined by calculating the total distance traveled during conditioning. As demonstrated in Figure 4, at 3 mg/kg, KI mice exhibited an overall increased locomotion activity across the four injections of cocaine, indicative of sensitization, while WT and HET did not exhibit any increase in cocaine-induced locomotion.

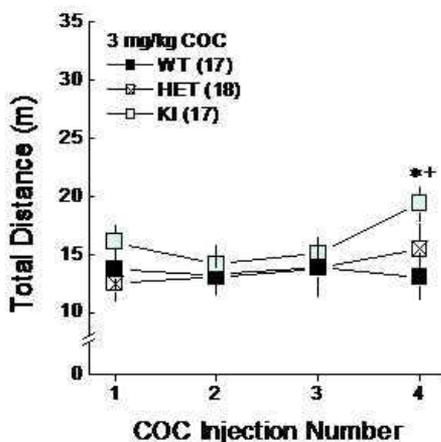


Figure 4. Locomotion activity at 3 mg/kg. After cocaine treatment, sensitivity to the drug when analyzing locomotion activity in KI mice was observed as indicated by the \*+ at injection 4.

When administered 10 mg/kg cocaine, KI mice showed a significant increase in locomotion after the first injection, but this level of activity did not change with repeated cocaine treatment. In contrast to this, both HET and WT mice show a definite increase in locomotion activity across the injections, indicating sensitization. These results are illustrated in Figure 5 below.

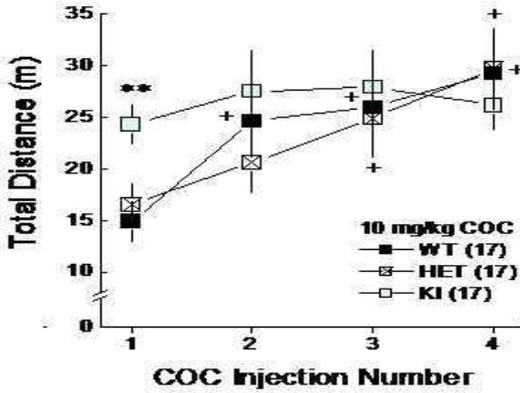


Figure 5. Locomotion activity at 10 mg/kg cocaine. This graph shows KI mice staying relatively constant throughout the 4 injections while WT and HET show an increase in sensitivity across the 4 injections.

*In vivo Microdialysis* - TS KI mice examined during *in vivo* microdialysis yielded low basal glutamate levels (50% reduction) prior to injection 1 of 3mg/kg of cocaine. This is illustrated by Figure 6 as the KI basal glutamate results are significantly lower in concentration from the WT, during the first hour of sample collection (time -60 to 0 min).

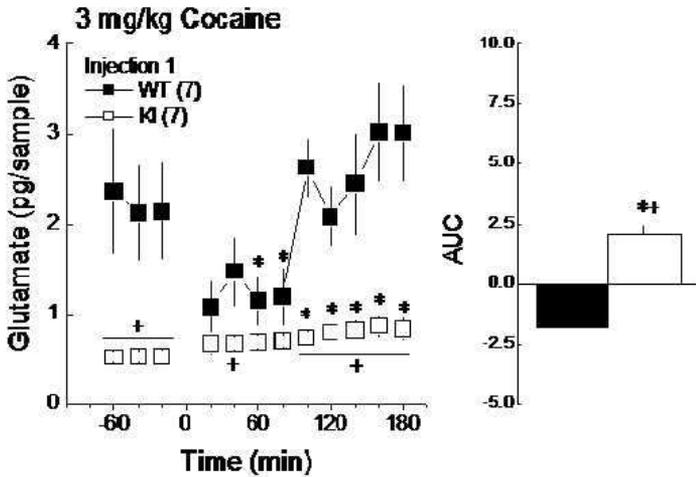


Figure 6. Microdialysis at 3 mg/kg cocaine Injection 1. The graph above depicts the results observed during injection 1 of cocaine treatment. KI exhibit low basal glutamate and an overall increase in accumbens glutamate after injection 1.

Also illustrated by Figure 6, when injected with 3 mg/kg cocaine, TS KI mice show increased accumbens glutamate relative to their baseline, while WT mice exhibited a drop in glutamate that recovered by the end of testing. The cocaine-induced rise in glutamate exhibited by KI mice is similar to that observed in previous research of animals with repeated cocaine treatment [REF] and following *Homer* gene deletion [Szumlinski et al. 2006]. Injection 4 findings at the same dosage reiterate the observations found with injection 1 as TS KI still show reduced basal glutamate levels and a rise in glutamate after cocaine (data not shown).

On injection 1 of 10mg/kg of cocaine, low basal glutamate levels in TS KI mice are displayed in Figure 7 (left). However, both genotypes show a non-significant rise in glutamate after cocaine. Meanwhile, on injection 4 of 10 mg/kg cocaine, the basal glutamate levels of WT mice dropped to that of KI mice, consistent with the effects of repeated cocaine reported previously [e.g., Baker et al. 2003; Swanson et al. 2001; Szumlinski et al. 2006, 2007]. The low basal glutamate levels of KI mice were not further affected by repeated cocaine treatment at this dose. When injected for the 4<sup>th</sup> time with 10 mg/kg cocaine (time 0), WT mice exhibited an increase in glutamate levels, indicating glutamate sensitization. However, TS KI mice exhibited a drop below baseline in glutamate levels when treated repeatedly with this dose. These findings are illustrated by Figure 7 (right).

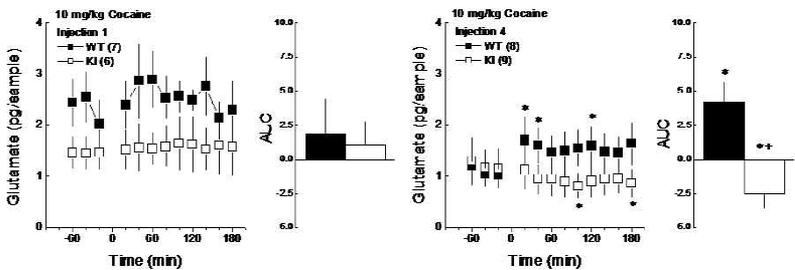


Figure 7. Microdialysis results for injections 1 and 4 at 10 mg/kg. Injection 1 (left) results show low basal glutamate levels for TS KI mice while WT exhibit normal basal glutamate levels. Injection 4 (right) shows a reduction in WT basal glutamate levels to that of TS KI, a characteristic of repeated cocaine treatment. Also illustrated here is increased accumbens glutamate after injection 4 for WT while TS KI mice show a drop below baseline in accumbens glutamate.

Expressing the data for cocaine-induced changes in glutamate as a percent of baseline values facilitates comparisons between the different doses of cocaine and the two genotypes. As shown in Figure 8, WT mice exhibited dose- and injection-dependent cocaine-induced increase as NAC glutamate levels at 3 mg/kg cocaine had no significant affect (Figure 8A, B). In contrast, repeated treatment with 10 mg/kg cocaine exhibited increase in NAC glutamate levels (Figure 8C, D).

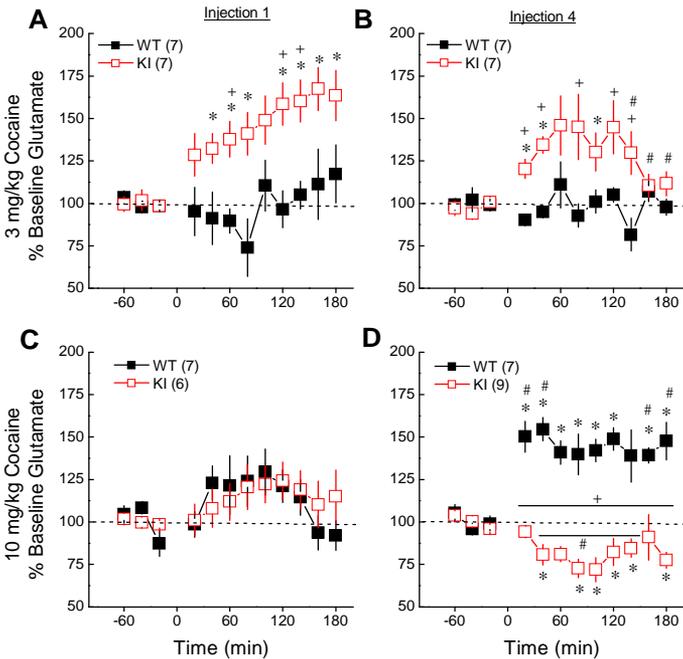


Figure 8: Cocaine-induced changes in NAC glutamate with data expressed as percent change from baseline values.

Meanwhile, TS mutants showed significant increase in accumbens glutamate after both acute and repeated treatment with 3 mg/kg cocaine. This is demonstrated by Figure 8A, B. Furthermore, at 10 mg/kg cocaine, TS mutants showed a reduction in NAC glutamate to that of below baseline (Figure 8C, D). Meanwhile, basal NAC dopamine levels were not found to be altered at either dose of cocaine for the WT or TS mutants (Table 1).

	Glutamate		Dopamine	
	WT	KI	WT	KI
Pre-3mg/kg COC (COC naïve)	2.21 ± 0.58	1.04 ± 0.16*	7.62 ± 1.40	9.25 ± 2.6
Post- 3mg/kg COC	1.88 ± 0.84	1.02 ± 0.12*	8.21 ± 0.98	8.73 ± 1.18
Pre- 10mg/kg COC (COC naïve)	2.34 ± 0.45	1.46 ± 0.51	7.26 ± 1.16	7.66 ± 0.84
Post- 10mg/kg COC	1.01 ± 0.25 +	1.21 ± 0.39	7.14 ± 2.23	5.42 ± 0.93

Table 1: Effects of TS-->AA mutation of mGluR5 upon basal extracellular glutamate levels (ng/20 (l sample) and dopamine (pg/20 µl/sample) within the NAC of naïve and repeated cocaine-treated mice. \*p<0.05 vs. WT; +p<0.05 vs. respective COC-naïve group.

Genotypic differences were not observed across injection 1 and 4 of 3 mg/kg cocaine (Figure 9A, B). However, at injection 1 of 10 mg/kg cocaine the dopamine response of TS mutant mice were shorter lasting than in WT as illustrated by Figure 9C. Furthermore, after repeated treatment of 10 mg/kg cocaine, the TS mutants did not sensitize while WT showed clear sensitization seen by the increase in dopamine response, relative to injection 1 (Figure 9D).

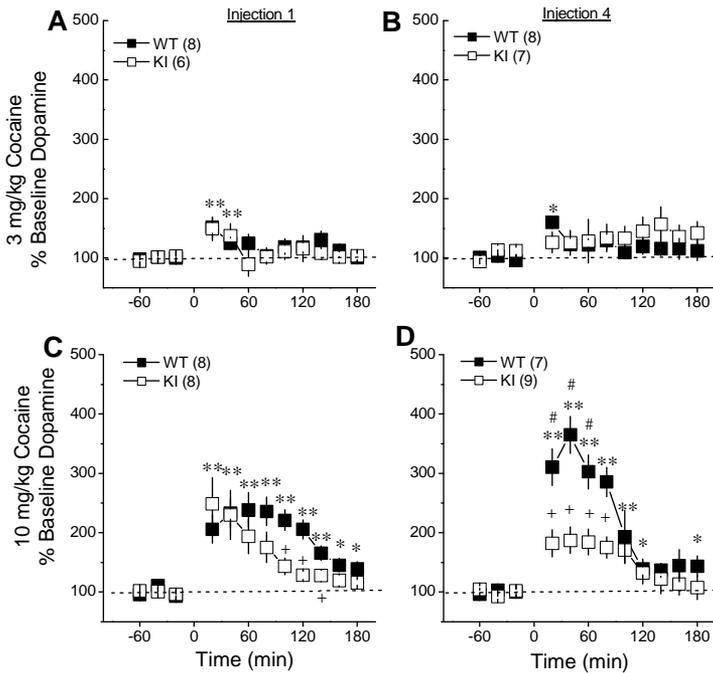


Figure 9. Cocaine-induced changes in NAC dopamine

## Discussion of Data

Cocaine abuse continues to be a serious problem in the United States. According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), cocaine is among the most frequently mentioned illicit substances by hospital emergency departments across the nation. Recent research exploring the neurobiology of cocaine addiction has found glutamate to be involved. Therefore, this study explores the interaction between a group 1 metabotropic glutamate receptor and Homer proteins to further characterize glutamate transmission. *In vivo* microdialysis assays measuring differences in basal glutamate content among the different genotypes revealed similar results to those collected from *Homer* knock out (KO) mice in a previous study [Szumlinski et al. 2004]. Like *Homer* KO mice [Szumlinski et al. 2004], TS mutants exhibited a reduction in basal glutamate levels of greater than 50% in the NAC and a greater capacity of low doses of cocaine to elevate NAC glutamate. These effects of *Homer* KO or TS mutation of mGluR5 bear similarities to the effects of repeated treatment with moderate to high doses of cocaine ,i.e., >10 mg/kg, reduces basal glutamate content in the NAC of WT rodents [e.g., Baker et al. 2003; Szumlinski et al. 2006].

The data suggest that mutations of these 2 phosphorylation sites on mGluR5 are sufficient to produce abnormalities in basal glutamate consistent with a “pre- sensitized” state. Consistent with this notion, TS mutants exhibited a significant rise in NAC glutamate when injected with a low dose of cocaine, a dose that does not normally influence glutamate levels in WT or undrugged rodents. Such data suggest that these mice are more sensitive to the glutamate-releasing effects of this stimulant. Interestingly, at the higher cocaine dose, TS mice failed to exhibit differences from WT mice when injected acutely with cocaine. However, the TS

mice failed to exhibit cocaine-induced glutamate sensitization and in fact, exhibited a drop below baseline in glutamate levels when treated with the higher cocaine dose. In contrast to and consistent with other work in the laboratory [e.g., Szumlinski et al. 2006, 2007], the repeated treatment with 10 mg/kg cocaine sensitized glutamate in WT mice. Thus, it is not simply that the TS mutation of mGluR5 augments sensitivity to the glutamate effects of cocaine. If that were the case, then the magnitude of the glutamate sensitization would be greater, not less, in TS mutants. Nevertheless, these data indicate that the TS mutation on mGluR5 affects the normal regulation of basal NAC glutamate levels as well as the response of NAC glutamate systems to cocaine, implicating the phosphorylation of mGluR5 as critical for normal glutamate transmission within this region.

The mechanism underlying the abnormal glutamate response to repeated 10 mg/kg cocaine exhibited by TS mice may relate to their blunted dopamine sensitization observed at this dose. Even though the TS mutation did not affect basal dopamine levels, TS mice had blunted cocaine-induced increases in dopamine following both acute and repeated treatment with 10 mg/kg cocaine. Indeed, there is considerable evidence for an interaction between brain glutamate and dopamine systems [e.g., Vanderschuren and Kalivas, 2000]. While it is impossible to discern precisely why TS mice exhibited blunted glutamate and dopamine sensitization at 10 mg/kg cocaine, these data nonetheless support a critical role for the phosphorylation of mGluR5 and Homer binding for the normal regulation of these neurotransmitter systems within a brain region highly involved in reward.

Interestingly, the cocaine-induced changes in NAC glutamate exhibited by TS mutant mice were super-imposable upon their CPP results, particularly at the 10 mg/kg dose. The CPP findings showed that at a moderate dose (10mg/kg), place-aversion is associated with a drop in accumbens glutamate. This is shown

by figure 10, where the image to the left is the graphed results for microdialysis at 10 mg/kg and the right image is of CPP also at 10 mg/kg for TS mutants. While it has been demonstrated for some time that the rewarding and reinforcing properties of cocaine are associated with an increased capacity of cocaine to elevate NAC glutamate [e.g., Szumlinski et al. 2004, 2006, 2007], this is the first suggestion that the aversive properties of cocaine may be mediated by reductions in NAC glutamate. Studies are currently in progress to test this hypothesis.

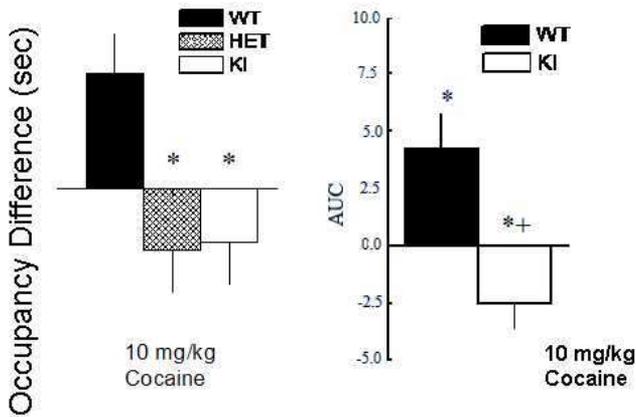


Figure 10. Microdialysis (left) and CPP (right) results for 10 mg/kg cocaine in TS KI mice. This figure illustrates how microdialysis results of cocaine-induced changes in NAC glutamate are superimposable upon CPP results.

By reducing the physical interaction between mGluR5 and Homer proteins, behavioral sensitivity to cocaine reward and locomotor activity increases. These data are consistent with earlier

data from *Homer* KO mice [Szumlinski et al. 2004] and indicate an important role for signaling from mGluR5 through Homer in the development of cocaine addiction-related behaviors. However, in contrast to earlier data from *Homer* KO mice, where increased behavioral sensitivity to cocaine was clearly associated with increased cocaine-induced glutamate but not dopamine transmission [Szumlinski et al. 2004], the increased cocaine behavioral sensitivity exhibited by TS mice appears to be associated with changes in both the dopamine and glutamate response to this drug. One obvious explanation for the differences in the neurochemical dysregulation between *Homer* KO mice and the TS mutant may lie in the fact that the mGluR5 receptor in KO mice is intact and capable of being phosphorylated [Szumlinski et al. 2004], whereas its phosphorylation state is prevented in the TS mutant. mGluR5 antagonists block drug-induced dopamine and glutamate release [e.g., Lominac et al. 2006], thus disrupted mGluR5 function in the TS mice is a likely mechanism to account for the effects of this mutation upon both neurotransmitter systems. Overall, these data support an important role for mGluR5-Homer interactions in mediating both the behavioral and neurochemical effects of cocaine, and a key role for NAC glutamate in both the appetitive and aversive properties of cocaine.

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**BREAKING OLD HABITS:  
El Salvador, Politics, and Media**

**Jorge E. Cuellar**

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UCLA Mentor: Robin Derby  
Department of History

**Abstract**

*During the 1990s in El Salvador, as most nations in Central America moved out of wars and into an era marked by a transition to democracy, television emerged as an ad-hoc political institution increasingly pivotal in policymaking and electoral processes. In 2009, El Salvador's popular vote went to ex-journalist Mauricio Funes of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) who defeated the right-wing ex-director of police Rodrigo Ávila of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), bringing an end to ARENA's twenty-year hold on the presidency El Salvador. The electoral moment lends itself to a critical Gramscian analysis, particularly of common sense, political communication, and the processes that make up ideological production. This project examines television content directed at the voting population investigating how its discursive power maintains the dominant paradigm. It aims to understand the operation of discourse, culture, coercion, and power in achieving political change and especially how the Salvadoran media functions to inhibit the leftward political tide currently taking place throughout Latin America.*

## Media Hegemony Discourse

Media is the main channel through which differing and conflicting perspectives, symbols, and meanings can be expressed. The media operates on the pretense of setting up a pluralistic mode of information collection and dissemination that is purportedly for the benefit of society. However, as many scholars note today, this end goal can easily become tarnished, polluted, and misguided.<sup>1</sup> Historically dominant elites who seek the continuance of their political and economic advantage have used media to reinforce the status quo and to coerce populations and groups that make up civil society. In thinking about the media as quasi-political institution, it becomes important to examine the power by which it operates. Marcia Landy asks an important set of applicable questions: What role do media institutions play in the context of economic, political, and civil society, and how do they now function to bring an overwhelming majority of citizenry into line and to marginalize the dissenters through a campaign of vilification?<sup>2</sup>

How have media played an active role in creating the illusion of choice, if not subversion?<sup>3</sup> Media in its many forms represents a type of power that insists on itself as a legitimate and infallible communication method by means of selective programming aligned with its beneficiaries—e.g. political and interest groups who benefit from the current power structure and ultimately seek their reproduction. These groups seek to perpetuate unequal power relations by maintaining what Antonio

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars who employ perspectives critical of media's intents, goals, and effects come from diverse academic traditions and range from media scholar Robert McChesney, Toby Miller, Noam Chomsky, to critical theorist Slavoj Žižek and media sociologist Armand Mattelart.

<sup>2</sup> Landy, Marcia. "Gramsci, Passive Revolution, and Media," 101-102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 102.

Gramsci terms hegemony, which refers to the way that the political and social domination of the bourgeois class in capitalist society is pervasively expressed not only in ideologies but in all realms of culture and social organization.<sup>4</sup>

Images and narratives, which are at the center of culture production are, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, largely developed by media to soothe a politically disempowered and historically uneducated populace to better synchronize itself with the principal ideas of ruling elites which become the unrealistic aspirations of the popular masses. The voting base that legitimizes elite power through elections and political processes are in, Marshall McLuhan's words, 'massaged' by the onslaught of media images that shape their thinking. These messages coincide with the aims of hegemony; in other words, media messages are employed to pacify the largely illiterate and unsuspecting populace with its misleading and coercive logic. For example:

The daily hegemony presented by the media and exercised by the ruling classes generally managed to prevent unseemly eruptions of popular anger. With the growth in literacy and widening of the franchise, the national media, elite opinion makers, and globalized communications networks such as CNN/CNN en Español exercise more subtle but no less pernicious forms of hegemonic control over the Latin American masses.<sup>5</sup>

The discursive power expressed from the relationship between media and its audience functions conjunctively to

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<sup>4</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, p. 104-107

<sup>5</sup> Harry Vanden, "Social Movements, Hegemony, and New Forms of Resistance," p. 18.

maintain hegemony and suppress counter-hegemonic projects that may arise. The circumstances that breed the hegemony are presented by the discourse itself in a mutually beneficial relationship that maintains status quo power inequalities while ruthlessly ingrain a given message in the population. As discourse scholar Jacob Torfing writes, “Hegemony and discourse are mutually conditioned in the sense that hegemonic practice shapes and reshapes discourse, which in turn provides the conditions of possibility for hegemonic articulation.”<sup>6</sup> It is this symbiotic relationship of hegemony and discourse power that creates the fertile context in which, I contend, hegemony reaches its critical climax.

During times of presidential elections, such as those in El Salvador, I argue, the hegemony must expose its vulnerable insides, that is, present the elaborate ideological structure upon which it is built, to concretize, justify, and appeal to the larger society. In El Salvador, the ruling ARENA party, in power from 1989-2009, has constantly needed to underscore its vulnerability to internal challenges. However unlikely, ARENA has represented itself through an oppositional method stemming from the post-Cold War era in which it portrays the left as a definite and unstoppable threat. The application of Gramsci’s thinking to the case of El Salvador demonstrates how the ARENA party acted as an arbiter of capitalism in El Salvador, and serves as a reminder of the tendencies of capitalism to rejuvenate itself through discursive innovation and the restructuring of class relations.

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<sup>6</sup> Jacob Torfing, New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek, p. 43.

## Culture, Power and Political Communication

Culture is the instrument through which domination is exercised. “The culture industry is a vehicle for mass unconsciousness today...Culture reproduces the quotidian, hence reproducing power.”<sup>7</sup> Political communication, as a facet of the culture industry, functions as a continuously adaptive mechanism that dictates and acts upon changing social conventions. Electoral moments are the playground for much political communication; media industries poll, develop, and propagate often overly simplified versions of pressing social issues for mass consumption. Much like in the United States, in El Salvador, elections are plagued by “talking heads” in the form of “expert analysis” on political shows, talk shows, radio programs, newscasts, etc., which serve the purpose of exhausting people, and help contribute to the creation of a confused, nebulous, and cluttered political (and informational) landscape. El Salvador’s March 2009 political moment saw the triumph of left leaning candidate Mauricio Funes Cartagena of the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) over the right-wing Rodrigo Ávila of ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance) for the presidency of the Central American republic. The recent election contest provides insight into the function of media in political campaigns, the rhetoric behind televised election campaigning, and the role of the print and electronic press.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ben Agger, The Discourse of Domination, p. 305.

<sup>8</sup> The advertisements displayed and disseminated during the months running up to the election showcase the psycho-historical dimensions of campaigning that draw upon the fears and worries that marked the brutality of the civil struggle of the 1980s. All political advertisements referred to and examined in this paper are from a collection of television spots captured on Salvadoran television by the author during a trip to El Salvador in February 2009.

To borrow from Antonio Gramsci's critical vocabulary, election campaigning is a state function complicit with allied media outlets to maintain "common sense." In El Salvador, this is noticeable in the direct connections between media ownership and political partisanship. Common sense is the operation of making class divisions and inequalities appear natural and inevitable which in turn remove them from examination, criticism and challenge. The dimensions of common sense establish the dominant way in which populations experience daily life and are thus of paramount importance to my analysis of political consciousness and dynamism in El Salvador. Living life in this passive manner creates a culture of consent, which, as Chomsky notes, is the offspring of media outlets who manufacture and complicate the understanding of society for profit gains. They fabricate passivity, provide "guidance," and greatly influence the agency of individuals.<sup>9</sup>

The media's reproduction of common sense is made possible by the many monopolies composed largely of individuals belonging to what critical globalization scholars describe as the transnational capitalist class (TCC). In El Salvador, all nationally broadcast television programming is owned by a handful of private media entrepreneurs that seek only to sustain their economic privilege through the perpetuation of the status quo. Telecorporación Salvadoreña (TCS) and the man who founded it, Boris Esersky, have through government connections shaped the current Salvadoran broadcast spectrum and kept forces disloyal to the government from buying ad space within most Salvadoran broadcast outlets. Through TCS, Esersky controls three of El

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<sup>9</sup> Chomsky, Noam. Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies, p. 21-23.

Salvador's five VHF television station outlets.<sup>10</sup> Esersky's stations dominate the market and have captured 90 percent of the audience.

Esersky, however, is not passive about exerting his considerable media power. TCS and Esersky has publicly given free advertising to the campaigns of right-wing ARENA party politicians, and the news and information programs on his station have generally been supportive of the conservative politicians in power.<sup>11</sup> Keeping in mind that ARENA has been in power since "peace" was supposedly introduced to El Salvador at the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in 1992, there is evidence here to delineate a fundamental confluence of bad business practices and media monopolization that impedes the proper implementation of the peace process. For example, these two forces have hindered counter-hegemonic expression on most if not all nationally broadcast television networks. The Salvadoran campaign advertisements examined in this paper are indicative of the uses of media in the development of a politics that reveals a Gramscian attention to the orchestrated and dynamic elements of cultural formation and their consequent manipulation by party politicians.

Media discourses frame issues for the public, and media may become a battleground in which groups struggle over the dissemination and construction of social reality. For those reasons, the ruling class in Latin America, especially, but not exclusively under military regimes, has often exercised tight control over what views are expressed. It is important to note that the incumbent President of El Salvador, Antonio Saca who served 2004-2009, was also a media mogul. Due to his strong ties with the media and culture industries of the country, he was able to garner wide

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<sup>10</sup> Rockwell and Janus note that El Salvador also has six UHF stations, which compete for less than 5 percent of the viewing audience and can only be seen in San Salvador and the city's suburbs.

<sup>11</sup> Rick Rockwell and Noreene Janus, "The Triumph of the Media Elite in Postwar Central America," pp. 56-47.

support from powerful and influential economic elites. Thanks to the control ARENA exerts over the multinational information consortiums (news corporations, national monopolies), the world's elites, as voiced by local elites, impose a vision of reality that is closely governed by, following Althusser, a partial ideological framework.<sup>12</sup> These existing doctrinal barriers prevent the formation of alternative thought that might question the legitimacy of the current world order. Thus, in this sense, the role of the media is not to offer objective information to citizens but rather to defend the established political, economic and social order through diverse effective means such as propaganda, disinformation and censorship.

### Elite Resistance and the Media

As exemplified in El Salvador, the media plays a pivotal role in determining political visibility and exerts a major influence in election outcomes. With the watered-down discourse that constitutes much of political campaigning, voters are swayed by advertisements and television spots that not only ask for their vote but also instill in them a “conscience” by means of a political value system. In short, most political advertisements are concentrated vaccines of misleading information targeted at voting populations for manipulation and consent. They present the voting public with the tools, albeit with its inherent inaccuracies and shortcomings, to confidently defend their political positions in their selection between the left and right, as the example below shows.

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<sup>12</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” p. 142-7, 166-76.



With the rise of a socialist populism in places like Venezuela, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, and now El Salvador with the election of Mauricio Funes, the right has sought to reinvent itself in order to fight off the oncoming socialist takeover with an arguably brutish campaign targeting themes of deception, tyranny, and communism as their chief concerns.<sup>13</sup> This so-called “neo-populism” is fashioned primarily through the media proliferation of images and messages that obfuscate power inequalities in order to allow status quo interests to persist. Interestingly, transnational elites of various left-leaning countries such as Venezuela and Cuba have exposed themselves and their allegiance to the old aristocratic order by pooling their resources together in a “solidarity” resistance movement against the left (see image 1.). Under the guise of “Fuerza Solidaria,” allied economic groups have recouped their capital to prevent (or challenge) the “communist” invasion of their nations by describing them as dangerous to national sovereignty and risky to people’s economic stability. They project messages that intimidate people by asserting that remittances will end (*remesas* are the number one source of revenue for families in El Salvador), they will lose their jobs, etc.

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<sup>13</sup> In the political advertisements, Mauricio Funes is compared to Barack Obama through images evoking “hope” and “progress.” While the comparisons are not meant to be direct, they are inadvertently drawing connections between the historical circumstances the candidates find themselves to propel Mauricio’s candidacy forward.

The right-wing ideas disseminated by these media campaigns are psychologically harmful and employ a sweeping logic to characterize and belittle the left as an unsuitable solution to the country's ailments. The oppositional media campaigns that transnational elites have developed seek to smear the left and prevent their acquisition or maintenance of power by playing on the character, charisma, and popularity of candidates by proposing a direct connection in political lineage to figures like Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro, who they portray as antichrists, dictatorial, authoritarian, and repressive. This discursive tactic frames charismatic leaders similar to them as inherently power-happy opportunists ill suited to fulfilling the needs of their people. It is interesting to note that although there has been no political alteration since the end of the civil struggle, ARENA as a social force continues to disallow dissent, to the point of using corrupt political practices and statistical manipulation, to prevent the "demon" of leftism, such as the FMLN from gaining political power in El Salvador. Whether preventative or fearful, the right-wing has exercised its power to sustain and strengthen itself by growing stronger after every successive electoral victory. Election contests, as media spectacles *par excellence*, have been complicit in validating this phenomenon.

### Discourse and (Neo)Populism

Populism, traditionally, includes a core belief that the institutions of classical liberal democracy, especially legislatures and courts, are anachronistic, inefficient, and inconsistent with the true expression of "the people's will" (or at least the populist officials' interpretation of it). The new populist wave or "neo-populism" that has taken over Latin America is primarily of a leftist flavor. It claims to listen to the ailments of popular society, privileging the people over the interests of a handful of wealthy elites. However, it should be noted that the ideological variations

among the leftist populists are great. Lula of Brazil and Michelle Bachelet of Chile support free trade and close ties with the United States, whereas Hugo Chavez of Venezuela employs rhetoric replete with praise of socialism and attacks on capitalism and the United States as an imperial power.<sup>14</sup> The ideology of neo-populism presents a *caudillo* figure who is the incarnation of popular interests and identity that promises to steer the country towards the Promised Land, while characterizing the accused as some enemy akin to the devil. Neo-populism, in this sense, combines various religio-fundamentalist elements for its successful dissemination.

Mauricio Funes of El Salvador is a charismatic populist, similar to the rest of the leaders of socialist populist countries. The election of Funes marked the end of a period of rule by right-wing fiscal conservatives, free trade advocates, and neoliberal elites who bankrupted the country, sold off its natural resources to multinational corporations, and privatized basic goods such as water. This electoral victory has brought about what I call a “refreshing destabilization” to the political climate in El Salvador and has, because of ongoing historical hostilities, prompted elected ARENA party politicians to problematize necessary government mechanisms to further complicate the beginning of the incoming president’s term beginning in June 2009. Upon inauguration, Mauricio Funes and the FMLN has had to first pay off El Salvador’s debt while providing much-needed social services for its people. The FMLN, as a social force for change, has had to work against many of the ingrained structural problems of ARENA’s 27-year rule which are marked by, among many others, dollarization of the economy, an upsurge in gang violence, and failure in education reform.

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<sup>14</sup> Mitchell Seligson, “The Rise of Populism and the Left in Latin America,” p. 81.

For the last two and a half decades, El Salvador has been continually abused by ARENA party politicians, who turned the country into an elite playground to serve their needs and streamline the exploitation of grossly underpaid wage laborers which compose the majority of the population. The capital extracted from these workers is Spent in the global marketplace rather than used to develop the internal economy. Without an injection of profit infusion, El Salvador's economy has become one of export with little or no growth of local industry. Because of this one-way funneling of capital, there has been little economic growth; the clichéd phrase “the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer” becomes a harsher and more visible reality. The building of mega malls and high-class clothing outlets only further exacerbates this dichotomous reality. Examples such as the Maseratti and Ferrari car dealerships in San Salvador only serve to promote a false sense of bourgeois and meritocratic class mobility, serving as symbols to understand and decode the role of the popular classes in society. As is the case, because of the small return on any of the profits expropriated from the Salvadoran territory (as most of it is spent in the exterior), El Salvador is left further impoverished, lacking natural capital and developing at a snail's pace. The invocation in the modern media of common sense is characterized by the reinforcement of promises of freedom and democracy affected through the new constitutionalism of disciplinary neo-liberalism and the concomitant spread of market civilization.<sup>15</sup> Media, bolstered by the “common sense” of triumphant global capitalism have played a critical part in reinforcing a belief in the inevitability of socioeconomic depravity and thus, corporate greed.<sup>16</sup>

Individuality and civil society are diametrically opposed to one another on Gramsci's ideological terrain. In El Salvador, for

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<sup>15</sup> Adam D. Morton, Unraveling Gramsci, p. 126.

<sup>16</sup> Marcia Landy, “Gramsci, Passive Revolution, and Media,” p. 130.

example, this opposition is represented in the conflictive and oppositional nature of the two-party system. As this paper seeks to make evident, the media's role creates and fosters a problematic 'conception of the world' in El Salvador that keeps the growing population of the nation appeased and pacified through a barrage of civil life mechanisms that are accepted and lived uncritically. These conceptions are imposed and absorbed passively from the outside, or from the past, and contribute to people's subordination in what Gramsci describes as, "making situations of inequality and oppression appear to them as natural and unchangeable."<sup>17</sup>

Following this thinking, Herman and Chomsky provide a model for understanding the operation of the media and its associated messages in contemporary society. They write, "[The Propaganda Model]...contends that America's elite-agenda-setting media play an important role in establishing cultural hegemony, primarily by establishing a general framework for news discourse that is typically adhered to by lower-tier media."<sup>18</sup> Essentially, Herman and Chomsky are pointing to how the media operates to create a model paradigm that is followed by lesser media which, as businesses, are seeking higher ratings and visibility. In doing so, the American imperial media is able to dictate the shifts in media of other countries whose elites seek to emulate the "success" and "popularity" of said media outlets in their own countries. Through this process, media is effectively homogenized and is made to express similar positions and cover mundane stories with an identifiable 'corporate bias.' Consequently, the advent of the corporate news networks has facilitated the creation of what Jean Baudrillard purports in his seminal "The Precession of Simulacra." in which he notes that the sign (media messages) has been used to

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<sup>17</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Philosophy, Common Sense, Language and Folklore," in The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935, ed. David Forgács, p. 421.

<sup>18</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, pp. 1-2.

reinforce the existence of a social norm that is distorted through a constant flow of images, sound bytes, and concepts—the cultural currency of the age of information—that creates a reality upon which we judge our positions and ourselves.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the (media) sign is fundamental to understanding the political lives of individuals in El Salvador and why and how they are addressed as well as effectively persuaded by campaign advertisements.

High-intensity election moments expose the deep structural problems that affect societies. They make manifest the problems of a given nation and bring about political announcements and initiatives to defend and engender hope in a population. In discussing relations of force, Gramsci emphasizes that politics and political activity are fundamentally centered on attaining and maintaining power. A dual or dyadic opposition constitutes power: force and consent, violence and persuasion. These oppositions parallel Gramsci's characterization of the supremacy of a social group in terms of the exercising of moral and intellectual leadership over allied and associated groups (thus their reasons for continually revitalizing harmful discourse for political goals), and of the application of domination—'even with armed force'—in order to subdue antagonistic groups. Especially in a country like El Salvador, the idea of maintaining power through force is a daily reality for many and is further substantiated by the National Civilian Police (PNC) and private defense contractors that militantly patrol San Salvador's streets. Media messages when coupled with vivid daily images of suppression function as a powerful and all-encompassing vision of life that is difficult to dismiss. Many times the media only seeks to reinforce and foster a culture of energetic individuals to proselytize and create support to persuade those crucial undecided or non-voters.

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<sup>19</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," pp. 453-481.

It is evident [...] that even if election propaganda generally influences only an extremely small population of voters (if influence means converting them from one party to another, during the relatively brief period of the campaign), the investment of effort and money may be worthwhile, nevertheless, from the point of view of the political parties, for small minorities may make large differences. This is obvious in two-party systems where a single vote may, theoretically, change the result [...]<sup>20</sup>

### Democracy and Reproducing the “Nation”

It is the supposedly susceptible and malleable minds of voters that election media targets. Gramsci’s conception of common sense also operates on this terrain, as an impetus for cultural production that reproduces and widens inequity and inequality. Alternatively, common sense can be understood as the dominant paradigm, that particular social worldview that is corroborated by the media and that “serve to foster and reinforce an intellectual and moral culture geared towards protecting wealth and privilege from the threat of public understanding and participation.”<sup>21</sup> In following Gramsci’s thought, the “truth” to which the majority of the politically deactivated non-participants in society subscribe is understood under the umbrella of common sense. In this ecosystem, the political advertisements of both the left and right become the only direct political relationship citizens ever have to the political process which is made both attainable yet

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<sup>20</sup> Aeron Davis, The Mediation of Power: A Critical Introduction, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Noam Chomsky, Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies p. 14.

illusory where one is simultaneously included/excluded from what could hardly be considered a participatory democracy. Thus, common sense for Gramsci is the prize of hegemony, and is the ideology and discourse that is articulated in a top-down manner for the facile control of populations as an apparatus of capitalism. Aiming primarily to perpetuate the unequal power relations inherent to capitalism, common sense promotes individualism and accumulation, i.e. the meritocracy as fueled by extravagant aspirations to conspicuously consume. For sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, common sense, and thus the hegemony, is maintained through what he terms the “field of power,” in other words, a political force that is able to wield power over different social fields and various species of capital. He notes:

Domination is not the direct and simple action exercised by a set of agents (“the dominant class”) invested with powers of coercion. Rather, it is the indirect effect of a complex set of actions engendered within the network of intersecting constraints with each of the dominants, thus dominated by the structure of the field through which domination is exerted, endures on behalf of all the others.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, Gramsci’s notion of common sense operates as a means for the dominant culture to produce and limit its own forms of counter-culture. It is within these conditions that change is supposed to take place. As Herman and Chomsky note, “...elite media establish limitations on the range of debate and general boundaries for separate interpretation.”<sup>23</sup> The campaign

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<sup>22</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Practical Reason: On The Theory of Action, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, pp. 1-2.

advertisements broadcast by the right against the left in El Salvador's 2009 election seek to articulate a McCarthyite notion of communism as the "Red Scare," harking back to the Cold War era where any brand of leftism was considered to be the world's primary enemy. As such, a rhetoric of warfare, violence, and strife is consistently evoked and revitalized by the campaign advertisements that recall the trauma of the Salvadoran Civil War to prevent popular identification with the concerns and projects of leftism to develop.

The left in El Salvador is critical of the right and employs a Marxist rhetoric that aims to make apparent class distinctions in order to empower communities and jump start structural change. Such movements for public awareness directly challenge the right which has robbed the country blind behind the auspices of benevolence and protection. It is in this way that media generate fear. It also suggests that media redirect fear that already exists.<sup>24</sup> Herman and Chomsky's observations make apparent the mechanism in which media craftily re-open the collective wounds of El Salvador, for their own political and economic objectives.

Dominant lineages of thought are intimately linked with what Raymond Williams calls the "narrative of the nation," defined as those foundational myths that contribute to the formation of cultural identity. The masters who forge the narratives of nation are also a part of the global capitalist class which seeks only its class reproduction, doing all in its power to achieve just that, complicating the experience of society at large for its collective sustainment and gain. As Marx wrote,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its

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<sup>24</sup> Noam Chomsky, Class Warfare: Interviews with David Barsamian, pp. 91-92.

ruling *intellectual* force. The class, which has the means of material production at its disposal, has the control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling class, therefore the ideas of its dominance.<sup>25</sup>

One result of the monolithic and misleading discourses on meritocracy, progress and the Left presented by the media as complicit with the aims of an advanced capitalist society, has been the rise of projects of counter-hegemony throughout Latin America that have reinvigorated participatory politics through a reevaluation of the failed inadequate political, economic, and social institutions put in place by the colonial project and waves of economic liberalization. However, these projects remain in an infant stage. “Since the early 1990s, strong currents of populism have been suffusing the world of both politics and the media. [...] In such conditions, paternalistic discourse is no longer an option.”<sup>26</sup> Some political activists and populists are becoming critical of the paternalistic role that the media, and thus politicians as architects of that media, play in constructing the daily experiences of the people of El Salvador. The democratic socialist trend taking hold in Latin America seems to be one viable option at this critical juncture to combat ingrained and widening social inequity. The political right in places like El Salvador has grown ostentatious and careless, justifying their rule as Machiavelli

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<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The ruling class and the ruling ideas.” in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works, Vol. 5, pp. 59-62.

<sup>26</sup> Jay Blumler and Dennis Kavanagh, “The Third Age of Political Communication,” p. 221.

justified the enlightened despot. Due to the severity of ARENA's failed political aspirations, or perhaps because of their success in their strategic exclusion of the impoverished masses, these elites have now spread themselves too thin. Accordingly, the political project of the FMLN has risen and garnered popular support, piggybacking on the ideology of "change" similar to the Obama ticket in the United States.<sup>27</sup> As presented in the media advertisements there, Mauricio Funes' campaign acknowledges and repudiates the dirty campaign against him by citing Obama as representative for some kind of change whilst at the same time remaining ideologically divorced from many ideas of the United States Democratic Party. (Image 2)



Some of our most acute analysts have identified the relationship of media institutions and the institutions of government and politics as the critical relationship that defines national systems of political communication. The "political-media complex" is a constantly evolving relationship between media institutions and the institutions of politics and government and the ways in which both relate to the public. The idea behind the political-media complex is that "...in some respects, neither institutions and practices can be understood very well, or its

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<sup>27</sup> In the political advertisements examined, there are direct references to the notion of "change" as attached to Obama to the Funes/FMLN government and their programme of political alternance and subsequent economic change. It is primarily an association due to the promise and possibility of something new and revitalizing coming to El Salvador.

rationality appreciated, apart from other institutions and practices.”<sup>28</sup> Consequently, what must be brought into the forefront of examination are the underlying contradictions of media-making practices and the industries that articulate them. In pairing this complex with the sustainment of common sense in El Salvador, it is impossible not to give primacy to the work of the media during highly political moments such as elections as having an instrumental effect in candidate success. El Salvador, much like many media-driven democracies, is facing enormous changes on the communication front that raise serious challenges to the old order of monopoly, control, and traditional coercion. As Mazzoleni and Schulz write, “...media’s presentation of politics in the United States as well as in many other countries—as “show-biz” based on battle images, conflicts between characters, polls and marketing, all typical frenzies increasingly commercial in its outlook...has debased voters by treating them not as citizens but rather as passive “consumers” of mediated politics.”<sup>29</sup> Currently in many societies around the world, the media’s growing power is directly proportionate to the falling criticality in populations as undemanding citizens relinquish more power to government institutions.

### On Salvadoran Media-Politics

The “passive revolution” outlined by Gramsci is employed as an effective descriptive tool to understand the transition from right to left in El Salvador via subtleties like shifting the common sense. This framework contends that all must change, so that all can remain the same. The passive revolution is “a revolution from above” that excludes the masses (presented as silent subalterns).

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<sup>28</sup> David Swanson, “The Political-Media Complex at 50: Putting the 1996 Presidential Campaign in Context,” pp. 1264-65.

<sup>29</sup> Gianpetro Mazzoleni and Winfried Schulz, “Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?” p. 248.

Although the direction of the FMLN project under Mauricio Funes' presidency was unclear as of this writing, the possibility exists, as in many other cases in the history of Salvadoran politics, for an emergence of a new economic elite, the new rich that colludes with the traditional aristocracy. On this idea Gramsci notes, "...the old feudal classes...are not eliminated, nor is there any attempt to eliminate them as an organic whole; instead of a 'class' they become a 'caste' with specific cultural and psychological characteristics, but no longer with predominant economic functions."<sup>30</sup> Even with a radical change in leadership and better economic distribution, elites will persist in the sense that they have a specific culture intrinsically attached to their class status. The media's role in this shift, as well as in the sustainment of elite culture, is undeniable. The media will continue through television programming, such as telenovelas and sitcoms, to provide popular dramatizations to serve as cultural referents for the masses to try to emulate. Popular media such as sports and culturally relevant programming can also affect people through depoliticization and apathy. Media has proved to be a dominant force in determining electoral outcomes in which they have developed a language of reality that is parallel to the historical production of culture; its primary concern is for understanding the vexing and changing relations of coercion and consent to properly realign and maintain the hegemony.

The cultural formations emerging as a reaction to the shifting political concerns of El Salvador via leftist political projects are disrupting the common sense developed by the right that have only resulted in unproductive rearticulations of capitalism via neoliberalism. Gramsci's emphasis on hegemony presupposes the existence of something truly total. It saturates

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<sup>30</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Philosophy, Common Sense, Language and Folklore," in The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935, ed. David Forgács, p. 423.

society to such an extent that it even constitutes the limits of common sense for most people under its sway. It corresponds to the reality of social experience.<sup>31</sup> This has held true since the Cold War, and is only now being disassembled and properly being remedied. Stuart Hall notes, “The question of hegemony is always the question of a new cultural order...To construct a new cultural order, you need not to reflect on an already collective will, but to fashion a new one, to inaugurate a new historic project.”<sup>32</sup>

The leftist project in El Salvador under the FMLN has historically sought to change the class relations of society, but have only since 2009 been given the opportunity to act on their matured ideas. There is no telling if the FMLN will be successful. They are at a great disadvantage, and due to the residue of the Civil War, multipartisanship between the left and the right in Congress will undoubtedly obstruct and weaken structural reform legislation that requires a majority vote. The counter-hegemony of the left is vying to become the dominant hegemony of El Salvador. The mini-America feel of urbanized places like San Salvador provide a bleak picture for future deliberate democracy when processes of cultural imperialism and neocolonialism continue and increase as a result of capitalism’s now global scope. The problems of El Salvador are ingrained social problems that have become endemic to daily experience in the country and will take more than a single presidency to deliver it from the troubles of its past.

The resurgence of the left and the electoral victory of the FMLN in El Salvador is undoubtedly one of the harshest and most powerful blows to United States dominion of Central America. Because of the contemporaneous nature of this project, we have yet to see the unfolding of actual positive action with the new

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<sup>31</sup> Raymond Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> Stuart Hall, “Gramsci and Us,” in The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left, p. 170.

presidency. Funes and the FMLN have promoted projects such as Casa Mujer, a group of women's centers to provide support for the ever-increasing number of single mothers. Already there have been positive actions by the President in providing two sets of uniforms and school supplies for all children enrolled in public schools. While this is something that many take for granted, the poverty in El Salvador prevents many parents from providing these basic school stuffs. Never in the history of ARENA's executive rule has this necessity been provided. Nevertheless, there is no way to determine if El Salvador's new president Mauricio Funes will solve the media-democracy paradox through various institutional reforms. Through this preliminary analysis of various media industry texts and political communication literature, I have sought to bring focus on the media's importance in creating the appearance of consent under "liberal democracies."

Although excluded from discussion in this paper, there have been various alternative media outlets that have been born as a reaction against the monopolization of mass media. Since the end of the civil struggle in 1992, various loci of resistance such as Radio Farabundo Marti keep alive the spirit of social and political legitimacy to serve as a source for people who seek a different, more socially responsible media. To value democracy, it is imperative that we restructure the media system so that it reconnects with the mass of citizens who in fact comprise this "democracy." And this can only take place if it is part of a broader political movement to shift power from the few to the many. It might have its origins in the right, left, or elsewhere, nevertheless, it is necessary to be able to envision a different future, one that allows more creativity in media creation, ridding itself of deception, to demystify its processes and as for any political institution, exercise transparency.

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# **Their Mic' is their Weapon: Xicana Cultural Art-ivists in the Eastside of Los Angeles**

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## **Abstract**

*Inspired by the 1994 Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, a collective uprising formed a cultural political movement based in the Eastside of Los Angeles. Using qualitative approaches, this project examines one area of political engagement and practice in the Chicana/o community through an exploration of three artists: Cihuatl-Ce, FE, and Las Ramonas. Data were collected from online sources and field observations. This project places Xicana cultural art-ivists at the center of academic discourse as it explores how these particular artists fuse art and culture to utilize it as a political instrument of transformational resistance and rebellion. The study poses three main questions: how do these Xicana performers utilize art as a political instrument; how do they use culture as a source of solidarity and strength; and lastly, how does their Xicanisma manifest itself in their art.. Preliminary analysis indicates that despite their differing mediums of expression, these womyn share common purposes. Whether through revolutionary hip-hop beats, medicinal poetry, comedic teatro performances, or a combination of approaches, their work is intended to inform, transform, and empower all historically oppressed peoples. Additionally, the feminine energy and creativity expressed in their performances speak to womyn who continue to fight against white hegemonic and patriarchal domination. Through the autonomous creation of diverse spaces of creative expression and political education, these voices symbolically struggle side by side with the Zapatistas for what they declare as: “un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos.”*

## Introduction

Scholarly efforts have long explored the connection between art and politics in relation to the Chicana/o community. Existing literature typically focuses on Chicano mainstream performers; very few pieces focus on grassroots and alternative artists. Further, studies of female performers are extremely rare. Inspired by the 1994 Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, a collective uprising of artists, musicians, poets, filmmakers, and activists formed a new cultural political movement based on the Eastside of Los Angeles. In an attempt to achieve scholarly balance within existing literature and illuminate practices that are central to this movement, this project places Xicana<sup>1</sup> cultural artists<sup>2</sup> at the center of academic discourse. Using qualitative approaches, three artists are explored: Cihuatl-Ce, Felicia Montes (FE), and Las Ramonas. Data were collected from online sources, i.e. MySpace, event websites, etc., and field observations.

This research focuses on three main questions: How do these Xicana performers<sup>3</sup> utilize art as a political instrument of transformational resistance and rebellion? How do these Xicana performers use culture as a source of political solidarity and strength? Lastly, how does their Xicanisma manifest itself in their art? The present analysis indicates that despite their differing mediums of expression, these womyn<sup>4</sup> share common goals and purposes. Whether through revolutionary hip-hop beats, fierce and medicinal poetry, comedic teatro performances filled with 'carcajadas' (laughter), or a combination of these, their work is intended to inform, transform, and empower all historically oppressed peoples. Additionally, the feminine energy and creativity expressed in their performances strives to speak to womyn who continue to fight against both white hegemonic and patriarchal domination. By combining and intermingling feminine and indigenous elements their practices further reflect a unique 21<sup>st</sup>

century brand of Xicana feminism. Through the autonomous creation of diverse spaces of creative expression and political education, these voices struggle side by side with the Zapatistas for what they declare as: “un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Literature Review**

Existing scholarship offers insight into cultural/political ongoing and emerging scenes in the Los Angeles area. For instance, in “Cruising around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles,” George Lipsitz points out how Chicano rock-and-roll musicians in East Los Angles utilized a cultural strategy that was specifically designed to preserve the resources of the past by adapting them to the needs of the present. By “...informing the struggles of the present with the perceptions and values of the past” (22), these artists developed what he calls a ‘historical bloc,’ whereby their music served as a counter-hegemony to the white capitalist culture. Borrowing from Gramsci, Lipsitz refers to these individuals as “organic intellectuals” who brought their own cultural traditions into popular culture (9).

Although the womyn in my research are not all musicians, their artistic creations also invite the opportunity for them to exist as organic intellectuals whose music and ideas are counter-hegemonic, and who are thus creating a ‘historical bloc.’ These Xicanas utilize the same methods to relate to communities who’ve been historically oppressed without becoming part of the mainstream scene. They too “fuse multiple cultures” and realities that come as a result of living in two separate worlds: the barrio and white hegemonic institutions, but they nevertheless wish to remain of, for, and from their communities. In “The Battle of Los Angeles: The Cultural Politics of Chicana/o Music in the Greater Eastside,” Viesca points out that despite the fact that many of the artists he explores have chosen to remain outside of the music industry and have instead released full-length albums on their own

independent record labels, they've been quick to build global audiences and a growing popularity. (719)

Other research highlights the importance of cultural productions and re-productions as a source of transformational resistance and rebellion. For example, David Roman in "Latino Performance and Identity" acknowledges the fact that Latino performances tend to enact resistance and survival strategies through the rehearsal of cultural values and customs. He argues that Latino performances have historically aimed at "protecting the home culture and language in exile, educating the youth in the traditional customs and mores, providing the ideological and spiritual leadership that was needed to fend off the threat of assimilation to Anglo-American culture" (429). He notes that further research is needed to explore specific methods of enactment.

Although Viesca's article solely focuses on male artists on the Eastside, many of the arguments he makes can be applied to the Xicanas in this particular study. The fusing of culture and politics is suggestive of how they serve as agents of social change. Viesca explains how many of the artists in his study collaborate with visual artists, activists, and audiences to collectively form a cultural movement that reflects present conditions. Their coalition building results in a network of people involved in similar areas. Their emphasis on community building through cultural expression is heavily influenced by the rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, which calls for dignity and autonomy for indigenous communities and rejects neoliberal policies such as NAFTA. Furthermore, Viesca argues that, "Proposition 187 served as a catalyst for the Eastside scene's commitment to activism on behalf of immigrants and people of color" (723). He states that the Eastside scene serves as a site of resistance that is both a product of and a means for countering the impact of globalization in poor communities of color. In combining culture with politics, these performers

demonstrate a deep commitment to political activism and social justice. Consequently, their practices serve to critique their present conditions while developing new forms of art utilized to create counter-hegemonic resistance and re-workings.

Other scholarship points to the ways in which these Xicana performers serve as educators and transformers within their communities and in relation to social movements. In “The Push and Pull of Hip-Hop: A Social Movement Analysis,” Erin Trapp explores hip-hop music through the work of W.E.B Du Bois and two different sociological theories: the new social movement theory and political opportunity theory. She seeks to discuss the ways in which hip-hop music can both document and provoke social movements. In analyzing hip-hop through the framework of the new social movement theory, Trapp explains how music can reflect shifts that have already occurred within movements. Using this approach then, music is a reflection of a particular social movement because of “the notion that movements express ideas and transitions that already have happened and they engender action by uncovering contradictions between the existing system(s) of power and changing identities” (1482).

On the other hand, approaching hip-hop with a political opportunity theory, Trapp points out the possibility of hip-hop artists serving as agents of social change. These artists develop music as a response to a cultural threat. This explains how “disadvantaged actors rise above their subordinate place to respond to threats by exploiting opportunities, using nontraditional means of social protest to form a movement” (1483). In this manner, hip-hop artists develop music that invokes social action, therefore contributing to social movements.

Like female hip-hop performers, Xicana cultural performers may also serve as agents of social change. While not all of the Xicana performers in my study utilize music as a form of

self-expression, their performances require a break with cultural silences through the act of writing and challenging tradition. Rita Sanchez claims that the act of writing is a revolutionary act in that it serves as a potential source of collective change. She writes: "...involving writer and reader, both participants are breaking out of silence, no longer are they mere presences, but instruments for change, visionaries awakening the people" (67). She further acknowledges the fact that one person can easily start a chain reaction that motivates others to express themselves and evoke their own creativity.

Feminist scholarship proposes that womyn must break their silence by engaging in physical acts that go beyond solely writing. The contributors to This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, edited by Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, express the necessity for womyn to "...act in the everyday world...perform visible and public acts..." (217). The essays in this collection point to the importance of reclaiming one's self prior to helping the community and emphasize the importance of healing and spirituality.

Ana Castillo expands on the need for womyn to heal "from the devastating blows we receive from society for having been born poor, non-white, and female in a hierarchical society" (153). Healing may occur through the process of writing and expressing one's voice. In Making Face, Making Soul ( Haciendo Caras) Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color, Gloria Anzaldua elaborates on this idea and talks of survival strategies to combat racism, sexism, and colonization of the mind. She argues that healing comes in different forms, one being through the act of self-expression: "A woman-of-color who writes poetry or paints or dances or makes movies knows there is no escape from race or gender when she is writing or painting...Art is about identity, among, other things, and her creativity is political"(xxiv). Through self-expression and public performance, the Xicanas in my

research engage in the process of healing themselves and their communities. Building on this Chicana feminist scholarship, I further explore how Xicana cultural performers fuse multiple realities to accomplish similar goals.

This research project will not focus solely on music as a method of self-expression but will instead explore other choices of performance. It emphasizes the importance of embracing difference in achieving social change. A piece in [This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color](#) entitled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” underscores the importance of not only acknowledging difference but embracing it and understanding its function. In this essay, Audre Lorde states, “Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged” (107), hence the importance for women, especially, to recognize difference. Because the Xicanas in my study utilize different methods of expression and they themselves differ from one another, my analytical stance gives emphasis to the importance of recognizing and accepting their different approaches, despite their similar purposes.

Viesca’s article on the Eastside of Los Angeles scene points to its emphasis on hybridity. For instance, he notes that “rather than a politics of “either/or” that asks people to choose between culture and politics, between class and race, or between distinct national identities, the cultural movement reflected on the Eastside embraces a politics of “both/and” that encourages dynamic, fluid, and flexible stances and identity categories” (724). In doing so, these practices produce a new form of oppositional identity that facilitates the practice of community across ethnic and national lines. Viesca refers to these musical practices as a “strategic site for the production and negotiation of emergent national, racial, class, and gendered identities” (726). In addition, fluidity and flexibility is evident in the work of these artists, who

have creatively fused rhythms and elements from multiple cultures to create a unique sound of their own. Musicians within the Eastside scene look to the past and present for cultural traditions and formations that allow them to "...construct their own political and aesthetic practices of Chicana/o identity" (725). This is evident in many of the bands' names, sounds, and lyrics, which reflect their affiliation with an indigenous Mexicana identity.

Chicana feminists repeatedly point to the importance of recognizing one's indigenous roots. In Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma, Ana Castillo (1995) introduces the concept of "Xicanisma," a term that serves to explain much of what the Xicana performers enact in their performances. Castillo defines the concept as "...the acknowledgement of the historical crossroad where the creative power of woman in the flesh, thereafter, was subordinated by male society" (12). She notes that, "learning about our indigenismo is a way of learning about ourselves, an acceptance of oneself as an individual and of her/his people" (6). Gloria Anzaldúa argues that multiple identities and realities require constant analysis and critique. She speaks of fluidity and flexibility, the fusion of multiple realities, and the process of border crossing. In referencing the concept of the "mestiza consciousness," she explains: "...la mestiza is the product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" (100), hence stressing the significance of embracing multiple identities.

Because the Xicanas I focus on are themselves part of numerous and often conflicting worlds, identify with numerous identities, and constantly find themselves crossing both physical and psychological borders, they too engage in the process of blending and fusing. Moreover, in recognizing and reclaiming their indigenous voices through their performances, they also engage in the process of self-awakening.

In the second edition of Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education, Henry A. Giroux acknowledges the importance of utilizing and reaffirming difference as a concept that seeks to unify. He explains how a “Border Pedagogy” requires that borderlands, where clashing, blending, and hybridity occur, must be nourished. Giroux also emphasizes the importance of understanding power in relation to knowledge and learning. Accordingly, sites of struggles must be recognized as sites of resistance and transformation.

Giroux explains critical pedagogy and pedagogies in general as processes that seek to analyze and transform, and that occur within and outside classrooms. My research represents some of the pedagogies created and recreated outside of these academic settings. Because the female performers in my project are grassroots cultural producers within their communities, the approach Giroux proposes underscores their contributions to social change and transformation.

Related, in “*MUXERISTA* PEDAGOGY: Raza Womyn Teaching Social Justice through Student Activism,” Anita Revilla proposes that Xicana student activists employ a distinct kind of education she calls “*Muxerista* Pedagogy.” By definition, a *Muxerista* is

...a woman-identified Chicana/Latina who considers herself a feminist or womanist. The “x” replaces a “j” to signify a connection to the ancestry and languages of Mexico and Latin America. In claiming the *Muxerista* identity, Raza Womyn embrace feminism as defined by some liberal white women and womanism as defined by Black women, but they distinctly alter both to create a Chicana/Latina feminist identity that more accurately represents their realities. (91)

By applying Revilla's argument to this research, I argue that the womyn in my project are also contributing to the development of this alternative education. Similar to the ways in which the student activists learn from their activism and collective organizing, the womyn I focus on learn from and within their communities and further serve as social justice educators.

Existing research clearly illuminates the ways in which Chicana feminists reclaim their bodies and selves through the act of self-expression. Much has been said about the ways in which writing can serve as a tool for social change and transformation. The female performers I focus on in my research extend the importance of creating social change through the act of creative performance and further enhance the notion of culture as a source of strength and solidarity. Although some research explores the role of artists as cultural performers and agents of social change, not much has been said of those who are not within the mainstream scene, even less, if any, research actually seeks to understand the role of Xicana artists. This research project takes on the important and necessary task of closing this intellectual gap.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

For this project, I focused on artists that varied in method of performance. The first participant is named Xela and goes by Cihuatl-Ce. She is a self-proclaimed multi-media hip-hop artist who incorporates images into her performances. Felicia Montes (FE), the second performer I focus on, fuses numerous multi-media methods as a member of two female groups; as a solo performance artist she identifies herself as a poet. Lastly, I look at three multi-media artists and performers who comprise a teatro collective called Teatro M3 Las Ramonas.

## *Procedures*

Although there are many xicana performers contributing to this cultural political movement in Los Angeles, I chose to focus on performance artists whose methods differed from one another. In spite of the fact that Cihuatl-Ce, FE, and Las Ramonas may often combine approaches, they are best known for their contributions in particular categories of performing arts. For instance, Cihuatl-Ce uses hip-hop music to reach her audiences while Las Ramonas choose to express themselves through comedic skits. Despite the fact that FE has executed hip-hop flows when performing with the womyn's collectives in which she participates, as a solo performer she is best known for her spoken word poetry.

Having been raised in East Los Angeles I familiarized myself with many of the local events and had come across some of these artists years prior to this research. Although living 100 miles away from the venues where these artists most commonly performed made it difficult for me to regularly attend their cultural events, the Internet allowed me to remain informed. I eventually came to learn about many other artists and performers via flyers posted in the public pages of those artists I was already familiar with. The womyn I chose for the study represent only a small fraction of Los Angeles art-ivists fighting for social justice.

I take a qualitative social science approach to explore critically the activities of these performers, and to document their contributions to this particular movement. I collected and analyzed online data on each of the performers. The fact that these artists are not part of the mainstream scene limited the amount of available information, as did their newness to the Los Angeles scene. For instance, sources suggest that Xela has contributed to the movement since 1999 when she and other females formed a collective called Cihuatl Tonali (Female Energy). However, there

is no clear evidence as to when exactly she departed the group and became known as Cihuatl-Ce; but the date she joined a popular online networking site suggests that it was sometime in 2006. Similarly, although the members of Las Ramonas have organized and performed individually for over ten years, their collective was formed sometime in 2007.

The data were gathered from music albums, online networking sites, video sharing websites, blogs, grassroots publication sites, and college websites. Within these sources I gathered material from event descriptions, articles, photographs, blog posts, sample music, poetry, and videos. Out of the three performers, only Cihuatl-Ce has released an independent album of her own. This six-track demo album was purchased at one of her performances and is also available at other cultural shops in the community. The networking sites I made use of were MySpace (under which all of the artists had a page either in the Music or Comedy section), Ning, and LiveJournal, which allows people to share information in the form of discussion topics, stories, etc. Ning is a technological platform that allows people to create social network pages for specific interests. Within this platform, three separate pages were of use to my research. One of the networks is titled the “Punto Poetry Project” and it is designed to give a voice and a space to Latina/o poets. Similarly, “Poets for Human Rights” encourages people to share their work with others via their online network. Both of these networks encourage members to create a profile of their own. I gathered information from one third page within Ning called “[Mujeres de Maiz](#): A Woman of color activist collective.”

It was through the popular video sharing website YouTube that I watched performances by all of the artists. Surprisingly, I found quite a few videos on Cihuatl-Ce and gathered data from about seven. I watched only one post of Felicia Montes, and coincidentally it was recorded from one of the performances I

personally attended. Similarly, I was able to re-watch the performance of Las Ramonas I had seen. The music video “Chihuahua in a Box” is actually posted and available through YouTube.

Long was the list of grassroots and independent publications that referenced the performers. The alternative information sites included: *Fight Back News*, *La Union 1910*, *L.A Indie Media*, *Poor Magazine*, *Los Angeles Garment and Citizen*, *La Jornada*, and *CIEPAC (Centro de Investigaciones Economicas y Politicas de Accion Comunitaria)*; the last two sites actually focus on informing communities in Mexico.

The only blogs I collected data from were Ombbligo Sereno de la Luna (a blog intended to create dialogue from the hills of El Sereno to the mountains of Chiapas)<sup>6</sup> and Colectivo Zape, whose archives date back to 2005; both are found under the blog site named “Blogspot.” Aside from these personal entry sites, information was also gathered from educational institution websites. The institutions included Cal Poly Pomona, University of California, Los Angeles, Pasadena Community College, University of La Verne, and University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Information found in college and university sites were mainly located within the pages of campus student centers or associations.

I collected additional data from field notes recorded at three 2009 performances. On April 18, 2009 Cihuatl-Ce performed at an annual conference called “Raza College Day” at the University of California, Santa Barbara. One month later, on May 22, 2009 she was once again invited by the student organization el Congreso<sup>7</sup> to perform at the 40th Anniversary of el Plan de Santa Barbara conference. There, I watched both Cihuatl-Ce and Felicia Montes (FE) perform. It wasn’t until July 4, 2009, at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Farce of July in Los Angeles, which happened to have an all female line-up, that I was able to watch all three performers. Although data

was limited and future in-depth interviews with the artists would serve to expand this project, most of the materials gathered from these sites represent the perspective of grassroots organizers and community members.

Data analysis focuses on three central themes: the creation of spaces of alternative education, Xicanisma expression, and culture and politics. Data examined how these womyn utilized art as a tool for transformational change through rebellion and resistance, how they fused culture and politics and incorporated it into their art, and how their feminism was expressed through their performances.

### ***CIHUATL-CE***

Cihuatl-Ce, a solo hip-hop artist, uses music to create social change by informing the community about critical issues, especially those that affect womyn of color. Once a runaway, Cihuatl-Ce, also known as Xela, now hopes to empower youth by reaching out to and advocating for them. In her performances and lyrics she establishes and practices a Xicana feminism that seeks to empower the entire community by educating both males and females about the struggles of oppressed people all across the globe. Although I found no explanation for it, her music is particularly sensitive to the topic of violence towards womyn. This is evident in her lyrics and in the multi-media slide shows she sometimes incorporates in her performances. The slides of hard working womyn and statistics on domestic violence combine with powerfully charged lyrics to generate a show that empowers all who are present.

#### *Spreading Knowledge through Revolutionary Hip Hop*

After performing at different community venues throughout the United States, Cihuatl-Ce has established an audience

throughout the country. As a former member of an all female group called Cihuatl-Tonali (Female Energy), Xela took part in numerous rallies and marches, such as one against the elimination of the South Central Farm, which used to be community acres of cultivated land that fed hundreds of families in South Los Angeles. Eventually declaring herself a soloist, Xela continues to travel from community to community in hopes of spreading knowledge and solidarity.

Although there is no clear evidence suggesting that she takes part in the organizing of marches, rallies, and events, she does not fail to support them. On April 16, 2009 she participated in a concert called “Education Not the Bullet.” Organized by a San Francisco collective called HOMEY (Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth), “...the event focused on violence prevention, teaching young people to look for creative ways to express themselves and encouraging young people to go to college.” ([www.poormagazine.org](http://www.poormagazine.org)) In addition, alongside other female artists, Cihuatl-Ce was eagerly awaited at the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Farce of July 2009. As one of the first performers, her furious and empowering words about freedom and liberation quickly established the mood for an event created to discuss and reevaluate the concept of “independence.” One of her pieces began:

I’m talking about the real hustle: the hustle of our grandparents, our migrant workers, our students. I’m talking ‘bout the hustle of our Raza, the real hustlers...we refuse to be treated like commodities...We need to be free, we need to be free... free by any means, by any means...

And at end her performances she elaborated:

When I say We Want, you say Freedom! And I’m not talking about that being free, the type that

makes you numb, I'm talking about the real revolutionary decolonization!

Cihuatl-Ce also visits college campuses. In April of 2009 she visited the UC Santa Barbara community during the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Raza College Day Conference. As a conference created to empower youth culturally and politically, and to provide them with necessary information to attain a higher education, Cihuatl-Ce easily moved her young audience with her powerful words and images. As she rapped about brutalized womyn and “indigenous resistance,” slides depicting the facts of their realities, such as domestic violence, adorned her background. Later in May 2009, she performed on the second day of a three day conference organized to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of el Plan de Santa Barbara—which initiated the establishment of Chicana/o studies all over the country—and create dialogue between the campus and local community.

### *Representing for Womyn all across the Globe*

In a photo album, accessed through her public online page (<http://www.myspace.com/cihuatl1>), Xela shares pictures of womyn attending the various venues she has visited. She refers to the album as “Native Wombyn Nation Representing.” In it there are pictures of womyn from Colorado, Oregon, Oakland, Minnesota, Utah, Oxnard CA, and Las Vegas, Nevada. Her efforts to build bridges with womyn from around the U.S. are further apparent in other sections of her public page and particularly in her lyrics.

Two out of the five blogs posted on her page concern womyn. One of her blogs, entitled “& then you wonder why I'm angry,” includes an article concerning the beating of female artist Rihanna by her boyfriend, the well-known artist, Chris Brown (blog 02/9/09). In her second blog she exposes the grotesque case

of Megan Williams, a black womyn from West Virginia, who was raped and tortured “...for a whole week, by six white individuals, three males and three females between the ages of 20 and 49” (blog 09/15/07).

Her sensitivity towards violence against womyn is also revealed in her lyrics. One song of hers is dedicated to a friend who was killed by her boyfriend. At the Farce of July 2009, she stated the following prior to performing this song:

This next piece is dedicated to a sister, I do this piece even though it might be a little bit of a downer, but just to remind us why it is that we're females here up on the mic.' Too many times we are being abused, too many times raped and everything else, the domestic violence that occurs in our communities, we need to start having a protocol to that, some type of dialogue needs to happen, so this one goes out to all the sisters that we've lost.

The lyrics to this song speak of brown sisters who have suffered from brutality. She questions the issue and wonders “when will this...be explored?” Frustration is expressed as to how many more womyn will suffer and die “...before the hardcore men and womyn warriors begin to dialogue, creating protocols...” Violence and brutality against womyn is an issue that pertains to all members of the community, not only those it directly affects. Cihuatl-Ce points out: “...when our womyn die we all fall.”

Most of her words induce feelings of love, frustration, anger, and hope in regards to womyn in particular. They encourage rebellion “against the government and any form of authority” and resistance, insisting that a womyn is sacred and worthy of an acknowledged voice. Her song “Da Resurrection of da Goddess” challenges objectification of womyn and reinforces the importance

of reclaiming of our bodies. She sings about the brutal killings in the city of Juarez, Mexico where the unsolved murders of hundreds of maquiladora workers continue. In another song entitled “Dreamah” she proclaims herself and all females as “creators, sacred, educators, cultivators...” who dream about liberation and use “verbals as artilleries.”

The rest of her music encourages womyn to resist oppression by speaking out and taking up arms in self-defense. A song entitled “Suelta la Lengua” (let your tongue loose) insists that as womyn we must speak out despite those who attempt to silence us. In “Armate” (arm yourself) she attempts to establish solidarity with the womyn in Chiapas as she contends that a womyn’s rebellion is justified.

The concept of sisterhood and solidarity is further articulated in a piece called “Radio Resistencia” (Resistance Radio). In her compilation disc (Cihuatl-Ce, release date unknown) and on her public page (<http://www.myspace.com/cihuatl1>), she shares a piece where a grassroots radio host is interviewing her and another female artist (one of the members of the all-womyn group called Guerrilla Queenz)<sup>8</sup>. In this five-minute dialogue they discuss the topics of sisterhood and solidarity, stressing the importance of supporting one another as womyn. According to them, in their music they express sisterhood and what they “...believe is womyn energy” and in doing so they connect with “sisters” from all over the world. They explain the connection between mother earth and our bodies, claiming that since the earth is “out of balance, we are out of balance.” They therefore maintain that womyn must begin to heal themselves, and our relationships with one. Cihuatl-Ce points out: “...when we start healing womyn, we start healing our communities.”

In this dialogue, the artists introduce a very important issue: solidarity amongst females within the hip-hop scene. They speak

of the necessity for them to stand in support of one another especially since they deal with similar issues within the industry. Cihuatl-Ce alludes to this statement when she reveals to a journalist at the “Education not the Bullet” concert: “There are a lot of woman MC’s...but sometimes, we don’t get invited.”

### *Re-awakening Ancient Spirits: Culture and Politics*

While her lyrics are highly suggestive of a Xicana feminism lived and expressed through the art of “revolutionary” hip hop, her music reveals additional messages of love and revolution for all peoples. In “Armate,” a song justifying a womyn’s rebellion, she clearly states the need for a revolution. She emphasizes the need to fight for “our sacred land.” This concept is especially relevant to the Zapatistas who are struggling against multinational corporations that invade their native lands. The lyrics in “Vamos” (Let’s go) acknowledge the fact that on the northern other side of the Mexican border we live on stolen land and indicate the irony of facing constant harassment by the border patrol. The chorus to this song, however, states: “en la muerte regresamos a la tierra” (in death we return to our land). Dominant in her music is the idea that we are interrelated to mother earth. She makes constant reference to “la tierra” (the land), pachamama or Tonatzin (both terms translate to mother earth), and various aspects of it. Likewise, she draws attention to spirituality and notes that “our spirits are ancient” (Rise Above) and must be “liberated.” In “Drums before the Battle” she challenges us to “imagine a liberated spirit...imagine the collapse of this system...imagine nations united.”

Her lyrics, music, and performance aesthetics all combine to evoke an indigenous identity that stands in solidarity with all other indigenous communities. Throughout her songs she directly speaks of decolonization, resistance, and rebellion. When speaking of resistance she often specifies it as being “indigenous resistance.”

For instance, in “The drums before the battle,” she asks everyone who is “seditious” to put their fist up in the spirit of “indigenous resistance.” The embracement and reclamation of her indigenous roots clearly dominates her identity as a womyn and as an artist. Although her music is primarily in English and Spanish, she manages to incorporate the Aztec language of Nahuatl. Her artist name Cihualt-Ce translates in Nahuatl ‘Womyn-One’. Moreover, her logo, a native mother carrying a child on her back and a gun on her side, automatically captures a feminine and indigenous energy that symbolizes who she is as an artist and what she represents. In many of her performances she further integrates indigenous elements and instruments such as rattles and hand drums.

As she shares verses with her audience, she stands, arms adorned with beautiful body art, in clothing displaying indigenous symbols ranging from owls and butterflies to hieroglyphics. On her public page, various photographs depict a womyn dressed and adorned in cultural clothing and jewelry produced by local vendors. A closer picture of one of her tattoos reveals an elaborate Maiz on her right arm. Maize, a sacred crop of Mesoamerican people, and a subsistent aspect of many indigenous cultures today, further accentuate her indigenous identity.

In her music she continuously mentions and describes indigenous elements from past and present cultures. In her song “Infinite,” she writes: “we are the ancient writings, we are the walking codices.” Countless times she talks about elements of the universe, such as the moon, the sky, birth, God(esses), balance, stars, medicine, sacredness, and energy. These concepts she particularly relates to the indigenous communities in Chiapas where the people are daily fighting for dignity and justice. In this manner, Cihualt-Ce fuses numerous realities across time and space.

Through revolutionary hip-hop, Cihualt-Ce strives to share her experiences and knowledge with numerous communities. She

expresses a determination to “bring down the tower of patriarchy” (Song: “I have no crew, I castr8 for kicks”) and strives to support the Zapatista notion of creating a world where many worlds fit. In one of her blogs, titled “Un Mundo donde Quepan Muxos Mundos,” she suggests a critical necessity to include queers in the struggle. Cihuatl-Ce therefore aspires to create solidarity and support amongst all oppressed peoples, males and females alike. Her moving and empowering performances contribute to the healing of herself and her community and work towards the process of decolonization.

## *FE*

Felicia Montes, known as FE (hope), has been organizing and performing in the community for over ten years. As the co-founder and current member of two womyn’s collectives, Mujeres de Maiz (Womyn of Corn) and In Lak Ech, she performs alongside other Xicanas who express themselves through song and poetry. Recently choosing to take the path of a solo performer as well, she engages in indigenous Xicana “floetry” all across the globe while at the same time working towards her Master thesis, which seeks to document the contributions of Mujeres de Maiz. Although FE has combined performance methods, she primarily identifies herself as a poet. Her passion for social justice provokes her to engage in both creative performance and community organizing that seeks to particularly empower “Raza wombyn.”

### *Healing the Feminine Collectively*

In 1997, FE, along with a few other Xicanas, began two significant womyn’s collectives. One group, In Lak Ech (Mayan concept: you are my other me), is a performance poetry collective composed of all “Xicana multi-media artists, writers, mothers, teachers, and organizers united to tell her-story through poetry & song.” (<http://www.myspace.com/inlakech>) In their words they

seek to empower communities by informing them of issues relevant to womyn, mother earth, and social justice. As a female drum circle, their songs combine indigenous elements in voice and instruments. Their song, “Love song,” is performed in the Aztec Language of Nahuatl in conjunction with a beating drum, together producing a pleasant indigenous song. This modern form of oral tradition thus seeks to voice the struggles of the many that are fighting to create a better world.

That same year, Montes and another Xicana co-founded a second collective of Xicanas called “Mujeres de Maiz” (Womyn of Corn). Their purpose was to unite womyn of color in the Eastside of Los Angeles; they began by creating a zine. Although the name of the zine is unknown, it strove to give voice to all womyn regardless of age, sexuality, and “formal” education. Through the years, their zines and performance art events have facilitated a network of womyn worldwide. In their public biography they state: “What began as an open call for submissions to the zine’ evolved into the collective of women of color artists committed to social justice and the empowerment of our communities.” (<http://www.myspace.com/mujermaiz>) In exposing art and poetry from womyn in the U.S and the rest of the world their zines serve to give voice to cross-cultural and inter-generational herstories. Their events also serve to facilitate a worldwide network of males and females. The public blog “Ombligo Sereno de la Luna” expresses admiration for the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Mujeres de Maiz, an annual month long series of events hosted by the collective. According to the blog “Roughly a thousand participants caught some of the heavy hitter wombyn poets, musicians, actors, dancers, drummers, artisans and visual artists from the West Coast and beyond.”

Felicia also makes significant contributions to community events and activist demonstrations. In her “Punto Poetry Project” (<http://punto poetry.ning.com/profile/>

[FeliciaMontesFe](#)) profile she indicates that she has “organized hundreds of cultural events, marches, protests; from the streets to campuses, ranchos, and both concrete & real jungles for many artists and social justice causes.” One of her projects includes the “Peace and Dignity Journeys” which is an organization “that strives to unify all tribes ranging from Alaska to Kuna Nation to Panama. The group usually partakes in a 7-month run every four years. Each of the running participants represents their native tribe. Every run has a specific theme; the 2009 theme honored sacred sites built by indigenous tribes.”([www.pcccourier.com](http://www.pcccourier.com)) On her public page, Felicia mentions how she ran 2 out of the 6 months in 2002 and further promotes a compilation CD she co-produced in honor of the 2008 Peace and Dignity Journey.

### *Education to and from the Community*

FE’s identification with indigenous communities worldwide is further noticeable in her performances as a solo artist. On June 20, 2008 she posted a blog on her public page entitled “New Poetry/Music Page for my creations.” Here she expresses her desire and decision to spread her wings “a bit” and do her “thang in other circles...here and there.” She points to the fact that this is a huge step for her since she once only believed “...in collective work and thought that doing something on your own or with your own creations only was just too egotistical.” Although this blog may not have been her formal declaration as a solo performer, it is highly suggestive of the fact that she recently decided to perform on her own.

Whether alone, or alongside her two collectives, Felicia Montes tackles national and international issues. In August of 2003, for instance, Felicia shared some of her poetry at a festival that took place in Hollenbeck Park on the Eastside of Los Angeles. The festival was organized to celebrate the 1970 Chicana/o Moratorium where hundreds of community members publicly

declared their opposition to the war in Vietnam. This gathering, attended by Latinos contra la Guerra (LAW), students, teachers, artists, parents, and families, also served as a public outcry demanding an end to the occupation of Iraq, more schools, a stop to anti-immigration policies, and the termination of U.S legislation supporting drug smuggling in Colombia.

Her public page displays pictures of her at different performances. Among the performance sites she mentions are academic conferences such as the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS), college campuses and high schools, and community events. For example, for the 2009 Native American Heritage month hosted by the Native American Student Center at Cal Poly Pomona, FE was invited to perform. As a “Chicana-Indigenous” spoken word artist, her poetry paralleled the event’s motto: “Reclaiming Our Identity and Celebrating Our Culture.” Additional pictures depict her presenting at Cal State Northridge for a Day of the Dead celebration and at UC Riverside with In-Lak-Ech. FE also shares a picture of herself performing at a concert called “Fighting Native Alcoholism” at the Indian Heritage High School in Seattle, Washington.

On October 26, 2008, Montes performed in Los Angeles as part of an event called Sister Fire, which was co-sponsored by the Education Department and Center for Cultural Fluency at Mount St. Mary’s College. As a “national women of color multimedia arts tour that traveled across the U.S.,” this event allowed FE to join in on the collective vision against violence towards womyn of color. Her contribution to this event and other events concerning womyn of color, such as “16 years later, Femicides in Ciudad Juarez,” a day of art activism at the Self-Help Graphics, and the Farce of July 2009, an all female line-up, illustrate her compelling efforts to empower womyn and create solidarity amongst them.

These efforts are evident across all borders, including the one that separates the North from the South. An online collective, intended to create a network of people who support the Zapatista struggle, reveals that Felicia Montes was part of the first annual “Festival de la Digna Rabia” (Festival of Dignified Rage) in Mexico City, 2009. Throughout the four day festival, artists from 20 different countries performed with the purpose of reminding communities from all over the world that their social organizing must forever be “abajo y a la izquierda” (from the bottom and the left). This gathering, organized by the EZLN, hoped to facilitate an exchange of information and strategies, and continue the struggle towards a new world. (www.la\_jornada.unam.mx) An online article written about Felicia Montes’ performance at this festival notes:

Her poetry, so rich, made me vibrate when her verses were fused with beats in a beautiful mix. She says that she is experimenting blending her poetry with a hip-hop base that carries the Chicano taste that only the people from the other side know how to incorporate in their artistic expressions. (<http://colectivozape.blogspot.com>)

Indeed, FE practices Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of hybridity in her artistic performances.

### *A Ritual of Culture*

At the Farce of July 2009, Felicia Montes, along with Mujeres de Maiz, combined indigenous elements with hip hop beats to create a unique performance. In their lyrics they spoke of international womyn of corn whose country is “mother earth.” Her performance partner repeatedly insisted that they cannot be “contained” and could bring peace through “prayer.” As a self-identified “Xicana Tejana,” FE reclaims her indigenous roots

through performing artistic ceremonial rituals. Her public page invites us to listen to two additional hip-hop tracks she does in collaboration with “brothers” from a group called “ITS Circle.” Both tracks speak of fighting together for freedom and make extensive references to indigenous concepts. For instance, Fe says “we are connected to the earth...representing from Chiapas to L.A” while the male artists speak of “duality...”and “walking towards the sixth son.”

Felicia Montes evokes a genuine sensitivity to the struggle of all exploited peoples. In a poem she titled “Independence Day” she points out that people’s dependency on material possessions supports the growth of greedy corporations. She asks us to come together and respect one another because she assures us that: “together we can fight to be free...” Prior to collective organizing and solidarity, however, FE’s poetry echoes a necessity to create balance by loving and caring for ourselves. In “Over-Compensating Xicana Complex” she writes about her passion for “el movimiento” (the movement) and of always being “down for the brown.” These efforts to “save the world,” she explains, often result in self-negligence. Through this poem she thus prays for “health and guidance.”

In the name of peace and dignity, and whether in the concrete jungles of Los Angeles or the forests of Chiapas, Montes joins circles of prayer and ceremony alone and/or in the company of other “neo-nahual, shape-shifting survival sisters” (Poem entitled: Creating My Other Me’s) hoping to empower herself and other womyn of color. Her fusion of indigenous elements and hip hop beats allow her to execute experiments in her spoken word performances, experiments that seek to share her story with the rest of the world and that facilitate bridges of solidarity among communities of struggle. As “una soldadera (a female soldier) of the street, danzante (Aztec dancer) diva, fly girl feminist, ghetto grad student,” FE seeks to attain liberation by reclaiming an

identity and culture that was once stolen, because as she points out: “la cultura cura” (culture cures).

### ***TEATRO M3: LAS RAMONAS***

Teatro M3 Las Ramonas is the newest of the artists discussed in this paper. Utilizing teatro as a way of expressing issues pertinent to their communities, these womyn introduce a unique and modern method of artistic performance. Although very little information can be found on this collective, evidence suggests that individually these womyn have contributed to the movement for more than ten years. The feminine and indigenous energy they share with their audiences allow for the creation of transformational resistance that seeks to create a new and improved world.

#### *Exercising the Xicanista Within*

These Xicanas established their theatre collective sometime in 2007 at the Mujeres de Maiz celebration with the purpose of “creating, re-creating, sharing, and provoking a Xicanista critique through the medicina (medicine) of carcajadas (laughter).” (<http://www.myspace.com/lasramonas>) The group is composed of three womyn: Marlene Beltran, Jo Anna Mixpe Ley, and Marisol L. Torres. On August 23, 2008 they declared on a public blog their decision to extend their collective name. Simply known as Teatro M3 they later chose to call themselves Teatro M3: Las Ramonas. “Las Ramonas,” an obvious word play on the infamous American rock band “The Ramones,” also suggests an intended connection to Ramona, a prominent, if not, the leading female figure of the Zapatista movement, who passed away in 2006 after a long fight against cancer. Their logo, a rendition of “The Ramones,” frames a Zapatista womyn in the center adorned with the words: Las Ramonas: Dignidad (dignity).

## *Information Delivered with Humor*

Their two public pages feature very few photographs. In two they are shown performing at a Mujeres de Maiz event in 2008 while the rest are of their performance at the Annual Farce of July of the same year. In June of 2009, the group traveled to the University of Seattle, performing in another state for the first time. In a public blog they express their excitement at representing Los Angeles in Seattle and hopes of sharing laughter and theatre with the world.

Two of the members of Las Ramonas are in fact part of the collective In Lak-Ech<sup>9</sup> and since In Lak-Ech organized the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Farce of July 2009, an all female line-up and fundraiser for the group, Las Ramonas made a surprise appearance. In a ten-minute piece, performed prior to the last performance of the night, these womyn utilized comedy to stress the importance of uniting for the movement. As “In-Rock-Ech” they convinced their audience of why they were ‘better’ than In-Lak-Ech and spread laughter with their exaggerated impressions of ‘hard-core’ Xicanas singing oldies for ‘el movimiento’.

With the help of Martha Gonzales, member of Chicana/o band Quetzal, Las Ramonas directed and produced their very first parody music video in August of 2008, which is not only posted on their public online page but on a couple of other sites as well. Entitled “Chihuahua in a Box” the six-minute video expresses feelings of frustration towards Hollywood movies that misrepresent Xicana/os. Martha Gonzales plays the part of a white womyn with a talking Chihuahua named “Disney.” In the video, Las Ramonas sing a punk rock song about the misrepresentation of their culture by the mainstream media and they shout “Ya Basta!” (Enough!) They are shown posting flyers throughout the streets of L.A of a missing Chihuahua named “Dignidad” (dignity), hence suggesting their ongoing struggle to attain dignity. Dressed in dark

clothing that includes black fishnets, bandanas, and feather earrings, the clip suggests a unique mixture of rock and indigenous elements.

On their public blogs they promote their appearance in additional events and Internet sites. For instance, they have a flyer promoting the Reel Rasquache Film Festival in Los Angeles where their video was shown. A link to a popular site called “FunnyorDie” where people upload and share funny videos on the web is also posted on one of their blogs. Another link takes you to a popular site called “Latino L.A.,” created to inform the Latina/o community of local events and information. The site shares an article by Las Ramonas in their Arts & Entertainment section. The article briefly introduces who Las Ramonas are and what their music video is about. In it they also explain why they chose that particular topic for their video. They write:

WHY Chihuahua in a Box, you ask? Because! Las Ramonas were OUTRAGED... well actually we were mildly concerned, umm, no, more like sharply dissatisfied. With what, you ask? With the offensive, stereotypical, appropriating, racist, rata (rat) greed machine pumping out yet another sorry piece of crap excuse for a movie in a long line of pieces of crap called Beverly Hills Chihuahua. (<http://latinola.com>)

The purpose of their music video and performances is clearly to initiate dialogue surrounding important issues.

Using laughter as “medicine,” this theatre group engages in a form of resistance that seeks to transform their existing realities and the realities of all communities fighting for peace and dignity. Despite the fact that they are fairly new, their rebellious spirits clearly demonstrate a combined passion for social justice.

Choosing to merge politics with laughter, these womyn are already engaging in a Xicana critique of their own and are on their way to spreading ‘risas’ (laughter) and dignity throughout the world.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have explored the contributions of three particular performers to a movement that emerged as a response to globalization and neoliberal policies. Although these artists are only a small fraction of those devoted to contributing to these efforts, it is important to consider them for the sake of understanding this movement as a collective struggle of men and womyn artists, vendors, musicians, writers, activists, performers, students, and community members. It is also critical to recognize that although their methods and approaches differ, the products of their contributions collectively serve to counter capitalist, white hegemonic and patriarchal discourse to ultimately create social change and transformation.

While social protest may often appear limited to actual organizing, nontraditional means should also be considered. Their hip-hop lyrics, spoken word pieces, and/or comedic performances serve to inform and empower their audiences about struggles all across the globe. By remaining outside of the mainstream scene, these artists have retained a strong commitment to their communities. They have crossed physical and symbolic borders and managed to bridge different realities to create international and intergenerational solidarity. In creating alternative spaces of political education, their creativity has allowed them to enact the role of social justice educators and agents of social change.

To understand culture as a source of strength and unity, political and aesthetic practices must be viewed as strategies of survival. These performers cleverly blend and mix different cultural elements from across time and space to promote the

reclamation of indigenous roots. Because they identify themselves as indigenous womyn they thus reclaim their Xicanisma identity. Not only do they gain self-empowerment through self-expression and public performance, but they are also able to promote cultural and female empowerment in communities all across the globe. Their art has therefore enabled them to juggle multiple collective identities as cultural performers, social educators, Xicana feminists, and agents of social change.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative spelling suggesting an indigenous identity (often used by the artists)

<sup>2</sup> A term frequently used among many of the artists

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this project, I define the term “performer” in relation to David Roman’s definition of “performance”: not only conventional theatre but any number of cultural occasions and social processes that involve ritual, movement, sound, and/or voice on the other hand, and the various individual and communal roles that socialized subjects embody in the world, on the other. (429)

<sup>4</sup> An alternative spelling suggesting a feminist critique

<sup>5</sup> Literally translates to: A world where many worlds fit; one of the goals of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico.

<sup>6</sup> El Sereno is a working class district in the Northeastern part of Los Angeles; Chiapas is a state in southern Mexico and the birthplace of the Zapatista risings.

<sup>7</sup> Chicana/o & Latina/o organization on campus; the official MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) chapter of UCSB

<sup>8</sup> Guerrilla Queenz is also an underground and Los Angeles-based group.

<sup>9</sup> Collective co-founded by Felicia Montes

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## **Discography**

Cihuatl-Ce's Demo Album: Cihualt-Ce

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Cihuatl-Ce Revolutionary

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFIkznX1GUAX48>>

C ihuatl-Ce

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=em5rYKZVLMU>>

Xela (Cihuatl-Ce)

<[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li7nNbfswfg&feature=PlayList&p=F1BE527E6B4D9BB2&playnext=1&playnext\\_from=PL&index=16](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li7nNbfswfg&feature=PlayList&p=F1BE527E6B4D9BB2&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=16)>

Cihuatl Ce @ KPFK & "Dreamer" @ Watsonville

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# Immigrant Anthems and the Post-2006 Lyrical Moment

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## **Abstract**

*This research project investigates Latino music produced post-2006 in response to the 2006 Immigrant Marches that protested HR bill 4437 introduced in December 2005. The bill aimed to criminalize organizations assisting undocumented immigrants. I focus on the lyrical content to establish how these songs contribute to the concept of "anthems" as symbolic hymns during significant political moments. By reviewing the rising presence of Latinos within the music industry, I examine how their billboard popularity—albeit ironically—parallels contentious steps towards anti-immigration laws. Traditionally, music dealing with immigration has been in the Mexican-based corrido genre popularized, for instance, by Los Tigres del Norte. The recent anthems appear across genres and from artists of non-Mexican origins. For example the anthems that have emerged as a result of this historic event are the narrative and political “Mojado” by Ricardo Arjona and Intocable, “Nuestras Demandas” by the B-Side Players, and “Pal Norte” by Calle 13. I focus on how these anthems helped shape a collective identity for Latino communities, both consciously and unconsciously. Ultimately, by observing the significance of these musical productions on collective Latino immigrant identities through song and lyrical analysis, I hope to underscore the significance music has on ethnic and linguistically marginalized communities.*

## **Introduction**

A song never starts a revolution...but it can provide the accompaniment. (Singer/Songwriter Ricardo Arjona)

Popular music can be a valuable source of evidence about social history. (George Lipsitz)

In response to draconian immigration measures proposed by House of Representative bill HR 4437 in 2005, millions of immigrants and their supporters took to the streets in record-setting numbers (Bada, 2007). From Los Angeles, Phoenix, Houston, Denver, to Minneapolis and several other metropolitan areas, the sight of masses of people creating gridlocked downtowns in support of more just and humane immigration legislation were prominently covered in major media outlets across the country.

Introduced in the House of Representatives in December 2005, HR 4437 sought to criminalize unauthorized immigrants which would have led to increased numbers of people detained and deported (Rim, 2009). The bill's contentious policies were grounds for immediate action and resulted in record-setting national marches during the spring of 2006. A reported 3.5 to 5.1 million people marched through the streets of many major cities across the United States protesting the passing of the bill (Bada et al. 2007; Rim, 2009). The millions of supporters that took to the streets reflect the significance of this social-political moment in 2006. The fact that the marches and rallies were organized largely through a range of media outlets is also significant.

Academic attention surrounding these historic marches has, thus far, focused on television coverage in Los Angeles (Otto, 2010), the dynamics of Chicago and its unique immigration politics (Pallares and Flores González, 2008), or the general

immigration movement (Buff, 2008). Less academic attention, however, has been paid to the impact of these marches on popular culture and vice versa. This essay explores how HR4437 helped craft, in María Elena Cepeda's words, a "musical imagination" where music by Latino musicians across genres produced a unique lyrical moment. Whereas corridos<sup>1</sup> capture heroic adventures and tragic love stories, anthems demand that the listening public collectively take notice.

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, an "anthem" is defined as a psalm or hymn sung responsively; a song of praise; or as "a usually rousing popular song that is identified with a particular subculture, movement, or point of view" (Merriam-Webster, 2009). The third definition of "anthem" is most relevant to examining popular immigrant-themed songs that speak to the immigration experience. Popular music, regardless of genre, is considered popular for its commodification and commercial success or for its ability to be reflective of a specific group of people or community. Although the Mexican-specific corrido genre is closely identified as a musical *testimonio*<sup>2</sup> for Latinos, in this paper I look at the anthem as representative of the sociopolitical moment using Peter Narváez' (2002) definition:

A special form of socially conscious song, anthems are sacrosanct signifiers wherein group participants mutually make emotional investments and reap the reward of collective support, assertiveness, and empowerment. (p. 315)

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<sup>1</sup> The corrido genre is as essentially a Mexican border ballad. Américo Paredes defines it as a narrative that focuses on border conflict and strife as its main theme. (Paredes, 1958, p. 205).

<sup>2</sup> *Testimonio* is the Spanish word for testimony.

This paper looks across genres and Latino-origin music to discuss how these “anthems” lyrically capture the tribulations of border-crossing, a transnational experience, to establish an immigration discourse.

The songs examined in this study all contain narratives dealing with experiences of border-crossing, adapting to a new homeland, and learning how to navigate the challenges of existing in multiple worlds. These narratives speak to the experiences of Latino immigrants in the United States, many of whom constitute the lower working class sectors of the national population and speak to these audiences across different musical genres. Popular culture is inherently local in terms of cultural productions, since it hosts politics of identity that interact with “issues of identification, sense of belonging, and the meanings of home, place, roots, and tradition” (Simonett, 2000). Studying popular music is of major importance because of its ability to establish a sense of community, or an ethnoscape, to contest and change the ‘imagined worlds’ of the establishment (Simonett, 2000; Appadurai, 1990).

Few scholars have studied the concept of anthem in popular music and even fewer have studied music that addresses the U.S.-Mexico border-crossing experience outside the corrido genre. The U.S.-Mexico border-crossing experience refers to a physical and geographic crossing; this is not a specific Mexican experience but rather a pan-Latino one. Narváez (2002) addresses how popular culture creates expressions for regional communities and social movements. In modern popular culture, songs are frequently associated with people, commercials, or films to create a sense of historical memory. Narváez discusses how in many cases vernacular songs can “accrue anthemic meanings;” frequently songs change over time to adopt a more explicit political purpose (Narváez, 2002). This study enters the conversation by looking at songs that have gained relevance to significant social movements in immigration politics.

This project relies on Stuart Hall's (1997) ideas on discourse in order to understand how we accrue meanings and produce a discourse through language. Hall believes, "It is us—in society, within human cultures—who make things mean, who signify," which maintains that while meanings are arbitrary, the significance society grants them hold importance in daily practices. The anthems in this study shape a discourse based on immigrant cultural productions and representations. According to Hall, these discursive formations constitute a "body of knowledge" which in this case will create an approach to discussing immigrant culture and productions.

Helena Simonett (2000) argues for the need to study the role of culture in social life in order to find answers to questions regarding the politics of identity within specific communities. Two major recurring and overlapping themes are pertinent to the project. First, sites of popular culture and cultural production are viewed as expressions of identity and indicative of significant social-political moments. Second, popularity and the significance to a community are privileged over commercial success. To understand cultural productions as representations of identity, I use Simonett's (2001) definition of popular culture, referred to as a set of practices:

In which subaltern groups (working class people, marginalized groups, or immigrants) survive culturally and to the strategies through which they filter and refashion what evolves from hegemonic culture and then incorporate and fuse this with what comes from their own historical memory. (p. 273)

These 'subaltern groups' must produce different forms of popular culture - in this case, the anthem - to claim cultural space in a

society where their community is largely marginalized. Yet these politically-tinged songs may carry less commercial success.

In this study, the umbrella genre of Latino popular music encompasses the ballad, norteño, reggaetón, and reggae fusion genres of the analyzed songs. Cepeda (2009) uses the musical imagiNation to establish its association with a “(trans) national Latino community whose identity narratives are based on routes *as well as roots*.”

Latino popular music is cast as common space for imagining and enacting Latinidad outside of traditional national borders, and in ways not so overtly shaped by the racism, classism, heterosexism, sexism, and xenophobia that many U.S. Latinos confront on a daily basis. (p. 554)

In her work on “Nuestro Himno” and “Reggaetón Latino” (two other notable immigration-themed songs released in 2006) Cepeda claims that these “popular cultural manifestations... demonstrate an understanding of citizenship beyond the conventionally “political ultimately privileges the practices of quotidian experience and self-understanding” (2009, p.550). The songs analyzed in this study are reflective of such manifestations created to challenge the anti-immigrant sentiment behind the HR 4437 bill.

Simonett’s articulation of the technobanda genre serves as a prime example of popular music serving as a necessary element in the construction of identity. The technobanda genre is able to “enact cultural identity and to revitalize a deeply felt and threatened ethnic boundary” allowing individuals to contest oppressive norms (Simonett, 2000). Similarly, Appadurai (1990) views the ethnoscape as a social construct guided by the history, language, and political positioning of nation-states, multinationals, and diasporic communities. Simonett’s concept of revitalizing a

threatened ethnic boundary is revealed through the analysis undertaken in this study of Ricardo Arjona's "Mojado," Calle 13's "Pal Norte," and the B-Side Players "Nuestras Demandas" as immigrant anthems serving as sites of contest and protest.

In addition to confronting various issues related to the immigrant experience, music within popular culture serves to understand the purpose behind transnational migrations and the construction of border identities. Employing a cultural approach to examine high, folk, and popular culture, as well as symbolic forms of identification, this study expands on issues related to race (Saldívar, 1999). To clarify, while popular culture can produce suggestions of identity expression it does not define identities of those who embrace it. Since popular music functions as a form of identity expression, the second aspect of the project aims to develop a discussion of how popular immigrant-themed songs are associated with social and political moments in order to document certain immigration policies.

Like an ethnoscape, certain musical genres can envelop qualities that speak to specific social-political moments. William Gradante (1982) sees the ranchera<sup>3</sup> as "a sociocultural phenomenon that exhibits an enormous amount of variation" because of the epic quality the genre holds. Rancheras provide the listener with "an experience that was more personal and more emotional than aesthetic" which contributes to the emotion and identity of the listener signaling an anthemic quality (Gradante, 1982). Much like the ranchera genre, the anthem garners a narrative quality that gestures to a movement or experience. Therefore an anthem serves as a platform for contestation to the

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<sup>3</sup> The ranchera is a traditional Mexican genre of music that usually describes themes of love, patriotism, and nature. (Gradante, 1982, p. 41). It is similar to the corrido genre but differs in that it is sung by one person.

contentious bill, necessary to discuss immigrant-themed music produced during this significant political and social moment.

Ramón Saldívar (1999), in his work on popular music and its association with social movements, highlights how cultural productions within popular music are able to serve as a platform for contestation and identification by marginalized communities. The link between cultural productions and social movements can develop relevant ideas on race and ethnicity in the post-civil rights era as seen with the anthems examined here (Saldívar, 1999). Simonett (2000) offers a relevant example of Saldívar's perspective by explaining how the KLAX radio station, which plays technobanda music, was termed "the program Governor Pee Pee Wilson hates the most" during the time of protest against Proposition 187 in 1994. The movement against Prop 187, founded through the radio waves, gave Mexicans a newfound sense of pride during a period when being Mexican carried a negative connotation. In this case, a radio station that plays a genre of music relevant to Latino immigrants is seen as an agent broadcasting the type of songs that carry anthemic meanings. In a similar vein, Dolores Casillas (2010) argues that immigrant radio listeners use broadcasting as a window to "home" countries and to help navigate newfound residences.

The second theme of this project seeks to understand the popularity of the songs studied in relation to the reception they garnered by Latinos in the United States. Narváez contends that, "It is the sharing of important areas of common social experience through song" that signal "anthemic" qualities whose traits are "useful to go beyond the facts of popularity and look at the engaging, unresolved tensions developed in the song text" (Narváez, 2002). Therefore, a song's popularity is based on its reception rather than its commodification since, "real song popularity cannot be simplistically quantified" (2002, p.269). This study argues that the popularity of music should not just focus on

successful commodification based on sales but rather look at the organic use of songs that combines elements of regional folklore and culture.

### Song Selection

This investigation includes a song and lyrical analysis and an examination of the popularity and reception among Latinos of three songs. In developing a literature review, reading magazine reviews, and conversations with fellow scholars, I have identified key Latino musicians and anthems that have been especially significant to the Latino community in relation to the Immigrant Rights Marches that took place in 2006. The song and lyrical analysis consists of reviewing the themes and issues prevalent in the songs. The song selection process was based on looking for songs from artists who are not necessarily of Mexican origin but have produced or performed songs speaking to the border-crossing experience. The second factor used to select the songs for the project included searching for songs that varied in genres and were not the traditional corrido genre that has historically spoken to the experience of border-crossing. I sought to include songs of diverse and more contemporary genres. The third part of the selection process involved tracking when these songs were released and if they were adopted or were a response to contentious immigration reform policies of the HR 4437 bill.

The selection of the songs was not a completely random process; the songs were selected for their differences in genre, the artist's national origin, and contributions to the social-political moment between 2005 and 2007. The first of these, Ricardo Arjona's "Mojado" (The Wet One), was an obvious choice because of the attention the song received during the 2006 Immigrant Rights Marches. The Guatemalan-born singer released "Mojado," which features the Tejano group Intocable, in December of 2005. The song did not enter the charts until April of 2006 and spent

eleven weeks on Billboard's Regional Mexican Songs chart but never made it to the Top 20 on any Spanish-language chart (Billboard.com). The song did reach its peak on Billboard's Latin Songs, Latin Pop Songs, and Regional Mexican Songs charts in the two weeks following the May 1, 2006 Immigrant Rights Marches yet still never entered the Top 20 (Billboard.com). The move up the charts indicates how the song gained airplay during the marches and signals its important association to this sociopolitical moment. "Mojado" itself gained popularity for its use as background music for television and radio shows discussing topics of immigration signaling, again, the song's association with the political moment in 2006 (M. Ramirez, personal communication, 2009). "Pal Norte" by Calle 13, discussed below, shared the same path as "Mojado" on the radio.

A second, the single "Pal Norte" (To the North), released in late 2007, was chosen for this study for the themes embedded in the song's lyrics and its reference to migrating toward the global north. The song is an example of the contemporary genre of reggaetón speaking to the immigrant crossing experience. Cepeda considers reggaetón to be a hybrid musical genre which "has proven a fertile site for the negotiation of youth identities" of African American, U.S.-Latino, and Latin American youth (2009, p.560). The artist also carries a more straightforward and aggressive tone in the song which may provide a sense of empowerment for an immigrant, similar to "Nuestras Demandas" by the B-Side Players. Because of the following the group has established and because of their youth-friendly genre-crossing sound, the content of their music is able to reach a younger audience translating to their music reaching a larger audience.

Lastly, I include the B-Side Players' "Nuestras Demandas" (Our Demands) as an example of a non-commercialized song (the song did not chart on any Billboard charts and did not receive any prestigious awards) carrying strong anthemic qualities. The B-Side

Players are an underground band comprised of members from various ethnic backgrounds. Their music also fuses many different genres together in a way that is similar to Ozomatli. Their song is pertinent to this study because it was written specifically in response to the social-political moment of 2006. However, despite their lack of commercial success, the B-Side Players exemplify the voice of the people in a non-mainstream manner in that they created a song with political implications rather than with the expectation of commercial success.

### **Analysis of the Songs**

The tradition of songs speaking to the Latino immigrant experience is closely identified with the corrido or norteño genre made popular by musical acts such as Los Tigres del Norte. The corrido genre is a narrative genre that is used to narrate the different experiences ranging from fate and pursuit to challenge and farewell (Hernandez, 1999). Los Tigres del Norte are pioneers in documenting the immigrant experience in their music with songs such as “La Jaula de Oro” and “Tres Veces Mojado” within the corrido genre, both of which are anthems in their own right. As previously mentioned, this study departs from the tradition in that these sample songs vary across different genres—from ballad, reggaetón, to hip-hop and reggae—and the artists are not of Mexican descent.

### ***Mojado***

Despite their different Latino origins, artists are speaking to an experience associated with a primarily Mexican audience. Arjona’s “Mojado” opens as a ballad and midway switches to a norteño, both genres different from the traditional corrido genre, which is intrinsically Mexican. The diverse Latino origins of the artists and diverse genres of the songs introduce the anthems observed in this study. “Pal Norte,” by Puerto Rican group Calle

13 featuring Orishas, from Cuba, is a hip-hop styled reggaetón song that did fairly well in the mainstream music market. The group went on to earn a Latin Grammy for the 2007 Best Urban Song (Grammy.com). The B-Side Players' "Nuestras Demandas" covers a mixture of genres that includes hip-hop and soul, fused with Afro-Latin sounds. The group's members are as diverse ethnically as the sounds of their music. What separates the B-Side Players' song from Arjona and Calle 13 is that their music did not reach the same kind of commercial success in the music industry.

Border-crossing, identity, and the search for a sense of belonging are major themes addressed by Arjona in "Mojado." The song opens with the narrator (singer) describing the mojado preparing to make the journey across the border and reworking the fears in his head. "Mojado" expresses a hauntingly real account of the border-crossing experience yet strikes a romanticized image of it as well. Aware of the dangers that lie ahead, the mojado embarks on this journey while the narrator tells the audience of his plight. In this almost idealized image of the hard-working migrant, Arjona cleverly juxtaposes the lyrics with the genre of the song to create a romanticized notion of a migrant person.

Arjona questions why the mojado must constantly prove he is not an alien, an experience that many immigrants endure because of heavy anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States. Arjona asks, "Si la luna suave se desliza por cualquier cornisa/ Sin permiso alguno/ por qué el mojado precisa comprobar con visas que no es de Neptuno" (If the smooth moon slides behind any cornice without permission/ Why does the "Mojado" need to prove with visas that he is not from Neptune?). The ability to reach immigrants by empathizing with their struggle adds to the association of anthem as representative of this sociopolitical moment since, as a product of popular culture, Arjona's lyrics in "Mojado" dynamically interact with identity issues for the listener. In keeping with Narváez' definition of the anthem, Arjona's

“Mojado” shares “important areas of common social experience through song” and “look at the engaging, unresolved tensions developed by the song text” (2002, p. 275).

The theme of belonging in Arjona’s “Mojado” speaks directly to the immigrant listener. The emotional distress and frustration of adapting to life in the United States is clearly expressed in the lyrics. The comparison of the undocumented immigrants position in society in relation to the legal citizen’s duties highlights the class conflicts that trouble many immigrants once they make it across the border: “El mojado/ el indocumentado carga el bulto/ Que el legal no cargaría ni obligado” (“El Mojado” the undocumented one/ carries the baggage that the legal person does not carry nor is obligated to). Arjona later encourages the listener to consider a ‘universal visa’ that we are granted at birth and expires at death as a God-given right to travel across borders without restriction or persecution. A universal sense of belonging is introduced here that questions the importance of borders to the audience. Cepeda, in her work on “Nuestro Himno,” identifies how a sense of national belonging in popular music creates a “nation-as-family” notion (2009, p.551).. This is true for the lyrics in “Mojado” as well The concept of anthem lies heavily in this part of the song because the narrative no longer sees the “mojado” as simply a “mojado” but rather brings every listener together with the ‘universal visa’.

The anthemic quality of “Mojado” is obvious given the political moment in which it was released. In the recent collective memory of Latino immigrants, the song has gained significance for retelling the immigrant experience to the United States in a public forum. Arjona has mentioned in interviews that the lyrics of “Mojado” do not only specifically apply to the U.S.-Mexico border but also to his native Guatemala’s border with Mexico contributing to its anthemic quality since it is not specific to one border-crossing experience (Gurza, 2006). Arjona’s comments emphasize

an important point in this discussion of anthem which is that since border-crossing is not a nation-specific process, it is a transnational one. The effects of transnationalism and globalization in today's economy have a major impact on patterns of immigration which are complicated by issues of race and class.

Arjona has stated that "A song never starts a revolution...but it can provide the accompaniment." This reflects the songwriter's intention to accompany a movement in how "Mojado" complimented the Immigrant Rights Marches (Gurza, 2006). The song is the least lyrically-aggressive of the three songs being discussed in this study despite Arjona's reputation as a political musician. The next song takes a different approach in describing a musical perspective on the border-crossing experience.

### ***Pal Norte***

Calle 13, comprised of half-brothers René Pérez Joglar, known as "Residente," and Eduardo José Cabra Martínez, "Visitante," rose to fame for their blunt lyrics and mixing of hip-hop and reggaetón sounds. Their song, "Pal Norte," was released in late 2007 and, like "Mojado," did not have huge success on the Billboard Latin charts. The song was released as the third single from the band's second album *Residente o Visitante* (Resident or Visitor) which is a play on their nicknames and carries immigrant connotations emphasizing the band's awareness of social-political issues to which their listeners can relate.

The lyrical content of "Pal Norte" is much more explicit than "Mojado" in that it expresses anger for the reality of having to cross the border "illegally," rarely by choice. Where "Mojado" spoke of the immigrants' internal struggle in the United States, "Pal Norte" enters with an aggressive account of the actual crossing experience. The chorus of the song says, "Tengo tu

antídoto/ Pal' que no tiene identidad/ Somos idénticos/ Pal' que llegó sin avisar/ Tengo tranquilito... Para los que ya no est'n para los que est'n y los que vienen” (I have your antidote/ For those without identity/ We are identical/ To those who came without warning/ I have peace of mind/ For those no longer here/ For those who are/ And those who come). The chorus calls forth anthemic connotations in that the artist is creating a collective identity for the immigrant regardless of country of origin. Again, following Narváez’ ideas on the anthem, “Pal Norte” functions as a “good anthem” in that it empowers a people with a “collective regional sense of common experience” by supplying the ability to express unvoiced emotions (2002, p.277). A specific-origin sense of nationalism is absent because this anthem, like “Mojado,” understands that the harsh reality of crossing is universal among immigrants who make the journey, specifically by ground. The transnational element of “Pal Norte” lies in its depiction of a global journey migrating north never calling out a specific country of origin or destination.

Calle 13 employs Arjona’s concept of the ‘universal visa’ and Narváez’ notion of empowerment in the “Pal Norte” lyrics by claiming their own direction on the journey pal norte. The first verse describes the narrator setting out to cross the entire continent and travel without a compass or concept of time, declaring his own autonomy. Joglar denies the use or need of luxuries to cross the border and instead relies on the protection from a higher power, “A irme de caminata sin comodidades/ sin lujo.../ protegido por los santos y los brujos” (To go for a walk without commodities/ without luxuries.../ Protected by the saints and the witch doctor...). The sense of belonging is then presented in an unapologetic manner since the speaker is dictating his own path north with the aid of the spirit world.

The last verse of the song, which is more of a universal shout-out than a verse, is the most anthemic part of the song. The

concept of creating hope among a struggling group of people is anthemic in that it creates an emotion that can be found among some Latino immigrants and leaves open the chance to be responded to by the masses of migrants in the United States. The last verse says, “Esta producción artístico-cultural/ hecha con cariño y con esfuerzo/ sea como un llamado de voluntad/ y esperanza para todos, todos...” (This artistic-cultural production/ Made with love and effort/ Let it be a call of will/ And hope for everyone, everyone). Here, the consciousness behind the song resonates with the listener since it is created with the hope that the masses may hear this anthem, affirming that the journey was not made in vain.

### *Nuestras Demandas*

The third song, “Nuestras Demandas” by the B-Side Players brings a different element to the discussion on anthems. The B-Side Players, a San Diego-based band, incorporates different styles of music heavily influenced by jazz, Afro-Latin, and hip hop sounds. Their pro-immigrant anthem “Nuestras Demandas” was released in the summer of 2007 and their music video features footage from the 2006 Immigrant Rights Marches. Unlike “Mojado” and “Pal Norte,” this song was not commercially popular but rather had more popularity in the underground music scene. Inherently a protest song, “Nuestras Demandas” bears themes of rebellion, protest, and disassociation from mainstream music while creating a universal movement for change.

Beginning as a declaration, “Nuestras Demandas” is in effect the immigrants’ demands. The band lists what they see as necessary actions for change to improve the world around them. By alluding to Zapatista<sup>4</sup> references demanding peace, justice, and

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<sup>4</sup> The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) began their first armed uprising in January 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico. The Zapatistas became recognized

freedom, the B-Side Players assert their rebellious stance on the situation they are living in. Their discontent with oil-obsessed ‘murderers’ is also reflective of the song’s protest characteristics. In one line the song asserts, “No queremos fronteras segregando el mundo/ es tiempo mi raza para revolución,” (We don’t want borders segregating the world/ it is time, my people, for a revolution), imagining a borderless world. The call to *mi raza*<sup>5</sup> to begin a revolution implies a very important anthemic quality in creating a unity among the song’s listeners.

In addition to a call for action, the B-Side Players draw attention to their non-mainstream background and embrace it. The fact that they are not mainstream gives their anthem a more grassroots appeal in that the song was created for a more political reason. The song declares, “En todas tus revistas y periódicos/ en todos canales de tu televisión/ todas estaciones de tu radio/ no vas a encontrar este movimiento/ solo pa’ la gente que quiere cambio” (In all your magazines and newspapers/ in all of your television channels/ in all your radio stations/ you won’t find this movement/ only for the people who seek change). This song’s anthemic quality is found in its disassociation from mainstream popular culture while still being adamant about a call for change.

## Discussion

All three songs contribute to an emerging immigrant genre in Spanish-language music. Each song presents a different perspective on the immigrant experience, creating cultural responses to an issue that is hotly debated in the United States. These anthems are reminders that the immigrant experience, while

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as a social movement that aimed to uphold autonomous government structures within indigenous regions in Mexico (Stahler-Sholk, 2010, p. 269).

<sup>5</sup> *Mi raza* is the Spanish phrase for “my people” or more literally “my race.”

varied among migrants, is universal in that there is a struggle against unwelcoming oppressive entities such as anti-immigrant supporters in the receiving country. Diversity in the style of music and the background of the artists proves that contemporary music can provide a space to discuss immigrant issues regardless of genre and national origins.

This study aims to understand the distinction of these cultural responses as anthems for a movement that mobilized over four million immigrants to demand their rights. Ricardo Arjona and Intocable's "Mojado," Calle 13 and Orishas' "Pal Norte," and the B-Side Players' "Nuestras Demandas" all illustrate Narváez' definition of anthem in that they indeed act as 'sacrosanct signifiers' of collective support, assertiveness, and empowerment for a people through music (Narváez, 2002). The lyrics of these three songs resonate with listeners in the urgency for the call for change that they exclaim.

The significance of these anthems lies in that the border-crossing, or immigrant, experience becomes a Latin American experience not specifically tied to one nationality, Mexican. Common themes in the lyrics include border-crossing, discrimination, agency, religion, and understanding how to adapt when living in the United States. These songs are categorized as anthems because of their popularity which is not necessarily measured by commercial success. While some of the songs in question garnered more airplay and commercial success, others had more of an underground popularity. Despite commercial success or lack thereof, I stress that neither path makes a song more or less anthemic. Commercial success does not contribute to a song qualifying as an anthem; conversely if the song is commercially successful, that should not disqualify it from being considered anthemic. Regardless, these anthems are vital to the study of immigrant popular culture since they allow for the

creation of a cultural space in a world where immigrants are largely marginalized.

Anthems of historic sociopolitical moments are not a new phenomenon. One needs not to look very far to understand that music and protest go hand in hand. Marvin Gaye, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez, to name a few, are prominent anti-war musicians, all ranging in musical genres. If we recall the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam-era anti-war protests, and more recently the surge of pop music singers (Lady Gaga, Pink) bringing attention to LGBT rights, we are reminded that music has and always will serve as a vehicle for commentary on the sociopolitical moments in history.

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# **A Consideration of the Possible Effects of African-American Culture on Spousal Separation and Divorce**

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## **Abstract**

*Divorce in the United States remains a major social problem. Despite extensive research on a range of topics regarding divorce, there are few studies examining experiences of divorce on a micro-level in collectivistic cultures. Collectivist cultures are those that value the goals of the collective over goals of the individual. In the United States, African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latino communities are typically characterized as collectivist. This study uses a grounded theory approach to understand holistically the divorce experiences of African American families and possible influences from the African American culture on divorce. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with parents or adolescents who experienced separation and/or divorce. The cumulative data suggests that the African American culture has an effect upon the reasons for spousal separation/divorce as well as the communication strategies used by spouses when discussing the divorce with children and extended family.*

The research literature on divorce and families is extensive and provides unique insight into the communication processes during a divorce. However, many of the couples sampled in the studies are White Americans who, arguably, undergo a divorce process that may be unique to their cultural background. This research utilizes the collectivistic/individualistic paradigm to support the idea that the traditions, values, and ideals in the Black American and White American cultural communities differ. This is because the collectivistic and individualistic tendencies within each culture can influence the processes, behavior, and communication strategies of families. This is not, however, a comparative study between the divorce experiences of people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Rather, this paper seeks to understand the divorce processes and components in the divorce process, of Black American families in order to uncover any possible influence that Black American collectivism may exert on the entire divorce process.

The effects of divorce on the family system have been widely studied and there is significant research theorizing about the impact of divorce on multiple sectors of the family. Divorce is difficult for spouses, especially if they have children. Families with children have unique experiences because the presence of a child may necessitate the continuation of the bond between the parents. This may cause added stress for parents experiencing divorce because there are issues that must be addressed such as difficulty in “solo parenting, continuing discord with the former spouse, decline in emotional support... and economic hardship” (Amato, 2000, p. 1276, 2000). The stressors are more considerable for women than men. According to Amato (2000), women are more vulnerable to consequences of divorce. Research consistently indicates that economic instability is a contributing factor in psychological well-being (Amato, 2000; Gadalla, 2009). Many women gain primary custody which burdens them financially as they now need to sustain the child on significantly reduced

monetary resources. These circumstances create a difficult environment for women as they balance the loss of a partner, changed finances, and rearing the children (Amato, 2000). But there are also positive consequences of divorce such as higher self-confidence, greater sense of control, and happiness (Amato, 2000). Conversely, male spouses gain financial stability after the divorce (Amato, 2000). Reasons for this include a job market that disproportionately favors men over women and men having lessened parental responsibility which can ease the effect of divorce, although there are non-custodial fathers who experience unique stressors post-divorce due to the loss of contact with the child (Amato 2000; Lawson & Thompson 1996).

In addition to the spouses, children are also greatly affected by the divorce process. Adolescents who undergo the divorce of their parents experience significant and detrimental psychological, physical, and emotional effects that can influence their childhood and persist well into adulthood (Aro, Huure, & Junkari, 2006). Parental relationships with the children can also be compromised during the divorce process. For example, father-adolescent relationships are more likely to deteriorate because the father is typically the parent to leave the home and the first to re-marry. The difficulty in maintaining long-distance relationships with children is commonly at the root of weakened paternal bonds. Often times the father will create a new family system where the child is not involved, lessening the quality time they spend together. The child then experiences feelings of abandonment and even resentment because things which were once good and familiar have severely shifted (Aro et al., 2006). However, there are significant factors to predicting post-divorce father-adolescent closeness including pre-divorce closeness, quality of the mother-child relationship, and the adolescents' perception of well-being (Scott, 2007).

The maternal-adolescent relationship also shifts post-divorce where the mother frequently discloses more intimate and sensitive information (such as financial concerns and anger/complaints regarding the ex-husband) to the adolescent (Koerner, Jacobs, & Raymond, 2000). In fact, mothers are more inclined to talk about these matters with their child(ren) than fathers (Dolgin, 1996). Maternal disclosures can also be gendered as mothers turn to their daughters more frequently than to their sons (Koerner et al., 2000). Adolescents' exposure to such information can cause them to experience psychological distress (Koerner et al., 2000) and even propel them into "early adulthood" where the adolescent feels older than his or her chronological age (Koerner, 2006). Divorce can also affect the formation and maintenance of the adolescents' future relationships. Children of divorce are likely to marry other children of divorce and their marriages are more likely to fail than marriages where only one person experienced divorce in their family as a child or neither person experienced divorce as a child (Wilfinger, 2003). Some research concludes that a pattern of intergenerational transmission of divorce can be formed as children of divorce experience a failed marriage as an adult (Amato, 1996; Amato & Deboer 2001; Wolfinger, 2000).

Ethnic identity is a critical aspect when studying human behavior, attitudes, and communication because it can potentially take precedence over other influential aspects. Each ethnic culture has beliefs and values that are deeply rooted. Children are raised to abide by such beliefs which in turn creates the patterns that get carried on generation after generation. It is critical that the intersections of these various identities (i.e., gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, etc.) are considered when studying people's attitudes and behaviors. Are the divorce experiences and perspectives noted in research representative of families across all cultures? Do families from various cultures experience the impact of divorce in the same way as families traditionally studied? Have

studies generalized findings to hold true for families where their intersecting ethnic and cultural identity has shaped a much different divorce experience? There is a vast amount of research studying the Black family and divorce in the Black family in fields including Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Black Studies. But their approach to the research does not include a close examination of the communication strategies and processes that take place from pre-divorce to post-divorce. Communication research has widely surveyed divorce processes in families but these studies use the perspective of families from individualistic cultures. This study seeks to broaden the field by studying the experiences of African American families in collectivistic cultures and using an individualism-collectivism paradigm

Individualism and collectivism have been studied as characteristics of interpersonal and intergroup behavior (Sagy, Orr, & Bar-On, 2001). Although these concepts have been examined throughout the social sciences, a universal definition has yet to be determined. According to Hui and Triandis (1986), *collectivism* is defined as the “subordination of individual goals to the goals of a collective, and a sense of harmony, interdependence, and concern for others” (p. 246). This can be best understood as considering how the decisions one makes impact others, the sharing of tangible and intangible resources, and the feeling of involvement and contribution in others' lives (Hui & Triandis, 1986). *Individualism* is linked with self-centeredness and defined as the “subordination of the goals of the collectivities to individual goals, and a sense of independence and lack of concern for others” (Hui & Triandis 1986; Triandis, 1995). Current scholarship highlights interdependence, harmony, and social hierarchies as key features of collectivism collectivistic cultures while individualistic cultures are associated with high levels of competition, pleasure, and personal achievement (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990).

Some research exists that has applied this theoretical construct to the study of the cultural differences across ethnic groups. Using a meta-analytic study, Coon and Kimmelmeier (2001) studied the levels of individualism and collectivism across four large ethnic groups: African American, Asian American, Latino American, and European American. They found that compared to White Americans, the three other ethnic groups scored significantly higher in collectivism using three collectivism scales measuring connectedness to family, the interrelatedness and identification with in-group members, and sharing a common fate with a religious, national, or ethnic group. In another study, African American college students were found to score higher on aspects of collectivism that privileged identification with the in-group and support common goals as well as fostered interdependence (Komarraju & Cokley, 2008).

Collectivism-individualism can also be studied within families across cultures, although, thus far there has been very little research on this concept. According to Schwartz (2007), familism and collectivism have strong correlations where familism “prioritizes the family over the individual” (p. 102). Ethnic groups such as Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black, reflect this notion where the needs of the family take precedence over the needs of self (Schwartz, 2007).

This study uses collectivism when studying the Black family because the cultural values of kinship and maintaining close relationships across generations in the African American community seem to mirror the critical components of collectivism. Within African American families, importance is placed upon the extended family. Black families rely upon other members of the family to serve as a strong support base, but in doing so, sacrifice personal needs and/or desires for the betterment of the family (Taylor, Keith, & Tucker, 1993). Individual family members provide significant support and social networks for one another,

often assuming a community-wide responsibility (Anderson, 2000).

In time of need, the extended family and other members of the community have served as frequent helpers; the most utilized has been the mother, followed by the sister, spouse, and female friend (Taylor et al., 1993). According to Anderson (2000), this communal support base contributes to a stable Black family because it provides additional resources that would have otherwise been unavailable. In 1965, Moynihan labeled the Black family as unstable and broken because it is headed by single Black women who lack education, a privileged societal position, and a man to keep the entire family system in balance (Moynihan, 1965). Anderson (2000) argues that a single-parent household is virtually non-existent in the Black community because there is always blood related and/or fictive kin, such as the “auntie” or “play cousin,” who assists in keeping the household together. These strong kinship ties and community-wide responsibilities reflect the African American adage “Lift as you climb” encapsulating the belief that as you strive towards a better future, take hold of those who fall behind so that you all can prosper together (Anderson, 2000). This precise sentiment highlights the collectivistic tendencies within African American families as there is a strong sense of interdependence and individual sacrifice for the benefit of the greater family system.

Divorce can certainly be identified as an event when family members rely upon the formal and informal social support networks of their kin to ease the process. With respect to divorce, the African American family has a strong foundation to withstand the detrimental effects that can potentially incur. According to McKelvey and McKenry (2000), various sociopolitical setbacks and historical experiences, particularly slavery, have prepared African Americans for the adversities they face when a marriage ends. It is from these experiences that they acquired a “collective

consciousness” which defines a family within the Black community as interconnected, a small aspect of a larger social system. This consciousness translates to placing the extended kin at the nucleus of the Black family while displacing the marriage which serves as the center of most Western nuclear families. Thus, at the point of marital dissolution, some scholars argue that the Black family system is not severely impaired because the Black marriage does not define the system’s stability (Anderson, 2000; McKelvey & McKenry, 2000).

The idea of the collective consciousness can be applied to the Black women’s divorce experience compared to her White female counterpart. According to McKelvey and McKenry (2000), Black cultural experiences allow the woman to make a steady transition after marital dissolution, bearing low levels of psychological distress and maintaining her psychosocial well-being. Their research reports that Black women exhibit a greater sense of personal mastery and economic well-being because the African American community provides women with greater skills to use active communal coping rather than internalizing her emotions and with the resources to deal with adversities associated with divorce (McKelvey & McKenry, 2000). Black women’s strong sense of independence can influence the transition from marriage to divorce to singlehood. According to Pudrovska (2006), Black women are more autonomous during the marriage, taking the traditional roles typically assigned to men, and consequently, are more acclimated to living alone (Orbuch, 1999; Pudrovska, 2006). They have the tools necessary to sustain their emotional, physical, financial, and psychological well-being independent from any male counterpart (Pudrovska, 2006). Comparatively, White women experience greater strain during the divorce process than Black women (Pudrovska, 2006).

Upon becoming single again, Black women have fewer traumatic post-divorce experiences than White women because

they do not expect to re-marry. According to Fossett and Kiecolt (1993), there is a shortage of marriageable Black men for Black women. In the U.S. African American community, Black males have high percentages of unemployment, incarceration, and mortality creating a sex-ratio imbalance. This leaves many Black women single and annuls the possibility that they will marry in the future. Overall, their experiences of singlehood, due to divorce, never having married, or being widowed, are less problematic (Engram & Lockery, 1993; Pudrovska, 2006). In examining the Black family on a micro-level, research shows that Black women rely upon the communal support system provided by extended kin to ease their divorce and post-divorce process.

Similar to Black women, Black men also rely upon the family system to cope with the stressors of the divorce. According to Lawson and Thompson (1996), Black men undergo a difficult transition upon marital dissolution due to particular divorce-related stressors which can cause psychological distress. The first of these is financial strain; others include non-custodial parenting (including loss of contact), and child support issues. Black men use family and friends, particularly their mothers, as coping mechanisms for the divorce. Family and close friends provide emotional and tangible support (such as assisting with caring for the children). Another coping strategy is establishing new heterosexual relationships post-divorce. According to Lawson and Thompson (1996), Black men report a steady increase in the percentage of dating one year post-divorce. Although the divorce can cause psychological distress, dating can increase the overall well-being of Black men. Black men, unlike Black women, have an advantage in the marriage market. There is a surplus of female prospects, thus there are ample opportunities for them to create new heterosexual romantic relationships (Gotten & Secord, 1983).

Gender influences how males and females experience divorce, but in examining the racial component, both Black women

and Black men are able to transition from their divorce into post-divorce with the aid of a family support system. The interdependence within the Black family, including the concern for one other and the level of investment, upholds the critical components of collectivism and these studies offer evidence that cultural values and ideals significantly shape the divorce experiences of families within collectivistic communities. Identifying this cultural influence suggests that this particular community may have a unique divorce narrative that warrants study within the context of its individual culture.

This paper investigates how the collectivistic tendencies within the African American culture influence various aspects of the separation/divorce process, paying particular attention to the influence from the extended family (specifically mothers and grandmothers). In examining these points of influence, the study takes into account the direct and indirect implications of the collectivistic tendencies within the African American culture. The research questions include the reasons for divorce, the type of disclosure the parents used when communicating the divorce to the children and shifts in the interpersonal relationships for the parent-child, the two ex-spouses, the spouse and the ex-in-laws, and parent-extended biological kin (including their parents).

## **Method**

This qualitative research study used telephone interviews to solicit information from members of the African American community about their experiences of divorce and/or separation. The study uses a grounded theory approach to data analysis to allow prominent and common experiences of participating Black families to emerge.

Participants were chosen based upon two criteria: 1) self-identified as African American/Black and 2) experienced divorce and/or separation either as a child or spouse. Both adults and

adolescents are included in the sample population because of the unique perspective each brings to the divorce story. Adults experience divorce directly which allows for richer and more in-depth responses. Adolescents are not entangled in the divorce experience as primary actors, allowing them to express themselves in a more unbiased fashion. There was no age requirement for the adolescent participants as long as they could vividly recall the experience and provide clear examples, stories, and personal narratives.

The study included African Americans who had legal or informal separations or divorces. This is because the study is not focusing upon the legality of the marriage separation but rather the experiences that took place when the spouses split their union. For some families, the legal process for a divorce is not an option due to high costs, lengthy reviewing processes, or required hearings in court that removes the spouse from work or household responsibilities. For some, informal separation may be the only option. This is an important segment of the population to include because they offer a unique perspective on the divorce experience and enriches the data.

The study was advertised across the United States. California was, however, a primary target for participants. Researchers employed various forms of advertising which included placing flyers in areas with a high percentage of African Americans. In Santa Barbara, California, researchers advertised on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Electronic advertisements were sent via the Black Studies Department Listserv and paper advertisements were taped in high traffic areas including The Arbor food court, Davidson Library, the African Diasporic Cultural Resource Center (AdCRC), and the University Center. In San Diego, advertisements were placed in church bulletins at New Seasons Church in the Bancroft neighborhood and St. John Missionary Baptist Church in

Oceanside. Finally, in Riverside County, the University of California, Riverside Ethnic Studies Department sent an electronic flyer via its e-mail listserv. In addition to these forms of advertising, the snowballing method was used. In San Diego alone, 10 other forms of advertisement were placed in newspapers, magazines, and e-mail listservs by people who heard about the study and wanted to pass along the information. Also, after each interview with participants, the researcher asked if the person knew of anyone who may be interested in participating. If so, they collected the name and contact information.

To date, there have been sixteen African American spouses and adolescents of divorce who have participated. Out of the 16, 10 are spouse participants, 2 males and 8 females, aged 34- 57 years. The marriage length ranged from 3.5 years to 22 years. All currently have either biological, adoptive, and/or step-children. Out of the 8 female spouse participants, no one is re-married and 2 are dating; out of the 2 male spouse participants, no one is re-married or dating. All spouses identify as Christian ( Methodist, Baptist, or Non-Denominational), and 9 of the 10 describe religion as “very important;” one describes it as “fairly important.” There are six adolescent participants, 3 males and 3 females, ranging in age from 18-34. The age at the time of parental divorce ranged from 2-19 years old. After the divorce, 3 remained in the mother’s custody, 1 remained in the father’s custody, 1 was in a shared custody arrangement with both mother and father, and 1 moved between his aunt and grandmother.

Data were collected from June to August 2009. Telephone interviews were audio-recorded using a Radio Shack Digital Telephone Recorder. Interviews were conducted over a landline telephone and lasted from an hour to an hour and a half. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could stop at any moment. They were also told that their information is strictly confidential and names and personal or other

identifying information would not be associated with their audio recording. The interviews were designed so as not to inflict any physical, mental, and/or psychological distress. In the event that it did, the participant was instructed to inform the researcher who would skip the problematic question or take a pause.

Before conducting the interview, the researcher read the consent form and asked for verbal agreement. After this, the researcher posed the demographic questions which differed for the spousal and adolescent participants. The questions for the spouses included age, sex, birth place, occupation, date of separation and divorce, number of biological, adoptive, and/or stepchildren, number of people living in household, who lives in the household, custody arrangements for the child (if children were present during time of relationship), if they received counseling for divorce, income bracket, highest degree earned, and importance of religion, and religious affiliation. The demographic questions for the adolescents who experienced parental divorce also included age, sex, birth place, occupation, if they received counseling for divorce, importance of religion, and religious affiliation. In addition, the adolescents were asked with whom they primarily lived with after the divorce, how many times the mother and father had been married, and how often they saw the non-custodial parent.

All interviews were semi-structured; the researcher used the same interview schedule, but encouraged the flow of natural conversation. That meant that the researcher could slightly deviate from the format as necessary in order to gather the data needed. Probing questions such as “why,” “can you give an example,” and “do you recall a vivid memory” were used to retrieve narratives and stories from participants. This methodological approach provides rich information helpful in generating critical themes for the study. For example, during data collection, the participants might make a claim in the interview but their example indicated

something different. Thus, the stories and examples help to place the participants' responses into context.

The interview schedule differed slightly for the adolescent and adult participants. The adolescents were asked questions about the nature of their relationship with both parents pre-separation and divorce and post-separation and divorce. They were also asked questions about the type of communication they shared with their parents regarding the divorce and what coping strategies they used. Adults were asked about the nature of the relationship with their spouse pre- and post-divorce, including the reasons for the divorce. Follow-up questions were also used to extract more detail about the participants' responses. These impromptu questions were generated by the responses given by the participant. The interview transitioned to questions about the physical changes post-divorce, including custody arrangements, communication with their ex-spouse's family, and the division of household responsibilities. Both participant groups were asked for cultural comparisons of the African American culture to the larger U.S./American culture. These questions asked for broader comparisons of the overall divorce process.

All participants who completed the entire one-hour interview were compensated with \$25. At the end of the interview, the researcher retrieved a mailing address; this address was only used for the purposes of payment and participants were informed that it did not have to be a home address. The checks were mailed using the United States Postal Service.

## **Analysis Method**

Qualitative analysis of the interviews was conducted to provide a complex assessment of the various divorce experiences and their relation to collectivistic tendencies. During the interview, researchers took detailed notes that highlighted critical themes, important quotes (with time stamps), and relevant details

of the participants' divorce experience. All interviews were transcribed and read thoroughly by the researcher. The data was analyzed using open coding for themes and properties organized into three areas of focus: Pre-Divorce, Divorce, and Post-Divorce, indicating the participant identification number that related to the theme. Conscious efforts were made to ensure an open-mind when the researcher undertook the thematic analysis. The broad themes were amended when new information was extracted from the interview transcripts, including discrepant data. During this process, the researcher discussed the revised themes with a blind researcher to ensure accuracy of analysis. The interview transcripts were read a second time to identify core substantive themes.

## **Results**

This study seeks to understand the divorce experience of Black families using the theoretical concept of collectivism. The grounded theory approach to data analysis and semi-structured interviews including probing and follow-up questions left room for participants to speak freely about their personal divorce story without feeling constrained by pre-defined interview questions. These approaches provided the space for common, reoccurring experiences of the participants to surface spontaneously. The results from the 16 participants are not intended to be generalized across the African American community, but rather to highlight the divorce experiences of these individuals. There were multiple variables used to investigate the overall divorce experiences of Black families pre-divorce, during separation/divorce, and post-divorce. From these, three themes were identified from the data: 1) the battle for control between spouses, 2) gender differences in communication styles, and 3) communication of divorce-related issues to adolescents and extended family.

### *The battle for control*

Both the male and female participants identified the continual struggle for power between Black men and women as a key reason for their divorce. In the study, 6 out of the 16 male and female participants identified Black women as independent and autonomous spouses in the marital relationship. The female spouses in the study self-identified as independent and described their strength as being a part of who they are: “I am independent.” But they also expressed frustration because their husbands perceived this to be a bad thing. Melonie explained that her husband thought she was too controlling and “aggressive in nature” and Joanna confessed that Black women get “flack from men when (they’re) too dominant.”

This independence translates into the woman’s role within the family. In many stories, wives described the woman as holding a prominent role within the family where she has more control over the household. For example, Thereasa jokingly admitted that “I did everything myself” because she did not trust her husband to tend to the necessary household responsibilities such as finances, child rearing, cooking, and cleaning. She described how in years after the divorce, her daughter inquired if the father was the reason the family did not have cable. According to Thereasa, her husband never contributed to anything with regards to the household, and so she did not want the cable to exacerbate his laziness and lack of involvement. Many of the other female participants commented that Black women in contemporary times are very strong and independent individuals. Some commented that their independence is necessary. Some believe that their husband was not leading the household effectively and felt compelled to lead it themselves. In other instances, the women had to maintain the household by themselves because their husbands were physically and mentally absent from the home. For reasons including

adultery, addiction to pornography, loss of interest in the family, and/or refusing to succumb to a patriarchal familial structure.

Along similar lines, participants described Black men as individuals seeking to be dominant and in control. One of the male spouses in the study commented that he was raised in a patriarchal family where men are the head of the household. He even referenced Biblical scripture and sayings from his father that instructed women to submit and cater to their husbands. Melonie described her husband as trying to establish and re-establish himself as the head of the household despite constant deployment overseas for combat every six months. The participants who were children of divorce noticed the power struggle between their mother who seeks autonomy and father who seeks to be the head of the household. Nicole expressed that the dissension in her parents' marriage mostly stemmed from their differing outlooks on gender roles. She describes her father as very controlling and her mother as a woman who could "yell and throw it down." Their conflicting points of view gradually built over the years and resulted in the demise of the marriage. These varied perceptions of power and who should hold it caused conflict in the marriages and were at the root of many of the participants' divorces.

In reference to the narratives and stories provided by the participants, it is clear the spouses were entering into a constant struggle: Black women sought to head the household because from their point of view, Black men failed to uphold their responsibilities. Black men also sought to be head of household but failed because the women were firmly entrenched in the position. Some men retreated from the challenge and allowed the women to continue to assume this role while others faced the challenge and worked to transfer the power from the woman to the man. This struggle for power within the family reflects the economic problems of the African American community as a whole because, unlike other cultures, women have historically

been the dominant income provider for the household (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). When families face divorce, Black women tend to assume this role as the head of the household because they want to ensure that the needs of the family are met. The actions and decisions of Black women are taken out of concern for the entire family, whereas those of Black men are frequently done out of selfish ambition and ego.

### *Conflicting communication styles*

Another difference was the conflicting communication styles in the marriage. Two participants commented that the reason their marriages failed was because they could not communicate effectively. Marvin explained that he and his wife had different arguing styles that caused a rift in the marriage because it was never identified. He explained that he is an introvert and tends to be quiet and more reserved. He did this as a strategy to sift what is important to share from what is not important, ultimately “sheltering” his wife from constant arguments. However, his wife interpreted his minimal communication as him “shutting her out.” His wife preferred to communicate frequently and, as noted by the participant, their arguments resulted in her yelling, screaming, and name-calling, him walking away, and her getting more upset because he left the confrontation. Marvin and his wife put a strain on their marriage because they were always arguing which resulted in another argument about how they communicate.

Vanessa also experienced difficulty in her marriage because she and her spouse had overall limited communication. Her communication style was to “nip it in the bud” while her husband preferred to evade the problem in hopes that it would subside. These communication differences between husband and wife have such a strong impact because they can affect how the children are raised, how the household is structured, and how critical decisions are made. According to Vanessa, her husband

wanted to usurp all the power in the relationship and to act like a “single man” by not communicating to his wife about certain things. She believed her husband could talk to everyone else about their problems, including co-workers, the church, and extended family members, but he could not talk to her. In turn, she felt “shut out” by her husband. Between his aloof communication style and dominant behaviors, the marriage could not last.

Communication differences between men and women can cause spouses to feel alone in the relationship and create a gap that continues to widen over years of arguments, unilateral decisions, and miscommunication. Ultimately, they cannot effectively communicate about the existing problems in the marriage (including the “power struggle”) because they misinterpret their partners verbal and non-verbal messages as an attack rather than a stylistic difference. These actions can be interpreted as dismissing the need to rely upon family. The husbands are not using their wives as an emotional buffer to their problems. There is a sense of interdependency within the Black family where the problems of one member become the problems for all members. Although this ideal is reflected in African American’s family beliefs system, the behaviors are going against the interdependency in the family.

#### *Communication of separation to the children*

Most participants who physically separated from their spouse and sought a divorce had very little communication with their children regarding any point in the pre-divorce, during divorce, and post-divorce process. Participants stated that their children had no need to be involved in their marital matters. However, the information they did disclose was vague and simply explained that the parents do not love each other and the father would be moving. Marvin said that his conversation with his two sons was limited to “me and mom are not getting along.” Vanessa said that she did not tell her daughter everything but did share that she and the father were getting a divorce. The parents wanted to

provide as little information as possible. Many participants believed that this was to lessen the negative impact of the divorce on the children and keep their lives as “pleasant” as possible. Marian shared that her parents made a great effort not to interrupt their lives by keeping the matters of their separation and divorce between the two of them. Parents sought to shelter their children from the negative aspects of divorce by disclosing limited amounts of information.

A few of these participants also indicated that this conversation with their children was unnecessary because the children were aware of the circumstances. Thereasa said that her two children were “very receptive” about the marital problems and Vanessa said that her daughter “deduced on her own.” Children witness the problems in their parents’ relationship and gather that their parents are not satisfied in the marriage. For example, many children who either participated in the study or whose parents participated in the study witnessed a parent move out of the shared bedroom and parents sleeping in separate bedrooms for an extended period of time. Marvin explained that after years of arguing, his wife moved out of their shared bedroom and into the spare bedroom down the hall. When asked if he communicated with his sons about the separation, he explained “kids pick things up; they figure things out.” Sarah also indicated that her children watched their father move all of his belongings into a separate bedroom. These explicit behaviors sent non-verbal messages to the children who are old enough to understand the changes taking place in the household. In other divorce experiences, children were exposed to daily arguments between their parents, or on the contrary, watched their parents have sparse interaction. Thereasa shared that her children commented in later years that their father was never around.

In examining these issues from the adolescents’ perspective, the children in the study had vivid memories of

witnessing their parents' relationship plummet. Kimberly could recall her father moving into a spare bedroom which resulted in the father limiting contact and communication with the children and the wife. Alexandria expressed that she was surprised that her parents' marriage lasted as long as it did, saying "they should've gotten a divorce a long time ago." The adolescents themselves were very aware of their parents' divorce. The parents in this study found no need to communicate directly with their children about the specific circumstances of the divorce because, as exhibited through the children's stories, they were fully aware of what was occurring in the household. Even further, the parents had no desire to activate strong negative emotions. Living under the presumption that the children will indirectly receive the information on the spousal divorce allows the parent to spare the child from re-living the hurt each time the topic is discussed.

#### *Communication of separation to other family members*

Participants frequently communicated the circumstances of the marriage and separation to their extended family. Often times these conversations took place because the spouse was seeking advice or opinions from their loved ones, especially mothers, fathers, brothers, and/or sisters. The participants who had many conversations with the extended family during the divorce had sought advice throughout the marriage too. Three participants explained that this created problems in the marriage which led to the divorce. Joanna identified her intrusive mother-in-law as the precise root of her divorce. She explained that her husband's mother would call 3-5 times a day, interfere in her child-rearing decisions, and create a situation where the husband feared saying "no" to his mother. She further commented, "Bottom line: I loved my husband, but he loved his mother more than he loved me." Of the four spouse participants who admitted that extended family influenced the decision to separate/divorce, in all cases, the men

shared more information with and were influenced more directly by the extended family than the women.

In other instances, some spouses discussed few of the marital issues or matters of the divorce with their extended family. Rather, they chose to keep the details within their marriage or their immediate, nuclear family. Some participants said that they did this because they wanted to conceal all personal information from their family. For other participants, concealing their marital issues was not purposeful. Thereasa and Marvin noted that their families lived so far away that it was not feasible to keep them updated about their marital statuses. Concealment of information was a strategy for some participants to maintain a level of privacy. Thereasa further explained that although the physical distance caused her to share less with her extended family, she mentioned that the situation simply “worked for the better” because if they knew they would “get too involved.” Sarah also said that her husband made it clear that the privacy of their marital matters must remain within their family. Her daughter, Kimberly, explained that her father did not want anyone to know that he and his wife were living in separate rooms, arguing all the time, and working towards getting a divorce. Spouses and adolescents chose to communicate with their extended family members on a need-to-know basis.

When the spouses needed some form of support from the extended family, then they would share the details of their marriage. If, however, they felt that they could cope with the situation by themselves, then the extended family played a limited role. Thereasa and Marvin indicated that their family knew little of the situation, but these spouses also have college-level degrees and make over \$90,000 a year. Families with higher income levels do not seek much support from extended family because they can provide it themselves. This is not limited to financial needs but includes emotional needs as well. Thereasa and Marvin also mentioned that they received extensive professional counseling for

their marital problems. Families who are financially stable can afford to pay for outside services whereas others less well-off seek the counsel of family members. Britney said that she would have received counseling after the divorce but her precarious economic situation following the divorce forced her to cope with the situation using other avenues such as internal coping, alcohol, drugs, family, and friends.

There was variation in the extended family's level of influence upon the decision to divorce. Some participants noted that the extended family, particularly the mother, sister, and in one instance, the father, exercised their position as stake holders in the family's endeavors throughout the marriage and divorce. They offered solicited and unsolicited advice to ensure that their opinions about the marriage would be heard and carried out. This caused some participants to choose to conceal personal matters because they could foresee their family becoming too involved. Overall, the level of support the spouses needed may have influenced the level of support they sought and received. The reverse can also hold true: the less support the spouses needed, the less support they sought from their extended family. This does not mean that the extended family would not have offered their help, but rather that the spouses could meet such needs using other means.

## **Discussion**

Black men and women enter into a power struggle where both are seeking to be positioned as the head of the family. Although their endeavors appear to be self-seeking, there is an underlying concern for the stability of the family. Many of the women embrace a strong sense of self and independence because they find themselves pressured to fulfill all roles in the household if the husband is physically, mentally, or emotionally absent from the home. Both male and female participants expressed the sense that men are not rising to their responsibilities. Rather than let this

be the demise of the family, the women do what is necessary to keep the family stable.

Black men have a strong desire to uphold the traditional patriarchal structure with the man as head of household. This desire clashes with the strong Black woman. As both enter into the conflict, the motives are not entirely self-seeking; rather both spouses want someone strong leading the household. Black women believe they are best suited to fulfill this position because they have been doing it for so long whereas Black men believe they were created for this position. There is potential for Black men to have individualistic tendencies, like pride, which interfere with their need to lead. This means that Black men are more concerned with the goals of self in taking the power from the wife rather than the goals of the family. Conversely, Black women enter into this struggle for power against the men with the primary intention to fulfill the responsibilities of the household.

Divorcing families choose not to communicate the personal matters of the divorce with their extended family because they believe their family will become too involved. The divorcing families recognize the potential interference and withhold information. This idea reflects a strong sense of familial investment where extended kin are stakeholders in the relationship. Thus if something falters, it has an effect on them as well. This idea of interconnectedness certainly reflects the overarching concept of collectivism because the family feels a part of the relationship and believes the decisions will have an impact upon them.

Limited disclosure to children regarding the divorce can appear to transmit conflicting messages. The parents' verbal communication conveys that nothing is wrong but non-verbal communication signals that there are serious problems in the relationship which may result in abrupt changes in the marriage. Although some research encourages open communication with

children, families that communicate in a more limited fashion may do so in order to keep the children's need at the forefront. Contemplating divorce is fraught with difficulties and parents feel that they must suppress their feelings around their children or other family members lest it cause even more stress. Parents may have some desire to share their experiences, frustrations, and emotions about the situation with the children to establish transparency and honesty. It might even be cathartic for the parent to have an avenue to release his or her thoughts to someone who has witnessed everything transpire. But parents choose to use other strategies of communicating the divorce to their children in order to maintain a state of normalcy in the home and in the children's lives.

### **Future Research**

Future scholars should incorporate the idea of assimilation, meaning a collectivism culture living in an individualistic society, when researching any broad cultural influences upon the communication strategies used within the African American community. African Americans have been living within U.S./American culture for hundreds of years, providing the space for dominant U.S. values to take . There are potential implications concerning how rooted the African American traditions and values are within Black people in modern day. Assimilation can overshadow the communal and collectivistic tendencies that research has linked with the African American community. Assimilation can also be a significant variable when examining particular aspects of the Black divorce experience. Some research has already begun to shift the view of collectivism and individualism as bipolar as earlier scholars have studied it (Hofstede 1980; Hui & Triandis 1986; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990) to being thought of as two uni-polar dimensions. Recent research has re-examined the Individualism-Collectivism continuum and found that it overlooks the possibility for cultures to have both individualistic and collectivistic tendencies (Singelis,

Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). As a result, they identified four dimensions from this continuum: horizontal collectivism, vertical collectivism, horizontal individualism, and vertical individualism. This would mean that a culture can have a high degree of vertical collectivism *and* a high degree of horizontal individualism.

In light of this new research, scholars have identified African Americans as having high horizontal individualism and high horizontal collectivism (Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2001; Komarraju & Cokley, 2008). Scoring high on horizontal individualism means that people prefer to be self-reliant, unique, and have the freedom to express themselves yet see themselves as being equal to other group members. Horizontal collectivism refers to identification with the in-group and viewing themselves as an equal with other in-group members (Komarraju & Cokley, 2008). They also are willing to sacrifice self-interest if required by the cultural norms of the in-group (Komarraju & Cokley, 2008). These dimensions provide new insight to this topic of study because they complicate the idea that cultures can be explained by one concept. This emerging research offers a new perspective to the ways in which cultural beliefs, history, and values are studied as scholars are recognizing the dimensional complexity of cultures around the world.

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# **Attitudes and Perceptions of Mental Health among Black UCSB Students**

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## **Abstract**

*Culture has been found to be an important variable in understanding how various ethnic groups seek support and engage in different forms of health behavior (Kim et al, 2008; Thompson & Chambers, 2000; Parham, 1999). According to the Student Mental Health Report 2006, conducted by the University of California system wide, mental health issues have increased among UCSB students, and racially/ethnically underrepresented student populations were found to be at high risk of experiencing negative mental health concerns (Dimsdale & Young 2006). However, the UC report is limited and does not provide a racial or ethnic breakdown of UCSB students who use mental health services. This current study uses qualitative and quantitative methods to examine perceptions of mental health and the use of mental health services by Black/African American UCSB students enrolled during the 2008/09 academic year. Two focus groups were conducted with semi-structured questions. Participants discussed their experiences and beliefs regarding mental health and on-campus services. A 92-question survey, borrowed and abridged from the survey on “Interpersonal Relationships of University Students” (Hashimoto and Kim, 2008), was also given to participants. Data collected aims to enhance existing information in the Student Mental Health Report 2006, provide recommendations to better assist Black and other underrepresented UCSB students, and contribute to social science knowledge on cultural assumptions of help-seeking behavior.*

Mental health is an important aspect of an individual's overall health and wellness. Colleges and universities provide a number of health related services for students. However, when students do not utilize these services, one needs to ask why. Having adequate mental health is critical to the success of students as they journey throughout their college career and beyond. This current work is an investigation of how African American/Black undergraduate students at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) perceive mental health and the mechanisms that influence or shape their attitudes towards utilizing mental health services. Since the African American/Black student population at UCSB tends to underutilize such services, this research further examines the students' unique social relationships within their community and the rest of UCSB population for the possible answer for their underutilization.

Research on mental health has shown that culture is important when evaluating a client's health behavior and use of services. Mental health is fundamental to one's overall health and productivity; it is the basis for successful positive relationships and contributions to society, community, and family (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). The meaning of mental health varies widely across cultures. For mental health professionals and other related practitioners to effectively engage with their clients they must be aware of the social and cultural elements that influence their client's health (Sue, 1977). The U.S. Surgeon General (1999) states that the diverse effects of culture and society on mental health is key to developing mental health services that are more responsive to the cultural and social contexts of specific racial and ethnic populations. If this effort to be responsive is not made, cultural misunderstandings between the client and service provider will continue to "fragment" mental health services, and prevent clients from utilizing and receiving appropriate care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

## **African-Americans and Mental Health**

A range of literature on mental health states that African-Americans underutilize mental health services for reasons such as cultural mistrust of the medical system, stigma, and inadequate relationships with community service providers (Belgrave and Allison, 2006; Parham, White, Ajamu, 1999; Gary 1985). Blacks, along with other ethnic groups, have been found to use more traditional support networks when seeking help and dealing with problems of stress, anxiety, or other forms of psychological distress. These traditional support networks may consist of family, friends, clergy, traditional healers, or other networks (Mio, Barker-Hackett, Tumambing, 2009; Parham, White, Ajamu, 1999; Neighbors & Jackson, 1984). In Neighbors' National Survey of Black Americans (1991), he found that the type and severity of the problem determined whether or not an individual decides to seek help. Additionally, Helms' study noted that African-American students who possessed higher levels of mistrust towards mental health professionals were less likely to seek counseling services than White students (1984). African-American students assumed that counseling services staffed predominately with White workers would be unsatisfying because of the racial and cultural differences they believe existed between them and White practitioners. Helms' study concludes that the negative attitudes of African-American students directly translated into their lack in use of mental health services (Helms, 1984).

### **Considering Culture within Social Support and Help-Seeking Behavior**

Compared to European-Americans, African-Americans, when experiencing mental distress, seek help from traditional support systems more often than from professional counselors or other mental health service providers (Mio, Barker-Hackett, Tumambing, 2009; Belgrave and Allison, 2006; Parham, White, Ajamu, 1999; Gary 1985). A racial and/or cultural preference is

common among African-American individuals when communicating mental health related concerns to a support provider. Discourses within the media regarding African-American health issues tend to use language that construct the health behaviors of African-Americans as negative without further analysis to explain the underlying origins of particular behaviors. The dissemination of such generalized health information provides little or no reference to cultural norms, heterogeneity of health behaviors within the group, or systemic challenges that may account for differences in African-American health behavior. Oftentimes cultural and racial differences are ignored, and the lack of cultural analysis creates an ethnocentric perspective when evaluating the health behavior of populations who are not of European descent (Kim et al, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008; Belgrave and Allison, 2006; Parham et al, 1999).

In understanding the role of support systems in African-American help-seeking behavior, it is imperative to work within a culturally specific context. Social support is defined as a network of communication and mutual obligation that provides feelings of love, care, esteem, and value to others, that “effectively reduces psychological distress such as depression or anxiety during times of distress” (Kim et al, 2008, citing: Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Seeman, 1996; Fleming et al, 1982). Social support naturally involves relationships among individuals and is practiced according to one’s culture and patterns of social relationships. The use of social support depends on the nature of the relationships and the shared assumptions between the “support seeker” and “support provider” (Kim, Sherman, Taylor, 2008).

Cultural differences must also be accounted for within collectivist identified cultures (i.e. African-American, Asian/Asian-American, Latin-American, etc.) and individualist identified cultures (i.e. Western European-American), when studying the nature of social support. Mio, Barker-Hackett,

Tumambing, (2009) state that psychotherapy (and other forms of counseling) tend to rely heavily on the individualistic process. Therefore, this form of counseling is problematic when applied to collectivist cultures where people tend to have an interdependent sense of self. Individualistic cultures tend to view the self as independent and possessing a set of self-defining attributes, where more collectivistic cultures view the self as interdependent with the goal of working toward the survival of the group rather than the individual (Belgrave and Allison, 2006). In studying interpersonal relationship patterns of European-American and Asian-American students, Kim et al., (2008) note that relationships within individualistic support networks are independent and “freely chosen” with relatively little obligation to group members and social support is freely pursued without much caution. Collectivist groups are found to be more cautious when acknowledging personal issues to others within their network of support. This is evident from the cultural assumption that “individuals should not burden their social networks” where it is assumed that other members share the same social obligation (Kim et al, 2008). Culture is reflected in the social norms, behaviors, and beliefs of a group; incorporating cultural analyses into studies of health behavior will serve to enhance the understanding of various health outcomes among diverse populations.

## **Mental Health within the University of California System**

All University of California campuses provide some form of mental health services for students. Recently, however, many UC campuses have struggled to maintain funding for these services which has directly affected the availability of staff and the quality of on-campus mental health services (Dimsdale & Young, 2006). According to the 2006 Student Mental Health Report, the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) has experienced over a 200% increase in the number of mental health related visits to its Health Center from the 1994-1995 to 2004-2005 academic

year (Dimsdale & Young, 2006). Total mental health visits were at 2,102 in the 1994-1995 academic year and increased to 4,608 in 2004-2005 (*Figure 3, Student Mental Health Report 2006*). UC Santa Barbara has been one of the UCs that has continued to struggle with funding and provide quality mental health services to its students (Dimsdale & Young, 2006). To add to this challenge, the mental health report states that for all campuses in the UC system, populations who are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health concerns are graduate students, international students, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning students (LGBTQ), and racial/ethnic minority students (Dimsdale & Young 2006). In its effort to provide a snapshot of the state of mental health and the quality of services within the UC system, the Student Mental Health Report 2006 does not provide a systematic racial/ethnic breakdown of the students who seek mental health related services at UC Santa Barbara. The presence of racial/ethnic statistics is a critical aspect in the development of solutions to the steady rise of mental health related visits that has been seen not only at Santa Barbara's campus but other UC campuses as well.

In April, 2009, I met with Dr. *Jeanne Stanford*, Director of Counseling Services at UCSB. I asked Dr. Stanford how many Black students utilized counseling services during the academic school year. Based on UCSB counseling statistics, Dr. Stanford stated that during the 2008/09 academic year, forty-four students who identified as Black/African-American had obtained services at UCSB's on-campus counseling center. According to Dr. Stanford, this was a low number compared to the number of visits by students who identified as Caucasian. In her observations, there is less stigma associated with seeking therapy among Caucasian students which contributed to their higher frequency of visits to the counseling center. With approximately 19,000 undergraduates in the 2008/09 academic year, and about 570 Black undergraduates, Black students accounted for only eight percent of the Black undergraduate student population who had used counseling

services. In response to this low statistic, the present study focuses on the overall influence of culture in determining the health behavior of African-American students by exploring their attitudes, experiences, and use of mental health services at UC Santa Barbara. Since Blacks students are among the student populations deemed at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems, this study seeks to understand how these students use social support if they are not immediately seeking help from the university's campus services.

Based on previous investigations, it is important to gain an understanding of how these particular students have developed a concept of mental health (Parham et al., 1999). This study first raises the question: *How do Black students define and conceptualize mental health?* Research on Blacks' attitudes towards mental health services shows that Blacks generally have negative attitudes towards services (Belgrave and Allison, 2006; Parham, White, Ajamu 1999; Gary, 1985) and therefore I ask: *What are Black student's attitudes toward mental health services at UCSB? How do their attitudes and concept of mental health influence their use of services and help seeking behavior?* Furthermore, since culture influences (directly and indirectly) how group members navigate the social environment as well as their "health priorities, decisions, beliefs, and behaviors" (Kreuter & Houghton, 2006), this study seeks to address information missing from the Student Mental Health Report 2006 on racial/ethnic demographics of mental health visits and aims to provide an explanation of the low numbers of Black students who seek mental health services as reported by the mental health professional at UC Santa Barbara.

I want to investigate the role culture might play in determining Black students' perceptions of mental health given that there are a wide variety of services available to students at UCSB. I also ask: *How do Black students seek help when experiencing emotional*

*distress?* To generate additional data regarding Black students' use of social support, I used an abridged version Kim & Hashimoto's (2008) "Interpersonal Relationships of University Students" questionnaire. Questions from this survey specifically ask Black students about their coping techniques, reasons for seeking support, and their ideas about using mental health services.

## **Method**

This study is based on focus group discussions and a questionnaire. Focus group discussions can provide through active engagement and conversation insight into how students construct the idea of mental health. The construction of attitudes and perceptions is socially influenced and is therefore not an individual process but an interactive one. The interplay of ideas and experiences of Black individuals within the focus group contributes to the larger social context of how Black students define and conceptualize mental health. In addition, the questionnaire that was given to the students after the focus groups specifically examines how student participants respond when experiencing stress and how this response relates to their use of social support. This mixed method approach of conducting both a focus group and survey allows for some understanding of how members of the Black student population at UCSB utilize mental health services and engage in other forms of help-seeking behavior.

Upon recruitment, students agreed to participate in a focus group discussion on the "opinions, attitudes, and the use of on-campus mental health services." Prior to beginning the focus groups, the study was approved by UCSB's Office of Research and participants signed consent forms prior to their participation. Two focus groups were scheduled according to the participants' availability.

Since African-American students are included in the underrepresented group of students who are at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems, compared to other largely represented students within the UC system (Dimsdale & Young, 2006), this research seeks to explore the attitudes, cultural assumptions, and behaviors of this high-risk group. Focus group and interview participants were recruited from the online social network “Facebook” and personal contacts. Six students volunteered to participate in the study; two identified as male and 4 identified as female. All of the participants, whose ages ranged from 20-21, racially identified as Black or African-American. Participants were actively enrolled at UCSB for the 2008-2009 academic year. Among the participants there were 2 sophomores, 3 juniors, and 1 senior. The number of participants who volunteered for the study was small and is not a representative sample of the Black student population at UC Santa Barbara. The solicitation of participants took place during the summer when most students are away on vacation or engaged in other summer activities. Solicitation for participants during the academic year would have provided better access to a larger sample of students.

### *Instruments*

A 74-item questionnaire was derived from the survey, “Interpersonal Relationships of University Students” (Hashimoto and Kim, 2008). Hashimoto and Kim’s longer 167-item survey evaluates culture and social support differences among Asians and Asian-Americans in relation to European-Americans. Sections of the questionnaire ask how a respondent deals with stressful events and their feelings about using social and professional support. These particular sections were adapted and abridged for this current study to assess how African-American students, in particular, behave and seek support during times of mental distress. The abridged questionnaire contained 74 items that focused on three topics: the Brief COPE, an assessment of coping strategies,

(Carver, 1997), “Social Support” (Taylor et al., 2004), and “Seeking Professional Help” (Hashimoto & Kim, 2008).

The Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) measures the type of coping strategies that an individual uses in response to stress. The measure consists of 13 subscales with a total of 28 items. The subscales along with a sample item of each are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: COPE Subscales

Emotional Support	e.g., “I try to get emotional support from others”
Instrumental Support	e.g., “I get advice and help from other people”
Planning	e.g., “I think hard about what steps to take”
Active Coping	e.g., “I concentrate my efforts on doing something about the situation I’m in”
Positive Reframing	e.g., “I look for something good in what is happening”
Denial	e.g., “I say to myself ‘this isn’t real’”
Self-Blame	e.g., “I criticize myself”
Behavioral Disengagement	e.g., “I express my negative feelings”
Substance Use	e.g., “I use alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better”
Self-Distraction	e.g., “I turn to work or other activities to take my mind off things”
Religion	e.g., “I try to pray or meditate”
Acceptance	e.g., “I learn to live with it”
Humor	e.g., “I try to make fun of the situation”

The Social Support questionnaire contained 22 items and asked how important certain concerns would be in deciding to seek or use social support. Examples of these measures include: “If something were bothering me, I would not want to disrupt my social group by sharing it;” “If I discuss my problems with the people I am close to, it makes it a bigger problem than if I keep it to myself;” “I think it is selfish to seek help unless it is an emergency situation” (Taylor et al., 2004).

The Seeking Professional Help section contained 24 items and assessed respondents’ opinions about using mental health services. Here, examples include: “I would want to get professional help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time;” “There are certain problems which should not be discussed outside of one’s immediate family;” “Psychological problems, like many things, tend to work out by themselves.” (Hashimoto & Kim, 2008). All questionnaire responses were scored on a five-point Likert-type scale. The Brief COPE and Social Support sections range from 1 (“Not at all”) to 5 (“Very Much”), and the Seeking Professional Help section ranges from 1 (“Disagree”) to 5 (“Agree.”).

### *Procedure*

There were 3 participants in each focus group. As an African-American woman and a UCSB student, I took on the role of facilitator, assuming that participants would be more comfortable disclosing information to someone who identified with them in multiple aspects. Two focus groups were scheduled, based on student availability. The discussions took place in a closed room environment on the campus of UC Santa Barbara. Discussion questions were semi-structured and contained open-ended questions beginning with the following: “How do you define mental health?” Sample follow up questions included: “How would you describe someone who is mentally unhealthy?” “How would your family or friends respond if you revealed that you were

depressed or struggling with anxiety?” Further follow up questions varied according to the students’ responses, but were related to the participants’ experiences with on-campus mental health services and their opinions about the data from the Student Mental Health Report (2006) which were presented to them at the time of the focus group. Following the group discussion, participants were asked to complete the abridged version of the “Interpersonal Relationships of University Students” questionnaire (Hashimoto & Kim, 2008).

### *Data Analysis*

Results from the questionnaire were averaged and scored according to each subscale using Microsoft Excel™. The Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) scores from the six African-American participants in this study were averaged for each subscale and compared to the scores of Asian and Asian-American and European-American students from the “Culture and Social Support” study (Taylor et al., 2004). The “Social Support” (Taylor et al., 2004) and “Seeking Professional Help” (Hashimoto & Kim, 2008) scores were averaged and scored respective to each item.

The analysis of the focus group discussions were coded into 5 general themes: concepts of mental health, social support, on-campus services, barriers to seeking help, and alternatives. This data hint at the influence of stereotypes, racial preferences, religion, and perceived access to services.

## **Results**

### *COPE and the use of Social Support*

Coping strategy scores from the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) were averaged for each subscale. In assessing the coping strategy scores, the reliance on Social Support for coping was determined from the combined scores of the Emotional Support

and Instrumental Support subscales from the Brief COPE (Taylor et al, 2004). From this composite, African-American students reported more reliance on Social Support for coping ( $M= 3.77$ ) than either Asian or Asian-Americans ( $M= 3.02$ ), or European-American students ( $M= 3.47$ ) (See Table 1). Asian and Asian-American students relied less on social support than either African-American or European-American students. In this small sample, African-American students sought more Emotional Support ( $M= 4.08$ ) than Instrumental Support ( $M= 3.75$ ), however further analysis should be conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between the two scores. More African-American ( $M= 4.08$ ) than Asian and Asian-American ( $M= 3.08$ ) or European-American students ( $M= 3.63$ ) sought emotional support. African-American students also reported seeking more Instrumental Support ( $M= 3.75$ ) than the other groups (Asian American,  $M= 2.97$  and European American,  $M= 3.31$ ).

Other cultural differences in coping were seen in African-American use of Positive Reframing ( $M= 3.75$ ); Asian and Asian-Americans ( $M= 2.95$ ) and European-Americans ( $M= 3.01$ ) engaged less in this strategy. This indicated that African-American students may try to frame their situations in a more positive light rather than focusing on the negative. African-Americans relied more on Self-Distraction ( $M= 3.91$ ) than Asian and Asian-Americans ( $M= 3.01$ ); European-Americans used this strategy even less often ( $M= 2.84$ ) than the other two groups. Self-Distraction among African-Americans may be driven by a strong reliance on religion ( $M= 4.16$ ) or other spiritual sources. This finding was consistent with previous research that found religion to be a frequent source of social support within the African-American culture. Acceptance was found to be used more among Asians and Asian-Americans ( $M= 3.92$ ) than either African-Americans ( $M= 3.5$ ) or European-American students ( $M= 3.49$ ). This trend may be driven by Asian and Asian-American's lesser use of Social Coping

(M= 3.02) compared to African-Americans (M= 3.77) and European-Americans (M= 3.47).

Table 2: Cultural Differences on COPE subscales

Subscale	<b>Black/African-Americans</b>	Asians and Asian Americans	European Americans
<i>Social Coping</i>	<b>3.77</b>	3.02	3.47
<i>Emotional Support</i>	<b>4.08</b>	3.08	3.63
<i>Instrumental Support</i>	<b>3.75</b>	2.97	3.31
<i>Planning</i>	<b>3.66</b>	3.38	4.06
<i>Active Coping</i>	<b>4.25</b>	3.59	4.17
<i>Positive Reframing</i>	<b>3.75</b>	2.95	3.01
<i>Denial</i>	<b>2.66</b>	1.34	1.23
<i>Self-Blame</i>	<b>3.25</b>	2.59	2.72

<i>Behavioral Disengagement</i>	<b>2.5</b>	1.91	1.68
<i>Substance Use</i>	<b>2.41</b>	1.46	1.60
<i>Self Distraction</i>	<b>3.91</b>	3.01	2.84
<i>Religion</i>	<b>4.16</b>	1.93	1.62
<i>Acceptance</i>	<b>3.5</b>	3.92	3.49
<i>Humor</i>	<b>3.33</b>	2.66	3.02

*\* This table illustrates the calculated mean of each COPE subscale by racial group.*

*What is “mental health?”*

When asked to provide a definition of mental health, participants described mental health as “being sane,” “personal well-being,” and the ability to be “social” and “competent” within society. Black students in the focus groups believed that mental health is a positive state of mind and is determined not only by their physical capabilities, but also by their surrounding social environment. They believed that the ability to “fit-in” with various social environments demonstrates that an individual is in control of his or her life. Half of the participants believed that the ability to function well within multiple social environments is evidence that a person has a good support system, which is critical to maintaining a positive state of mental health.

Participants perceived a mentally unhealthy person to be “insane,” “negative,” “crazy,” and capable of causing physical harm to others. According to the participants, a “crazy” or “negative” person is a threat to their social environment and disrupts the harmony within a group. The students’ concept of mental health was found to be socially constructed such that an individual’s state of mental health varied in relation to their social interactions. Similar to previous research findings (Lincoln, Chatters, Taylor, 2003), psychological distress among Blacks was directly associated with the type of interaction received from their social support networks. In examining how patterns of social interactions are interrelated and influence health outcomes, researchers found that social support lowered psychological distress among African-Americans (Lincoln, Chatters, Taylor, 2003). Among the six study participants, mental health was understood to be a state of well-being that is positive and desired for an individual’s overall health, which allows them to have positive interaction within their various social environments.

### *Social Support*

Social support is a resource used for coping and reducing distress. As shown in the Brief COPE scale (Carver, 1997), Black students relied more on social support to deal with various forms of stress than Asians, Asian-Americans, and European-Americans. The focus group data revealed that family and friends are the initial source of support that Black students use when experiencing stress. This use of support among Blacks is comparable to previous research on Black mental health (Mio, Barker-Hackett, Tumaming, 2009; Parham, White, Ajamu, 1999; Neighbors & Jackson, 1984). When asked how their family would respond if the participant was to reveal that they have depression, all of the participants stated that their parents would not be helpful in assisting them with their problem. Participants believed that their parents would not take their problem seriously and would regard or

consider their psychological distress as insignificant compared to other problems that are experienced in the world. Two participants stated that their parents would respond saying, “You should not be depressed. There are others in worse situations than you are.” Two more participants stated that their parents would compare their lives to the poor in Africa. According to the students’ experiences with their immediate family, parents appear to demonstrate difficulty in constructing a context for their son’s/daughter’s pain. Participants believe that their parents are not immediately able to understand their child’s emotional distress. The participants’ parents perceive them as possessing a better quality of life because of the level of privilege these students have attained as a result of attendance at an institution of higher learning.

To discount their child’s psychological distress and highlight the suffering of others, parents may add more to the distress of these African-American students. These remarks made by the participants’ parents may be interpreted as “looking on the righter side of things.” This method of coping, according to the Brief COPE subscales, is called “Positive Reframing” (Carver, 1997). Among the participants, the scale indicates that they are more likely to rely on Positive Reframing ( $M= 3.75$ ) as a means of coping, compared to students of Asian or European decent. This coping strategy is used to see [the stressor] in a “different light” and “make it seem more positive” (Carver, 1997). Positive Reframing may be a coping strategy that is learned from close family members such as parents. Seeing the good in a situation rather than seeing its challenges is a way for Black students to lessen the effects of psychological distress in their life.

Although the family is sought out for support, friends were a more immediate source of social support among Black students at UCSB. According to participants, friends have the ability to empathize more with their experiences as university students. Friends and other peers are able to immediately provide needed

emotional support; however, instrumental support from a friend may vary depending on other relational factors. In general, participants believed that their friends were able to give emotional support that is not readily provided from family members due to the lack of common experiences as a college student.

### *On-campus services*

Four out of the six participants revealed that they have never used on-campus mental health services at UCSB such as Counseling and Career Services and the Student Health Service. These four students had heard that counseling and other mental health services were available, however these services did not appeal to their personal needs. Also, the four participants believed the services to be “good” according to other’s experiences, but still had not sought out services for their own use. The remaining two participants had utilized counseling services; however they expressed having two very different experiences.

One participant revealed favorable opinions about the services which he received and stated that he had a great experience because he was able to talk to a professional who shared a similar identity and life experience. The other participant revealed that she had ceased using counseling services because the psychologist recommended prescription drugs to help with her depression. In addition, the psychologist did not identify with her racially, which made her feel uncomfortable due to potential racial stereotypes and biases which she believed the psychologist possessed. It is important to note that the two participants who had utilized these services are also employed by on-campus departments that readily provide information about the services available to students. The other four participants were less knowledgeable of the counseling and other therapeutic services that are offered on UCSB’s campus.

## *Barriers to seeking help*

Black students expressed several concerns which prevented them from using mental health services at UCSB. Participants generally perceived on-campus mental health professionals to be White, with little or no racial or cultural variation among the counseling staff. The assumption that the counseling staff were all White has led participants to also assume that staff would not be able to identify with Black students racially, culturally, socially, and/or economically. Cultural competency is a concern for Black students when considering whether to utilize these services. From their experiences on campus, participants stated that others (non-Blacks) possessed inaccurate assumptions about Black students' experiences, which discouraged them from seeking help outside of their social networks. In sharing his experiences about interacting with White students on-campus, one participant stated:

They assume like they already know a lot about [Black people's experiences] so when they're talking to me it's just like 'Oh, we're talking Black to Black' but no, we're not talking Black to Black, we're talking Black to White. They're always coming to me like, 'You know I completely understand what you're talking about' and I'm like, 'No, you don't.'

It is apparent that other participants may have had similar experiences because during the discussion participants revealed that they do not want to perpetuate any stereotypes or preconceived notions that White professionals may hold about African-Americans and for this reason, most of the participants had not utilized mental health services as an immediate source for help. The students' interactions with White students have shaped the belief that not only White students, but White professionals on campus, are incapable of empathizing with or relating to the life experiences of African-American students.

## *Alternatives*

All participants agreed that it is not common for Blacks to use mental health services because there are other sources of support available to them. Within the university environment, Black students have found support within Black student organizations and among the small number of Black academic counselors, or other on-campus Black faculty and staff. One participant stated, “...*The groups are getting bigger and stronger, the support is there. We don’t look to those mental health services because we have our support within our own [community].*” Most of the participants agreed that “*talking to people who have more of your particular standpoint can help you better.*” Race is an important factor in determining from whom Black students seek help. Participants said that they prefer to seek help from academic counselors and staff that are Black. According to the participants, obtaining support from someone who is Black makes the experience more comfortable. Support that is sought from Black academic counselors and/ or staff is more instrumental, whereas emotional support is sought from closer social ties such as family, friends, and/or among other Black student organizations.

Participants also mentioned taking responsibility for their own problems. Questions about personal responsibility scored the highest ( $M= 2.91$ ) on the “Social Support” (Taylor et al., 2004) section of the questionnaire. This sense of personal responsibility may be driven by actions such as self-distraction. Participants scored relatively high on the “Self-Distraction” subscale ( $M= 3.91$ ) which indicated that occupying themselves with other activities is a coping strategy that Black students are more likely to use if they choose not to seek immediate help. Half of the participants noted that engaging in activities such as listening to music, praying, watching television, or other alone time activities are amongst the behaviors employed to cope with personal stressors.

## **Discussion**

This study examines how Black students at UCSB understand the concept of mental health and how their ideas manifest in their use of mental health services and overall health behaviors. In addition, this study seeks to develop a general understanding of Black students' attitudes toward mental health. Appreciating the role of social support has proven to be an important resource in understanding African-American health behavior. Participants were reluctant to seek professional mental health services due to factors such as previously learned coping strategies, perceptions of mental health professionals, and the students believe that campus mental health services do not reach out to the UCSB community as a whole, but particularly to the Black student community.

Black students' concept and understanding of mental health is typically dependent upon their relationship to their social environment. From the students' understanding, an individual or "the self" does not stand independent of others within their social environments. Because the self is derived from the presence of and interactions with others, the mental state of an individual tends to be directly affected by the existence of social relationships. Many scholars understand interdependence to be a common characteristic in the Black community (Morling et al, 2002; Taylor et al., 2004). This cultural understanding of the self is evident in several of the students' emphasis on "fitting-in" as an indicator of "positive" mental health. This notion of "positive" mental health among the participants is what Harley and Dillard (2005) describe as the absence of disorder and the ability to be "proficient and functioning effectively in a pluralistic society."

The ability to "fit-in" indicates a sense of control which otherwise may not be possible if there are conflicts within an individual's social environment. Lincoln, Chatters, Taylor (2003) found that among African-American respondents, negative

interaction within their social networks tended to be mediated by personal control. This indicates that group harmony can be disrupted if an individual is exhibiting behavior that is inconsistent with the normative behavior of the group. Disrupting group harmony produces an initial negative response from the group as the individual is perceived to be exercising a lack of controlled behavior that would otherwise be consistent with the group. This sense of control within African-American culture relies on interpersonal connections where the individual feels stability by being aligned with the norms and preferences of their social environment. In cultures that tend toward individualism, people exercise autonomy over their social environment so that it aligns more closely with their own preferences (Morling et al, 2002), a process in which the application of “primary control over situations in order to achieve desired outcomes” (Morling et al, 2002). In this respect, the feeling of control attained by establishing the self in congruence with the social environment is a characteristic of African-American culture that researchers have called “secondary control” (Morling et al, 2002). Compared with individualistic cultures where the self exercises more control over the social environment, collectivistic groups like African-Americans are guided by their social environments where the individuals may have less autonomy.

Black students’ attitudes and actions towards seeking mental health services are contrary to the expectations of mental health professionals at UCSB. The participants’ responses and experiences emphasize the importance of having social support systems when seeking help. It is not typical for people of African descent to rely on unfamiliar outside sources, such as formal counseling services, when seeking help for intrapersonal and interpersonal problems. The subscale data from the coping scales strongly indicated that Black students relied more on social support compared to the social coping scores of Asian/Asian-American and European-American students. Based on the respondents’

perceptions of mental health services and its professionals, the mental health professionals who possess fewer social ties with the group are less likely to be used as a means of support by Black students. The students' attitudes about receiving counseling services from White professionals on campus may come from the history of racial prejudice and discrimination as a racial minority within the United States. However, perhaps more immediately relevant, the students' belief that White professionals are unable to identify with them indicates that there is a disconnect between the two; White professionals are perceived as lacking understanding of the social, economic, or political constructions that influence the Black identity and life experiences. Therefore, Black students have relied more on support from other Black faculty, counselors, and staff outside the university's counseling services, where students are able to share similar cultural and life experiences and, establish a more personal connection that would not be possible with a White professional.

## **Conclusion**

Until recently, European-Americans have been the dominant racial population within the UC system. Although there has been a significant change in the racial and ethnic population within the UC system student body, there has not been a similar change at the staff and faculty level. As a policy matter and given the changes in UC student demographics, it is important to continuously assess campus climate and the well-being of students. On-campus services and programs should be designed with the knowledge of how to reach out to students who may culturally be reluctant to seek needed services. The different worldviews of African-American and Asian-American students for example influence the thought patterns, behaviors, and functioning within their social systems (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). This understanding of various cultures and worldviews is the key to interpreting any group's help-seeking behavior and use of health

services. Frequent face-to-face promotion, awareness of, and education about, available services will dispel myths and assumptions about resources such as mental health related services. Furthermore, the visibility of mental health professionals of color will aid in the disruption of the assumptions that all of the staff are White and culturally incompetent. Modifying campus services and programs in this way should empower and corroborate cultural norms of health behavior in order to maintain an individual's development and functioning within their respective communities and the larger society. The demonstration of commitment to better serve racially/ethnically diverse and other at risk student populations will help to enhance the well-being of not only UCSB students but other students throughout the University of California system.

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# **Transgender Community Challenges and Generational Differences of Perceptions of Community**

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## **Abstract**

*In Santa Barbara County, transgender individuals have few options for community inclusion. Many report feeling isolated and susceptible to harassment, violence, and in general, report a gross sense of marginalization in Santa Barbara's socially and politically fragmented climate. Engagement of 38 transgender participants through transgender support groups, events, online listservs, message boards, and focus groups indicate that younger transgender individuals maintain a stronger conviction of the existence of a transgender community compared to older transgender individuals, but may be less satisfied with the support they received. This study assesses these hypotheses and confirmed that transgender youth were less satisfied with the community support that they received.*

## **Introduction**

This study is a follow-up to a larger project conducted by Dr. Tania Israel's Counseling Psychology Research team at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). The original study sought to assess the challenges experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals in Santa Barbara County. Due to a gross under representation of transgender participants in the initial study, I located 38 additional transgender-identified participants through various community outlets to further examine their lives and experiences in this geographic area. In general, the data gathered from these 38 participants point to a lack of community feeling and a host of other problems and social disparities. These challenges included harassment, violence, and alcohol abuse. Anecdotal evidence from the original study's focus groups suggested that younger transgender-identified individuals experience community in a different way than do the older individuals. This paper explores this hypothesis and seeks to uncover those differences.

In the United States, sexual minorities often face prejudice, misconceptions, and discrimination (Meyer & Northridge, 2007). These concerns are exasperated for transgender populations (Remafedi, Farrow, & Deisher, 1991). Support for transgender individuals is seen as a necessity by advocates working in LGBTQ community organizations. In our local community, the responses of transgender participants in Israel's project validate the need for support. Further, because of generational differences within transgender communities, this project hypothesizes that the degree to which individuals perceive an existence of a transgender community, their engagement, and with it, their satisfaction differs across age groups.

## Literature Review

Transgender is a broad umbrella term that encompasses many gender identities. Indeed, the prefix *trans-* bridges our society's current gender binaries (Boswell, 1991). The meaning of *trans* differs with each individual. Truly, "there are as many genders as there are people" (Boswell). *Trans* individuals cannot be perfectly classified, there are even narrower umbrella terms that broadly describe these communities. For example, commonly used terms are: *transsexual*, *transgender*, *cross-dresser*, *transvestite*, and *gender-queer*.

The term *transsexual* is typically used to describe those who have a self-identity that falls outside of societal gender expectations of their birth-sex. Often, they will undergo a *transitional* stage of aligning their sex with that of their gender. Additionally, *transsexuals* typically feel that in order to be congruent with their gender identity, they must undergo *sexual reassignment surgery* (SRS) (Meyerowitz, 1998) in order to complete this alignment. The direction of this sexual expression change is expressed through the acronyms *MTF* (male-to female) and *FTM* (female-to-male) (Hunter, 1998). *Transgender* is another term that can be used as a gender identity underneath the larger *trans* umbrella. These individuals face many of the same gender issues as *transsexuals*, but they do not necessarily undergo *sexual reassignment surgery* or *SRS* in order to undergo a complete transition. Because many individuals who do decide to undergo SRS may hold a dichotomist view of gender and wish to fully cross from one end of the gender spectrum to the other, community may only be needed during the transitional process. As seen in the "community forum" aspect of our ongoing CBPR project, once transitioning is completed, it may be possible that these individuals wish to integrate into mainstream society and no longer need an LGBT community (Israel, Oaks, Saunders, Miresghi, Lin, Rogers, Cogger, & Avellar, 2009).

Those who *cross-dress* generally do not use this term as a salient gender identity. These individuals may fetishize dressing in the attire of the opposite gender or sex, but are often heterosexual with no homosexual tendencies (Bullough & Smith, 1983). Similarly, two other commonly used terms are *drag kings* and *queens*. These terms are not reflective of any one salient gender identity, but rather, “drag kings” and “queens” are terms used to describe physical displays of gender stereotypic behavior of one gender by a member of the opposite gender group (Rupp, 2010). Historically and clinically, the term *transvestite* has also been used to pathologize and diagnose these individuals as having a mental disorder. As a result, the term *transvestite* has become a popular, albeit socially incorrect term used to describe these individuals (Calogeras, 1963). Finally, *genderqueer* is a term encompassing the wide spectrum that lies within gender (Burdge, 2007). According to Burdge, “queer theory provides a useful postmodern analysis framing the subversion and potential elimination of dichotomous gender constructs.” “genderqueer” connotes characteristics of both “males” and “females” and the ability to move and transition with fluidity between both gender constructs. Historically, the positive valuation of “queer” is new, arising within the last two decades and has quickly gained popularity (Halperin, 2003). Because this capitalizes on challenging traditional dichotomist ideas of gender, it would seem that it might foster a larger sense of community for those identifying as genderqueer.

In the context of mainstream American society, trans-identified persons are often faced with unique issues and challenges in nearly all aspects of their lives. Self-report surveys, needs assessments, hot-line calls, social service records, and police reports, clearly indicate that transgender people are at high risk for physical violence. Further, this victimization typically begins early in life. Many fear for their safety (Stotzer, 2009). Indeed, according to a study by Bostwick and Kenagy, 56% of both MTF’s

and FTM's reported that due to their gender identity, they felt uncomfortable and unsafe in public spaces (Bostwick & Kenagy, 2005). One individual illustrates this fear saying,

I had these three guys that didn't like me and I'm not totally sure why they didn't. But I think a lot of it had to do with my gender expression and my sexuality and just basically who I was. [...They beat my ass on my fifteenth birthday [with a leather belt....T]he guy that I was with [...] just sat back and watched while they did this to me (Wyss, 2004).

According to a health-related needs study, 40% of transgender individuals reported incidents of violence (Xavier et al., 2007). A similar study revealed that 80% of transgender individuals in a Los Angeles study cited verbal abuse as a result of their gender identity (Reback et. al., 2001). Most particularly, sexual violence against those who are transgender is found to be quite commonplace in comparison to gender-typical individuals (Stotzer, 2009). One such victim states, "In my neighborhood, either they want to beat you up or they want a free blow job" (Bocking et al, 1998). According to one study, sexual harassment and violence rates are on the rise (Witten, 2003).

Transgender individuals also face challenges when it comes to accessing quality mental health and medical care. According to a recent study, finding trans-knowledgeable and friendly care providers is a challenge for transgender individuals (Sanchez, Sanchez, & Danoff, 2009). Sanchez *et al.* further state that in order to provide these individuals with competent services, providers should be exposed to transgender issues and needs. In fact, there are still hospitals that will not provide transgender individuals with care. For instance, in January 2008, Charlene Hastings, a 57 year old transgender woman was refused breast augmentation surgery at a hospital outside San Francisco (Letellier, 2009). Transgender

individuals require both specialized and general health care service; therefore it is important that providers be able to offer high-quality care.

In order to aid in alleviating the stress that comes about as a result of significant societal prejudice and intolerance, transgender individuals are in great need of social support and community (Dworkin & Yi, 2003; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007; Taylor, 2007; Szymanski & Kashubeck-West, 2008). According to Sarason *et al.*, this support has been defined as “the existence or availability of people upon whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value, and love us” (Sarason et al., 1983). Thus, it is important to analyze the issues that trans-identified individuals face across their lifespan to examine their unique contexts.

## **Transgender Youth**

Due to their status as minors, transgender youth face unique social disparities. Because minors must first gain parental consent prior to surgical and/or hormone intervention, many are forced to transition without such facilitation. As such, “effects of the overwhelming levels of discrimination and harassment they face on a daily basis.” are exacerbated (Carroll, 2009). Additionally, denying access to hormones “represents a refusal to recognize the humanity of trans people, frustrates their ability to self-determine their gender, infringes on their personal autonomy, and adds to the cumulative effects of the constant discrimination they confront.” (Pooja & Gabriel, 2007). Taking hormones at a young age strengthens one’s sense of gender self-determination and identity; a person experiences a greater degree of control over their gender presentation and heightened levels of confidence as a result (Rubin, 2003). Further, it has been shown that preventing youth from attaining “gender-affirming” care is a great detriment to the youngster’s physical and mental health (Shield, 2007). Over time, such an individual may begin to develop a strong hatred for their genitalia as their body undergoes hormonal changes and secondary

sex characteristics (Cohen, 1997). Should this process continue into adulthood, mental anguish may occur (Turner, 2009).

Not only are transgender youth subject to discrimination in society, many must navigate through this discrimination as well as through persecution with little or no familial or institutional support and a dearth of peer networks (Crozier, 2001; Burgess, 1999). Due to their high levels of external conflict and their lack of familial, institutional, and peer support, transgender youth face feelings of isolation, helplessness, and despair (Burgess). Transgender youth are also shown to suffer high rates of depression (Shield). According to some studies, more than half of all transgender youth actually attempt suicide (Cody, 2007).

In the educational system, transgender individuals face numerous challenges, reflecting a state of substantial vulnerability and discrimination within the schools (Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009). Further, transgender individuals often confront unsafe conditions (Russell, McGuire, Lee, Larriva, & Laub, 2008). Russell *et al's* research confirms that LGBT students were less likely to perceive their school as safe compared to non-LGBT students. Anecdotal evidence shows that transgender individuals experience even worse conditions than lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals do. Grossman *et al.*'s study indicates that individuals often avoid and escape these stressors by avoiding school altogether. Because current curricula “overwhelmingly neglect[s] the transgender community,” researchers contend that school “allows for perpetuation of myths, stereotypes, and oppression of this particular population.” (Case, Stewart, Tittsworth, 2009).

## **Transgender Adults**

Transgender adults face unique challenges. According to one study, gender transitioning most often takes place in the adult years of an individual's life. Further, it is during this time that

societal and cultural expectations are at their strongest and can cause “detrimental psychological and physical consequences” (Hines, 2006). Hines’ study provides first hand accounts of what it is to be a trans-identified adult. As to why many transition during this period, Amanda, a 45 year old MTF explains,

I buried it literally under the floorboards until it stank and when I was thirty-eight years old it stank enough that I had to bring the floorboards up and do something about it. And it was becoming like cold sweats, sweating profusely on a cold day, panic attacks basically.

Many find themselves at the point of not being able to hide their gender identity any longer (Hines).

Although adults have greater control in their choice to transition than youth, many may still experience great hardship. For example, in Hines’ study, a 67 year old MTF states, “I got into a very secret cross-dressing situation, which was really dangerous when I think about it. I mean my livelihood was with the Air Force and by this time I’d got [sic] a wife and two kids. It was a stupid thing to do really, looking back on it. You only have to think about attitudes from the military to gay people. And so imagine what would have happened if I’d have said ‘I want to be a woman’. So I just kept it to myself. Basically I became a workaholic and when that happens your family life suffers and my wife and I drifted apart (Hines).

The issues that transgender adults face also spill into the workplace. For instance, employers often allow their gender expectations and bias to influence their hiring practices (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Ally Howell, a highly educated 58 year-old with

two law degrees, contends that it is her gender presentation that proves to be a detriment to finding employment. Howell states, "I've been applying for jobs at private firms, as well as in-house counsel for companies--I don't even get interviews," she says. "On my [résumé] I'll list I've been on the board of LGBT organizations--I'm not going to hide it, but I'm sure it's cost me interviews." In the meantime Howell earns living teaching online law classes, where her gender presentation does not play a role (Garcia, 2008).

Once hired, an individual may face issues of isolation and persecution should they undergo gender transition during their tenure in the job (Schilt & Connell). Maintaining their employment post-transition, they may be expected to undergo a change of job that reflects the direction of their transition (Schilt & Connell). That is, FTM's would be expected to engage in "men's work" and MTF's in "women's work." The gender schemas of the employer may force these changes (Griggs, 1998). Someone who was hired as a "man" in a high-powered position may now be forced to assume a lesser position once their transition into being a woman is complete (Griggs).

Historically, courts have denied extending protection to transgender individuals in the workplace. In 2007-2008, many political activists rallied for the inclusion of transgender protections in the Federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). However, their inclusion was denied by Congress, and once again, this group was left without employment protection (Paisley, 2008). As such, many who identify as transgender can lose their employment and livelihood based solely upon their gender identity, rather than ability. Not only does this evoke feelings of isolation and exclusion, but loss of employment can create a profound sense of meaninglessness.

Based on the existing literature, it is clear that transgender individuals face a plethora of challenges. Most of these can lead to feelings of isolation, fear, and as a result, invisibility. Many seek

but do not seem to have found a sense of community. A wide range of variables can affect sense of community throughout their lives.

This project seeks to shed light on how generational differences may impact individuals' sense of community. In particular, it seeks to determine whether age affects perceptions of community for transgender individuals. Transgender participants responded to questions regarding the existence of community, the experience of social support, and satisfaction with social support. Through survey research, 38 trans-identified individuals were asked numerous questions regarding their sense of community.

This project focuses on the following questions: "How much do you feel that a community exists for transgender/genderqueer people in Santa Barbara and nearby areas?" "Over the last three months, how often have you gone to a person in the LGBT community other than your significant other for support?" "How satisfied are you with the support you have received from people in the LGBT community?"

## **Hypothesis**

Of interest in this study is the relationship of age to perceptions of community. Does the overall sense of transgender community improve or lessen with age. Based on anecdotal evidence from the original Israel study, I am hypothesizing that younger transgender individuals will have a stronger conviction that transgender community exists but that they will be less satisfied with social support in the LGBT community compared to the older participants.

## **Methodology**

### *Procedures*

As previously stated, due to a small transgender participant pool in Dr. Israel's initial study, this project was developed as an

addendum to engage a larger base of transgender participants. In accordance with previously set CBPR practices and methodologies, the project engaged members of the local LGBT community in nearly all facets of research design and implementation. Most specifically, community members were involved in survey formation, data collection, and data interpretation. As guided by previous CBPR literature (Minkler & Hancock, 2003), the team allied itself with various community agencies. In addition, meetings with service providers were held and a “partnership council” was established. This council is a group of representative community members who met monthly to inform or guide the direction of the CBPR project. CBPR methodologies secure involvement of local service providers and community members. Further, by engaging local community members, an ample participant pool was reached. Outreach was done through transgender support groups, events, and online listservs, message boards and forums. The following criteria were used to determine eligibility: participants were age 14 years or older; participants were self-identified as transgender or genderqueer; and participants resided, worked, or socialized within Santa Barbara County.

Because the most recent county census states that 34% of the population identifies as either Hispanic or Latino, all survey materials (survey, informed consent, and recruitment sheets) were developed in both English and Spanish language. In addition, in order to engage as many individuals as possible, online and paper and pen hardcopy surveys were created. Responses were gathered from early 2008 until May 1, 2009. Thirty respondents participated via the online survey, and eight of the participants responded via the hardcopy version.

### *Participants*

A total of 38 participants completed the survey upon which this report is based. Although all 38 participants identified as

transgender, many also held other gender identities as salient. Twelve participants (31.6%) identified as “male-to-female” (MTF), eight (21.1%) identified as “female-to-male” (FTM), and 10 participants (26.3%) identified as “gender queer.” The remainder of the participants identified as “other” for gender identity, or did not respond to that question. Participant ages ranged from 15 to 65, with a mean age of 37. Seventeen participants (44.7%) were between the ages of 16-35; 11 participants (28.9%) were between the ages of 35-55, and eight participants (22.1%) were 56 years of age or above. Twenty-eight participants (52.6%) identified as “white,” and seven participants (18.4%) identified as “Latino/a.” Three participants (7.9%) identified as “Native American,” two participants (5.3%) identified as “African/a,” one participant (2.6%) identified as “Asian American,” and one participant (2.6%) identified as “Middle Eastern.” Finally, six participants (15.8%) marked an “other” ethnicity. Because participants could select multiple ethnic identities, the total sum percentage was 105.2%.

In terms of education level and socio-economic status, two participants did not earn a high school degree, and one participant had earned only a high school degree or equivalent. Ten participants had attended some college, but did not hold a degree, six had earned an Associate’s Degree, two earned a Bachelor’s Degree, three had attended some graduate school, 10 earned a graduate or professional degree, three had earned other types of degrees, and one participant did not respond. With regards to socio-economic status, six participants identified as “poor,” five as “working class,” seven as “lower-middle class,” 13 as “middle class,” three as “upper-middle class,” three as “other,” and one did not respond.

## *Measures*

### *Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC).*

In order to gauge participants' sense of belonging to and being able to rely on a larger LGBT community, a modified form of the Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) measure was used (Proescholdbell, Roosa, & Nemeroff, 2006). Initially created to gauge PSOC among gay men, the PSOC is comprised of three subscales. The first subscale, *Influence*, assesses the degree of the participant's influence upon their group as well as the group's influence on them. The second subscale, *Shared Emotional Connection*, measures the participant's perception of geniality and understanding among group members. Finally, the third subscale, *Fulfillment of Needs and Belonging*, assesses the participant's feeling that their needs are met through their group membership as well as to how much they feel that they belong to the group.

The PSOC measure in this study is composed of 17 short statements and includes a five-point Likert scale. The PSOC items are as follows:

1. "How much do you feel able to influence the actions, thoughts, and feelings of other LGBT people?"
2. "How much do you feel your opinion matters to other LGBT people?"
3. "How much do you care about what LGBT people think of your actions?"
4. "How much do you feel you can influence what the LGBT community is like?"
5. "How much do other LGBT influence your thoughts and actions?"
6. "How much do the opinions of other LGBT people matter to you?"
7. "In general, how well do LGBT people get along?"

8. "In general, how warm do LGBT people feel toward each other?"
9. "In general, how friendly do LGBT people feel toward each other?"
10. "In general, how thoughtful are LGBT people toward each other?"
11. "In general, how much of a sense of camaraderie do LGBT people feel with each other?"
12. "How often do you feel like you belong in the LGBT community?"
13. "How often do you feel that you are a member of the LGBT community?"
14. "How often do you feel a part of the LGBT community?"
15. "How much do you feel that you can get help from the LGBT community if you need it?"
16. "How much do you feel that you can get help from the LGBT community if you need it?"
17. "How much do you feel that your needs are met by the LGBT community?"

Participants rated the degree to which each question reflected their perception of the local LGBT community. Participants were given the following answer choices: *none*, *a little*, *some*, *a fair amount*, and *a great deal*. In this study I analyze in particular the question, "How much do you feel that a community exists for transgender/genderqueer people in Santa Barbara and nearby areas?"

High levels of internal consistency for each of the PSOC subscales (alpha levels ranging from .82 to .87) have been shown by Proscholdbell *et al.* (2006). Support was also provided for combining all individual factors into one overall PSOC score. Additionally, the overall score was reached by calculating the mean for each independent subscale and then combining each of

the three means to come up with a new mean which would give equal weight to each of the three subscales.

### *Social Support and Interaction.*

In order to assess our participants' satisfaction with the support that they have received from the people in the LGBT community, a six-point Likert scale was used. This scale measured participant satisfaction with the lowest score, "1" being very dissatisfied and the highest, "6" being very satisfied. This scale is based on a short version of Sarason's et al's., Social Support Questionnaire. (Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987). Because it is hypothesized that younger participants will hold a greater sense of community than older participants, the question "how often have you gone to a person in the LGBT community other than your significant other for support?" was also analyzed. This question was measured with the frequency items: *never, once or twice, a few times, and many times.*

## **Results**

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Based upon the literature and the anecdotal evidence garnered from the ongoing Community-Based Participatory (CBPR) research project, it would seem that perceptions of community would vary when age is a variable. Predictions for this study were that younger transgender individuals would have a stronger conviction that a transgender community exists compared to older transgender individuals, but that they would be less satisfied with social support in the LGBT community than those who were older.

### *Psychological Sense of Community*

In regards to Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) it was hypothesized that younger participants would give higher

ratings on the question “How much do you feel that a community exists for transgender/genderqueer people in Santa Barbara and nearby areas?” Further, because of this mixed hypothesis, three individual subscales were used as well as the total PSOC score to get a better picture of the participants’ sense of community. Pearson’s correlation method at an alpha level of .05 was used for all tests.

Statistical analysis reveals a non-significant  $p$ -value of .469 (there is no significant correlation with age) for the question “How much do you feel that a community exists for transgender/genderqueer people in Santa Barbara and nearby areas?” Although there was no evident correlation in regards to this specific question of PSOC, a correlation analysis was used for all PSOC subscales, as well as for a total score of PSOC.

Regarding the PSOC subscales, the first of which, “Influence,” was found to be non-significant at a  $p$ -value of .961. Similarly, the  $p$ -value of .602 on the subscale of “Shared Emotion,” was a non-significant. Finally, regarding the subscale “Membership and Fulfillment of Needs,” it too was found to be non-significant at a  $p$ -value of .576. Because all subscales proved to be non-significant, it was no surprise that the sum of all PSOC scores was found to be non-significant at a  $p$ -value of .204.

### *Social Support and Interaction*

Because it was hypothesized that younger people would be less satisfied with the support they have received from members in the LGBT community, it was expected that they would give lower ratings on the question “how satisfied are you with the support you have received from people in the LGBT community?” compared to older individuals. Also, in order to get a better picture of participants’ sense of community, responses to the question, “over the last three months, how often have you gone to a person in the LGBT community other than your significant other for support?”

were also analyzed. Pearson's correlation method at a significance level of .05 was used for both questions.

With an alpha level of .05, the question, "how satisfied are you with the support you have received from people in the LGBT community?" was statistically significant at  $r(36) = .455, p < .05$ . This significant result indicates that the older a person was, the more satisfied they were with the support that they received. However, the question, "over the last three months, how often have you gone to a person in the LGBT community other than your significant other for support?" showed a non-significant  $p$ -value of .471, which indicates that there is no observed relationship between a participant's age and how much they have turned to an LGBT community member for support.

## **Discussion**

Using Pearson's correlation method, all PSOC questions proved to be non-significant, which was inconsistent with the hypothesis of this study. In addition, using age as a factor, the frequency with which individuals accessed community was also non-significant. However, there was a significant correlation for satisfaction among participants. Specifically, it was positively correlated at  $r(36) = .455, p < .05$ . Thus, consistent with my second hypothesis, it would seem that satisfaction levels are positively correlated with older age levels.

Because all findings for PSOC were non-significant, it remains unclear how transgender PSOC across age may vary. As a result, implications for practice are still inconclusive. The question, "how satisfied are you with the support you have received from people in the LGBT community?" and its significant correlation of .455 shows that older transgender individuals are more satisfied with the support they receive than those who are younger. However, it should be noted that for many transgender older

individuals, they have had much more time to solidify their identity and to develop a greater sense of community.

The data points to the need for higher quality social support for younger individuals. Based on evidence from the literature, it would seem that younger transgender individuals need greater support both from the school system and at home. In order to facilitate this support, educators, school counselors, and parents need access to more education on transgender issues and concerns. Ideally, such education would lead to higher levels of support for and sensitivity to transgender individuals.

There is a need for additional research. Hosting transgender community forums and directly targeting more people who identify as transgender may provide a richer pool of data. Because social support was shown to increase with age, two new questions arise: 1) “Why is satisfaction increased with age?” and 2) “Does satisfaction actually increase with age or is it simply related to the experiences of this particular age group?” Because this study was correlational in nature, no causal inferences can be made. These questions lead to a obvious need for additional research.

Outreach and data collection regarding this marginalized population was challenging. Because these communities are often victims of discrimination and harassment, members tend to become “invisible,” or go “stealth.” Often preferring to integrate with the larger community, many do not wish to be regarded as “transgender.” As a result, access to these communities is typically closed. Due to our limited access, data collection was confined to two local support groups, gay pride festivals, and online listservs, message boards and forums, which led to a very small (N = 38) sample of participants.

The demographics of our population were not without bias. The size of the city and the availability of support services and networks limit the population regardless of age. In an expanded

study, comparing this city with a larger metropolitan area may well indicate more persuasively how age effects the perceptions of support and community.

Transgender individuals continue to face discrimination and harassment in the U.S. For them, community may be a significant source of support and comfort. The transgender community is complex and multifaceted. Age may be one significant variable with respect to the degree of satisfaction with support services or/and perceptions of community. In order to address these issues in further detail, additional community-based research is needed. My suggestion for future research is to conduct a stronger transgender-specific risk-needs assessment not only in Santa Barbara County, but in other regions as well. Not only will this give us greater insight to the challenges that these populations experience, but will lead to greater validity with the inclusion of a larger participant pool. Finally, focus groups and other community collaborations will inform transgender community specific interventions.

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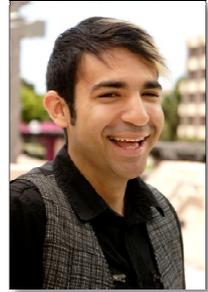
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After Dr. McNair's death, Congress provided funding for the Ronald E. McNair Scholars program dedicated to preserving Dr. McNair's legacy of scholarship and achievements and to encouraging participants to pursue their academic and professional goals.

The cover is an iconic image of the UCSB campus, one of the most beautiful academic settings in the country. The photo shows the Pacific Ocean with reefs just offshore, the beautiful lagoon that fronts the campus, the campanile, and a view past campus to the surrounding agricultural region and the Santa Ynez Mountains.

