McNair Scholars Research Journal

Volume 2 - Spring 2006

Featuring research of Boise State McNair Research Fellows
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- David Hall - McNair Program Coordinator
- Helen Barnes - Academic Specialist
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Desire Denied: A Bibliographic Overview of Sexual Inequality and Blind Women

Deborah M. Allen: McNair Scholar
Dr. Virginia Husting & Dr. Robin Allen: Mentors

Social Science

Abstract

This literature review examines social science research on blind women's experiences with sexual relationships. The findings suggest that socially constructed barriers marginalize blind women, often resulting in blind women being labeled as asexual. The intersection of able-ism and sexism positions many blind women as outsiders who do not possess sexual attractiveness. After discussing perspectives that examine socially constructed barriers rather than biological barriers to blind women's sexuality, the paper reviews some consequences of denied sexuality, such as exclusion from heterosexual and homosexual relationships and increased risk of violence. The paper concludes with suggestions on how to challenge socially constructed barriers and a call for further on blind women's experiences with sexual relationships.

Review and Analysis

Sexual democracy should be recognized as a key political struggle, not only because of the importance of the basic human right to sexual autonomy, but also because … a group's sexual status tends to reflect and reinforce its broader political and social status. I understand sexual agency not merely as the capacity to choose, engage in, or refuse sex acts, but as a more profound good, which is in many ways socially based, involving not only a sense of oneself as a sexual being, but also a larger social dimension in which others recognize and respect one's identity (Wilkerson, 2002, p. 34).

Although my review of the literature indicates more research on blind women's experiences with sexual relationships is needed (Ferrell & Griego, 2001; White, 2003), evidence suggests that socially constructed barriers marginalize blind women, often resulting in blind women being labeled as asexual (Cole & Cole, 1999; Rosenblum, 2001; Watson-Armstrong, O'Rourke, & Schatzlein, 1999; White, 2003). After discussing perspectives that examine socially constructed barriers rather than biological barriers to blind women's sexuality, I review some consequences of denied sexuality, such as internalized self-doubts, exclusion from heterosexual and homosexual relationships, and increased risk of violence. I conclude with suggestions for how to challenge socially constructed barriers and end with ideas for further research.

This biographical essay focuses on American blind women. Since the discourses of blind women vary (Asch, 2004; Ferrell & Greigo, 2001; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Milian, 2001; Mintz, 2002; Rosenblum, 2001; Schriempf, 2001; Smith, 2004), the inequities discussed here are general patterns that do not apply to all blind women. My research suggests that the intersection of disablism and sexism positions many blind women as outsiders, who do not possess sexual attractiveness (Schriempf, 2001). Nevertheless, my research also suggests some blind women are exceptions and do engage in satisfying sexual relationships (Rosenblum, 2001).

Since blind women embody complex, interconnecting, diverse subject positions involving more than blindness and gender, such as race and religion, this paper provides a simplified, narrow perspective of the lives of blind women who are denied their sexuality (Asch, 2004; Ferrell & Griego, 2001; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Milian, 2001; Mintz, 2002; Schriempf, 2001; Smith, 2004; Thomas, 1999). Moreover, because specific research about blind women's sexuality is limited (Ferrell & Griego, 1999; White, 2003), much of the information I use in this paper comes from general research about disabled women. All of the literature I cite comes from disability studies perspectives, and the literature I reviewed dated no earlier than 1999.

My use of the term sexuality is limited to romance and physical acts of sex. In addition, I use the terms
blind women and disabled women rather than using awkward and wordy people-first language, such as women who are blind or visually impaired. Many scholars and activists prefer the use of people-first language because they believe using language that emphasizes the person before a disability reduces a general tendency to judge people by their disabilities rather than by their other unique qualities as human beings; however, other scholars and activists do not adhere to the exclusive use of people-first language, preferring to use blind people and similar terms (Omansky-Gordon & Rosenblum, 2001). As a blind woman, I refer to myself as a blind woman, and my large network of blind friends and acquaintances also call each other blind people. Furthermore, many of the authors I cite in this paper use a mixture of terms, such as blind women, and people-first language.

For most blind people, living with the physical reality of blindness is easier than dealing with negative, dominant, socially constructed beliefs about blindness (Asch, 2004; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Milian, 2001; Omansky-Gordon & Rosenblum, 2001; Schriempf, 2001; Thomas, 1999). In his book about the social history of blindness in the United States, Frances Koestler discusses the historical contexts for prejudice blind people have experienced, and he asserts, "Blindness as social liability, blindness as punishment for sin, blindness as uselessness to self and others--these were but three strands woven into the cocoon of myths and superstitions which continue to influence modern attitudes" (2004, p. 3). Status, privilege, and power are typically reserved for bodies that conform to constructed cultural standards (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Milian, 2001; Wilkerson, 2002). Blind women violate hegemonic standards for sexual attractiveness (Garaland-Thomson, 2002; Schriempf, 2001; White, 2003).

Common misconceptions label blind people as dependent, incapable of independence, and needing protection (Asch, 2004; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Schur, 2004). Socially constructed attitudes and environments that exclude and otherize blind people disadvantage blind people more than lack of sight (Asch, 2004; Milian, 2001; Schriempf, 2001).

In her discussion about social constructions of disabilities, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states, "Disability, like femaleness, is not a natural state of corporeal inferiority, inadequacy, excess, or a stroke of misfortune. Rather, disability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender" (2002, p. 4).

If human beings' perceptions of physical attractiveness are socially constructed, changing standards that deprive blind women of sexuality will be possible (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Milian, 2001; Rosenblum, 2001; Schriempf, 2001). Instead of emphasizing the need for cures for blindness, many blind people emphasize the need for changing unwelcoming attitudes and environments, such as those posing barriers to blind women's sexual equality (Ferrell & Griego, 2001; Garland-Thomson, 2002; McAlland & Ditillo, 1999; Omansky-Gordon & Rosenblum, 2001; Schriempf, 2001; Thomas, 1999).

Rather than being a pathological difference, blindness is a characteristic. However, by promoting the belief that blind people" suffer" from a biological tragedy and cannot be "normal" unless their afflictions are cured, medical professionals often contribute to damaging stereotypes that mark blind individuals as other (Patterson & Satz, 2002; Thomas, 1999). In their article about genetic counseling and the disabled, Annette Patterson and Martha Satz argue that many geneticists allow their misconceptions about disabilities to guide how they counsel their clients. The authors state, "Disability rights advocates have a strong political position to exert regarding their interest in such transactions, and in general, regarding the status of those who are disabled. Their political movement, as other liberatory movements before them, asserts that an apparent "natural" hierarchy, in this case separating the abled from the disabled, is in fact one largely constructed by societal practice. They contend that the difficulties presented by a given disabling condition often have more to do with the way society defines and responds to these conditions rather than with the inherent "limitations" of the conditions themselves. They further argue that genetic counselors participate in this "construction" by attempting to define and explain the nature of a particular condition often without themselves having any significant experience of disability or interaction with disabled individuals" (2002, p. 121).

Negative attitudes relegate blind women to a marginalized status and provide a foundation for the social disadvantages many of them experience. The common belief that blind women are asexual (Cole & Cole, 1999; Rosenblum, 2001; Watson-Armstrong et al., 1999; White, 2003) is enmeshed in a complex web of other disadvantages blind women experience. For example, sexual desire cannot be mandated by legislation, but some of the social conditions that influence blind women's access to economic and social status do impact the perceived desirability of blind women as potential romantic partners. In an effort to remove some of the attitudinal and environmental barriers faced by blind people, various laws have been enacted in the United States. However, the socially constructed barriers that inhibit the lives of many blind women are so deeply entrenched in our society that enacting legislation, such as The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), has done little to improve the social standing of blind women in the United States (Asch, 2004; Milian, 2001).
Despite the implementation of the ADA, poverty rates of disabled women are approximately twice those of women without disabilities (cited in Schur, 2004). Living in poverty and lacking opportunities to become financially secure interfere with the ability of many blind women to be considered as desirable equal partners in long-term relationships. Until hegemonic, visual-centric attitudes about what it means to be blind are changed, most blind people will continue to be devalued, designated as other, and denied their sexuality (Garland-Thomson, 2002; White, 2003; Wilkerson, 2002).

The media contribute to the myths that otherize, pathologize, and neuter how blind women are commonly perceived (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Rosenblum, 2001; Wilkerson, 2002). In her review of Tennessee Williams' work, Ann Fox points out a disturbing parallel between how both disability and queerness have been pathologized in American culture (2004). In addition to perpetuating and constructing negative attitudes about people who are disabled or queer, Williams' work provides an example of how the media legitimate prejudice by medicalizing rather than embracing differences. Furthermore, when disabled people are depicted in the media, disabled-male characters are more common than disabled female characters, and both genders are usually given roles that lack sex appeal (Rosenblum, 2001).

By inaccurately representing blind women as either asexual or abnormally sexual, the media often respond to a culture that systematically devalues blind people. *Red Dragon* is an example of a recent movie that perpetuates negative beliefs about the sexuality of blind women. The fact that a sighted actress played the role of the blind character in the movie exhibits the film producers' lack of confidence in the abilities of blind people. However, even if a blind actress performed in the movie, the imbedded messages that marginalize and set blind women apart would have been clear because a blind actress would have most likely followed the same script.

A disturbing drama about the hunt for a serial killer who believes murdering others will transform himself and his victims into higher states of being, *Red Dragon* is the prequel to *Silence of the Lambs* and is part of the Hannibal Lector series. The blind character, named Reba, plays a significant, although secondary, part in the movie. The relationship that develops between Reba on her lover exaggerates a pathological connection between physical disabilities and social difference.

Reba's lover is the Red Dragon, a brutal, serial murderer, who targets entire families. Growing up with an abusive grandmother and additional feelings of inferiority because of a soft-pallet problem contribute to the Red Dragon's desire to use murder to transform himself and wield power over members of the society he believes shuns him. Reba meets the Red Dragon at the film processing company where they both work. The two relate to each other as outcasts, and they quickly begin a sexual relationship. Reba does not know that her lover feels compelled to slay others to serve a twisted belief system.

The Dragon is attracted by Reba's ability to understand being different and her inability to see what he perceives as his disfigurement.

Reba's blindness is used to make her character appear vulnerable and too pitiful for even a brutal, serial murderer to kill. Although she works and lives on her own, she becomes easy prey for a vicious murderer, who can even watch a video of his next intended victims while Reba obliviously snuggles up to him.

Her difficulties with having healthy sexual relationships are emphasized in the movie. After a coworker makes unwanted advances on her, Reba expresses her frustration with being considered different when she says, "If there is anything I hate worse than pity, it is fake pity--especially when it is from a walking hard-on." After learning her lover's true nature, Reba laments, "I should have known." Furthermore, Reba told the Dragon, "I know what it is like to always have people think you are different." The Dragon's perception of Reba as different and a fellow outcast provided the impetus for his desire to have a relationship with her. Subtle and overt messages in this movie reinforce attitudes that equate blindness with abnormal sexuality. Negative depictions of blind women in the media contribute to another dimension of a complex web of socially constructed attitude and physical barriers that restrict the lives of blind women.

Blind people live in a culture where environments designed by and for sighted people often prevent them from fully participating in aspects of life that enhance their sexual attractiveness and provide opportunities for meeting potential romantic partners (Milian, 2001; Wilkerson, 2002). With rare exceptions, accommodations are designed for those who can see. As a result, blind people must adapt to environments designed for the majority (Asch, 2004). Lack of access, such as to transportation, prevents many blind people from fitting in with their peers by being employed or by being able to attend social events (Rosenblum, 2001; Thomas, 1999). Wanting to avoid transportation problems, many blind individuals avoid becoming romantically involved with other blind people (Rosenblum, 2001). While discussing social constructs, Adrienne Asch states, "… instead of speaking of impairments at all, we should be speaking of environments" (2004, p. 21).

Accepting the myth that blindness is a personal medical tragedy rather than a characteristic of people who are systematically otherize, even academic programs often fail to include the experiences of disabled people in
According to Susanna Mintz, "Feminist disability scholars have pointed out that mainstream feminism's critique of patriarchal myths of women as essentially sexual and maternal ignores the fact that ablest culture also deems disabled women to be essentially asexual and unmaternal" (2002, p. 157). Furthermore, Rosemary Garland-Thomson states, "We need to study disability in a feminist context to direct our highly honed critical skills toward the dual scholarly tasks of unmasking and re-imagining disability, not only for people with disabilities, but for everyone" (2002, p. 4).

Many blind women suffer severe consequences because of socially constructed barriers that inhibit their access to sexuality. Internalized doubts about their sexual attractiveness, rejection as a potential sex partner, and increased risk of sexual vulnerability are some of the consequences blind women often endure (Rosenblum, 2001; Milian, 2001; Schriempf, 2001). Being marked as other and undesirable and lacking power to change dominant misconceptions can influence blind women to feel inferior (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Milian, 2001; Thomas, 1999; Wilkerson, 2002). Many disabled women internalize negative attitudes, leading to doubts about their own beauty and sexual attractiveness (Thomas, 1999). In an ethnographic study of thirteen blind individuals' perceptions of body image, Nili Kaplan-Myrth found that not being able to see others does not prevent blind people from adopting and privileging dominant visual-centric standards for attractiveness. Kaplan-Myrth concluded, "Blind people, like sighted people, see themselves through multiple lenses. Ultimately, there is no difference between blind people and sighted people; for both, 'seeing' is an interpretive act rather than a mere sensory activity. The "importance of knowing about not knowing" (the paradoxical inability for blind people to retreat into a looking-glass-free world) highlights the extent to which body image is influenced by evaluations of oneself through other people's eyes (2000, p. 297).

The misconceptions about blindness that permeate our culture can make it difficult for blind women to maintain positive self-images (Milian, 2001; Rosenblum, 2001; Thomas, 1999). Joining organizations of the blind, such as the American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind, gives some women an opportunity to share their frustrations, find positive role models, fight for political change, and participate in promoting counter-hegemonic discourses (Asch, 2004; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Rosenblum, 2001; Schur, 2004; Wilkerson, 2002). But even among the blind, women are disadvantaged. For example, blind men often fail to see blind women as potential sex partners (Rosenblum, 2001).

Some researchers suggest that both heterosexual and lesbian blind women are at a disadvantage because they cannot engage in usual courtship rituals (Cole & Cole, 1999; Ferrell & Griego, 2001; Rosenblum, 2001; White, 2003). However, since blind women appear to have more difficulty establishing sexual relationships than blind men, not being able to see cues fails to provide a full answer. For example, blind women are more likely to live alone and less likely to marry or have children than blind men (cited in Rosenblum, 2001; Schur, 2004).

Being marked as other also endangers blind women. Blind women experience higher rates of violence than non-disabled women (cited in Cole & Cole, 1999; Ferrell & Griego, 2001; Watson-Armstrong et al., 1999). The common belief that blind women are inferior is a suspected contributor to the high rate of violence they experience (Watson-Armstrong et al., 1999). In one study, over 50 percent of congenitally blind women reported being forced to have sex at least once during their lifetimes, and another study revealed that two-thirds of women with disabilities interviewed experienced some kind of sexual assault (cited in Rosenblum, 2001). Resisting the tendency to internalize negative beliefs is often made even more difficult for blind lesbians who are frequently rejected by other blind people (Ferrell & Griego, 2001). According to an essay by Patrick White, after a long history of attempting to repress the sexuality of blind children, compulsory heterosexuality has become the emphasis in sex education for blind youth during the past thirty years (2003).

For blind lesbians, who are already at increased risk of experiencing violence because of their gender and disability, safety concerns can prevent them from coming out (Ferrell & Griego, 2001; Wilkerson, 2002). Hate crimes perpetrated against homosexuals, such as the murder of Matthew Shepard, provide support for those fears (Ferrell & Griego, 2001). Wanting to avoid associating themselves with marginalized communities, many disabled lesbians hide both their disabilities and sexual preferences (Samuels, 2003). Internalized negative beliefs about disabilities and homosexuality can result in some blind lesbians suppressing their sexuality and having enough self-hatred to commit suicide (McAlland et al., 1999).

Changing the systematic and individualized inequalities that mark blind women as undesirable will require individual and joint advocacy, inclusion of disabled women in the feminist agenda, public education about gender and disability, and deconstructing macro-and micro-level discrimination (Rosenblum, 2001; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Mintz, 2002; Saxton, 2003; Schriempf, 2001; Wilkerson, 2002). In her discussion about how disabled women
can challenge multifaceted barriers to sexual and reproductive equality, Marsha Saxton wrote, "... we must be prepared to take on the discriminatory policies of a variety of institutions: medical, social services, legal, and media. But we must also do battle within ourselves" (2003, p. 292).

Blind women must lead the effort to claim sexual equality. They must take the initiative to research their own lives and educate others about their experiences. As Patrick White suggests, "I hope that in the future blind people will wrest control of the story of their own sexuality from the hands of the sighted, for the available material, painfully limited though it is, constitutes the totality of our cultural inheritance of official information on the subject" (2003, p. 134).

Among feminists the saying "the personal is political" is common knowledge (Schriempf, 2001). Claiming sexual equity is an act of both personal and political empowerment for blind women (Wilkerson, 2002). Blind women must become aware of and counter internal and external beliefs and conditions that set them apart as other and undesirable. They must reject the social constructs that divide the nondisabled from the disabled and the feminine from the masculine. Although non-disabled people need to join in tearing down social constructs that designate them as undesirable and different, blind women need to lead the way to change. When socially constructed barriers that mark blind women as other and undesirable are deconstructed, Adrian Asch's words will become a reality. She states, "I am interested in achieving a society where eyesight is no more consequential for life chances than is eye color" (2004, p. 10).

My review of the literature provides much evidence for blind women's experiences with sexual inequality in the United States. Although the research about the existence of sexual inequity is clear, more empirical research about the impact of denied desire on blind women is needed. Much of the literature I reviewed focused on conceptual issues or referred to studies conducted over a decade ago. In addition, with rare exceptions, research that has been conducted regarding the sexuality of disabled women lumps women with a wide variety of cognitive and physical disabilities together. Specific research on the sexual experiences of blind women is needed. Qualitative and quantitative studies about the impact of teaching both blind and sighted peers sexual socialization skills that include blind people, effective ways to use the media to project positive sexual images of blind people, and blind individuals' experiences with sexual violence require attention. None of the literature I reviewed contained recent statistics describing rates of sexual violence perpetrated against blind women. The intersection of blindness and gender with class, race, employment, and education needs more exploration. Furthermore, the diverse narratives of blind women's experiences with sexuality deserve more recognition in disability studies literature.

**References**


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Letting Go of the Harness for the Last Time: A Descriptive Realism Approach to Exploring the Ending of Working Relationships with Guide Dogs

Deborah M. Allen: McNair Scholar

Dr. Robin Allen & Dr. Virginia Husting: Mentors

Social Science

Abstract

In this research, I use a combination of feminist methodology and descriptive realism to explore my experiences and the experiences of other totally blind individuals who have ended working relationships with guide dogs. Little research has been done on the approximately eight thousand blind people who are partnered with guide dogs in the United States (Eames & Eames, 2004). A primary goal of this qualitative study is to give voice to the unique narratives of people whose experiences are rarely explored in academic literature (Contreras, 2003; Schneider, 2005). I blend information I gathered during interviews with five blind authors and ten blind participants with my autoethnography to illustrate how concepts can be applied to broader social issues, such as policies at agencies that provide guide dogs to blind individuals (Denzin, 2001; Ellis, 2002).

Introduction

Even though she is covered with dozens of acupuncture needles, my beloved black Labrador guide dog Lily is comfortably dozing on a dog bed next to me. As I write this, I occasionally stop to pet a small patch of unquilled fur on her head. Although the acupuncture is reducing the pain she experiences because of degenerative arthritis in her back, nothing will stop the inevitable. Lily must retire soon.

Despite her pain, Lily is still eager to get in her harness and guide me through hectic days of running from class to class, dashing to catch buses, and climbing stairs to volunteer at a shelter for victims of domestic violence. Just yesterday, she stopped me from being hit by cars twice. I cannot imagine my life without her by my side for almost every moment of every day; she has been guiding me for over seven years now. Beyond keeping me safe, she has been my closest companion during important events in my life, such as witnessing the birth of my granddaughter and staying by my side when I was hospitalized for a major surgery.

In addition to my emotional turmoil about Lily's impending retirement, I have logistical concerns. I do not want to leave her for two weeks to train with a successor dog, I do not want another dog, and I do not have enough income to afford another dog. Giving Lily away is not an option because our bond is too close.

As Lily's physical condition deteriorates, my autonomy is gradually being taken from me. The freedom I once took for granted is vanishing. No longer can I just walk to and from the store if I need something, nor can I walk to the campus if I miss the bus, or the buses are not running. I must depend more and more on others to provide transportation for me.

During the visit with the vet today, I broached the difficult topic. I said, "I probably have to start thinking about retiring Lily." With a sigh, the vet, who is next to me the most devoted to keeping Lily working, sadly replied, "Yes, at some point you will have to give up too much to keep Lily working."

The above narrative is my own. In this research, I use a combination of feminist methodology and descriptive realism to explore my experiences and the experiences of other totally blind individuals who have ended working relationships with guide dogs (Denzin, 2001; Ellis, 2002). In the following pages, my narrative is blended with passages I extracted from interviews with five authors and ten participants to describe some difficult aspects associated with ending working relationships with guide dogs; in addition, I conclude with a discussion of my findings and suggestions for further research.

I derive the concept of making the Obvious Dubious from Michael Patton, who explains researchers use
this approach, "(t)o disabuse misconceptions ..." (1990, p. 423). Except for information pertaining to me and the names of authors and their guide dogs, all other names of people and dogs are fictionalized.

Making the Obvious/Dubious

The role of schools and the role of veterinarians during and after a working relationship ends may appear straightforward. The schools provide successor dogs, and veterinarians provide medical care and advice. However, my research indicates that these roles entail many nuances.

The role of schools

Wynona: "I make the choices, but confirmation from my school is valuable for me. I also feel like I owe it to the staff to keep them informed. I feel loyalty to them and gratitude for their investment into training my guide dogs."

In addition to training guide dogs and blind people, the participants expressed a wide variety of expectations for the roles they think their schools do or should fulfill. Maintaining good communication between staff members at schools and blind clients, preparing blind partners for the reality of ending working relationships, and expanding training options were major themes that reoccurred during my interviews.

Good communication between blind individuals and staff members at schools can prevent problems and build bonds of trust between graduates and staff members. Some of the participants who experienced mismatches felt that when they expressed concerns while training with mismatched dogs, staff at their schools did not take their concerns seriously. Bob: "When I had problems during training, my instructors blamed me. They did not see that the dog was not working. After I brought the dog home and he still did not work, a trainer came out to evaluate us. He told me that the dog needed to be retired, and it wasn't my fault. Having that acknowledgement was good, but I would have liked to have an apology."

Receiving accurate and thorough information about their successor dogs from the staff at schools is important to many blind people. Because of unpleasant experiences some of his friends have had with guide dogs, Clark is concerned about getting a successor dog with behavior problems, such as destructive chewing. Clark: "There is a risk factor, and I am afraid of the unknown."

After finishing training and going home with her third guide, Penny was concerned when Freesia started having accidents in her home and at Penny's workplace. When Penny called Freesia's puppy raiser to ask if Freesia had a history of accidents, Penny was dismayed to discover that the puppy raiser did not housebreak Freesia. Being told that her third guide dog was not housebroken before bringing Freesia home could have saved Penny much frustration and damage to her new carpets. Penny: "I had thoughts of sending her back, but I like her, and I decided that we would get through this. She is a sweet dog. It took several months, but I housebroke her."

Some participants expressed frustration because staff members at their schools did not take their requests seriously. Carey: "When I applied for my third dog, I made it very clear that I did not want a male. I even refused to go to an earlier class because the only available match for me was a male. I got to the school expecting a female, but I got a male; Poplar. I was very disappointed, but I decided to try to make it work, mostly because I didn't want to wait for another class/dog if there was no female available among the dogs in that class string. I'm a terrible cane traveler, and Awesome was already settling in with her adoptive family. One of the reasons I didn't want a male was that I didn't want to have to deal with "marking". Poplar did try it once we got home, but figured out pretty quickly that it was not to his advantage to continue the behavior."

Nevertheless, Cary appreciates the support she has received from her school. Carey: "I don't know what I would have done without the wonderfully supportive, caring staff. When I needed an ear, a hug, advice or validation, I always knew where to go: I was never disappointed. I retired four dogs in five years. It was one of the most difficult times in my life. In my lowest moments, I felt I must be doing something wrong. The truth is, that no one was at fault; there was nothing that I, or anyone at my school, could or should have done differently. The things that happened were simply beyond our control."

Maintaining open communication and bonds of trust with trainers at schools often helps graduates feel supported when they make difficult decisions. Many of the participants expressed appreciation for the trainers who visited them in their homes and helped them make decisions to end working relationships. Having a trainer observe her and Endive working helped Penny make a choice to retire him. Penny: "I had the trainer come out to watch
Endive and me work. She said that his work was excellent, but he was working too slowly. … I move fast, and Endive was just too slow. People did not help when they questioned my decision to retire Endive. He seemed fine to them. Having the school back me up on my decision to retire him really helped."

Some of the participants told me that they did not think their schools did enough to prepare them for ending working relationships. Randy thinks schools should do more to prepare blind people for the realities of having to end working relationships. Randy: "My first guide worked for 10 full years and died in my home. It was so traumatic that I very nearly refused to apply to receive another guide dog. My second guide dog worked for 6 years and suddenly lost his own sight. A year or two after retiring him, he died in my front yard. Again, the experience is so traumatic that I sometimes feel that guide dog schools are negligent for not preparing students for this experience in any way and for not providing adequate services for those who lose their guides by whatever cause. My third guide dog only worked two years and was retired for inappropriateness for the work. Again, I should have rejected her in the first six months, but the experience of losing a guide dog is so difficult, I tried in vain to make the relationship work for a couple of years. I am only 4 months into the successor dog relationship now. I feel pretty certain that this will be my last, simply because I find building the relationship to be such a great investment and, though the good working years are truly invaluable, the ending experience simply swings the overall balance of the experience too far toward the unpleasant side."

Because of a disturbing experience he had when one of his retired guide dogs passed away, Randy believes that schools should provide detailed education and preparation for graduates. Randy: "That would include education and preparation for the retirement and the death of guide dogs. Schools should prepare us for both. I had a dead dog in my house, and I did not know what to do with the body. Who should I call: the police, the fire department? How could I go through thousands of dollars worth of training to get a guide dog and not know what to do with my dog's body?"

According to Katherine Schneider(a retired clinical psychologist who has written on ending working relationships with guides and has much experience with retiring her own guide dogs), staff at guide dog schools should focus attention on retirement when people are in class to get a successor. "Because if a person is having trouble moving through the grieving process, the bonding process with the new dog can be adversely effected…Left overs from a previous dog can get in the way of accepting a new dog. In the business, we call it second-dog syndrome, but second-dog syndrome can happen with any dog. Schools should put articles about retirement in newsletters. If a counselor is available at the school, the counselor should call people before they go to class to see how they are dealing with the ending…I do not think one transition group meeting during class is enough…Having articles available at schools for students to read during class is also a good idea because some people don't want to talk." Speaking about the role of instructors during a difficult ending, she said, "My perception is they know it is hard for people to retire their guide dogs, and the way they choose to deal with hard is to not deal with it unless someone is a meltdown: which may be too late and not always public" (Personal Communication, January 25, 2006).

Nationally known activists in the assistance dog movement Ed and Toni Eames both support having grief counseling available at schools. Ed: "A lot of schools have started having grief counseling sessions for folks getting successor dogs. You need to have trained people doing it. The counseling staff needs to be separate from the instructional staff (Personal Communication, January 29, 2006). Expanding options for training with guide dogs could benefit many potential and current blind partners of guide dogs. Most of the schools require blind individuals to travel from their homes to live at residential training centers for two weeks to a month to train with guide dogs. Attending residential training programs is unpleasant for some, and some have difficulty leaving work, family, or other responsibilities to go away for training.

Randy did not like taking a month out of his life to live at a school to train with a guide dog. After staying at a school to get his first guide dog, he switched to a school that offered options for home training. Randy: "I always half joke that one of the worst parts of getting a guide dog is being locked up in prison with a bunch of other blind people."

Ruth: "My school is very nice—even when we disagree. The staff tries to get me a new dog as quickly as possible. The school gave me home training with my last dog, and the home training option helped a lot."

Having a choice to train with a guide dog at home instead of traveling to a school could prevent difficulties with employers. Lynn: "My work never got in the way of me going away for training for a new dog until I got my fifth dog. I had explained to my boss that I needed time off for training, and my boss was very upset. I almost did not get my fifth dog because getting away from work was so hard, but after appealing to human resources and upper management, I did get the time off."
In some cases, expanding options for home training could help parents not be forced to choose between their needs for mobility and their children's needs. I delayed getting my first guide dog for several years because I did not want to leave my children to go away to train with a dog for a month. When I did go away to train with my first guide dog, my children were seven and nine. Leaving them in the care of family for a month was terribly painful for my children and me.

Brightwater: “I was nursing my daughter when I decided to return to train with my second guide dog. My daughter was only fifteen-months-old when I left for class. I weaned her sooner than either of us was prepared to handle. I lived in an area where I did not feel safe traveling with my cane, so felt I had no choice.”

The role of the veterinarian

Clark: "Having a guide dog is a major way to get independence. Yes, that independence is kind of expensive, with vet bills and so on, but that independence is worth the price. I love these dogs, every one of them. I tell other visually impaired people to get one: even if they are expensive. Having the privilege to work with them is unreal."

Within the community of blind people who are partnered with guide dogs, the belief that veterinarians treat both members of a working team is common. When a guide dog is unable to work because of serious health problems, the dog's blind partner often faces inhibited mobility and reduced access to daily activities. Veterinarians are often called upon to provide preventative and diagnostic care, dispense health advice, make blind partners aware of serious health concerns, provide advice about when to retire a guide, and/or support both members of a team through euthanasia.

In some cases, a skillful veterinarian can keep a team working: despite a guide's serious medical problems. Receiving treatments for arthritis from a veterinary acupuncturist has made it possible for Lily to continue enjoying her work well past when Lily would have had to retire without the acupuncture. However, my limited income prevents me from being able to afford the care Lily needs. Fortunately, Lily's veterinarian has been willing to donate her services to keep Lily working, but many veterinarians cannot offer their services for free.

When Sarah's first guide dog, Buttercup, started having seizures a few months after the two were partnered, a veterinarian's careful attention to prescribing medications that controlled Buttercup's seizures without interfering with the dog's ability to work kept the two working together for eight years. Sarah: “When the seizures began, I had her just long enough to bond, and I did not want to give her up. Luckily, she responded to the medication and was able to keep working.”

Regular injections in Oak's eyes to prevent blindness kept Randy's second guide working for several years before Oak finally went blind. Talking about bringing Oak to the vet for the injections, Randy recalled, "It was such a gruesome thing to watch. I had to hold him down during the treatments, but I was so proud of him. He never moved. He was always still. He was so good."

Radiation treatments at a veterinary hospital allowed Lynn to extend her fourth guide's life for a year after Syringa was diagnosed with cancer. During one of Syringa's stays in a veterinary hospital, a deaf veterinary student stayed up late at night and studied as she hand-fed Syringa through a feeding tube. When the student was asked why she went through such extraordinary measures to care for Syringa, she just replied, "She's a guide dog. " Lynn was able to keep working Syringa lightly until the last three months of Syringa's life. Lynn paid for Syringa's treatments by using a loan program at her school that allows graduates to request to borrow money for unusual medical expenses. The graduates must agree to pay back the loans with monthly payments, but the loans are interest-free.

After nearly a year of returning to her veterinarian's office to have Orchid treated for bladder infections and incontinence, Carey's veterinarian finally did an exploratory surgery and discovered that Orchid had a malformed bladder. Since most schools do not assist graduates with veterinary expenses, Carey was fortunate to receive financial assistance for veterinary bills from her school. Carey: “I made lots of vet visits. At first, I was paying the bills on my own. Once surgery became necessary, I asked my school to pay for that; they also reimbursed me for some of the other medical bills. Orchid was my dog; my responsibility. I finally asked for help because the surgery was very expensive and because we suspected, and then knew, that Orchid needed to be retired.”

The role of the veterinarian can be especially important when decisions must be made about euthanasia.

The first step in making a decision that you can live with is to get a good assessment of your guide's condition from a trusted veterinarian. Some doctors will tell you when it's time but most believe that only you can make this most important decision (Samco, Retrieved January 18, 2006).
Scuba and her vet were very close. Always crazy about food, Scuba knew that she could mooch a virtually unlimited number of cookies from the vet during her office visits. The vet would always say, "I shouldn't be doing this," before tossing a cookie in the air for Scuba to catch. Scuba was a month away from her thirteenth birthday when I brought her to her vet for what began as a checkup and ended as Scuba's last visit to one of her favorite people. That day, I had noticed that Scuba was lethargic, and I was concerned because she refused to eat for the first time I knew her. When the vet told me that Scuba was seriously ill with internal bleeding and what looked like a fast-acting cancer in her stomach, I decided not to make Scuba suffer. I made the decision to have Scuba euthanized that day. The vet did not try to influence my decision in any way, but she did provide her support when I made the decision. When I started crying before the procedure, I am glad that the vet knew Scuba and me well enough to urge me not to be upset, for Scuba's sake. I did not want to alarm Scuba, and I am glad that I held myself together until after Scuba passed. The vet and I cried together after Scuba passed. I did not stop crying for days, and I appreciated the fact that the vet and family members took care of all the details regarding Scuba's cremation.

Endive lived with Penny for over two years after he retired. After a long battle with cancer, Penny made the difficult choice to end her beloved partner's suffering with euthanasia. Penny: "He could not evacuate his bowels... It has been over two years now, and I cried for days before and weeks after. I still grieve for him."

Ed and Toni Eames have given presentations about guide dogs at every veterinary school in the United States and in several veterinary schools abroad. They had much to share about the role of veterinarians. When I asked them if they include advice about dealing with blind clients who are ending working relationships in their presentations, Toni answered, "We do not give advice because some people have good people skills, and some people do not. We can only tell them what it has been like for us. We give no advice: just facts" (Personal Communication, January 29, 2006).

Ed Eames provided an example of how he conveys the importance of a working relationship and the veterinarian's role in a working relationship. Ed: "Echo was going blind, and I needed a vet to clearly tell me that working him was not safe. I kept asking different veterinary ophthalmologists at different schools, where we traveled to give presentations, if Echo was safe. I got a lot of equivocations. Then, I finally took Echo to a vet who emphatically said that I was risking myself and my dog by working Echo. When I was emphatically told that I was putting us both in danger, that is when I retired Echo. The vet has a great responsibility to keep a partnership going, but the vet also has a responsibility to let the blind person know when it is time to retire a dog. The blind person has the responsibility of educating a veterinarian about what the guide dog does so that the vet can provide clear answers" (Personal Communication, January 29, 2006).

Lena Contreras discovered that the number one reason for early retirement among her participants' guide dogs was medical problems (2003). Ed and Toni Eames promote increasing financial support to assist disabled individuals with veterinary expenses for their assistance dogs.

Since two-thirds of disabled Americans are unemployed or underemployed, they constitute the most impoverished segment of society. Many live on the federal Supplemental Security Income program, which provides less than $500 a month.

Although veterinary care has not skyrocketed to the extent of human medical costs, it still represents a major investment for those at the lowest end of the income spectrum. Veterinary costs, combined with the cost of providing a high quality dog food, have been economic deterrents for many disabled people considering partnership with assistance dogs. It would be unfair to place the financial burden of reducing the costs of medical care for assistance dogs exclusively on the backs of veterinary practitioners, who are not the most highly paid medical professionals. We have called upon the pharmaceutical companies and dog food manufacturers to help defray the costs of care for assistance dogs. (Eames & Eames, 2004, p. 103).

In addition, Ed Eames believes that schools should do more to help students with veterinary expenses. Ed: "Personally, I do think that guide dog schools should provide more money for veterinary care. Only one currently offers an annual allowance for veterinary care. Making funds available to graduates to provide medical care for their guide dogs should be part of the schools' fund-raising efforts... Providing funding for veterinary care is a good investment to keep a team working as long as possible. When the schools put such huge investments into teams to train them, it would seem to me on a purely financial basis that you would want to spend even a thousand a year to keep a team working" (Personal Communication, January 29, 2006).
Conclusion

As I listened to numerous heart-wrenching accounts about the retirement or death of beloved guide dogs while gathering data for this research, my level of respect for the bond of mutual trust and dependency that develops between blind humans and highly-trained canines who work together as teams increased. The personal accounts that were contributed for this research reveal a myriad of hardships associated with the ending of working relationships; nevertheless, these narratives are not intended to be representative of all blind individuals’ experiences.

By making personal stories public through this exploratory work, I am concluding this project with more questions than I had when I began this research. How can staff at schools improve communication with students and graduates about behavior and other problems exhibited by dogs before, during, and after being partnered? What can schools offer to effectively prepare and assist staff, students, and graduates with ending working relationships? Do schools need to expand home-training options? What can be done to increase blind individuals' options for paying for veterinary care for their guides? How can veterinarians be prepared to treat guide dogs and their partners as working units? Can objective criteria for basic physical and working standards be developed and used to help guide decisions about ending working relationships? Should schools or consumer organizations of the blind create memorials to honor deceased guide dogs?

Lena Contreras found that the average working time for the guide dogs in her study was 4.8 years (2003). I did not average the working time of the guide dogs in my study because my sample was not representative. Lena Contreras and I both used email lists to recruit our participants, and we both want to see future researchers go beyond email lists to recruit participants (2003). If the average working life of a guide dog is around five years, most guides are retiring when they are approximately seven-years-old. Is it reasonable to expect guides to work longer? If dogs can work longer, why are they not doing so now? If on average dogs cannot realistically be expected to work longer, potential and seasoned guide dog partners should be told so that they can make informed choices. At the very least, people associated with the guide dog community should avoid promoting arbitrary expectations for how long guide dogs can work (Schneider, Personal Communication, January 25, 2006).

I began this project with the presumption that a lack of research about the ending of working relationships has, likely, contributed to a lack of awareness of barriers many blind people face. I suspected that beyond emotional barriers, many blind people face social, economic, family, and other hindrances during the process of ending working relationships, but my literature review leads me to believe that few barriers have been identified through research. Difficulties leaving family or work to attend training at guide dog schools, costly veterinary care, and inadequate preparation and support for ending working relationships are some of the barriers that I identified during this research. Consumer organizations, such as Guide Dog Users, Inc. (GDUI) and National Association of Guide Dog Users (NAGDU) need to work together with schools to remove the social and economic barriers many blind individuals encounter when their guide dogs retire or pass away. If lack of funding prevents schools from expanding home-training and veterinary-assistance for blind people, consumer organizations and individual graduates from schools need to become more involved with fund raising and pushing their schools into expanding services. Both NAGDU (NAGDU Mentoring Program, Retrieved February 27, 2006) and GDUI (GDUI Empathizers Program, Retrieved February 27, 2006) provide peer-support counseling for people who are dealing with the retirement or death of their guide dogs; however, all schools should have professional grief counselors on staff who provide comprehensive preparation, training, and support for ending working relationships to blind students and staff.

The people who contributed to this project provided diverse perspectives, and their voices describe a broad range of experiences with the ending of working relationships. As a descriptive work, this research is intended to inspire awareness and more research. Sharing personal experiences to raise individual and institutional awareness and to make the personal political has been an effective and accepted practice among feminists for over four decades (Rosen, 2001). While common themes reoccurred during the interviews, and my literature review, those common themes reflect much diversity, because despite similar events peoples experiences and perspectives are unique. I hope what has been described in this work will initiate individual and institutional changes and will inspire others to expand upon the many questions that emerged from this exploration using descriptive realism.
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References


Cubans in Costa Rica: A Collection of Life Stories

Adriana Solis Black: McNair Scholar

Dr. Robert McCarl III: Mentor

Department of Anthropology

Abstract

This ethnographic essay examines the experiences of Cuban immigrants living in Costa Rica. The study aims to examine the degree of adjustment, adaptation, integration and/or assimilation of Cubans living in the small city of San Isidro del General in southern Costa Rica. This group represents a minor body of immigrants for whom Costa Rica serves as a country of first asylum and potentially as their new, adoptive homeland. Some major theoretical considerations and analytic themes that emerge out of this work are the issues of immigrant identity through the displaced people’s perspective; issues of separation from one culture and introduction to a new one; and issues of integration, adaptation or assimilation to the host culture. Other analytic themes that emerge in this research relate to politics, occupational adjustments, inter-ethnic relations, family relations, socio-economic status, education, employment, the personal perceptions of the United States and also of the Costa Rican government’s care of the migrant population.

Introduction

Collecting oral histories is a practice that binds scholarship with activism; the oral histories of exiles is both a contribution to knowledge production and a practice of resistance against the loss of identity of diasporic peoples. In focusing my work on interviews conducted in Costa Rica, I seek to explore material that focused on two different contexts. First, I want to produce ethnographies and life histories told by the people themselves as unfiltered and unedited as possible. I want my research to become a channel through which the participants could convey their message, their story, their accomplishments, hopes, frustrations and everything that had led them to this point in their life. The second context has to do with a less personal account of the stories in favor of a more academic take of these life histories. I am interested in exploring “diaspora” and the cultural boundaries that became a theme throughout the conversations I had with each of the participants.

The concept of diaspora

Diaspora is defined by Östen Wahlberg as “a concept used to describe various well-established communities that have experienced ‘displacement’” (Wahlberg, 229). A more extensive, yet more thorough and precise definition of this concept is presented by William Safran who describes it as:

“Expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors have been dispersed from a specific, original ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral’ or foreign regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another; and
their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (extracted from Wahlberg’s paper p. 231). (Safran 1991:83-4 from the 1st issue of the journal Diaspora).

Based on this definition and in order to be able to thoroughly analyze the internal process of relocation and resettlement of Cuban refugees in Costa Rica, this concept allowed me to better focus my attention while engaging in conversations with interviewees that resulted in emerging topics such as alienation and insulation, sense of belonging, home sickness and loneliness.

The Cuban exodus

“I left Cuba during the first year after Castro took over due to the fact that there were too many ideological differences between his regime and me. I like to express my perspectives and my points of view freely, without a care in the world and that’s why I was arrested twice in less than six months. I’d had enough, so I left” (Mario – citation referred to interview logs in appendix)

Since the revolutionary movement of Fidel Castro in 1959, Cubans have been exiting the island pretty much non-stop. According to Diaz-Briquets, “close to ten percent of the Cuban population (including those native to Cuba and their foreign-born descendants), or between 1.20 and 1.25 million Cubans, can be grossly estimated to have been living outside the country in 1990, mostly in the United States (1.053 million)” (Diaz-Briquets, 415). People disenchanted with the new regime began leaving for a variety of reasons. A primary reason of the upper classes and later of all other classes was both political and economic (Diaz-Briquets 1997, 416). After the fall of communism in Russia in the early 1990s Cuba experienced an immense economic crisis, followed by a deep desire for a change in regime. People that continue to oppose it found their way away from Cuba into other countries, Costa Rica,

I shipped my girlfriend (who soon after became my wife) off to the United States in a plane the day before I had planned to leave the island because I was afraid they would find out I was planning to leave and keep her there. I left the following day and by the next month I had already reunited with my mom, my dad and my siblings in Miami” (Mario)

Other aspects found in the literature have to do with the importance of family ties abroad and the general idea of family to Cuban immigrants/refugees. Having family abroad becomes a strong motivation to leave behind the economic hardships of the island in hopes of a reunion with loved ones as well as a motivation to better their economic status. Almost all of those who leave Cuba will not be able to return. This happens because the Cuban government reinforces a, “political intransigence, travel restrictions, and refusal to grant those few Cubans contemplating a permanent return the right to do so” (Diaz-Briquets, 418). This causes an absence of return migration as well as the unification of Cuban families abroad. Isolation reinforces the capacity to retain many characteristics of Cuban culture, even when separated from Cuba and contact with other Cuban nationals.

Michael M.J. Fischer argues that, “ethnicity is not something passed on from generation to generation to generation taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided” (Fischer, 195). Acculturation for the interviewed Cuban immigrants in Costa Rica is a perfect example for this argument. This generation of immigrants has re-made the pattern of culture in their image to fit their own needs. Acculturation then does not result in a homogeneous social unity but rather becomes a process of fractionalizing and breaking things up into a new pattern that serves the needs of the individual rather than those of the community as a whole. Costa Rican culture then did not consume the pattern of identity of these Cubans but rather lent elements of it to the individual who then amalgamates them to the ones they already carry within themselves to serve individual purposes. Though Cubans are impacted on the daily basis by the host culture by Costa Rican culture, this interaction has not changed the core ideas of the ethnicity they have internalized. They have successfully integrated themselves to an ethnic group similar, but not the same as the one they came from. They have been able to participate in the culture without feeling marginalized. They have found work, established families and relationships with Costa Ricans and peoples of all other nationalities.
Costa Rica and its refugee population

Why Costa Rica to conduct this study? Costa Rica has had a long relationship with migratory groups. For the last few decades, Costa Rica has seen large migratory flows from various Latin American countries such as Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador and most recently, Nicaragua and Colombia. Thousands of immigrants from the last two nations have entered the country in a mass migration due to the recent economic and political status. In Costa Rica, the United Nations established ACNUR or United Nation’s High Commissioner for the Refugee Populations in 1983 to help provide the country with a “backbone” to ensure the right treatment and protection of these migratory groups. In addition to this office, many other governmental entities such as the Oficina de Refugiados (Office for the Refugees) of the Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería (General Office of Immigration and Foreign Affairs), the Departamento de Migración para los Refugiados (Department of Migration for Refugees) formed to tend to the needs of refugee populations. After many of the wars and dictatorships in Central and South America came to an end, many of the immigrants returned to their countries, causing these governmental entities to either close their doors or be reduced to a minimal amount of activity. (“Diagnóstico sobre el grado de integración” 2002, 14). According to the ACNUR, after Ecuador, Costa Rica is the second country in Latin America that receives the most applications for refugee status.

Methods

Due to the lack of availability of Cubans in rural Costa Rica, the interviews conducted for this project were randomly selected by seeking out Cuban nationals and allowing those willing to participate a time and a place to talk, knowing what the research was about. In total, seven native Cubans were interviewed in a five-week period in the small town of San Isidro, South Costa Rica. The interviews were conducted either at the home of the participants, at their places of work or in a public space. The range of those interviewed was wide, varying from trained professionals, such as a middle aged doctor, a philologist, a retired professional boxer, an elderly woman from rural Cuba, a mechanic, a former airport radio controller, a former school teacher and an administrative assistant. Topics discussed varied according to the interests and life experiences of the respondents. An interview guide was created to address specific issues that dealt with their situation in Cuba prior to migrating to Costa Rica, their opinions on the Costa Rican system and its government, issues related to family, relationships with other Cubans in the community, their integration to the Costa Rican society and culture and their thoughts on a post-Castro Cuba and the possibility of a return migration.

Themes found in the research

As a result of the interviews conducted, a series of themes emerged. Some of the most prevalent themes will be developed further while others will be left as open-ended questions that will require further research. The main themes to be developed as individual categories in this body of work are as follows: experiences in Cuba prior to departure, the migration experience, life in Costa Rica: the processes of integration and acculturation; this includes, but is not limited to: individual perceptions and emotions, family life, contrast between the Costa Rican and Cuban cultures and the lack of association with other Cubans in the area. Also, I will briefly address the sentiment towards the Costa Rican government and policies and the idea of the economic betterment vs. the intellectual stimulation and the sentiments of Cubans in Costa Rica towards the stereotype of Cubans residing in the United States.

Experiences of people in Cuba before leaving

For many of the people interviewed, the main reason why they left Cuba was not physical persecution from the government, as many might think.

“My situation in Cuba was normal, just like any other person there, I worked as a doctor, but I decided to leave to better my economic situation.” (JC)
“I come from a hard-working family, people that work to earn a living, honest people that didn’t intervene in politics, they had no interest in politics or anything like that, my family were normal people...leaving Cuba is something everyone aspires to. I didn’t leave because I was politically prosecuted specifically, because nobody was after me, but I did leave to try to improve my life economically and to get my daughter out of there, give her more options” (quoted Vivian).

The main reasons that surfaced during the interviews had to do with political issues and also with a desire to better their economic status. When politics and economics are two strong reasons as to why people decide to move on to a different country in search of a better life, the lines between the two reasons become blurred. Because the political situation has been about the same in Cuba since the fall of Russian communism in the early 1990s, and the economy of the country significantly declined, most of those interviewed declared their main reason for leaving to be an economic one. However at least three of the people made comments on their political situation, this being their first motivator for leaving.

“My situation in Cuba was quite disenchanting, I became very depressed and even began to lose the desire to live. This is all provoked by the political situation there. I just couldn’t tolerate it anymore. Communism forces people to live a life of double morals and double standards. People have to learn to go against their morality and do things nobody else in the world would do in order to survive. These things people do are discouraged and punished by the government, but sometimes this is the only way to survive.” (Guillermo)

The immigration experience

Anyone who leaves the island and does not return is considered a traitor and therefore stripped of citizenship and, technically, all ties to Cuba.

“When you leave Cuba, you renounce all your constitutional rights, everything. In my house the government emissaries counted everything inside, down to the spoons and forks, all utensils and everything was left in an inventory, I couldn’t give anything away, now, it belonged to the government... I couldn’t say tomorrow I’m going back to live in Cuba. No. I would have to ask for permission to the government and they would have to analyze my case, because I renounced to living in Cuba... I can go back and visit, but I can’t make the decision to return to live that easily.” (Vivian)

Even if you go through the appropriate paperwork and leave the island with the permission and support of the Cuban government, traveling back becomes an arduous and difficult task full of restrictions and bureaucratic paper trails. While some Cubans arrived to Costa Rica with the full support of relatives already established in the country, others arrived to a completely new country with no support. So is the case of athletes and artists, who are a small privileged class in Cuba. Because of their professional status, they count with the full support of the government to leave the island for work purposes. These people who then chose to stay in a different country and not return to Cuba as required, lose the capacity to ever return to island, so the choice is made consciously knowing there will be severe consequences to the decision. This is also the case for any other professionals exiting the island for tourism purposes who choose to not return.

Happiness and the sense of home

The issue of happiness and Costa Rica as a new homeland is relative to most of the interviewed.

“You ask if I am happy here and that’s a hard question to answer. I’m partly happy. One is never content. One is “happy”, sure, though one would like to be with relatives, in the neighborhood you grew up in, with brothers, sisters, mom,
dad, everyone, but the situation there does not allow for one to have those freedoms as a human being in that country... I don’t like to think about it, because when I think I’m not happy here, I look around at all the freedoms I have and I realize that I chose to be here, and that makes me happy.” (Roberto)

Even though the process of integration into the Costa Rican culture and community was relatively easy for all of them, the issue of having family away and the issue of not being able to visit, or visiting with lots of restrictions, resonated with all of them. Also, the difficult conditions in Cuba discourage people living in Costa Rica from visiting their relatives. This is a great source of sadness for all of those interviewed.

Overall, there seemed to be an air of easiness coming from the participants of this research. The idea of living in a different place than that they came from was not at all a burden and many times it was rather a relief. Though there is still plenty of grief over leaving loved ones living in less than ideal conditions, a number of interviewees also recognized that it was very much a personal choice. They felt at ease with their choice to leave Cuba and the fact that they could never return to live there and possibly never see some family members again.

These people have been able to adapt to the Costa Rican culture while still retaining a lot of their own traditions and customs. Their personal concept of ethnicity had become malleable, allowing for aspects from the host culture to ideas of ethnicity to become part of the ideas they have known all their life. This creates an amalgamation of ethnicity and culture that works for each individual, but not necessarily for the whole group of Cuban immigrants.

Process of acculturation: How does a Cuban adapt to life in Costa Rica?

To many of the interviewed, adapting to the Costa Rican culture was made easier because they already had members of their family living there. For those who did not have family around, the transition seemed to be just as easy, because they felt that there were strong similarities between the two cultures.

“To tell you the truth I didn’t feel that there are that many differences, some of the ones I noticed the most when I first arrived were the temperament of the people, you know, us Cubans have a stereotype to be loud, and here people are more paused, calmer, more amicable, more controlled, all that. I also noticed that some of the words I’m used to using could be taken offensively here, and vice versa, I had to learn the lingo of the ticos (Costa Ricans). In reality, these are all just small details” (Vivian).

A strong sense of Cubanismo (sense of national pride) prevailed through every single interview. One man explained how to him, Castro had learned to manipulate this national sentiment to reinforce his doctrine. He also explained that the inherent pride of being Cuban is not a pride of the government, but rather a pride attached to the history of the country, to their ancestors and their culture as a whole. Although feelings of frustration and blame to the government for the decay of the island and the struggles of the Cuban population were prevalent amongst all the interviewed, a deep love and respect for their homeland and for those who remain in it became a common thread.

“I am first Cuban, second, Cuban and lastly Cuban, and I will be Cuban even after I’ve died, even if they bury me here, away from her. In the grave I will continue to be Cuban” (Roberto).

The United States

The one Cuban interviewed that had resided in the U.S for almost forty years before deciding to retire in Costa Rica conveyed that he had never integrated well to the U.S. culture and lifestyle, hence the decision to move to a country with a culture similar to his. He said,

“I do not want to seem ungrateful to the U.S. by any means because, after all, this is the place that welcomed me and my family when I had nowhere else to go. What I’m saying is that I never felt as part of the American people, I never felt integrated and I always knew where my place was.” (Mario)

When asked why they chose a Latin American country over the United States, which many of them confirm having extended family members at, most of the responses had to do with the difficulty with the language
and also with the ability to find work within their professional field.

“First of all, I don’t think in the U.S I would have had as easy of an entrance as I did here, where I didn’t have any problems at all. Second because of the language barrier and third, because I didn’t want to loose my ties to my professional career and the incorporation to the field of medicine in the United States would have been a lot more arduous that it was here.” (JC)

Cubans in the U.S., more specifically those living in Miami of an older generation were mentioned in a few different occasions. Cubans in Costa Rica seemed to be looking to stay away from the stereotypical image of the Cuban in Miami waiting for Fidel’s regime to fall to reclaim the land. This general feeling of Cubans living in Miami waiting the fall of the Castro regime to go back to Cuba and reclaim it as their own is somewhat troubling and I am not sure what they based their claims upon. Perhaps they base these fears upon the belief that the first exodus from Cuba was by the wealthiest people of Habana, who were supporters of the corrupt government of Fulgencio Batista, who had created a severe bridge between those who were well off and those who became known as the “desposeidos” or those who had lost it all (Montaner, p 49). These affluent people were able to preserve their money but not their land, but continued to have ties to the island and in time, they believe that they can go back and reclaim the properties that once belonged to them. This would return Cuba to the way it was before Castro (Carlos Alberto Montaner, p. 84). These people fear that Cuba will fall out of one hard regime and into another one that would be much too similar to that of Batista, before the revolutionary movement lead by Fidel Castro, which took Batista out of the commanding chair and moved Castro into it in 1959.

The Costa Rican government and people

For those who spoke about the Costa Rican government, the sense was that the system is fair and the paperwork and requirements to become a resident of the country are fair. All the interviewed had at least residency status, which was a fairly simple process initiated either by themselves upon arrival or by a relative with a Costa Rican citizenship through a process of reclamation. For those who arrived because of business and stayed, they received support through amnesty as asylees and were able to establish residency within a few months. An interesting piece of criticism towards the Costa Rican government was not towards the immigration system, as I would have imagined, but rather towards the lack of support of professional artists and the arts as a whole in Costa Rica. The message conveyed was that, even though in Costa Rica there is plenty of room to improve financially, there is an immense lack of support for personal betterment leading to continuous professional improvement.

“Even though in Cuba the situation is hard, the government has always supported the sports and the arts. There, it is mandatory for you to keep up to date with your professional field of studies, and the government pays for you to attend workshops, including food, transportation and housing on top of your full salary while you are away in training and this often happens once a year. Here, though there are plenty of opportunities to work, once you incorporate yourself to the workforce continuing to improve your professional self and staying up to date in your field is entirely up to you, and there is no support from the government to do so.” (Eric)

Conclusions

This research draws a lot of parallels with the works studied in the literature review. Although the material read did not specifically address the issues of Cubans living in rural Costa Rica, it is observed that there are strong parallels in the findings of prior research done amongst Cuban populations and my own body of work. The reasons why migration occurred, issues of integration into and adaptation to the new community, how these people deal with the absence of family and the seeking of family members abroad, the issue of reverse migration are all common themes amongst the work already done and my own. Though far more work needs to be developed still in the topic, this particular research attempts to shine a light on the experiences lived by Cuban immigrants fleeing their
beloved homeland in search of economic stability, a place where they can safely voice their opinions and a better life for their families.

Based on my personal experiences as a Costa Rican immigrant now in the United States, I too share a lot of similar experiences to the ones described in this work. In many ways, my experiences integrating into the American culture vary greatly from the Cuban’s experience integrating into the Costa Rican culture and in many ways the experiences are almost the same. The idea of family in the United States is far different than that of most people in Latin America. This was the single most challenging thing I had to grasp. Just like those Cubans in Costa Rica, I too hold dearly my sense of identity as a Costa Rican and although I have successfully integrated to many of the aspects of the American lifestyle and culture, I have retained my core identity not only as a Costa Rican, but also as a member of the Latino culture. Happiness to me, as conveyed to me by those interviewed, is relative. I find joy in what I do and enjoy my life as much as I can, but I am also very aware of the fact that I am living in a different country, as part of a society that is not the one I was raised in, and that many times becomes a difficult thing to do. However, far harder than living out of touch with people that share similar cultural background as yourself, is living separated from your family. Each day that goes by I think of them, wonder what they are doing, how they are and when I will get to see them again. A simple everyday happenings such as running an errand or going to a movie theater provides me with the opportunity to daydream as to what that experiences could be like if only I was with my family if they were here to share it with me. I have lived in the United States now for over eight years and the feelings of separation from my family have not changed one bit.

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References


**Works Cited**


**Appendix**

**Eric, interview conducted on [date] at his place of residence in San Isidro.**

A: Cual era su situación en Cuba?
E: Yo en Cuba tenia una situación privilegiada. Quienes son los que tienen privilegio en Cuba? Los militares, los artistas y los deportistas. Porque? Los deportistas tienen un hotel en cada provincia, tu te presentas con tu carnet y te venden de todo menos licor y cigarros. Los artistas tienen parecido, en Cuba yo era escritor. En estos hoteles ibamos a congresos, de jurado y nosotros comiamos y dormiamos y firmábamos y el ministerio de cultura pagaba. La desventaja es que los salarios en Cuba son pesimos y no se puede vivir asi. Yo con esa ventaja que tenia lograba escapar algunos dias del mes de mi desventura, pero eso no lo pasaban otras personas. Acá hay una diferencia, en Cuba, el conocimiento es un valor, se puede avanzar por conocimiento, la gente escoge estudiar lo que de veras quieren estudiar porque el salario es malo en todas partes, asi que no importa lo que estudies. Aquí los estudiantes estudian carreras donde puedan encontrar trabajo.

A: Hace cuanto vive en Costa Rica?
E: 9 años

A: Salio solo de Cuba?
E: mira, yo vine en funcion profesional, invitado por la universidad nacional, a dar un circulo de conferencias de literatura infantil y me quedé. Ahora, yo tengo un problema grave, a mi no me calzan las materias de allá con las de aquí. Yo estudio filología, pero mi énfasis es diferente al que ofrecen en este pais. Entonces aquí yo no tengo mi titulo y no puedo tener trabajo en mi area. A pesar de que que he reclamado, aun no he podido que me equivalgan mi titulo de Cuba a pesar de que tengo muchísimas obras publicadas aquí, en España, por medio de la UNESCO, he sido profesor en congresos internacionales. A: a pesar de las dificultades que ha tenido en el ambito profesional, que otras cosas ha encontrado difíciles para adaptarse?
E: ese ha sido la única dificultad, pero lo que pasa es que eso me limita en todo. A mi me sale el sueldo normal por mes por la mitad de lo que le sale a un profesor universitario tico. Yo pensaba que si me quedaba eso era lo que yo me iba a ganar tambien, pero eso no paso.

A: Porque escogio Costa Rica?
E: lo que pasa es que los cubanos no tenemos los medios para pagarnos nuestro propio pasage, entonces el ministerio de cultura es el que paga. Yo sali en el 96 despues de que se cae el comunismo en el mundo, entonces todo se hizo muy dificil, yo tenia la opcion de salir a España pero me dieron que ese no me lo podian pagar pero para Costa Rica si, entonces me vine para acá, tambien yo tenia otra vision del mundo, yo pensaba que el arte se apoyaba mas en estos paises, pero no es asi. En el sistema comunista el arte tiene prioridad. Por eso digo que tiene cosas muy buenas y otras no. En cuba lo malo es que no hay libertad de expresión no hay, no hay elecciones, entonces compensan por otros medios a los profesionales, permitiendo que continuen avanzando en sus carreras mientras se les paga, etc.

A: Esto es algo ambiguo, porque a pesar de que se les permite avanzar en la educación, no se les permite opinar. Entonces tienes un pais de gente altamente educada, pero que no puede ejercer el derecho de expresión, que es la manera de transmitir esa educación que han recibido.

E: si, esto es muy contradictorio. Pero uno si aprende a opinar. Por ejemplo en Cuba la diferencia entre los examenes es que te permiten elaborar ensayos por donde puedes llenar hojas llenas de tu opinion, aprendes a argumentar, en vez de memorizar. La cosa de la opinion no es tan grave, a menos que decidan formar un partido politico, etc.

A: (me habla de su obra, me habla de eventos culturales que suceden en el area)

A: Se comunica con su familia en Cuba?
E: con mi hijo y mi hermana por correo electronico.

A: (me cuenta la anécdota del Che Guevara, la relacion entre el Che, Camilo, y Fidel)
A: de que parte de Cuba es ud.?
Guillermo, interview conducted on [date] at La Casita coffee shop

G: mi situacion en cuba era muy desagradable, el comunismo es algo muy desagradable que hasta mata los deseos de vivir. Margina a la persona por completo, existe una ausencia de Dios, y aquello niega a Dios. Mucho de los cubanos que aman a Dios tienen que negar su existencia y burlarse de él, lo que hacen es practicar la religión, pero deben adorarse al comunismo. Por esto, para recibir algunas ventajas para poder vivir un poco mejor, entonces la gente que no quiere ser mentirosa en esta vida, la persona que no quiere vivir una doble moral, tener una doble cara, no debe vivir en Cuba. En cuba debe ser así. Eso lo ves en el campo socialista entero, todo es una mentira. En cuba derechos no existen, en cuba existe una ley que se llama Legalidad Socialista que dice que nadie, nadie esta por encima del estado, el estado esta para velar por todos. El estado se compone de delincuentes… ella por ejemplo existe una ley de expropiación, no existe la propiedad privada, se le da a la gente una propiedad ficticia, la gente que viven en las areas rurales tienen, casita, una finca, siempre y cuando trabajas para el estado. Si la casa faltara para darsela a otro o a ti te sacan de tu casa y se la dan a otro y a ti te ponen en otro lado. No lo hacen tanto pero te ponen donde quiera. El gobierno le pone precio a todo. Por ejemplo el ganado, puedes tenerlo pero no lo puedes comer, el ganado esta inscrito como una persona y si le pasa algo tienes que decir, me lo robo fulano, o la mato fulano porque si no te pueden meter a la carcel por 9 años, hurto te dan de 2 a 4 años, sacrificio, 9 años, te pueden hacer hasta 70 años. El comunismo como tal mata a todo. Ni la naturaleza da fruto en el comunismo. En isla de pino se daban toronjiles y nunca antes había que hacerles nada para recoger unas cosechas maravillosas, y después de que vino el comunismo las plantas no han sobrevivido, con enfermedades, sequia, gomoso, y así, en un país comunista no funciona nada. Además uno no puede hacer nada, se supone que sobre la sociedad solo esta dios, entonces como ellos maltratan y marginan tanto a la sociedad, la sociedad no funciona tampoco, porque? Porque tu ves a gente trabajando sin desear y tratando de causar daño, se trabaja con resentimiento porque estas trabajando para el que te margina. En un país comunista lo que existen son numeros nada mas. Tantos soldados, en tal batalla perdí tanto, tengo tantos tanques, el hombre pasa a ser un numero en una sociedad comunista.

A: a usted le paso algo personalmente para venirse de Cuba?

G: yo siempre quise salir de Cuba. Intente dos veces en balsa, una tuvimos que virar, y la otra cai detenido pero tuve suerte porque no fui preso, nada mas me quitaron las cosas. Estuve en varios planes para salir, pero lo que pasa es que si tu eres el capitán de un barco y te vas a llevar un barco, ves la bola correr, hay gente que cae preso sin haber salido. En esos planes he estado en mas de 40. Mi sobrino se fue tan facil, el estaba pescando y cuando llego un barco montando gente, se monto y se fue. Eso fue en el 92. Se fue así, el y la mujer, embarazada. Llegaron a Gran Caiman.

A: Sin despedirse de nadie? Sin decir nada?

G: que va, mas bien topo con suerte, ningun cubano desaprovecharia esa oportunidad. Preparan tanto los viajes que a veces no salen, pero cualquier barquito pesquero lo mas que puede llevar son 50 personas y a veces hay 300 personas listas para irse. Por eso no se puede avisar.

A: tiene familia en los EEUU?

G: tengo un tío, sobrinos y muchos primos.

A: Le interesa ir a los EEUU?

G: No, ni me agrada. Yo soy de una region pequena y vivo aqui en una region pequena. La vida que me gusta es tranquila.

Sobre todo aqui en Perez.

A: Existe violencia fuerte en Cuba?

G: Si, y la carcel en Cuba es dura. Y existe tanta necesidad que obliga a la gente a prostituirse y vivir esa doble moral que la cualquier gente va a la carcel, sin embargo ir a la carcel especialmente para la gente joven a veces es mejor opcion, porque de joven te meten en la militar, te quiebran el espíritu y te obligan a hacer cosas que no. El ejercito de Cuba no es un ejercito normal. Alla se llama el UMAP (Unidad Militar de Ayuda a la Producción), o sea que eres militar pero tambien vas a producir, entonces te quiebran tanto que cuando lueve y estas durmiendo a las 10 de la noche, te sacan a limpiar trincheras toda la noche para el dia siguiente ir a trabajar un dia normal. No te pagan por estar en el servicio, es obligatorio y de 3 o 2 años.

A: Mantiene relacion con cubanos de la comunidad?
G: muy poco porque habemos pocos cubanos. Cada vez que nos vemos sí pasamos un rato agradable. Yo tengo muy buenas amistades ticas.

A: Se comunica con la familia en Cuba? Puede regresar a visitar?

G: puedo regresar pero no quiero regresar. No he ido de visita desde 1996. Eso es mi criterio. No me gustaría ir porque es ir a verlos sufrir y ellos sufren algo que tu sufriste. Incluso a nosotros nos maltratan si vamos a visitar. Nosotros tenemos que ir a pedir visa por ser traicioneros de la patria. Entonces para que ir a un lugar donde no se te quiere? A ver a la familia pasar necesidad? Mi hermano que tiene 65 años me dice, que si no nos veremos mas nunca, yo tengo fe que sí.

A: han venido ellos aquí?

G: una tía mía nada más. Pero es muy difícil porque este país esta que no aguanta más.

A: Lo oigo decir nuestro país? Se siente adaptado a esta cultura?

G: claro que sí, aquí tengo a mi familia, un niño de 4 años con una costarricense.

A: tiene hijos en Cuba?

G: no.

A: Si su familia no es militante del partido, participo en la contrarrevolución?

G: si, al ser inproductivo, o sea hemos mantenido por años mas de la mitad del país, una huelga de brazos caídos, todo se malgasta para no producir. Entonces cada vez que tienes una oportunidad, lo hace?

A: Sabe el gobierno de esto?

G: claro que si, y las carceles están a mas no dar.

G: en cuba para poder comer hay que robar. El que no roba no es cubano.

A: han venido ellos aquí?

G: una tía mía nada más. Pero es muy difícil porque este país esta que no aguanta más.

A: Cual era su situacion en Cuba? Porque decidio salir?

JC: Normal, como cualquier persona, trabajaba de medico y decidi salir para mejorar mi situacion enconomica.

A: De que parte es?

JC: Camaguey

A: Como siente el proceso de acceptacion en este pais? Porque escogio CR?


A: Se siente bien aquí? Hace cuantos años tiene aquí?

JC: …

A: Cual es la importancia de tener otros cubanos?

JC: yo no tengo relacion con mucha gente. No soy el cubano clasico de la pachanga/ A: Cada cuanto se comunica a cuba?

A: quien quedo en Cuba?

JC: mis padres, mi hermana y la abuela. Ellos no tienen plan de visitar porque yo no puedo ir a cuba ni ellos pueden venir aquí. En eso si estoy enredado.

A: porque …

JC: mis padres no quieren venir aquí a vivir, pero tampoco pueden venir a visitar porque no les dan visa. Tengo casi 8 años de no verlos.

A: porqué no puedo regresar ud. a Cuba?

JC: porque yo de Cuba salí para venir aquí de visita, pero yo ya tenia aquí residencia ( y en Cuba no lo sabian) y como uno es medico cuesta mucho que le den la salida, entonces salí de vacaciones y al quedarme aquí cuba no me permite entrar.

A: Si la situacion cambiara ciudadanos a cuba?

JC: que pregunta tan dificil… yo creo que no.

A: Porque?

JC: porque empeze una vida en Cuba la deje a la mitad y me vine para aca, aqui me he adaptado y tendría que hacerlo todo de Nuevo, no me gustaria empezar otra vez. Quizas iría todos los años pero no a vivir. Esos cambios son muy bruscos y no.

A: Se haya entonces muy adaptado aquí entonces?

JC: Si y aquí tengo toda mi familia, ellos vinieron de Cuba después de mi y aquí estan todos, aquí estan mi esposa, dos hijos, ella trabaja, ellos estan en la escuela.

A:Porque se vino a latinoamerica en vez de EEUU?
Mario, interview conducted on [date] at the offices of Quebradores del Sur.

M: Aunque yo estoy en Costa Rica, yo fui de Cuba a los EEUU. Vivi en los EEUU por mas de 40 años. Cuando me retire, en lugar de quedarme allí, yo decidi venir aquí, o sea, yo soy recien llegado aquí, pero no de Cuba sino que de los EEUU. Posiblemente mi historia va a ser aburrida para ti… yo llegue a los eeuu en los años 60s

A: Usted salio en uno de los primeros grupos de cubanos que salieron a los eeuu?

M: yo sali de cuba cuando todavía habian mantequilla, huevos, carne, habia de todo. Lo que a mi me empezo a faltar fue la libertad, yo tuve, eh, a mi me detuvieron dos veces, en el curso del primer año del gobierno revolucionario de fidel castro, por razones de diferencias ideologicas y que yo expresaba mis puntos de vista y no me importaba lo que nadie pensara y por eso estuve detenido dos veces. Primero, me trataron de meter en las fuerzas armadas. Yo era radiotelegrafista de un aeropuerto, controlador de transito aereo, entonces ellos dijieron que esa posicion tenia que ser militar, trataron de convencermee de tomar una posicion de sargento en la fuerza aerea y yo me negue, que no, yo queria ser civil, no queria ir a dormir a un cuartel en la noche, era libre y no me interesaba ser militar. Después me aumentaron a teniente si yo queria, y al decirles que no, no se, en el aeropuerto habian 11 soldados, antes no habian guardias, no habia necesidad, solo durante vuelos habian por seguridad, pero el gobierno tenia a 11 ahi viviendo todo el tiempo, se turnaban, entonces esa gente empezlo a tener un poco de preocupacion y la revolucion hizo algo muy inteligente, si tu eras de Limon, te mandaban a otro lado y los de aqui iban para otro lado, para que? Para que no vieran que les estaban quitando las tierras y la vida a sus coterraneos a las personas que eran familia y por esa razn la guardia, o el ejercito rebelde nunca fueron destacados en el area de donde ellos eran sino en otros lados. Yo ayude a muchos de ellos que no sabian escribir, ni leer, los ayudaba a leer a las familia, creamos una buena relacion. Yo empeze a hacer criticas a aquel sistema que andaba todo mundo armado. Un dia, iba dentro de mi automovil, yo los llevaba cuando iba de regreso a casa, a veces iba 4, 5 soldados, un dia se le fue un tiro a uno y no me mato de milagro, entonces, todas esas criticas, yo las haciamos y empezamos esos muchachos a pedir ajustamiento, porque empezaron a ver que era verdad lo que yo decia, ellos decian que cuando eran en la sierra, todos comunian de la misma lata, y ahora andaban descalzon y miren los zapatos de aquel capitán. Entonces ese tipo de comentario era el que yo haciamos y eso me creo una mala situacion, entonces empezaron a detenerme a cada rato, si te veian conversando conmigo te decian que era un subversivo, me hicieron la vida en pedazos hasta que me tuve que salir de cuba el 1 de febrero de 1960, un año despues de la llegada de la revolucion. Nunca fui politico, nunca fui militar, nunca tuve nada que ver con el gobierno anterior, simplemente por tener un alma libre, me hicieron la vida imposible. No me podian hacer otra cosa porque nunca habia cometido ningun delito, pero me hicieron que me fuera a los EEUU. Alli, como todos los demas exiliados, llegue a trabajar y a tratar de envolverme. Yo que habia sido un para-profesional, llegue a los EEUU a lavar platos, a limpiar pisos, que para mi eran cosas nuevas. Después me case, tuve mi negocio y bueno, esa es mi historia mas o menos. Basicamente esa es, sin entrar en detalles aburridos. El que es dueño de este negocio, (el quebrador), su padre, fue compaerio mio en el aeropuerto, cuando yo me fui, el quedo detenido, paso 16 años en la prision, y cuando llego a los EEUU con sus hijos pequeos trabajo.

Ahora yo estoy aqui, en este pueblo pequeño, estoy entretenido, la gente es muy buena y hasta ahora me gusta, y no me siento reciclado.

A: Se haya, se acostumbro facilmente?

M: Sí, yo he viajado mucho, cuando yo voy a un pais yo trato de ser cordial y no imponer mis costumbres en otros, cuando uno esta entre amigos se siente mejor. A mi me gusta cosechar amigos donde quiera que voy.

A: tiene familia en cuba? Salio solo?

M: bueno cuando sali de cuba si me quedaba familia, hace muchos años, poco a poco han ido falleciendo. Yo he perdido familia a los que queria mucho y me detuvieron dos veces, en el aeropuerto habian 11 soldados, antes no habian guardias, no habia necesidad, solo durante vuelos habian por seguridad, pero el gobierno tenia a 11 ahi viviendo todo el tiempo, se turnaban, entonces esa gente empezlo a tener un poco de preocupacion y la revolucion hizo algo muy inteligente, si tu eras de Limon, te mandaban a otro lado y los de aqui iban para otro lado, para que? Para que no vieran que les estaban quitando las tierras y la vida a sus coterraneos a las personas que eran familia y por esa razn la guardia, o el ejercito rebelde nunca fueron destacados en el area de donde ellos eran sino en otros lados. Yo ayude a muchos de ellos que no sabian escribir, ni leer, los ayudaba a leer a las familia, creamos una buena relacion. Yo empeze a hacer criticas a aquel sistema que andaba todo mundo armado. Un dia, iba dentro de mi automovil, yo los llevaba cuando iba de regreso a casa, a veces iba 4, 5 soldados, un dia se le fue un tiro a uno y no me mato de milagro, entonces, todas esas criticas, yo las haciamos y empezamos esos muchachos a pedir ajustamiento, porque empezaron a ver que era verdad lo que yo decia, ellos decian que cuando eran en la sierra, todos comunian de la misma lata, y ahora andaban descalzon y miren los zapatos de aquel capitán. Entonces ese tipo de comentario era el que yo haciamos y eso me creo una mala situacion, entonces empezaron a detenerme a cada rato, si te veian conversando conmigo te decian que era un subversivo, me hicieron la vida en pedazos hasta que me tuve que salir de cuba el 1 de febrero de 1960, un año despues de la llegada de la revolucion. Nunca fui politico, nunca fui militar, nunca tuve nada que ver con el gobierno anterior, simplemente por tener un alma libre, me hicieron la vida imposible. No me podian hacer otra cosa porque nunca habia cometido ningun delito, pero me hicieron que me fuera a los EEUU. Alli, como todos los demas exiliados, llegue a trabajar y a tratar de envolverme. Yo que habia sido un para-profesional, llegue a los EEUU a lavar platos, a limpiar pisos, que para mi eran cosas nuevas. Después me case, tuve mi negocio y bueno, esa es mi historia mas o menos. Basicamente esa es, sin entrar en detalles aburridos. El que es dueño de este negocio, (el quebrador), su padre, fue compaerio mio en el aeropuerto, cuando yo me fui, el quedo detenido, paso 16 años en la prision, y cuando llego a los EEUU con sus hijos pequeos trabajo.

Ahora yo estoy aqui, en este pueblo pequeo, estoy entretenido, la gente es muy buena y hasta ahora me gusta, y no me siento reciclado.

A: Usted se hizo residente?

JC: a los 5 meses y reclame a mi familia. Yo llegue con una visa A1 que me hizo residente. Empeze a trabajar y me los traje.

Mario, interview conducted on [date] at the offices of Quebradores del Sur.
A: Mantuvo comunicación con la gente de cuba?
M: Con mi familia, eh, yo me envolví mucho en las actividades políticas en contra del gobierno de castro, por razones obvias, ni siquiera llamaba a mi familia, a través de otros familiares nos comunicábamos, además, mi padre y mi madre y mi novia con quien me case después, a ella la mandé para los EEUU el día antes que yo me fui, porque yo sali sin permiso y temía que le fueran a cerrar la salida. Mi padre y mi madre y mi hermana, los traje rápido, estaba soltero cuando vinieron a los EEUU, mi hermano salio para EEUU, o sea, mi familia inmediata ya yo les hice la mente de que tenían que salir de ahí que eso no habría quien lo soportara. Yo pude tener un lugar donde mi familia pudiera estar así que eso no me causo mucho trauma, pero sí la familia que no era inmediata. Mi abuelita vino después, el padre de mi esposa y el resto de la familia ha ido muriendo. Todavía me quedan unas tías y el hermano de mi padre, con quien me llevaba muy bien, con el me identificaba mucho, mi tio era muy aventurero como yo, yo conversaba mas con el de mis aventuras que con mi padre, mi padre no quería saber nada de eso, claro, yo ahora lo entiendo después de que tuve hijos.

A: Sus historias no son aburridas, es mas son fascinantes. También le quiero preguntar, de que parte de Cuba es?
M: Yo naci en Marianado. Es un municipio de la provincia de la Habana, cerca de la ciudad de la Habana, 10 o 15 millas del centro de la ciudad. Una ciudad muy progresista con bastante industria. Estudie en Marianado, mis primeros años fueron ahí, el lema de Marianado es “La ciudad que prograsa”, ahora es la ciudad que progresaba...

A: Dos preguntas pequeñas...
M: Dispon de mi tiempo.

A: Gracias. Si el regimen de Castro terminara, regresaria a Cuba?
M: (toma su tiempo para contestar) Si yo pudiera participar, ser parte ejecutante de la salida de Castro, ahí estaría, ese es mi sueño, eso es lo que yo he querido hacer durante 40 y tantos años he tratado de hacer todo lo que esta a mi alcance para que eso sucediera, quisiera que mi ultimo alito de vida o si tengo que perderla tomaría el riesgo para que mi patria recuperara la libertad, eh, si Castro, se muere mañana y ahí un gobierno de transición yo no iría a Cuba inmediatamente, depende del tipo del gobierno que se estableciera ahí, porque yo no voy a aceptar un medio comunismo o una media dictadura. Yo soy un ser humano de blanco y negro a mi los terminos medios no me gustan. Yo soy muy crítico conmigo mismo, yo se cuando algo estab bien hecho y algo esta mal hecho y yo no voy a aceptar después de tantos años y de tantos sacrificios después de que les ha costado la vida a tanto compañero, a tanto amigo y a tanta gente buena, yo no voy a aceptar ningun tipo de componenda ni de medias libertades.

A: Cuando usted llego a los EEUU, alcanzo ud. Sentirse como parte de la cultura?
M: (toma su tiempo para contestar) Si yo pudiera participar, ser parte ejecutante de la salida de Castro, ahí estaría, ese es mi sueño, eso es lo que yo he querido hacer durante 40 y tantos años he tratado de hacer todo lo que esta a mi alcance para que eso sucediera, quisiera que mi ultimo alito de vida o si tengo que perderla tomaría el riesgo para que mi patria recuperara la libertad, eh, si Castro, se muere mañana y ahí un gobierno de transición yo no iría a Cuba inmediatamente, depende del tipo del gobierno que se estableciera ahí, porque yo no voy a aceptar un medio comunismo o una media dictadura. Yo soy un ser humano de blanco y negro a mi los terminos medios no me gustan. Yo soy muy crítico conmigo mismo, yo se cuando algo estab bien hecho y algo esta mal hecho y yo no voy a aceptar después de tantos años y de tantos sacrificios después de que les ha costado la vida a tanto compañero, a tanto amigo y a tanta gente buena, yo no voy a aceptar ningun tipo de componenda ni de medias libertades.

A: Cuanto siente por Costa Rica? Se siente mas acercado a esta cultura?

M: He estado aqui muy poco tiempo, de aqui te puedo decir que por haber viajado yo me adapto facil a otras culturas, yo, hay un numero de lugares en el mundo donde yo pudiera ir y vivir felizmente, yo nunca me he sentido Americano, eso a lo mejor te puede lucir que soy malagradecido con los EEUU porque me dieron la oportunidad de rehacer mi vida, de salvarme de un trastorno mayor, pero yo soy Cubano, tengo la mentalidad cubana. Si me adapte a la sociedad americana, tuve negocios alla, pague el IRS, toda la cosa, eso lo aprendi y cumpli con las reglas. En los 40 y tantos años de vivir alla, solo tuve un ticket de trafico, soy respetuoso, nunca he tenido problemas con los vecinos, los unicos problemas legales que he tenido han sido por el problema de Cuba, nada mas, pero yo he respetado las leyes y creo que si los EEUU me necesitaran para pelear por ellos, yo lo haria, como hermano, no como hijo, no me siento Americano.

A: que siente por Costa Rica? Se siente mas acercado a esta cultura?
M: No, no solo te quiero decir lo que tu necesites saber, para que te voy a hacer cuentos que no te interesan? Compermiso que voy a tomar un poco de agua que hasta ahora el que ha hablado he sido yo.

**Roberto, interview conducted on July 4, 2005 at Los Arcos Bar**

A: conversemos un poco, como llego aqui y porque?
R: yo vine aqui como entrenador olímpico del equipo de boxeo para la seleccion nacional de CR y aqui me quede. Despues fui asesor tecnico a nivel nacional y no me gusto porque paga muy poco, entonces decidi quedarme aqui, yo soy chef internacional entonces me dedique a la cocina. Hasta ahora me ha ido bien, tengo miy familia y me he dedicado a criar a mi hijastros y del trabajo a la casa de la casa al trabajo.

A: Usted salio de Cuba contratado y pudo haber regresado, porque escogio quedarse aqui?
R: porque aqui libertad de opinion y de todo, mas bien hay libertinaje, es un pais muy bonito, muy parecido a cuba en la cultura, muy humanitario la gente aqui, muy agradable, entonces escogi este pais para quedarme aqui. Yo he estado en España, China, Africa, Mexico, pero esto fue lo que me gusto. Vivir en Cuba es como estar preso.
A: Toda su familia quedo alla?
R: todos, todos son comunistas mil por mil. Son oficiales en las fuerzas armadas, el unico guisano soy yo.
A: le reprenden eso que usted se haya salido?
R: me imagino que algunos de mis hermanos sí, pero ya saben que la situación allá no es fácil, y que una persona como yo que siempre fui deportista y estuve bien al encontrarme allá viejo y retirado del deporte, iba a pasar del deporte. (menciono los nombres de altos ejecutivos en el deporte cubano) todos ellos sí se van a pensionar bien, pero uno no.
A: regresa a cuba a visitar?
R: no, hace como 25 años que no voy.
A: cuanto tiene de estar aquí?
R: bueno ya aquí llegué en el 87, pero estaba en Mexico antes, y aquí estoy esperando a ver que pasa, esperando a que me llegue la muerte.
A: Vive feliz? Esta contento?
R: Uno no esta contento, feliz entre paréntesis, porque uno quisiera estar con la familia de uno, el barrio, los hermanos, la mama, el papa, todos, pero la situación no permite que uno tenga esa libertad como ser humano allá en el país.
A: Si cayera el regimen de Castro regresaria?
R: No si cayera el regimen de Castro lo pensaria, porque ya uno esta viejo y como llegar a empezar de nuevo no, es un estorbo para la familia. Es mejor terminar lo que uno empezo aquí, ir alla de paseo, pero creo que va a ver mucha rivalidad sobre cuba.
Los mismos cubanos que estan en Miami son los que van a llegar de nuevo a corromper el pais, yo ni quiero el comunismo ni quiero ver la corrupción que existia antes del comunismo, así que mejor me quedo aquí.
A: Se comunica con su familia?
R: A veces, ya pues, les escribo 100 cartas y de 100 me contestan una y las demás me las devuelven, no se si es represalia o es la familia, yo pienso que la familia no las recibe, porque ellos me contestarian, aunque sea para decirme que no les escriba mas. El gobierno lee todo antes de entregarlo, ellos no entagan las cartas para mantenerlo a uno incomunicado totalmente. Es parte de marginarlo a uno.
A: tuvo que firmar sus derechos al gobierno cuando ud. salio a pesar de ser deportista?
R: cuando uno sale del país, para el gobierno, uno ya no es cubano, porque eres un traidor ante los ojos del sistema. Pero uno siempre es cubano, aunque viva aquí y se mueria aquí y se haga ciudadano, uno siempre es cubano. El cubano siempre es cubano hasta después de muerto. No por lo del nacionalismo político, sino por nuestros antepasados.
A: Se ha sentido marginado aquí?
R: eso es lo mas bonito que me gusta de aquí. Que aquí uno no tiene por que sentirse marginado, aquí el gobierno siempre le da esa potestad al extrajero, de que se sienta como tico, estando al dia con los papeles tienes los mismo derechos que todo el mundo, en el trabajo te tratan como un tico mas, no hay discriminación ninguna. Un poquito de explotacion, pero eso son las empresas privadas y si uno les sigue la corriente, si uno se siente maltratado uno puede dejar el trabajo y buscar otro.
A: tiene residencia en CR?
R: si
A: ciudadanía?
R: en eso estoy. Ya fui a hacer eso, pero me dijeron que necesitaba una constancia de nacimiento, así que estoy en eso, para ver como voy a hacer, yo llame a la embajada y me pidieron constancia y el pasaporte cubano, yo como se me vencio lo bote, porque una vez aquí de aquí no voy a salir, bueno ahora tengo ganas de ir a pasear, pueda que después me de un viajecito por suramerica para que mis hijos conozcan, pero para el norte no buscaria.
A: cual es su sentimiento acerca del norte?
R: bueno, a pesar de que no estoy de acuerdo con el regimen comunista en algunas cosas, hemos sido bastante maltratados y marginados por los EEUU, entonces es un rencor que yo tengo contra el gobierno de alla, no el pueblo, porque por culpa de ellos estamos nosotros asi, si no existiera ese bloqueo hace 45 años, el país no estuviera como esta, a lo mejor habria mas libertad, pero todos sabemos que los EEUU necesita el comercio con cuba y viceversa, porque cuba es la cuna de oro del caribe. El problema es que a como entraron gobiernos nuevos, mas dura se pone la represion. Lo hacen por castigar a Fidel y al que castigan es al pueblo. El pueblo sufre, Fidel todos los dias como carne, el pueblo no, dos bisteces cada 6 meses, si logran alcanzarlos, porque lo que mandan es media res por cada 20 mil personas. Obligado se hace vegetariano uno.
Aqui yo me siento bien. Yo a veces me he hecho a la idea de que estoy en Cuba. No tengo el mismo ambiente, la gente aquí no son tan alegre como nosotros, porque no importa que tan tristes estemos, si se nos ha muerto alguien en la familia si se forma una rumba en la esquina se baila. Aqui no. Se asemeja un poco, pero no es igual. No tengo a mi familia aqui, pero crie como 4 hijos de una señora que murio y esa es mi familia. Ahora tengo uno propio y otro al que le di mi apellido, yo soy su papa. Estar aqui fue como volver a nacer para mi. Yo llegue de deportista, estaba dando clases a la selección nacional y todo mundo te presta atención, pero cuando tocas otras puertas para que te brinden ayudas, no hay nadie que te ayude.
Aqui la comunidad cubana es pura basura. Usted llega a San Jose al bar Montecarlo y te sientas a conversar con los cubanos ahí, y ellos te van a decir que aquí la comunidad cubana esta para los millonarios cubanos que llegan de Miami a ver que pueden sacarse para hacerse mas ricos ellos, y es un puro descaro. Aquí a los cubanos que estan que no son de billete, olvidate que no hay nada pa’ ti. Aqui no tienes derecho a buscar nada en la comunidad cubana.
Aqui vino Celia Cruz hace 7 o 8 años y le dio a Lambarri, el presidente de la comunidad cubana 1 millon de dolares para hacerle la navidad feliz a algunos cubanos que estaban necesitados, y de ese millon solo se repartieron aqui, a gente que yo conozco de clase, pongamos que media, les repartio un poquito de limosna a cada uno y lo demás se perdio. Yo no, porque no tenia familia, pero hay que ver las necesidades que algunas familias cubanas aqui pasan que ni trabajo encuentran algunas veces y el presidente de la comunidad cubana aqui tiene una cadena de tiendas, el les puede dar trabajo aqui, pero que va, no.
A: Existe entonces un club para los cubanos en CR?
R: A sí, aquí esta la comunidad cubana y el club Jose Martí, en Escazú, ahí todos se reúnen a jugar dominó, comer arroz congri, cerdo asado, pero la hipocresía es grande. La gente aquí esta por plata. La gente ya viene malenseñada de Cuba.
Yo tuve un problema con un cubano en el Montecarlo. El hombre me dijo, yo el gobierno cubano lo odio, y le pregunto porque estas aquí en costa Rica? Por sabotaje me dijo. Que hiciste? Le puse una bomba a una escuela. Eso no es contrarrevolución, ese es ser homicida. Entonces ahí tuvimos bronca, le tuve que dar unas trompadas. Todos los contrarrevolucionarios son puro paquete. El problema es que de cuba salen mafiosos y llegan a países como estos y le dan un mal nombre a la comunidad entera, porque por unos pagan todos. Pero bueno, hasta ahora, no importa que tanto hace que salieras del país, siempre vamos a ser gente honorable y gente respetuosa, uno aquí no oye un cubano mato, violo, etc. Por tráfico si los pueden agarrar, porque quieren hacer plata rápido, pero por otra cosa no. Me siento muy orgulloso de eso. Porque cuando llegamos aquí, primero pensamos en Cuba, segundo lugar en Cuba y tercer lugar Cuba. Si no hicimos algo malo por alla, porque lo vamos a hacer aquí. Porque alla existen leyes mas drásticas que aquí, pero uno como persona tiene que usar la moral.
A: Piensa bien o mal de los cubanos que salen a los EEUU?
R: no, no, entre mas se puedan ir de la isla mejor, que dejen solo a ese hijueputa en la isla. Aunque le den carga social a otros países, pero también otros países deben de comprender que Cuba no es jugando.
A: Cuenteme de su educación?
R: yo comence a estudiar a los 15 años. Entre antes de que me agarrara el servicio militar y entre a estudiar cocina porque mi mama era chef, cumpli mis 5 años universitarios y después estudié boxeo. También soy profesor de judo y lucha libre.
A: Se siente feliz de estar aca?
R: a veces a uno le da mal de patria y hasta se arrepiente de haberse quedado aqui, pero después uno en el mismo arrepentimiento se da cuenta de que hubiera tenido que aguantar muchas cosas que se dan ahora que no se daban antes, como por ejemplo ahora hay un regimen de que uno no puede entrar a ciertas playas, restaurantes, etc. y yo pienso que si yo me hubiera quedado en Cuba ya estaría muerto, hubiera tenido muchos problemas. Así que estoy contento por haberme quedado aquí.
A: le ha parecido el sistema justo o dificil aqui?
R: no, me parece que es justo, porque si uno viene de afuera tiene que aprender acerca de la historia del país y es bueno saber donde uno esta, me parecen buenos los requisitos.
A: Paso mucho trabajo para sacar la residencia?
R: No, mas bien ni me molesto sacarla. Mas bien yo fui a la agencia de refugiados en el 88 y me preguntaron de donde era, les dije que cubanos y me dijeron que para que cubanos no habia nada, le dije como voy a andar asi sin papeles y me dijeron que como había andado hasta ahora, que siguiera asi. Yo me agoci a la amnistia que hizo Calderon y me hice residente asi, el dijo que todo el que andaba indocumentado hice las vueltas y arregle rápido.
A: Algo mas que agregar?
R: Los cubanos en cuba se dan cuenta de lo que pasan en otros países por medio de los extranjeros que llegan y cuentan a callado lo que pasa en el extranjero. Los cubanos andan como de tras de un parabán, cubiertos con cortinas negras que tu ves nada mas lo que Fidel quiere que tu veas. Las noticias salen todas omitidas, censuradas.

Vivian, interview conducted on [date] at the offices of Quebradores del Sur

A: usted nacio en cuba?
V: Sí
A: cual fue la situacion de su familia?
V: mi familia era una familia trabajadora, gente que trabajaba para vivir, honesta, honrada y que no se metian en la politica, no tenian un interes politico y nada, era gente normal.
A: porque tuvo que salir de cuba?
V: salir de cuba es lo que aspira todo el mundo por distintos moti ves, yo no sali especificamente por un motivo politico, porque nadie me estaba persiguiendo ni nada de eso sino que por tartar de mejorar, eh , economicamente y para sacar a mi hija, para que tuviera otras opciones. Yo no fui perseguida politica, aunque de una manera u otra uno siempre se ve afectado por el gobierno. Yo tenia un buen trabajo, un trabajo importante que controla el gobierno en comunicacion, mi hermano es medico y salio de cuba illegal, al salir ilegal y yo sabelro, yo fui complice de eso por tanto yo no era confiable para ocupar ese puesto que yo ocupaba, y por tanto perdí el trabajo. No me quiere sin trabajo, pero si perdí las comodidades que tenia en un trabajo donde hacia 25 años que trabajaba. Entonces bueno, tuve la oportunidad de venirme para aca y no lo pense dos veces, toma a mi hija por la mano y sali. Pienso que todo mundo intenta hacer lo mismo, salir buscando otros horizontes. Uno no lo hace ni por uno, yo vine hace 3 años, yo ya tenia mi vida hecha, eh pero pensaba en mi hija, porque aqui ella tiene mas oportunidades, fue por eso que sali de Cuba.
A: Vino porque aqui ya tenia familia entonces?
V: Sí, yo aqui ya tenia familia, viene a alego seguro, no? No venia a un destino insierto, sino que aqui ya tenia a mi hermano, tengo dos tios, mi primo y sabia que venia con trabajo aqui.
A: Sabia que venia a estar bien…
V: Sí
A: Cuales, en su opinion han sido algunas de las dificultades en allarse, situarse aqui en Costa Rica?
V: Bueno, mira, yo no vengo de una gran ciudad, yo vengo de un pueblo pequeno como este, donde todo mundo se conoce, crece junto y el que no te conoce a ti conoce a tu padre, etc., yo vengo de un lugar asi, de una familia muy grande donde todo mundo es familia, donde todos estan emparentados y asi, entonces extrañar la gran ciudad y esas cosas no, porque yo vengo de un lugar asi, eh, he tenido dificultades con el nombre de las cosas, a veces con la manera de uno expresarse, el ser uno malentendido, nunca
me ha pasado nada desagradable, pero hablo con miedo, porque las palabras son diferentes y hay personas diferentes, y esas cosas, pero así en general, grandes dificultades para adaptarme aquí no.

A: Y le gusta, se siente comoda con la cultura en general? Es similar a la cultura cubana?
V: Bueno, es distinto, no hay mucha mucha diferencia pero si se marcan algunos, en el temperamento de la persona, los cubanos tenemos fama de escandalosos, y aquí la gente es mas pausada, mas amable, mas controlada y eso.

A: pequeños detalles…
V: sí, pequeños detalles, uno se puede adaptar muy bien, y inclusive uno no se da cuenta de eso, pero yo, por ejemplo, fui en noviembre a Cuba, y todo mundo decía, “ay, estas hablando diferente, ya no es igual” uno no lo nota pero se va aplatanando (asimilando).

A: Usted aquí además de con su familia, tiene otras relaciones con otras gentes cubanas?
V: No, nosotros mas bien la relación que tenemos es familiar. Es posible que sea porque vivimos alejados, pero no.

A: acerca de la legalidad de salir de cuba y vivir en costa rica, cuénteme de ese proceso?
V: yo hice todos los tramites legales, mi hermano me reclamo, yo lo hice todo legal, con todo todo lo que hay que hacer, yo sali y no deje ningun… bueno, cuando uno sale de cuba, renuncia a sus derechos constitucionales, a todo. Yo no puedo decir, mañana voy a volverme a vivir a cuba, no, yo tendría que pedirle permiso al gobierno para que analizaran si yo pudiera volver a vivir en cuba porque cuando yo sali, yo renuncie a vivir en cuba. Yo no tenia derecho a nada de las cosas de mi propiedad. En mi casa contaron hasta los cubiertos, contaron los vasos, los electrodomesticos que quedaron alli y todo eso se quedo en un inventario para poder salir, y puedo ir de visita, pero no decidir regresar a vivir a cuba.

A: tienen limitaciones en lo que puede llevar o cada cuanto pueden ir?
V: Bueno, las limitaciones de lo que se puede llevar han sido de toda la vida para mortificar al cubano que esta fuera de cuba, pero bueno, el gobierno americano si tiene restricciones. Nosotros aqui no tenemos ninguna restricción de viaje, uno puede viajar a cuba cada vez que quiera.

A: que tal es para comunicarse a cuba, es facil?
V: bueno, no es mas facil, y es mas caro, en los eeuu, las opciones son mejores, aqui la tarifa es cara y es dificil la comunicación.

Mario interrumpe: en los eeuu no hay problema para comunicarse a cuba porque las compañias de telefono son independientes y el gobierno no les puede restringir la llamada a nadie, el problema es cuba. Al gobierno cuando se le ocurre, apaga todo. En cuba solo por pedir vivir en otro pais, te quitan los derechos fundamentales de ser ciudadano de ese pais.

A: tiene algo mas que agregar:
V: claro, yo siempre añoro, uno siempre extraña lo de uno, mas que yo deje a mis padres, abuelos, hermanas y bueno esas son cosas a las que uno no se acostumbra, sobrinos que van creciendo, nostalgias, pero, por lo demas, todo bien.

A: esta feliz de haber traído a su hija, darle una oportunidad?
V: si, como no.

A: cada cuanto se comunica?
V: a veces semanal, a veces cada dos semanas, pero tambien mantenemos correspondencia, y siempre estamos en contacto.

A: si el regimen terminara regresaria a cuba?
V: si

A: siente que costa rica es su nuevo hogar?
V: si, ya me acomode. De todas maneras, cuando yo sali, yo sabia lo que podia enfrentarme, yo sabia lo que me esperaba, pero aun asi, yo sali porque pues bueno, yo no he sido la unica, y mi caso no es de los mas malos de salir del pais, pero si sali decidida de que me tenia que acostumbrar a vivir en otro pais y me he adaptado bien. No dejo la esperanza de volver a vivir en Cuba, pero aqui yo vivo bien.

A: de que parte de cuba es?
V: de isla de pinos, una isla al sur.

A: un lugar bello…
V: No, Cuba es preciosa entera.
Eating disorders threaten the physical and mental health of an alarming number of people today. Attachment theory has been identified as having important utility in many areas of psychological functioning and is commonly used as a way to conceptualize emotional, social, and interpersonal problems. Attachment theory, therefore, may have important implications in the development and maintenance of eating disorders. Recently, a line of research has demonstrated a link between attachment styles and eating disorders. Nearly all of the research in this area, however, is on women. The purpose of this study is to examine both female and male undergraduate students to improve our understanding of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating using attachment theory to identify possible gender differences. Our findings indicate that Bartholomew’s (1990) four attachment styles are related to disordered eating in men and women differently. For both genders we found that secure attachment was negatively correlated with disordered eating behaviors. However, for men we found that none of the three insecure attachment styles we related to disordered eating behaviors, whereas for women, fearful attachment was significantly associated with disordered eating behaviors.

Introduction

Eating disorders threaten the physical and mental health of an alarming number of people today. The prevalence of these serious disorders has increased in recent years (Kitsantas, Gilligan, & Kamanta, 2003). Precise estimates of incidence and prevalence vary but tend to range from about 3% to 10% for females 15-29 years of age (Polivy & Herman, 2002) and about 2.4% for males (Espina, Ortego, Ochoa, Aleman, & Juaniz, 2002).

The two most commonly known and diagnosed eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Anorexia nervosa is characterized by refusal to maintain body weight at or above normal weight for height and age (below 85% of that expected), an intense fear of gaining weight, disturbance in the way in which one’s body weight or shape is experienced, and amenorrhea (an eventually cessation of menstrual periods for 3 consecutive months). There are two subtypes of anorexia. Individuals with the restricting type do not engage in binge-purge behavior, whereas the binge-eating/purging type engages regularly in binge-eating or purging behavior. Purging behaviors are the means by which an individual tries to get rid of the food eaten and include self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics or enemas (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Bulimia nervosa is identified by a pattern of bingeing followed by some type of compensation for the excessive caloric intake. The binging episodes are characterized by eating a larger than expected amount of food during a discrete period of time and a sense of no control over eating during the episode. The compensatory behaviors include vomiting, laxative use, diuretics, enemas, medications, fasting or excessive exercising. There are two subtypes of bulimia, purging type and non-purging type (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Virtually all conceptualizations of eating disorders make reference to body image (Polivy & Herman, 2002). Body image is characteristically defined as self-appraisals and emotional experiences about one’s physical appearance (Braitman & Ramaniaah, 1999) and body dissatisfaction is defined as negative feelings about the body (Polivy & Herman, 2002). It has been shown that body dissatisfaction characterizes persons with eating disorders and it is central to self concept and has important implications for interpersonal psychological functioning and the quality of life (Pruzinsky & Cash, 2002). Concern over body shape is even more prevalent
than are eating disorders, with research indicating 32% of females and 8.9% of males are affected (Espina et al., 2002).

Eating disorders are serious and can be life threatening. Medical risks include electrolyte imbalances, cardiac arrhythmias, and the female athlete triad (Petrie & Rogers, 2001; Thompson, 1996). The female athlete triad is defined as a combination of an eating disorder, osteoporosis and amenorrhea all at the same time. Even more alarming is the number of people who die from eating disorders. One meta-analytic study found a mortality rate of 5.9% (Neumarker, 1997). Because of the alarming prevalence and severity of these disorders, it is imperative that researchers investigate factors that may contribute to body image dissatisfaction and eating disordered behavior. Eating disorders are complex diseases, which do not arise from a single cause. Rather, they are thought to develop due to a combination of biological, cultural, personality, family and social factors (Beaumont, Russell, & Touyz, 1993; Garfinkel & Garner, 1982). Many theoretical perspectives on the causes of eating disorders have been proposed, each adding insight into causes of these disorders. Despite the vast research on eating disorders, anorexia and bulimia are not completely understood.

Attachment theory has been identified as having important utility in many areas of psychological functioning and is commonly used as a way to conceptualize emotional, social, and interpersonal problems. Research indicates that insecure attachment is related to several factors which are also characteristic of eating disorders, including anxiety, self-esteem, and depression (Corte & Stein, 2005; Kaye, Bulik, Thorton, Barbarich, & Masters, 2004; McCabe & Vincent, 2003; Mora-Giral, Raich-Escursell, Segues, Torras-Claraso, & Huon, 2004; Pearlstein, 2002; Stafford, Alloy, Crossfield, Moroco, & Wang, 2004; Williams & Riskind, 2004). Attachment theory, therefore, may have important implications in the development and maintenance of eating disorders.

Attachment theory is concerned with the development of internal working models. According to Bowlby (1969), infants and their caregivers are biologically predisposed to become attached to each other. The attachment beliefs are developed in order to promote security and protection from external threats or danger. Based on the interaction with the caregiver, the child begins forming internal working models of the self, the caregiver and the relationship between the two (Bowlby, 1973). The attachment styles resulting from the interaction between parent and child remain throughout the lifespan (Bowlby, 1969). Building on Bowlby’s theory (1969) about infant attachment, Ainsworth (1979) identified three attachment styles. Based on infants’ reactions after being separated from their caregivers, they were classified as secure, anxious-ambivalent, or avoidant. Securely attached children welcome the caregivers return after the separation, seek proximity, and are readily comforted in times of distress. Anxious-ambivalent infants show ambivalent behavior towards their caregiver and are not easily comforted when they are distressed. Avoidant infants avoid interaction or getting close to their caregiver.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) expanded upon Ainsworth’s (1978) three-category attachment theory by including adults on the basis that adult romantic bonds are similar to that of parent-child bonds. Each infant attachment style has certain aspects that correspond to adults in romantic relationships with the same attachment style. A secure attachment style is characterized by easily getting close to and trusting others. Someone with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style desires close relationships, yet is fearful of not being loved. These people, therefore, become easily absorbed in relationships to lessen their fears. An adult with an avoidant attachment style downplays the importance of intimate relationships and is skeptical of other’s intentions.

Many models of attachment have been proposed, but recently the four-category model of adult attachment proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) has been widely used. In this model, secure and preoccupied (anxious-ambivalent) styles remained, while two distinct types of anxious-avoidant attachment were identified. This 4-category attachment model is based on the idea that every individual has a positive or negative view of the self (worthy of love and support or not) and a positive or negative view of others (trustworthy and available or unreliable and rejecting), thus combining to form the four attachment styles. Those individuals with both a positive view of self and a positive view of other are considered to have a secure attachment style. Secure individuals are characterized by both an internalized sense of self-worth and comfort with intimacy in close relationships. Persons with a positive view of self and a negative view of other have a dismissing attachment style, characterized by avoiding closeness with others because of negative expectations. They maintain their high sense of self-worth by denying the value of close relationships and stress the importance of independence. Those with a negative view of self and a positive view of others have a preoccupied attachment style. These individuals have a deep sense of unworthiness but have a positive view of others causing them to seek excessive closeness, often leaving them vulnerable to emotional distress when their needs are not met. Fearful attachment is derived from a negative view of both self and others. People who fall
into this category are characterized by a sense of unworthiness combined with an expectation that others will be untrustworthy and rejecting. They desire intimate relationships with others, but often avoid them to protect themselves against anticipated rejection by others.

Recently, a line of research has demonstrated a link between attachment styles and eating disorders. In a sample of 547 college females, Becker, Bell, and Billington (1987) found that participants with bulimic eating patterns scored significantly higher than did women without eating disturbances in an object relation subscale measuring ambivalent interpersonal relations and fear of object loss. Also, in a non-clinical sample of young women, a significant relationship was found between reports of eating/body concerns and insecure attachment (Evans & Wertheim, 1998). In a study by Broberg, Hjamlmers, and Nevonen (2001), 145 female patients who attended an outpatient clinic for eating disorders and 315 control women were used to examine the connection between eating disorder symptoms and insecure attachment. They found that 75% of women reporting never having an eating disorder had a secure attachment pattern, whereas less than 50% of those with an eating disorder had a secure attachment style. Also, women in the normal group who indicated that they had eating disorder problems had more similar attachment patterns to the patient group than to the rest of the normal group. Sharpe and her colleagues (1998) used a single-item attachment measure and found that insecurely attached girls were more preoccupied with thinness and body shape than were securely attached girls. They were also at greater risk of developing an eating disorder. Similarly, Evens and Wertheim (1998) used the Adult Attachment Style questionnaire and found women with eating/body concerns, specifically a greater drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction, reported an insecure attachment style. Cash, Theriault, and Milkewicz (2004) were the only ones to examine both men and women. They found secure attachment for both genders to be significantly related to greater body image satisfaction and less dysfunctional self-investment in appearance.

Armstrong and Roth (1989) compared 27 eating disorder patients with 2 control groups using Bowlby’s theory of attachment. Participants completed the Hansburg Separation Anxiety Test, a projective measure of attachment and adult separation. Results of the study showed more severe separation and attachment anxiety in the eating disorder group. Specifically, ninety-six percent of the eating disordered participants showed anxious attachment. Using Ainsworth’s (1978) three-category model of attachment, Salzman (1997) found a very high frequency of eating disorders in women with ambivalent (anxious) attachment relative to all other attachment categories. Using the Adolescent Attachment Interview, Salzman observed that seven of the eleven participants with ambivalent (anxious) attachment reported having clinically diagnosed anorexia previous to the study.

To date, only a few studies have used Bartholomew’s model of attachment to examine attachment and eating disorders. Using this model is important since it differentiates between two types of avoidant attachment, dismissing (positive view of self and negative view of others) and fearful (negative view of self and negative view of others). Suldo and Sandberg (2000) examined a sample of 169 college women using multivariate multiple linear regression analysis. The four attachment scores (secure, preoccupied, fearful, avoidant) were entered as predictors of disordered eating scores. Results indicated that preoccupied (anxious) attachment scores were positively correlated with eating disorder symptomatology. Another study employing Bartholomew’s model of attachment examined female eating disorder patients and a nonclinical comparison to determine if participants’ attachment styles would accurately predict membership to the eating disordered group and the normal control group (Freidberg & Lyddon, 1996). Results showed that preoccupied and secure attachment styles (but not dismissing or fearful) were the discriminating factors in predicting membership to the eating disorder or the non-eating disorder groups respectively.

Whereas numerous studies have shown the link between anxious attachment and disordered eating, others have found avoidant attachment to be correlated to eating disorders. Latzer et al. (2002) administered the Adult Attachment Scale to anorexic and bulimic patients at an eating disorder clinic. Using chi squared analysis, they found the most prevalent attachment style of ED women was the avoidant style, whereas the secure attachment style was the most predominant among the control women. The Eating disorder patients were found to be less secure, more avoidant, and more anxious than the control group. Using the Adult Attachment Interview in a sample of female college students, Cole-Detke and Kobak (1996) found that women with deactivating attachment strategies (avoidant) had higher levels of disordered eating, whereas those with hyperactivating strategies (preoccupied) did not. Lastly, Brennan and Shaver (1995) found secure attachment ratings were negatively correlated with eating disorder symptomatology, yet both anxious-ambivalent and avoidant attachment ratings were positively associated with the EDI scores in a sample of female college students.
It is clear from the literature that there is a link between eating disorders and insecure attachment, yet it is unclear which specific attachment style is related to eating disorders. It is hard to compare findings across studies because of the numerous measures of attachment that are used. It is important to use Bartholomew’s four-category model of attachment because it differentiates between two avoidant attachment patterns. Also, this model has consistently been shown to be accurate and reliable. A major limitation of previous research is that nearly all of these studies examined exclusively women. Although a majority of the research in the field of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction focuses on women, recently attention to these topics in males has been on the rise (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2002). Previous research on gender differences between males and females in the risk factors leading to disordered eating and body dissatisfaction is sparse. Though research on males and eating disorders is increasing, there is still very little research on males and eating disorders using attachment theory.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to improve our understanding of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in a population of male and female undergraduates using attachment theory. Specifically, we want to examine the relationship of adult attachment style to body disordered eating using Bartholomew’s four-category model of attachment. Based on previous research, we hypothesized that those with a preoccupied attachment style and those with a fearful attachment style would score higher on measures of disordered eating. We also predicted that participants with a secure attachment style would score lower on measures of disordered eating. Our hypotheses are based on the premise that both preoccupied and fearful attachment styles are characterized by a negative view of self, which is characteristic of women with eating disorders. Because there is very little research in the area of disordered eating from an attachment perspective in men, our goal was to examine this relationship with the aim of identifying possible differences between the two genders.

Method

Participants

Three hundred twenty nine undergraduates (207 women, 121 men) at a large western state university participated in this study. They were all students of Psychology 101 and received course credit for their participation in this study. Participants were given a packet of questionnaires to complete in a 50 minute session. The ages ranged from 17 to 68 ($M = 22.17, SD = 7.14$). Approximately 90% were Caucasian.

Measures

Attachment. Attachment styles were assessed using the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). The RQ contains four short paragraphs describing the four attachment patterns (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing). The paragraphs are not labeled by attachment style, but with the letters A-D. Participants are asked to rate themselves on a seven-point scale the degree to which each of the descriptions is indicative of their feelings about close relationships. The RQ attachment ratings show convergent validity with adult attachment interview ratings (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and moderately high stability over eight months (Scharfè & Bartholomew, 1998).

Disordered eating and body dissatisfaction. Disordered eating behaviors were assessed with the Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983), which asked about students’ eating habits (e.g., I eat when I am upset) as well as how they feel about their bodies (e.g., I think that my stomach is too big). Responses were rated on a 5-point scale (0 = never/rarely, 4 = always), with higher scores indicating more disordered eating and body dissatisfaction. We used the three subscales most often identified with disordered eating and body image dissatisfaction: drive for thinness (preoccupation with weight and dieting), bulimia (tendencies to think about and engage in binging or purging), and body dissatisfaction (dissatisfaction with shape and size of various body parts such as stomach). The EDI has good internal consistency, with scores on the subscales ranging from .77 to .90.
Results

The means and standard deviations of all variables are presented in Table 1. Attachment scores range from 1 to 7, representing the degree to which respondents indicate how much they resemble each of the attachment styles.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Attachment and EDI scores by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>3.06 (2.04)</td>
<td>2.83 (2.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>2.56 (1.87)</td>
<td>3.11 (2.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>1.86 (1.50)</td>
<td>1.80 (1.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>2.66 (1.92)</td>
<td>2.31 (1.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive for Thinness</td>
<td>2.70 (3.94)</td>
<td>6.38 (5.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia</td>
<td>1.61 (3.09)</td>
<td>1.93 (2.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>6.59 (6.49)</td>
<td>11.59 (7.54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, multivariate multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between EDI scores and attachment scores separately for women and men. The four attachment scores (secure, fearful, preoccupied, dismissing) were simultaneously entered as predictors of each of the three EDI scores (drive for thinness, bulimia, body dissatisfaction). For women, the analysis yielded a significant multivariate effect, $F(3, 186) = 17.32, p < .001$. Univariate analyses indicated that attachment scores were significantly associated with bulimia, $F(4, 188) = 3.45, p \leq .01$. There was a nonsignificant trend for body dissatisfaction, $F(4, 188) = 2.41, p = .051$. There was not a significant effect for drive for thinness, $F(4, 188) = 1.83$. Follow up univariate regression analyses indicated that, when considered simultaneously, only fearful attachment scores were significantly correlated with bulimia ($B = .32, SE B = .11, \beta = .22, p < .01$). In contrast, only secure attachment scores were significantly correlated with body dissatisfaction ($B = -.58, SE B = .29, \beta = -.16, p \leq .05$). Finally, as expected, there were no significant predictors of drive for thinness. Bivariate correlations between the attachment ratings and EDI scores are shown in Table 2.

For men, the analysis yielded a significant multivariate effect, $F(3, 108) = 8.30, p < .001$. Univariate analyses indicated that attachment scores were significantly associated with drive for thinness, $F(4, 110) = 3.23, p < .05$. There was not a significant effect for bulimia, $F(4, 110) = 1.83$, or body dissatisfaction, $F(4, 110) = 1.54$. Follow up univariate regression analyses indicated that, when considered simultaneously, only secure attachment scores were significantly correlated with drive for thinness ($B = -.67, SE B = .19, \beta = -.34, p \leq .001$), as well as bulimia ($B = -.37, SE B = .15, \beta = -.24, p < .05$), and body dissatisfaction ($B = -.65, SE B = .33, \beta = -.20, p \leq .05$). Bivariate correlations between the attachment ratings and EDI scores are shown in Table 2.
Table 2. Correlations between Adult Attachment ratings and EDI scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Fearful</th>
<th>Preoccupied</th>
<th>Dismissing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive for Thinness</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive for Thinness</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to improve our understanding of disordered eating in a population of male and female undergraduates by examining the relationship of adult attachment style disordered eating using Bartholomew’s four-category model of attachment. For women, we hypothesized that those with a preoccupied attachment style and those with a fearful attachment style would score higher on measures of disordered eating. We also predicted that participants with a secure attachment style would score lower on measures of disordered eating. Because there is very little research in the area of disordered eating from an attachment perspective in men, our goal was to examine this relationship with the aim of identifying possible differences between the two genders. As will be discussed below, we found partial support for our hypotheses.

We first examined the role adult attachment plays in disordered eating in women. We entered the attachment scores simultaneously and found that secure attachment scores were significantly negatively correlated with body dissatisfaction, which is consistent with the literature (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Broberg et al., 2001; Freidberg & Lyddon, 1996). We also found that fearful attachment scores (negative view of self and negative view of others) were positively correlated with bulimia. This is consistent with a body of literature linking avoidant attachment styles to eating disorder symptomatology (Brennan & Shaver 1995; Cole-Detke & Kobak, 1996; Latzer et al., 2002). However, we did not find dismissing attachment, which is also a type of avoidant attachment, to be associated with any of the measures of disordered eating. Dismissing and fearful are both characterized by avoiding relationships due to a negative view of others, but they are differentiated by their view of self. Fearful individuals have a negative view of self whereas dismissing individuals have a positive view of self. The negative view of self may be why fearful attachment is correlated with disordered eating, whereas dismissing is not.

Contrary to our prediction, we found preoccupied attachment scores were not correlated with disordered eating, which is similar to the findings of Cole-Detke and Kobak (1996). These findings, however, are inconsistent with numerous other studies that have shown a link between preoccupied attachment and disordered eating (Armstrong & Roth, 1989; Freidberg & Lyddon, 1996; Salzman, 1997; Suldo & Sandberg, 2000).

For men, we found that secure attachment was significantly negatively correlated to drive for thinness, bulimia, and body dissatisfaction. Preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing attachment styles were not related to any of the measures of disordered eating in males. Similar to our findings with women and those of the literature
(Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Broberg et al., 2001; Freidberg & Lyddon, 1996), men who are securely attached are less likely to exhibit any type of disordered eating behavior. However, unlike women, insecure attachment styles do not seem to predict disordered eating behaviors. Thus, future studies should examine why attachment styles are more predictive of disordered eating in women than in men.

Despite our contributions, there are several limitations that must be addressed. First, the participants in our study were all college students, with a mean age in the early 20’s. This limits the generalizability of the results to other groups of people such as older adults and adolescents. Second, a majority of the students in this sample are Caucasian preventing us from exploring possible differences in ethnic groups as well as limiting the generalizability of our findings to other ethnic groups. Third, our study focused on a sample of undergraduate students. Future studies using clinical populations which use structured diagnostic interviews would add to our understanding of how adult attachment models are related to clinical eating disorders. Fourth, it is important to understand that eating disorders are very complex diseases that arise from a combination of factors. Attachment theory is a way to help understand the etiology, but there are many other factors that may contribute to disordered eating.

Our findings indicate that Bartholomew’s (1990) four attachment styles relate differently to disordered eating in men and women. Specifically, we found that men with secure attachment styles are less likely to exhibit disordered eating behaviors, whereas there was no relationship for men with insecure attachment styles. On the other hand, for women, secure attachment is negatively associated with disordered eating, whereas fearful attachment was positively associated. Therapists treating women for disordered eating need to take attachment style into account when designing effective treatments.

References


Adult Attachment as a Risk Factor for Intimate Partner Violence

Christine L. Pearson: McNair Scholar

Diana M. Doumas: Mentor

Department of Psychology
Gender Studies Minor

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between intimate partner violence and adult attachment in a sample of 35 community couples. Both partners’ attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were examined simultaneously as predictors of male-perpetrated verbal and physical intimate partner violence. Results from hierarchical regression analyses indicated high levels of female attachment anxiety predicted high levels of male-perpetrated verbal and physical violence. In contrast, male attachment was not predictive of male-perpetrated violence. These findings suggest for females, fear of abandonment and rejection may be a risk factor for becoming a victim of violence. Alternatively, exposure to violence may contribute to the development of attachment anxiety in females. Clinical implications include providing cognitive interventions to address female attachment anxiety.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence represents a significant social problem in the United States, with recent survey data indicating approximately 1.5 million women and 800,000 men have reported experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Although intimate partner violence has been examined from a range of theoretical perspectives, attachment theory has recently been identified as a way to integrate several psychosocial risk factors for violence, thus potentially providing a unifying theoretical explanation for intimate partner violence (Mahalik, Aldarondo, Gilbert-Gokhale, & Shore, 2005). In addition, attachment theory provides a useful model for understanding the perplexing co-occurrence of violence and intimacy within the same relationship (Mayseless, 1991). In this framework, violence is examined from a systems perspective, identifying violence as a means to regulate closeness and distance between partners in the relationship (Pistole, 1994). Specifically, discrepancies between preferences for intimacy and changes in the "socioemotional distance" between partners may serve as catalysts for intimate partner violence (Dutton, 1988).

Attachment theory provides a way to understand how human beings develop strong bonds with others (Bowlby, 1977). Through interactions of the child with the parent, infants develop internal working models of self, characterized by the degree of emotional dependence on others for self-validation, and working models of other, characterized by expectations about the availability of others (Bowlby, 1973). These cognitive representations, or relational schemas, shape expectations for adult peer and romantic relationships and guide an individual's behavioral responses to real or imagined separation from important attachment figures.

While many models of adult attachment have been proposed in the literature (e.g., Bartholomew, 1990; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), a widely used model in the study of intimate partner violence is the four-category model proposed by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991). Following directly from Bowlby's theoretical view, this model postulates two underlying dimensions - (a) a positive or negative image of the self and (b) a positive or negative image of others. This generates a model of four quadrants, each describing a separate prototype of each attachment style: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful. These four styles can be further collapsed into two dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. The preoccupied and fearful patterns are characterized by high attachment anxiety, or a fear of abandonment and rejection related to a negative self-model, and the fearful and dismissing patterns are characterized by high attachment avoidance, or a discomfort with closeness and intimacy related to a negative other-model. Continuous measures of these styles are often used as this allows for the study of
dimensions of attachment within each individual, rather than assigning individuals to a particular attachment style (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000).

From an attachment theory perspective, intimate partner violence can be viewed as an attempt to establish or maintain a level of personal security within the relationship. When a threat to or disruption of the attachment relationship is perceived, individuals become alarmed and the resulting anxiety leads to responses designed to preserve the attachment system (Bowlby, 1984). A violent episode may be precipitated by a real or imagined threat of abandonment or rejection by the attachment figure. Attachment theory also implies intimate partner violence may be utilized in a relationship as an attempt to regain a comfortable level of proximity with the partner as a way of dealing with the conflict created by opposing needs for closeness versus distance (Pistole, 1994). For example, an individual with high levels of attachment anxiety may respond to attachment-related cues with proximity-seeking behavior, while an individual with high levels of attachment avoidance may respond with distance-seeking behavior.

Although research demonstrates adult attachment as a risk factor of intimate partner violence. Several studies have identified a relationship between insecure attachment and intimate partner violence in male batterers, documenting higher levels of preoccupied and fearful (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994) or preoccupied and dismissing (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerinton, 2000) styles in violent males compared to nonviolent males. Similarly, research examining the attachment style of victims of male-perpetrated violence indicates the preoccupied and fearful styles are over-represented in abused women compared to nonclinical samples (Henderson, Bartholomew, & Dutton, 1997). Male and female individuals in reciprocally aggressive relationships also report higher levels of preoccupied attachment compared to those in nonaggressive relationships (Bookwala & Zdaniuk, 1998).

Although a growing body of literature demonstrates a relationship between perpetrator attachment style and violence, the attachment of the victim has been understudied. The limited research on victim attachment indicates the preoccupied and fearful patterns, characterized by attachment anxiety, are greatly over-represented in abused women (Henderson, Bartholomew, & Dutton, 1997). Although insecure attachment has been identified as a risk factor for intimate partner violence, research needs to examine the attachment styles of both partners in the relationship in order to fully understand how the attachment style of each partner affects the couple (Bartholomew, 1997). Thus, the aim of the current study is to add to the sparse literature on the relationship between attachment and intimate partner violence by examining both male and female attachment as predictors of male-perpetrated violence. Based on the literature, we hypothesized female attachment anxiety would predict male-perpetrated violence, whereas both male attachment anxiety and male attachment avoidance would predict male-perpetrated violence.

Method

Participants

Thirty-five heterosexual couples were recruited through advertisements in local newspapers. In order to participate in the study, couples were required to be together for at least 6 months. Female ages ranged from 18 to 67 (M = 31.00, SD = 11.54). Female participants were primarily Caucasian (82.9 %), with 8.6% Native American, 2.9% Hispanic, and 2.9% African American, and 2.9% Asian American. Females reported earning $0.00 to $60,000 (M = $17,991.18, SD = $15,566.00). Male ages ranged from 18-69 (M = 31.80, SD = 11.47). Male participants were primarily Caucasian (82.9 %), with 2.9% Hispanic, 5.7% African American, and 8.6% other. Males reported earning $0.00 to $100,000 (M = $25,825.59, SD = $20,844.83). Couples reported being together for 6 months to 17.8 years (M = 4.64, SD = 5.11) with 54.3% of couples reporting their marital status as single, 40.0% married, and 5.7% divorced.

Procedures

The data for this study were collected from couples who attended a one-hour session together. Partners were given instructions, completed informed consent, and were debriefed at the same time, but were separated into two rooms to complete their questionnaires privately. Participants completed a packet of self-administered questionnaires that included background and demographic measures and measures assessing attachment style, relationship variables, and intimate partner violence. Participants were instructed to respond to the violence questionnaire with reference to their current relationship with the participating partner. Couples were paid $25.00 for participation in the one-hour session.
Measures

Adult attachment. The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) was used to assess adult attachment. The RQ is a widely used self-report measure of adult attachment that contains four short paragraphs describing four attachment patterns: secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing. The RQ attachment ratings show convergent validity with adult attachment interview ratings (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998) and moderately high stability over eight months (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). The RQ has been widely used as a measure of attachment in studies examining intimate partner violence (Bookwala, 2002; Dutton et al., 1994; Kesner & McKenry, 1998; Mauricio & Gormley, 2001; Mahalik et al., 2005; Pistole & Tarrant, 1993).

For this study, the continuous responses on the RQ were coded into the two dimensions of adult attachment: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (see Dutton et al., 1994; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Attachment anxiety was obtained by summing the scores of the two attachment patterns with high anxiety, preoccupied and fearful, and subtracting the sum of the scores of the two attachment patterns with low anxiety, secure and dismissing. Negative scores on the anxiety scale reflect low attachment anxiety and positive scores reflect high attachment anxiety. Similarly, attachment avoidance was obtained by summing the scores of the two attachment patterns with high avoidance, fearful and dismissing, and subtracting the sum of the scores of the two attachment patterns with low avoidance, secure and preoccupied. Negative scores on the avoidance scale reflect low attachment avoidance and positive scores reflect high attachment avoidance. These two dimensions have repeatedly been found to underlie individual differences in attachment style (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Shaver & Hazan, 1993) and are correlated with indicators of violence (Dutton et al., 1994; Smallbone & Dadds, 2001).

Physical violence. The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) was used to assess the frequency of male-perpetrated physical violence. The CTS is a self-report inventory consisting of 18 behaviors that one might use during conflict with a partner. Participants rate the extent to which they have experienced each item in the past year on a 7-point Likert scale. These items are broken down into three subscales: reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical violence. Only the 8-item physical violence subscale was used in this study. To compensate for potential underreporting, the highest of the female and male partner reports of male-perpetrated violence was used as the estimate of male-perpetrated violence in the past year. The physical violence subscale has good internal consistency with a coefficient alpha of .87 and demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity (Straus, 1979). Factor analysis also demonstrates that the CTS comprises both psychological and physical factors (Barling, O’Leary, Jouriles, Vivian, & MacEwen, 1987). The CTS has been widely used as a measure of male-perpetrated violence in studies examining intimate partner violence (Babcock et al., 2000; Bookwala, 2002; Henderson et al., 1997; Kesner, Julian & McKenry, 1997; Kesner & McKenry, 1998; Mauricio & Gormley, 2001).

Results

Two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship of female and male attachment to male-perpetrated verbal and physical aggression. For each analysis, female attachment anxiety, female attachment avoidance, male attachment anxiety, and male attachment avoidance were entered simultaneously. As hypothesized, results of the regression analyses indicated female attachment anxiety significantly predicted both male-perpetrated verbal and physical aggression, whereas female attachment avoidance did not significantly predict male-perpetrated violence (see Table 1). Contrary to our hypotheses, neither male attachment anxiety nor male attachment avoidance significantly predicted male-perpetrated aggression.
Table 1. Standardized Beta Weights for Male-perpetrated Verbal and Physical Aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Verbal Aggression</th>
<th>Physical Aggression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Anxiety</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td>.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Avoidance</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Anxiety</td>
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<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Avoidance</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R2</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.27**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to add to the sparse literature on the relationship between attachment and intimate partner violence by examining both male and female attachment as predictors of male-perpetrated violence. Results supported the hypothesis that female attachment anxiety would predict male-perpetrated violence. In contrast, our results did not support the hypotheses regarding male attachment in that neither male attachment anxiety nor attachment avoidance predicted male-perpetrated violence.

Consistent with previous research linking female preoccupied and fearful attachment to male-perpetrated violence (Henderson et al., 1997), results indicated female attachment anxiety is related to male-perpetrated violence. Contrary to research identifying a relationship between male attachment and male-perpetrated violence (Babock et al., 2000; Dutton et al., 1994; Mahalik et al., 2005; Mauricio & Gormeley, 2001), however, we did not find a significant main effect for either male attachment anxiety or male attachment avoidance. The discrepancy in these findings is likely due to the samples studied, in that this study examined violence in a community sample of couples with low levels of violence, whereas several of the studies linking male attachment style to male-perpetrated violence were conducted with clinical samples of male batterers only. Further, these studies only examined male attachment style and used only the male’s report of violence rather than a combined couples’ report used in this study.

While the present study contributes to our understanding of the association between attachment relationships and intimate partner violence, several limitations should be noted. First, information in this study was obtained through self-report, potentially leading to biased or distorted reporting. To mitigate this problem, particularly the tendency to underreport perpetration of physical violence, we used a combined report of both partners’ reports of violence. Therefore, if either partner reported a violent event, this was added to the violence score. Next, the participants in this study were primarily Caucasian, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. It is also important to note that the levels of violence reported in this community sample are low and, therefore, differentiate this sample from clinical samples used in other research. The violence reported in this study likely reflects “common couple violence” rather than the “patriarchal terrorism” identified as battering used by males to control their partners (Johnson, 1995).

A final interpretational consideration is related to the correlational nature of this study. Theoretically, however, attachment begins in childhood, and thus, precedes romantic relationships. Therefore, it is likely that attachment precedes relationship violence, although this has not been longitudinally demonstrated. A longitudinal design would add to the current literature by addressing the causal direction between attachment and intimate partner violence, as well as the mechanisms that operate to perpetuate this relationship.

The results of this study have both clinical and research implications. Although our results are consistent with Kessner and McKenry (1998), we are not suggesting that females with attachment anxiety are evoking violence from their male partners. However, an association between attachment anxiety and male-perpetrated violence was evident and the specifics of this association remain unclear. These findings suggest for females, being afraid of abandonment and rejection may be a risk factor for becoming a victim of intimate partner violence. Alternatively, exposure to male-perpetrated violence may contribute to the development of attachment anxiety in females. Clinical implications
include providing cognitive interventions to address female attachment anxiety. Addressing attachment as a predictor to intimate partner violence may contribute to a reduction in violence. Future research should focus on an intervention model focusing on attachment patterns to determine if it will decrease the violence levels and increase commitment and satisfaction in relationships.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dr. Diana Doumas for the outstanding mentorship she has offered me not only the entire process of becoming an academic professional. Her willingness to assist me and provide guidance is unparalleled and greatly appreciated.

References


Impact and Push-Off Force Symmetry in Dominant Versus Non-Dominant Legs During a Jump Landing/Cutting Task

Luis Rosado: McNair Scholar
Chad Harris: Mentor
Department of Kinesiology

Abstract

Our goal was to examine ground reaction forces (GRF) following a series of unanticipated jump landing and cutting tasks (JLC) and the differences in these GRF’s associated with leg dominance. Nine recreationally active (at least 3x/week of running, cycling, aerobics, or recreational sports participation) right leg dominant females with no history of lower extremity injuries participated in the current study. Each subject conducted a set of 12 (JLC) trails, four (JLC’s) to three different directions. The subjects either performed a left cutting (LC), right cutting (RC) at 30 degrees from center or a straight ahead center cutting (CC) maneuver. Landing impact (IP) and push-off (PO) forces for both the dominant and non-dominant (IPN, IPD, PON, POD) were compared using ANOVA with repeated measures and post-hoc comparisons with t-tests. Significant differences were found between dominant and non-dominant leg IP and PO peak GRF during LC task. No significant differences were found for all other JLC tasks. These data suggest that the more extensive the change of direction opposite the dominant leg, the greater the forces acting on the dominant leg versus the forces felt during a change of direction towards the non-dominant leg of the subject. This would suggest that the amount of forces the non-dominant leg can accommodate is less than the dominant leg, which could play a role in anterior cruciate ligament injury.

Introduction

Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) injuries occur at a higher rate in female athletes than in male athletes. On average, female athletes sustain this devastating injury 3-5 times more often than male athletes. There are many possible explanations for this increased injury rate in female athletes ranging from hormonal differences to anatomical differences. Most commonly the ACL is injured during non-contact sporting events such as landing from rebounding in basketball to changing directions rapidly during a soccer match. Much of the research concentrating on the non-contact mechanisms of injury (namely cutting maneuvers) have focused on sprinting then cutting. Current research also explores anticipated change of direction, which allows the subject time to prepare their side cutting response. In a real life sporting environment, time to respond to the changing variables rarely exists. No research of late has combined unanticipated direction changes with the JLC task or examined to what extent leg dominance has on the JLC task. It is not known whether an opposite leg push-off or a cross over step is preferred, nor is it known if symmetry exists in landing and push-off force between dominant and non-dominant limbs when cutting to different directions.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess the symmetry between dominant and non-dominant legs for the impact and push-off kinetics of an unanticipated (JLC) task. In handedness of an individual it is most often the case that the strongest hand is the dominant hand. We intend to establish any possible ramifications that leg dominance has on JLC dynamics as well as which cutting method is preferred.
Methods

Female subjects (n = 9, Age: 22.33±3.74 years., Mass: 60.23±6.89 kilograms), all right leg dominant, were required to do a two-footed landing and then cut either to the right, center, or left using their preferred cutting style. The JLC task required subjects to jump horizontally a distance of \( \frac{1}{2} \) of their maximal standing broad jump and reach a height vertically at the middle of the horizontal jump that was \( \frac{1}{2} \) of their maximum vertical jump height. Immediately upon landing subjects sprinted at a 30 degree angle to the right (RC) or left (LC) or sprinted straight ahead (CC). Four trials to each direction were performed in a random order and the direction was identified by a light that was activated coincident with landing (Figure 1). Landings and push-offs from the JLC task were on flush mounted Kistler force plates and ground reaction forces were collected at 1250 Hz. Resultant ground reaction force peaks for impact for the dominant leg (IPD in Bodyweights, BW) and the non-dominant leg (IPN in BW) and for push-off for the dominant leg (POD, BW) and non-dominant leg (PON, BW) were calculated from three dimensional force recordings (figure 2).

![Figure 1. Unanticipated Directional lights.](image1)

![Figure 2. A. Impact ground reaction forces B. Push-off ground reaction forces](image2)
Results

Overall the subjects employed the opposite leg push-off maneuver over the leg cross over cutting strategy. This cutting method presented the following kinetic data. For the RC and CC conditions, there were no differences between IPD and IPN (RC: 2.16±0.97 vs. 1.91±1.08; CC: 2.20±0.93 vs.1.82±0.97). When the subjects sprinted in the direction of the dominant leg or straight ahead there were no statistically significant differences on the initial landing impact forces between legs. For the LC condition, IPD was significantly greater than IPN (p=0.005) (2.27±1.06 vs. 1.47±0.62). The initial landing force when the subject was to sprint in the direction opposite the subject’s dominant leg was greater for the dominant leg than for the non-dominant leg (Figure 3). For push-off force in the RC and CC conditions, there were no significant differences between POD and PON (RC: 1.61±0.48 vs. 2.20±0.49; CC: 2.06±0.32 vs. 1.60±0.41). The same results were found with respect to the push-off forces registered after landing. Pushing off in the direction of the dominant leg or straight ahead had no statistically significant differences between dominant or non-dominant legs. Again, when the subject pushed off to initiate the sprint in the direction opposite the dominant leg there was a statistically significant difference between the dominant leg and non-dominant leg (Figure 4). POD was significantly greater than PON for the LC condition (p<0.001) (2.62±0.32 vs. 1.15±0.23). The following representative line graph also shows both impact and push-off peaks as they compare to the three cutting directions (Figure 5).

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Figure 3. Impact peak ground reaction forces (GRF) for the dominant and non-dominant legs for each of the three cutting directions. Left cutting task is the direction opposite of the subject’s dominant leg.

Figure 4. Push-off peak ground reaction forces (GRF) for the dominant and non-dominant legs for each of the three cutting directions. Left cutting task is the direction opposite of the subject’s dominant leg.
Conclusion

Of the three conditions assessed for the JLC, the more extensive the cut to the non-dominant side, the greater the impact and push-off force on the dominant leg compared to the non-dominant leg. These data show that the dominant leg is capable of accommodating a greater impact force and a greater push-off force when cutting in the opposite direction. These data also suggest that the non-dominant leg is less capable of accommodating an unanticipated JLC task in a sporting event which may leave it more susceptible to ACL injury. An added inference that can be made from these data suggests that if the subject uses poor landing and push-off techniques during a dominant leg JLC event, there are greater ground reaction forces present to possibly injure the ACL of the athlete. Further research is needed to confirm if in fact the non-dominant leg is more susceptible to ACL injury. Our research lacks kinematics data to support our kinetic findings. Future research should focus on such data as well as a contrasting study with all subjects having left leg dominance. Our data lacks this element of comparison which is necessary in order to have an even greater understanding of ACL injury rates in female athletes.

Acknowledgments

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References

Personality Characteristics as Predictors of Health Risk Behaviors

Adam A. Torres: McNair Scholar
Dr. Mary Pritchard: Mentor
Department of Psychology

Abstract

This study examines personality characteristics as predictors of risky behavior, utilizing the widely accepted Big Five personality dimensions as indicators. The Big Five dimensions include: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Researchers utilized a 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey that investigates different types of risky behavior and for our purposes we utilized: delinquency, smoking & drinking, disorderly eating, and engagement in risky sexual behavior. Previous research has shown varying relationships between personality dimensions and risky health behavior. In addition, some problem behaviors have been investigated more thoroughly than others. Utilizing anonymous questionnaires, researchers surveyed 272 college undergraduates. For each risky behavior we predicted specific outcomes on each personality dimension. Some predictions are in line with previous research whereas others aimed to clarify those dimensions marked by the most variation. Researchers found agreeableness to be correlated with most delinquent behavior. Researchers also found gender differences in extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability, as well as various health risk behaviors.

Introduction

Language provides us with a tool that allows us to describe differences in people and further, these adjectives have allowed researchers to take a lexical approach in identifying personality dimensions (McCrae & John, 1992). It is hypothesized that traits that describe individual differences of personality would have become encoded in our language as adjectives (McCrae & John, 1992). These adjectives were clustered and analyzed to form what researchers have adopted as the Big Five or also known as Five-Factor Model (FFM) as the main representation of personality. These personality dimensions are extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), neuroticism or lack of emotional-stability (N), and openness to experience (O). Research in identifying personality dimensions started in the 1960s, but seemed to disappear until the 1980s, when many researchers agreed that these were fundamental dimensions of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1986; McCrae & John, 1992). The following descriptions of the Big Five are in terms of higher scores: extraversion is characterized as being energetic, talkative, sociable; agreeableness is characterized as being friendly, trusting, generous, and tolerant; conscientiousness is considered as being cautious, orderly, dependable, graceful, and responsible; neuroticism is characterized as being terse, anxious, and emotionally-unstable; openness is considered to be imaginative, and focused on wisdom, art, knowledge, and objectivity (Friedman & Schustack, 2003; Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & John, 1992).

There are many implications for the use of this personality taxonomy. It could be extremely helpful in its application in a clinical setting when concerning psychopathology. It would also be helpful to administer a personality assessment to find out how one varies in agreeableness before hiring them as an employee to work in a group setting. More importantly, it could be useful in predicting risky behavior such as, smoking, drinking, unprotected sex, counterproductive behavior, delinquency, eating disorders, and other aberrant behavior. According to McCrae and John (1992), the FFM can predict external phenomena with notable validity.

The rest of the paper will be a review of the literature that investigates various problem behaviors such as delinquency, smoking and drinking, disordered eating, and risky sexual behavior in relation to the
Big Five. From this literature, hypotheses will be made for each of the Big Five dimensions and each of the problem behaviors.

Delinquency

There are many factors that can contribute to delinquency, but most interesting was that less shyness and higher levels of emotional instability displayed at an early age was a predictor of an increased frequency of delinquent behavior (Leech, Day, Richardson, & Goldschmidt, 2003). Leech et al. used the Emotionality-Activity-Sociability and Shyness scale to find those attributes, which seem similar to extraversion and neuroticism of the Big Five. In addition, one study found support for neuroticism as being the best predictor of risky behavior (Lauriola & Levin, 2001). However, another study found that extraversion and neuroticism displayed little correlation with delinquency, whereas agreeableness showed the most support for this type of behavior (Heaven, 1996). In a study of school absenteeism, researchers found that openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability were all negatively correlated to absences (Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gibson, 2004), and increased absences were correlated with increased drop-out rates, gang membership, and lower IQ scores. Another study found conscientiousness to be a valid predictor of counterproductive behavior (Salgado, 2002) like absenteeism. In addition to these finding about conscientiousness, one study found that it negatively correlated with the number of times inmates had been arrested, showing that people involved in repeated criminal activity go about it in uncontrolled ways (Clower & Bothwell, 2001). Identifying students, by way of the Big Five, who have frequent absences or early signs of involvement in delinquent behavior could help school counselors be more successful in their intervention (Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gibson, 2004). Unfortunately, there seems to be some consensus on only one or two dimensions of the Big Five, indicating that more research is needed in this area.

Smoking and Drinking

Another health risk behavior that researchers have investigated are that of smoking and drinking. The research that has been done investigating neuroticism, extraversion, and smoking have had inconclusive findings (Shadel, Niaura, Goldstein, & Abrams, 2000) and requires more research. An interesting finding is that of openness and nicotine dependence, which notes that smokers who view themselves as being more independent or original are less dependent on nicotine (Shadel, Niaura, Goldstein, & Abrams, 2000). Additionally, high extraversion scores are also related to smoking (Wilkinson & Abraham, 2004) along with high self-esteem which is usually a characteristic of high extraversion scores (Robins, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001). Different types of drinking, like average daily consumption, are also correlated with extraversion (Kubicka, Matejec, Dytrych, & Roth, 2001), whereas low conscientiousness is the best predictor of the most drinking per episode according to the same study. High extraversion scores are also linked to lower parental control and support (Wilkinson & Abraham, 2004), making it difficult to attribute drinking to the extraversion or the lack of parental influence.

Eating Disorders

There has been little research using the Big Five to investigate anorexia and the studies that have been conducted show mixed results concerning one or two of the Big Five factors (Bollen & Wojciechowski, 2004; Ghaderi & Scott, 2000). One study had a control group containing more elderly people than the eating disorder sample, which makes it difficult to generalize their findings (Bollen & Wojciechowski, 2004). Another study differentiated between the subtypes of anorexia (anorexia nervosa restricting subtype and anorexia nervosa binge-eating/purging subtype) and the Big Five, where they found anorexia nervosa-restricting (AN-R) participants to have higher conscientiousness scores when compared to those in the anorexia nervosa-binge-eating/purging (AN-BP), while both subtypes had higher levels of neuroticism compared to the control group (Bollen & Wojciechowski, 2004). Ghaderi and Scott (2000) found similar results in regards to neuroticism, but opposite findings for conscientiousness; in addition the researchers found lower levels of agreeableness and openness in their eating disorder group when compared to the control group. It is clear that personality is a factor in those who partake in disordered
eating and it is evident that both neuroticism and conscientiousness are factors, but more research is needed to examine the effects of agreeableness and openness in relation to eating disorders.

Risky Sexual Behavior

Risky sexual behavior (RSB) has been attributed to sensation seeking (Gullette & Lyons, 2005; Shafer, 2001), which is related to high levels of extraversion. RSB can be unprotected sex (Gil, 2005) that would increase the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases; furthermore RSB can be sexual encounters that draw from impulsivity. This is also one area where gender in consistently investigated and one study found that males more than females report involvement in RSB at a higher frequency (Gil, 2005). Despite the support for sensation seeking being correlated with RSB (Gullette & Lyons, 2005), Bryan and Stallings (2002) hypothesized there to be a relationship between novelty seeking and RSB because of the correlation between novelty seeking and substance abuse, but to their surprise they found no relationship between novelty seeking and unprotected sexual activity. Bryan and Stallings (2002) also found the individuals who displayed lower levels of reward dependence (which they describe as warm, sensitive, and dependent) engaged in higher rates of RSB. Warmth, sensitivity, and dependence seem similar to the dimensions of agreeableness and conscientiousness according to the trait descriptive adjectives in Goldberg (1990); in addition it makes sense that lower levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness would cause problems because a higher conscientiousness score would be conducive to functioning well in society (Hayes & Joseph, 2003).

The Present Study

For each risky behavior we predicted specific outcomes on each personality dimension. Some predictions are in line with previous research, whereas others aimed to clarify those dimensions marked by the most variation. Concerning delinquency, we expected high scores for extraversion and neuroticism and low scores for agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. For smoking and drinking we expected high scores in extraversion, neuroticism, and openness, and a low score in conscientiousness, while expecting little or no correlation with agreeableness. As for eating disorders, we expected high scores in conscientiousness and neuroticism, and low scores in extraversion, agreeableness, and openness. Lastly, for risky sexual behavior, we expect high scores in extraversion and openness, and low scores for agreeableness and conscientiousness, while expecting little or no correlation with neuroticism.

Method

Sample

Participants were (males = 95, females = 177) freshman college students from a large western state university who participated for points toward their Psychology 101 grades. The majority of participants were freshmen level students (freshmen = 203, sophomores = 48, juniors = 18, seniors = 3) and Caucasian (Caucasian = 227, African-American = 5, Hispanic = 21, Asian = 5, other = 11). All participants were treated in accordance with the “Ethical Principles of Psychologist and Code of Conduct,” publication manual (American Psychological Association., 2001).

Materials

Personality. The participants were given BFI-54 personality inventory for measuring the Big Five personality dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness (John & Srivastava, 1999). Students answered items about how they perceived themselves being, such as, ‘I see myself as someone who is original, comes up with new ideas.’ Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from disagree strongly (A) to agree strongly (E).
**Health risk behavior.** Students were given the 2005 State and Local Youth Risk Behavior Survey to measure how frequently and what types of delinquent acts the participants had been involved in. This survey covers many different health risk behaviors, but for this study researchers used questions concerning behaviors of interest. We used questions concerning violence-related behaviors, suicide behaviors, tobacco use, alcohol use, marijuana use, other drug use, sexual behavior, and body weight dissatisfaction.

**Procedure**

Participants were asked to complete the survey anonymously while under supervision. They were asked to answer each question as they are and not how they would like to be and were informed that the results would be used for research purposes. Survey took about 15-20 minutes to complete. Students were informed that if at any time they felt uncomfortable due to the questions they could stop and would not be penalized.

**Results**

To examine the relationship between personality dimensions and health risk behaviors we ran Pearson’s *r* correlations between each personality dimension and all health risk behaviors. These correlations are shown in Table 1. Within delinquency, we found violence was significantly negatively correlated with agreeableness, but not with extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, or openness. Suicide was found to have a strong negative correlation with emotional stability, but not with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, or openness. Marijuana use displayed a significant negative correlation with agreeableness and a positive correlation with openness, but no correlation was found concerning extraversion, conscientiousness, or emotional stability. Other drug use was found to have a strong negative correlation with agreeableness, but not with extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, or openness. Within smoking and drinking, tobacco displayed a negative correlation with agreeableness and conscientiousness, but no correlation with extraversion, emotional stability, or openness. Alcohol was significantly positively correlated with extraversion, but no significance was found between alcohol use and agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. It should be noted that the relationship between emotional stability and alcohol approached statistical significance. There were no statistically significant relationships found between risky sexual behavior and personality. Body weight satisfaction was significantly positively correlated with agreeableness and significantly negatively correlated with emotional stability, but no significant correlations were found concerning extraversion, conscientiousness, or openness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extraversion</th>
<th>Agreeableness</th>
<th>Conscientiousness</th>
<th>Emotional Stability</th>
<th>Openness</th>
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<td>-.08</td>
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<td>-.24**</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01
We examined gender differences in personality, as well as health risk behaviors by utilizing a two-tailed t-test. Many statistically significant differences were found. A significant difference was found concerning extraversion, with females ($M = 23.27$, $SD = 6.86$) tending to be more extraverted than males ($M = 20.73$, $SD = 6.19$), $t(270) = 3.01$, $p < .003$. Agreeableness also displayed statistically significant differences between females ($M = 25.01$, $SD = 5.81$) and males ($M = 22.99$, $SD = 5.00$) showing that females tend to be more agreeable than do males, $t(270) = 3.00$, $p < .003$. Another statistically significant finding is that of emotional stability, with males ($M = 19.85$, $SD = 6.49$) tending to be more emotionally stable when compared to females ($M = 15.86$, $SD = 5.57$), $t(270) = -5.32$, $p < .00$. Significant differences in participation in violence displayed a drastic difference between males ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 5.84$) and females ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 2.52$), $t(270) = -4.60$, $p < .00$. Also, males ($M = 10.66$, $SD = 6.69$) tend to participate in the consumption of alcohol significantly more when compared to females ($M = 8.72$, $SD = 4.98$), $t(270) = -2.72$, $p < .007$, also males ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 5.45$) tend to participate in marijuana usage more than females ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 3.70$), $t(270) = -4.66$, $p < .00$. Males ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 4.46$) also displayed significantly higher levels of other drug use compared to females ($M = 1.10$, $SD = 2.60$), $t(270) = -3.46$, $p < .001$. Body weight dissatisfaction was significantly higher in females ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 2.33$) compared to males ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 2.14$), $t(270) = 5.04$, $p < .00$.

There were virtually no differences between males ($M = 21.78$, $SD = 5.63$) and females ($M = 23.03$, $SD = 5.07$) in respect to conscientiousness, $t(270) = 1.86$, $p = .06$, same is true concerning openness $t(270) = -.34$, $p = .734$. There was no statistical significance found between females ($M = .93$, $SD = 1.32$) and males ($M = .65$, $SD = 1.10$) when concerning suicide, $t(270) = 1.74$, $p = .08$. There was no statistical significance found between females ($M = 8.93$, $SD = 5.84$) and males ($M = 9.26$, $SD = 5.66$) concerning risky sexual behavior $t(270) = .46$, $p = .65$.

### Table 2. Means and Standard deviations in Gender Differences Displayed between Personality Dimensions and Various Health Risk Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23.27</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>3.01**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20.73</td>
<td>6.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.81</td>
<td>3.00**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22.99</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15.86</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>-5.32***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>7.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>4.98</td>
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<td>Alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>6.69</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>-4.66***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>2.33</td>
<td>5.04***</td>
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<td>Bodyweight Dissatisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>2.14</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$
Discussion

Research concerning the predictive power of personality and its dimensions has been of great interest, and we have set out to contribute to the body of literature. Examining personality characteristics as predictors of risky health behaviors was the goal of this study. Some of our hypotheses were confirmed, whereas other correlations failed to reach statistical significance.

Our results suggest there are correlations between personality dimensions and all risky behaviors investigated in this study, except risky sexual behavior. Our hypothesis of higher scores in extraversion and neuroticism was not found, but lower scores for agreeableness were found to be significant concerning delinquency. Participants who scored lower on agreeableness typically scored higher in the rate of violent acts they participated in, a finding in line with Heaven’s study (1996). Also, those who scored higher in agreeableness were typically female, thus engaging in fewer acts of violence. This was also confirmed by our data with significant differences between men and women in violence and agreeableness, females scoring higher in agreeableness and lower in violence. This makes sense considering the dimension of agreeableness. Those who score low are likely to be argumentative, uncooperative, or unsympathetic, thus engaging in violent acts with increasing frequency. To our surprise, although we expected those involved in more acts of violence to have scored significantly higher in neuroticism as proposed by Lauriola and Levin (2001), statistical significance was not reached. One possible reason for neuroticism not being significantly correlated to violence is possibly because of our finding of neuroticism and gender. Our study demonstrated that females tend to be more neurotic than males, yet engage in fewer acts of violence. We found support only for agreeableness when correlating the Big Five to violence. Identifying those individuals who score low in agreeableness, specifically in school settings, would allow school counselors to better help students.

Drug use, more specifically marijuana use, was negatively correlated with agreeableness, as it was with violence. Also measured were a variety of other drugs, such as cocaine and methamphetamines, which were also negatively correlated with agreeableness. It seems that most socially unacceptable behaviors (e.g., violence, marijuana use, other drug use) are negatively correlated with agreeableness, making it a better predictor of delinquency. It is no surprise that violence, marijuana use, and other drug use are all negatively correlated with agreeableness due to the anti-social nature of these behaviors.

Second, openness was not positively correlated with smoking or drinking as suggested by the literature. Agreeableness displayed the strongest negative correlation with smoking, which was predicted to have little effect. Considering how previous literature supports the correlation between smoking and openness, we now can see how people who consider themselves as original and different, could be considered argumentative, uncooperative, or less agreeable. As predicted, low levels of conscientiousness were related to higher participation in smoking behaviors. Also found were gender differences in smoking, where males engaged in smoking behaviors more often than females. In our study, males were less agreeable than were females, indicating that males should engage in smoking behaviors more than females, which was supported by the results. As for drinking, extraversion displayed the strongest correlation, which is in line with previous research (Robins, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001) and seems to be the most agreed upon relationship. One relationship that is difficult to understand is gender differences found in extraversion. Because females tend to be more extraverted, they ought to engage in more drinking, yet males tend to engage in drinking more frequently. This relationship needs further investigation.

Third, neuroticism seemed to be the best indicator of individuals engaged in disordered eating, which was in line with our hypothesis and previous research. It seems that those individuals who are emotionally reactive tend to engage in disordered eating more frequently. Females also engaged in disordered eating more frequently than males, which was supported by previous research. We hypothesized that agreeableness would have little or no effect, yet agreeableness was positively correlated with disordered eating. This could be because individuals who tend to be agreeable tend to be cooperative and stress blending in socially, thus trying to associate themselves with their peers or the media. This relationship needs more investigation, specifically the peer relationships of those who engage in disordered eating.

Fourth, sexual behavior was not significantly correlated with any of the Big Five dimensions. It could be possible that there were too few questions concerning sexual behaviors and more information about sexual behaviors would result a correlation with personality. There was a lack of gender differences as well, despite males being more involved in sexual behavior, the relationship was not significant. Perhaps, the lack of finding is due to the conservative nature of the environment in which they live. Also,
the majority of the participants were freshmen and it could be that many of them are now just starting to explore their sexuality.

It is evident that there are indeed relationships between personality and risky health behaviors. In this study, agreeableness seems to be the best predictor for delinquent behavior, but only in males. Males tended to be less agreeable than females, thus males tended to be involved in more violent acts, more tobacco use, and more illegal drug use in general. Whereas females compared to males, would participate in less violent acts, tobacco use, and illegal drug use. The predictive power of agreeableness should be investigated in future research specifically examining gender differences. It could be that males and females view agreeableness differently.

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References


