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## **Masthead**

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## Letter from the Editor



I am delighted to share with you the first volume of the *Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Issues and Media*, a journal established to provide students a forum to communicate about critical issues in a variety of media. The journal is the product of students in our Techni-

cal Editing course, who through their efforts and those of the authors collaborated to bring the pieces to fruition.

Each piece in the volume addresses the term “inequality,” a nebulous concept that each contributor interpreted in their own unique way through a medium that best fit their message. Through a diverse set of texts and video, the journal represents how each person chose to share their perspective. The first article, “This Pussy Grabs Back: Body Rhetoric at the Women’s March on Washington,” demonstrates the strategic impact of body rhetoric as a form of protest against the current political climate of reproductive rights and advocates for gender equality. In the article, Karyn Keene describes the scene at the Women’s March and discusses the rhetorical strategies of vagina-clad protesters making a point. Melisse Liwag, addresses the concept from the view of language. In “Singlish: That’s Bad English,” she makes the case for the richness of a Singaporean dialect of English. She notes that in recent years there has been a movement to curb its use in order to cultivate Standard English, a force that values prescriptive forms of language. What is lost, she explains, is the cultural identity of Singlish speakers and the communicative aspects it highlights. Drawing on interviews conducted at Inter-mountain University, Holly Neyer, in her article, “Discrepancies in the Concepts and Practices of Consensual Negotiation Between Male and Female Students: Exposed through Analysis of Linguistic Features,” demonstrates the complexity of discussions concerning consent and sexual assault. Through a linguistic analysis, she illustrates how language reveals gendered views

on the issue. The issue becomes more complicated, she explains, when alcohol is involved. Neyer’s research uncovers deep-seated beliefs about consent and sexual assault, and calls for universities and colleges to revisit their policy statements to address the issue more realistically.

The final two articles, an essay by Ben Davidson and a policy statement by Melisse Liwag, look at human/animal relationships and mental health, respectively. In his essay “a selfish species and its sister,” Davidson underscores the danger of anthropocentric thinking as it relates to animals. Reviewing the literature on pain and suffering he admonishes scientists for cultivating a culture where animals serve their purposes. As sentient beings, animals, too, are impacted by the material environment in which they live. It is no longer viable to maximize human benefit at the expense of animal treatment, classifying them as “other.” The final article, “CULTURING THE MIND: A Policy Brief to California’s American Mental Health Allies,” addresses the cultural aspects of mental healthcare. Liwag focuses on the Asian-American population in California, which comprises 16% of its total. While Asian-Americans experience mental health issues at similar rates as other demographics, they are less likely to seek help, she explains. Liwag helps identify some of the underlying cultural factors that might impact the lack of treatment and calls for a culturally competent healthcare system that can address the needs of potential clients. Her policy brief ends with suggestions for improvement.

The final piece, a spoken word, was created by Bilal Boussayoud. “Dialogue Makes More Dialogue” and “I wanted to hear this,” round out this volume as Boussayoud performs his poetry.

All contributions address issues pertinent to our contemporary time and merit our attention. Good reading!

Maureen Mathison  
University of Utah



# This Pussy Grabs Back: Body Rhetoric at the Women's March on Washington

Karyn Keane / Longwood University

Modes of social protest often utilize verbal and written forms of communication. Societal criticisms like Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and Upton Sinclair's book, *The Jungle*, have stood the test of time and are still regarded as historically significant; however, body rhetoric serves as another valuable form of protest and advocacy. Body rhetoric is a subcategory of visual rhetoric, which Prelli explains as "visual displays [that] influence our attitudes and feelings, shape and reinforce our beliefs and values, and constrain what we write, say, or otherwise think about them" (10). More directly, Booth and Spencer explain the concept of body rhetoric, stating, "Body rhetoric frames the body itself as a rhetorical text given that embodied performances constitute and communicate identities" (2). Advantages to body rhetoric as a means of communication include its widespread usability (anyone who has a body can participate in some capacity) and stylistic flexibility (materials can be few or many, depending upon the desired effect and available resources). Numerous examples of body rhetoric in action can be seen in photographs of the Women's March on Washington, where crowds gathered to protest the reproductive policies of an incoming president.

## The Women's March on Washington

The first Women's March on Washington

occurred on January 21, 2017 in Washington D.C. One report writes that "hundreds of thousands...overwhelmed the nation's capital" for the event (Przybyla and Schouten). The event website states that several "unity principles" guided the event, including an emphasis on reproductive rights. Their description reads:

We believe in Reproductive Freedom. We do not accept any federal, state or local rollbacks, cuts or restrictions on our ability to access quality reproductive healthcare services, birth control, HIV/AIDS care and prevention, or medically accurate sexuality education. This means open access to safe, legal, affordable abortion and birth control for all people, regardless of income, location or education.

The Women's March arose from widespread anxiety regarding the conservative Trump administration's policies. Although marchers advocated for a variety of progressive causes, they focused primarily on gender equality and reproductive rights. Their concerns stemmed from inconsistent statements regarding safe access to abortion and birth control, about which the president frequently changed positions throughout the duration of his campaign. One report notes that "Donald Trump took five different positions on abortion in three days" (Bump). Similarly, Trump's address to anti-choice protesters at the March for Life posed similar threats to women's reproductive rights as he declared, "Under

my administration, we will always defend the very first right in the Declaration of Independence, and that is the right to life" (McCammon). Lastly, resurfaced comments from a 2005 recording confirmed his misogyny. He bragged to Billy Bush, "When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything" (*New York Times*). In light of shockingly problematic comments like these, it is easy to see why protesters opted for high impact and memorable acts of body rhetoric to convey their feminist arguments.

The Women's March saw high rates of participation in body rhetoric as activists used their bodies to send messages to politicians. These messages conveyed their strong beliefs in gender equality and reproductive rights through artistic outfits and accessories. Examples of protesters using body rhetoric can be seen below in the photographs of women wearing vagina costumes (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).

While the signs accompanying the costumes capture viewers' attention by putting the women's messages into words, their use of body rhetoric with costuming strengthens their messages by combining small but impactful qualities, the implementation of identification-based principles, and the use of Aristotelian techniques.

## Analysis of Body Rhetoric

The photographs of the vagina-clad advocates initially appeared on various social media outlets and garnered widespread attention (both positive and negative). Their costumes

serve to demonstrate the effectiveness of body rhetoric in the role of argument.



Figure 1 (Complex News)

The suits debuted at the Women's March on Washington in 2017, just after Donald Trump took the presidential oath of office. The red and pink cloth of which each suit is composed is largely shapeless and reveals only the wearer's hands, face, and lower legs. Their accompanying signs utilize several different forms of media, including photographs, drawings, colorful lettering, tape, and small plastic hands.

The political conditions that produced this event explain the reasoning behind wearing an over-the-top vagina costume as a form of protest rhetoric: the bold colors of the suits captured viewers' attention and their overwhelming size conveyed the urgency of the



issues at hand. Although more “polite” forms of rhetoric (such as petitioning, letter-writing, calm public speaking, etc.) served as options, the use of the body to create a memorable image that stood for women’s reproductive rights was a powerful way to make a point. Extravagant displays like this spurred numerous positive reactions to the Women’s March. Many celebrities spoke out in favor of the event, including Ariana Grande, Emma Watson, and Zendaya (Bailey). *National Public Radio* (NPR) also published several pieces in support of the March, including one entitled “Mothers, Daughters, Sisters and Men Unite to Protest Trump’s Presidency” (McCammon). The title of the NPR article indicates the solidarity present at the event among supporters



Figure 2 (Build a Uterine Wall)

of reproductive rights.

The use of body rhetoric strengthens the women’s argument by combining several small qualities to create a prominent effect. In a discussion about the power of visual arguments, Zavoina contends that “subtleties in framing, choice of body type for subject, lighting, use of color, dress, accessories, and language inherent in the pose can all make important visual statements” (xviii). The vagina-clad women pictured in Figures 1, 2, and 3 employ several of these subtleties by using multiple aspects of their costume to make meaning.

Importantly, the costumes cover the women’s entire bodies (minus their face, hands, and lower legs) so that they appear amorphous, highlighting their message over all else. The three women use their costumes as a means of revealing and focusing on the vagina—a frequently concealed part of female anatomy. Despite these extroverted displays, the artifacts also conceal the wearers: cloth covers most of their bodies, downplaying their specific body types and identities. By employing an effective combination of “revealing” and “concealing” the women’s argument is strengthened. As described by Prelli, “revealing” refers to “the classical idea that to display is to ‘show forth’ or make known,” which, in turn, implies its opposite—to conceal” (11). This balance of revealing and concealing is crucial in the delivery of the women’s stance of protecting reproductive rights and promoting gender equality by making their message more relevant, and at the same time, more relatable to women everywhere. It does not

restrict their appeal to a specific group, but further advocates for the importance of rights.

Color, too, enhances their message. Their use of yonic pink and red tones—and, in the case of Figure 2, pubic hair for added effect—conveys an upfront attitude regarding the importance of reproductive health.

While the costumes are a general attack on anti-choice policies, the accompanying signs serve as accessories to the ensemble by conveying more specific sentiments against the Trump administration. Further, the suits’ assertive and memorable nature emphasizes the importance of leaving reproductive rights under female control in a way that remains in viewers’ minds longer and more meaningfully than it

would had the women simply dressed in normal clothing and held signs. These aspects of each display, though seemingly minor, enhance the effectiveness of body rhetoric by working together to create a more striking effect.

This use of body rhetoric also proves effective by providing future generations with new images of women’s role in media. In an essay about the historical developments of women’s poses, Baldwin quotes Kellner’s idea that “attitudes about one’s self are learned by the media” and that “girls negotiate and construct their own gendered identities through different definitions of what it means to be a

woman through the media” (88). Whereas images of sign-yielding protestors are quite common in popular culture, depictions of women using extreme and assertive techniques to convey a message proves rarer. These public displays make the women’s body rhetoric set new standards for upcoming generations and



Figure 3 (Read My Lips)

redefine concepts of women’s role in social movements.

### Rhetorical Techniques

The particular use of body rhetoric at the Women’s March shows how the power of argument can be increased through the use of Burke’s theory of “identification.” In the classic tome *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke (in the original) regards identification as “perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55). The women in the vagina suits use principles

of identification by enacting body rhetoric to connect with pro-choice individuals throughout the world. By representing a reproductive organ, they serve as visual representations of the fight for reproductive rights, “speaking their language” through visually “loud” costuming and the signs they hold. Further, they embody the attitudes and ideas of the pro-choice movement by proudly donning vagina costumes, thus demonstrating a disregard for politicians who advocate for patriarchal dominance over these rights. These small qualities of each display enhance the memorability and meaningfulness of the women’s protests, making their arguments more effective overall.

The women’s use of body rhetoric equally employs Aristotelian rhetorical principles to strengthen their argument. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle contends that rhetoric operates by “putting the audience into a certain frame of mind” (181). He further argues that in political situations, rhetoricians succeed by “establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action” (185). The pictured use of body rhetoric through costuming draws upon these principles through generating strong emotions of protest and implying the harmful effects of exerting control over women’s reproductive rights. Their yonic outfits enforce the progressive opinion that women should be in control of their own reproductive health, manifesting feelings of unity behind a single cause among audiences. Additionally, the women’s willingness to wear a shocking, over-the-top suit conveys the urgency of their cause. They embody the admirable personal trait of advocating for those in need of assis-

tance (in this case, women in need of reproductive healthcare) while stirring audiences to take action by wearing extreme attire and holding signs that directly criticize the opposing politicians.

The Aristotelian appeals of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* in the creation and delivery of their body rhetoric displays reinforces the urgency of the moment. Sonja K. Foss explains the three categories of appeals: “(1) logos or logical argument; (2) ethos or the appeal of the rhetor’s character; and (3) pathos or emotional appeal” (33). These artifacts address logos because they suggest that if multiple women are willing to dress up as vaginas to fight for their reproductive rights, then those rights must be necessary and their threatened state is highly problematic. Ethos also shapes the women’s use of body rhetoric by demonstrating the women’s character. Their holistic and exaggerated civic participation builds credibility because it implies that they are well-informed about the issues at hand and motivated enough to protest them using their bodies. Lastly, the protesters draw upon pathos because their body rhetoric arouses concern (for women’s dwindling control over their bodies), anger (at politicians who threaten reproductive rights), and motivation (to put an end to the war on reproductive rights). In addressing each of the three appeals in their protest displays, these women strengthen their use of body rhetoric and ensure the effectiveness of their message.

### Conclusion

Body rhetoric is a powerful means of

argument. The women’s costuming at the Women’s March strengthened their message through small but meaningful details, and the use of rhetorical techniques like Burke’s identification and Aristotelian rhetoric. Each woman’s costume and accompanying signage asserted that protecting reproductive rights is vitally important, particularly in lieu of the current political climate. Although many protesters arrived at the Women’s March with change in mind and signs in hand, bolder par-

ticipants donned outfits and accessories like the ones pictured in this article to make their voices heard. These protesters were probably unaware that they used formal rhetorical techniques and likely just wanted to create a memorable, lasting image for women’s rights; however, the attention given to their efforts on social media suggests their success nonetheless. Perhaps more active citizens might consider using body rhetoric for protest and advocacy.

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KARYN KEANE is a junior in the Cormier Honors College of Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. She is an English major with a concentration in Rhetoric and Professional Writing and a minor in Children's Literature. Her academic interests include pop culture, writing studies, public memory, and rhetoric. In addition to her English-focused studies, she is a reader for The Omnipedia Review and regularly contributes pieces to the Farmville-Downtown Partnership. Her other publications include "Partial,

Partisan, Contested: Public Memory at the National Museum of African American History and Culture" and "Nasty Women: Grendel's Mother and Wealhtheow as Equal Depictions of Femininity." She will also present her research on the National Museum of African American History and Culture at the 2018 National Collegiate Honors Conference. After graduating from Longwood, she hopes to pursue a doctorate in Composition and Rhetoric with the eventual goal of becoming a college professor.



## Singlish: That's Bad English

Melisse Claireneth Liwag / University of California, Davis

Growing up in Singapore, I used to say sentences like “Don’t be like that lah!” when reprimanding my sister or “Do this for what?” when questioning someone’s actions. My use of Singlish, an English dialect spoken in Singapore, was usually corrected by my parents and teachers to Standard English. However, I felt that it was wrong to say that Singlish is broken or bad. Each Chinese-influenced Singlish word – lah, lor, or hor – at the end of sentences conveys a particular meaning. Those words cannot be ordered in other ways. My conflict in thinking about languages reflects the two ways of approaching language in linguistics: a descriptive attitude or a prescriptive attitude. The adoption of a descriptive attitude is an attempt to decipher the mental and grammatical rules underlying the language – identifying how the language *is being* used by speakers. On the other hand, those who have a prescriptive attitude toward that language dictate *how* the language should be spoken and state rules that speakers *should* follow to be proper speakers of that language. The Singaporean government’s annual Speak Good English movement started in 2000 as a response to the growing usage of Singlish, which was adverse to the government’s goal for citizens to be understood in the global community. Some “remedies” to reduce Singlish usage included a book series on correcting Singlish, public

workshops, and school assemblies. Hence, when academics explicate the grammatical rules that govern the syntax and vocabulary of Singlish that speakers know intuitively, this is a descriptive attitude toward Singlish; however, when the government and affiliated academics denounce its use through the annual Speak Good English Movement and school teachings, they adopt a prescriptive attitude.

A descriptive attitude toward Singlish reveals a Singaporean’s knowledge of his or her language, explicitly states the rules that govern meaning and word order, and does not attempt to correct the usage. Singlish is an English dialect that developed from the variety of languages present in Singapore, which are Mandarin Chinese, Malay, Hokkien, Teochew, and Tamil. Although the official language is Standard Singaporean English, citizens often have learned a second language in addition to English from birth. Thus, Singaporeans use a dialect of English that combines the grammar and vocabulary of one or more of the languages they know. An example is a statement “She eat rice” which mirrors Chinese grammatical structure in the equivalent “Ta chi fan” (Tan). Furthermore, Singlish comes with particular intonations to indicate a person’s attitude or mood. For example, when I say “Don’t be like that lah”, the “lah” indicates persuasiveness and is always put at the end of a sentence

(Wong). Stress put on “lah” suggests a feeling of being annoyed. On the other hand, “lor” added to the end of “Anything lor” conveys neutrality in order to say that anything is fine. A way to say “don’t” in sentences is to put “never” in place of it such as “I never did my homework” (“Singaporean Blunders”). With sentences specifically structured like those mentioned, it is easy for Singlish speakers to identify sentences that are not well-formed and thus, know proficient Singlish speakers from non-proficient ones.

Despite having grammar and vocabulary unique to it, Singlish holds low prestige in formal settings, even leading to discouragement of its everyday conversational use in the government’s Speak Good English Movement and the schools’ emphasis on correction of students’ speech. The goal of the Speak Good English Movement is to:

“...encourage Singaporeans to speak and write in Standard English and help those who habitually use fractured, ungrammatical English to use grammatical English... We aim to help those who speak only Singlish, and *those who think Singlish is English*, to speak Standard English” (“About Us”; *emphasis added*).

This grammatically correct English refers to Standard Singaporean English with grammar and vocabulary modeled after that of British English – a product of Singapore’s colonial history. In accordance with this movement, school administrators have held school-wide assemblies to teach students that Singlish is broken English and to provide the correct Standard English alternatives to the so-called

incorrect usage. Beyond the classroom setting, there are many public workshops, contests, and programs available to all Singaporeans to improve their Standard English competency (“About Us”). Some grammatical rules that have been advocated for include eliminating words like “lah” or “lor” from the end of sentences and using “do not” in place of “never” (“Singaporean Blunders”) as criticisms of the more common Singlish phrases.

Although it is understandable and commendable for educators to teach students to be professional speakers and writers in formal settings, saying that Singlish is bad English, or not even English, comes from a prescriptive attitude that dictates how a speaker should use his or her language in their daily lives. Consistent with the movement’s goals, students should be encouraged to use Standard English and not Singlish in educational settings where it is appropriate; however, their use of Singlish when in conversation with friends or family should not be denounced or corrected. In addition, it is also inaccurate for the movement to imply that Singlish is not grammatical when it does have its own syntax and grammatical rules that are implicitly recognized by all speakers of that dialect. With Singlish persisting as an integral part of Singaporean cultural identity, the Speak Good English Movement has since evolved to recognize both Standard Singaporean English and Singlish as having essential linguistic components to consider in its arguments (Wong). Yet, there is still linguistic inequality between the two variations of English in that all Singaporeans are still strongly encouraged

to use Standard Singaporean English in their daily conversations with each other and the movement has yet to accept Singlish as English.

Singlish has established syntax and vocabulary; however, it is seen in Singaporean society as a form of bad English through the government's yearly Speak Good English movement and school curriculum that discourage its use in daily life. Adopting a descriptive attitude toward language makes the speaker the expert on his or her language and thus preserves its authenticity. A linguist's job is to decipher the rules behind the language to discover its complexities, not to assume that there is an absolutely correct way to speak a particular language. Singlish's linguistic

differences may not readily lend themselves to harmful social discrimination in Singapore because many citizens use it regardless of social class and many appropriately use Standard Singaporean English in professional or global settings. In the U.S., however, usage of particular linguistic varieties may confer incorrect beliefs about the person's intelligence or education which could be grounds for social discrimination and possibly lead to consequences in job, housing, and educational environments. The stigma towards Singlish draws comparison to other discrediting linguistic attitudes toward minority dialects in the U.S. and other countries. As a Singaporean might say to a critic of Singlish, "Don't be like that lah!"

MELISSE CLAIRENETH LIWAG is currently pursuing a double major in Cognitive Science (Neuroscience emphasis) and Psychology at the University of California, Davis. A deep passion of hers is to connect to her Filipino roots while learning more about other cultures' languages and customs. Her other interests include going on exciting food adventures with family and friends, and watching funny online videos in the comfort of her own home. A second article, "CULTURING THE MIND: A Policy Brief to California's Asian American Mental Health Allies," can be found on pg. 37 of this issue.

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# Discrepancies in the Concepts and Practices of Consensual Negotiation Between Male and Female Students: Exposed through Analysis of Linguistic Features

Holly Neyer / Boise State University

In this article I report on research I conducted on sexual consent, specifically, how university aged students conceptualize, discuss, negotiate, and practice their ideas about sexual consent through varying linguistic features. As a female university student I have heard, witnessed, and experienced the discrepancy of views on this topic amongst different groups of students, particularly the differences in how men and women understand and vocalize ideas on consent. To better engage this subject, I provide some general background information and statistics on consent, examine the current written policy on consent that aims to provide a unifying understanding for all of the Intermountain State University campus community, and finally summarize the major underlying discrepancies of linguistic variations between two conversations of the opposing sexes about sexual consent.

Through a linguistic analysis of conversations in groups of students I was able to discern that there are major discrepancies in the understanding of and negotiation of consent. Despite the high exposure to public discourse and educational information on what is legally deemed sexual consent, legislation, and university policies, the actual voiced opinions of

those interviewed deviate from the legal and educational documentation of what constitutes sexual consent. There was particular uncertainty between the lines of sexual consent and sexual assault when alcohol is involved.

Despite having access to and education of the same legal provisions and educational policy standards on the notion of sexual consent, male and female students have some major differences in how they perceive and discuss consent.

## Background

We've all heard it. The lesson of consent and its application to sexual negotiations have permeated our lives in both professional and social environments, as exemplified in this popular YouTube Video, with more than five million views: "Consent is like tea. Just imagine instead of initiating sex, you're making them a cup of tea. You say, 'Hey would like you a cup of tea?' They go, 'Oh my god, fuck yes, I would love a cup of tea! Thank you,'" then you know they want a cup of tea. If you say, 'Would you like a cup of tea?' and they say, "Uhh...you know, I'm not really sure," then you can make them a cup of tea or not but be ware they might not drink it" (Blue Seat Studios, 2015).

Consent is a topic that most students identify as something they understand. It is the age of saying of, "Yes means yes, and no means no." It has been impressed upon our psyche since a relatively early age. Upon the commencement of each new condition of employment, people are educated on consent. Most high school health classes cover the topic. The online course required of all Intermountain State University students to complete before beginning their freshman semester covers, in detail, the topic of consent.



However, it is obvious that there are discrepancies in the understanding and practice of consent when looking at crime statistics, and when reflecting upon the recent movements at the forefront of media coverage and popular culture such as Times Up and #Me-too. Despite the high exposure to education about sexual consent, there are on average, 321,500 rape and sexual assault victims every year in the United States ("Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics," 2016). These statistics

are not indicative of a community or a society that is well educated on the concept and practice of consent.

Tragically, there will always be predators within a society who will continue to commit these heinous crimes despite better knowledge. Nationally, more than 1 of every 10 university students experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation. That number drastically increases for women, with over 1 of every 5 female students becoming victims of sexual violence ("Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics," 2016). Despite high crime rates, female university students are often very unlikely to report a crime to law enforcement.

While only 32% of female victims ages 18-24 report to law enforcement in general, the number of reports drastically decreases to 20% if the female victim is enrolled in a university ("Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics," 2016). This decrease in reporting in higher education is alarming. These statistics support a trend seen in the United States that university campuses, policies, and social atmospheres have created, or at least allowed for the silencing of victims, as well as creating an environment for rape culture to thrive unchecked.

Alcohol, while a traditional staple of the college experience to many, is also statistically a traditional staple of rape and violent crime. According to a study by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the perpetrator in more than 50% of all violent crimes has consumed alcohol, with rape and



sexual assault being no exceptions (“Alcohol and Sexual Assault,” 2010). However, in the case of rape and sexual assault, over 50% of all victims additionally report being under the influence of alcohol. The blurred lines of a situation due to the consumption of alcohol, among other factors (e.g., the prioritizing of hyper-masculinity within fraternity systems or the commonality of date rape) suggest that sexual consent requires much more complex and critical discussion than simply “no means no” (Abbey, n.d.).

The established roots of rape culture on campuses and the complex manner in which it embeds into numerous different areas of university life makes the manner in which sexual consent is conceptualized and negotiated difficult to study and to identify potential solutions to the crisis. However, through a linguistic analysis of real conversations, with real university students, it is possible to analyze the discrepancies in the understanding and practice of consent in a critical and constructive manner.

Through genuine conversations and appropriate linguistic analysis, there may be an opportunity to formulate educational and preventative measures and solutions that provide a comprehensive and equal understanding of consent.

## Methodology

To examine sexual consent, I assembled two forum group discussions. I believed that a forum group discussion would be a better method to examine contemporary understandings and practices of consent and con-

sensual negotiation. Because of the high level of education and psychological aspects of how members of this segment of society have been conditioned to answer questions about consent, I wanted to cultivate a natural, relaxed, conversational-style forum discussion. I marketed on campus and through the college community to recruit participants for the study. I then separated these group forum discussions by gender. The participants in the group discussions came from diverse racial and social and economic backgrounds; however, all 8 participants identified as heterosexual, were between the ages of 19 and 25, and were born and raised in the United States. I recorded the data of their conversations using an application on my iPhone. For the analysis, I highlighted the main trends within the different forum discussions. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, I do not include direct data excerpts of their conversations, instead highlighting the varying linguistic tendencies of each group through categorization.

To assist in introducing the topic, I had posed several questions to the group members including; “How do you define consent?”, “Are there any situations in which consent can be perceived, but not directly given?”, and “How does alcohol factor into one’s ability to give consent?” I purposefully chose specific topics from the forum discussions, because not all of the conversation was relevant to the discussion of sexual consent. All the participants gave consent for their conversations to be recorded, analyzed, and included in this paper. The recordings are to be kept private for protection of all participants’ identity.

## Analysis

For the introductory portion of my analysis, I first examine the linguistic terms used in the Intermountain State Code of Conduct excerpt that speaks about consent. This point within the Code of Conduct is meant to provide a comprehensive understanding of consent, and to unify all students under the same basic laws, rules, and regulations on campus.

### (1) Code of Conduct

B. Consent The term “consent” means freely given agreement to engage in a course of conduct. Consent for sexual activity must be given free of force, threat, intimidation, or coercion. Neither silence nor a prior relationship is sufficient to indicate consent. Someone who is incapacitated in any way cannot give consent.

Consent will not be considered given by someone who is asleep, incapacitated by alcohol or illegal or prescription drugs, unconscious, harassed, coerced, threatened, or otherwise forced into sexual activity. Additionally, consent for sexual activity cannot be given by someone under 16 years of age and Idaho law additionally limits the ability of someone 16 or 17 to consent. For more information, see Idaho Code sections 18-1506, 1508, 6101 and 6108.

In the Code, consent is clearly defined in broad terms, “freely given agreement to engage in a course of conduct.” However, immediately after consent is established the following sentence quickly switches to addressing the idea of consent in the context of sexual consent. Therefore, while the word “consent”

has a broad definition, it is often referred to in terms of agreement to a sexual act. The Code next describes the terms that do not constitute sexual consent, which is through means of “force, threat, intimidation, or coercion”. However, this explanation is rather vague. It does not provide clear definition of any of these criteria, particularly coercion, which tends to be the most unclear concept.

The Code of Conduct then lists the criteria for which a person is “incapacitated” and therefore, “cannot give consent”. In excerpt 1, the Code lists reasons for incapacitation and consequently, the inability to give consent as follows: “someone who is asleep, incapacitated by alcohol or illegal or prescription drugs, unconscious, harassed, coerced, threatened or otherwise forced into sexual activity.” The Code explicitly provides both a comprehensive definition of sexual consent and the criteria for which sexual consent cannot be given, including the incapacitation of a person under the influence of alcohol. However, there is a striking difference between the written Code, versus how students actually discuss and practice the ideas and concepts of sexual consent as exemplified through the following data from the forum group discussions.

## Male Terms to Describe Sexual Assault Victims

Several trends emerged from my analysis. The first trend of linguistic features I describe are the male participants’ use of pejorative terms to portray female assault victims in comparison to the terms used by female participants to describe a similar subject

and scenario. When the males shared their thoughts and ideas on the aftermath of an alleged assault, they refer to an alleged assault victim with the use of a plethora of pejorative terms. For example, the men used a pejorative lexical choice of the term—“drunk slut”—to describe an alleged female victim and then referred to the alleged assault as “her slutty decisions.” The use of a pejorative term here reveals the speaker’s perception of the alleged assault victim. By labeling her with a pejorative term, specifically one that suggests a level of sexual promiscuity such as “slut,” the speaker makes it apparent that he does not view the alleged victim in very high esteem—a derogatory remark indicates a lack of respect for her and her experiences.

It is important to note that sexual promiscuity of women can often become a part of rape trials and cases, and can be a tool for discrediting the plaintiff/victim, as outlined in Susan Ehrlich’s article “Language, Gender, and Sexual Violence: Legal Perspectives” (2014). Furthermore, the word “slut” is most frequently used as a pejorative term to solely describe women. Additionally, the participant completely refutes the idea that this was not consensual through his use of the linguistic terms “her slutty decisions.”

Although he recognizes the woman’s impairment by referring to her as, “drunk,” he still chooses the word “decision” to refer to her role in the sexual activity. By using the term “decision,” this speaker completely invalidates the idea that this was nonconsensual activity, because a decision is a conclusion, resolution, or action reached after consideration.

This creates a lexical contradiction because the speaker knows and identifies the alleged victim’s state of inebriation by referring to her as drunk, yet still holds her accountable and responsible for the situation that ensued. This is in direct conflict with the Intermountain State University Code of Conduct that outlines the parameters of the concept and practice of sexual consent.



There were multiple instances of varied negative lexical choices targeted towards the defamation of a woman’s character or purity made by the men in this forum group discussion. In addition to the term “slut,” the word “whore” was also used frequently when describing an alleged female assault victim. Similar to the term “slut,” “whore” is most frequently used to describe women, and to taint

their reputation on the basis of sexual promiscuity. It is interesting to note that by using both of these terms, there is a level of disassociation between the ideas of being sexually promiscuous and being a victim of nonconsensual sex. By referring to an alleged victim of assault with disparaging labels, it draws attention to their level of alleged promiscuity. This casts doubt on the encounter being nonconsensual and is often refuted based upon the level of the so-called promiscuity of the alleged victim.

### Female Terms to Describe Assault Victims

When the women discussed ideas on sexual consent they tended to linguistically characterize alleged victims of nonconsensual sex in a strikingly different manner than the lexical choices of the males. The females used hypothetical situations to describe a scenario, often including usage of the first person “me/I/my” pronouns. For example, one of participants had made the comment, “I know it’s my responsibility to watch how much I drink, but don’t have sex with me if I’m that drunk.” Even when discussing a situation of alleged assault while under the influence of a substance, the women referred to a victim as a “drunk mess.” While this term still carries a negative connotation and portrays the victim in an unflattering manner, it does not directly attack a victim based upon her sexual history or alleged level of promiscuity. Additionally, the term “mess” or “drunkenness” is ungendered and not directly aimed against women as terms like “whore” or “slut.” The female participants were

also much more likely to use the term “victim” than the male group. They directly referred to experiencers of nonconsensual sex as “victims of sexual assault.” This linguistic pattern was not seen in the males’ group discussion.

### Terms to Describe an Assault

There was a major discrepancy between how female and male participants referred to assault. The male discussion group used a particular lexical choice, “cry rape,” several times when describing a woman who reports a sexual assault, while the women did not. This term was used by males while discussing women some participants believe have falsely claimed rape in order to save face amongst friends and social groups on campus. The term also appears when criticizing the manner in which a female assault victim copes with experiences while in a party scenario, or while intoxicated. There were multiple references within the male data of a peculiar verb choice of “crying” rape. This was an interesting and unusual verb choice, one that has been popularized in media and particularly social media. Such incidents include articles and allegations against famous athletes, politicians, and movie stars, to comedic “jokes” made by popular comedians and artists. This may be a play on words to create parity with the popular folktale of the boy who “cried wolf” in order to gain attention.

The high frequency use of the term has a muddying effect on the validity of the allegations that women make against their attackers. By associating linguistic terms describing an alleged sexual assault with the well-known



folklore of a lying and attention-seeking child, the use of this term creates a comparative relationship between the two.

This expression exclusively appears within the male discussion, but never appears during the female group's discussion. In general, the men appeared agitated in response to the conversational topics. Their tone of voice became distraught and occasionally raised their voices, yelled over one another, or spoke with hostile vocabulary choices when describing an alleged female victim. Some male participants appeared upset when discussing women who had reported sexual assault when they disagreed with the context of the sexual situation, which they indicated through eye rolls, exasperated sighs and breathing, interrupting questions and the use of active body language gestures such as throwing one's arms up in exasperation, or dismissing a statement with a wave of the hand.

Perhaps the most surprising of all of my findings was the tendency of women to refer to scenarios involving nonconsensual sex in the first person. The women would occasionally refer to a position within dangerous and compromising situations relating to rape and assault using the first person, "I." The men in the discussion never used the first person to describe a similar situation. This could potentially indicate that these women had either experienced a situation, or were possibly using linguistic features to indicate understanding of, empathy towards, or solidarity with victims.

## Terms to Discuss Alcohol and

## Sexual Consent

Finally, while there were major differences in the manner in which both groups thought about and discussed consent, there was one major similarity: an apparent level of confusion when discussing alcohol and its relation to it. Both groups' discussions frequently gravitated towards the topic of alcohol related sexual activity, without provocation from me. While both groups indicated that sex while under the influence of alcohol occurs, their ideas regarding it were somewhat unclear as to responsibility.

In the male group discussion, participants highlighted the inequality in their assignment of blame for an alleged rape. They discussed how guilt should lie with both parties, if both persons are intoxicated during the act. It was not only the men in my study who were clearly confused about how alcohol and intoxication factors into consensual sex, as the female group discussion highlighted uncertainty about the topic as well. The men often equated intoxicated nonconsensual sex to "drunk mistakes." The women jokingly referred to a similar scenario as "just a bad mistake that happens to all of us."

Alcohol consumption provides insight into the particularly blurry area of consent. Both groups played down the severity of such actions, and almost seemed to use alcohol consumption and the party environment as an accepted justification for these types of assaults taking place. If both parties are intoxicated, which according to an article published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and*

*Drugs*, in 97% of the alcohol-related sexual assaults, and both the victim and the perpetrator had consumed alcohol (Abbey, 2002), then there was general confusion into where the blame lies.

## Conclusion

When discussing the data, it is important to highlight the many differences in how men and women discuss sexual consent. As shown, the men and women in this research experience and interpret consensual and nonconsensual sex in very different ways. Men and women had very different reactions, exemplified in both their use of linguistic features and overall conversational tone and demeanor when discussing women who had allegedly experienced sexual assault. While the men used terms such as "slut" and "whore" to describe women who had been assaulted, or the phrase "cry rape" to muddy the allegations of women who were reporting such crimes, the women talked more about "hot messes," a non-gendered term, and also applied first person pronouns while speaking about situations of rape and assault. What is clear, as suggested by the data, is that both men and women are confused by the role alcohol plays in their negotiation of sexual consent. Both groups agreed that drunk sex occurs, but is not always necessarily nonconsensual, as is suggested by the Intermountain State University Code of Conduct. For participants there was clear confusion in how and when the difference between consensual intoxicated sex and nonconsensual intoxicated sex should be identified. Through analysis of current

Intermountain State University guidelines and naturally occurring data, it is evident that there is a major lack of collective understanding in what consensual sex really is.

Another finding is the association with language used to discuss consent and power. Some of the linguistic differences in the data might be attributed to power imbalances. In this study, men used pejorative language and language that cast dispersion on women who had been victims of sexual assault. They were critical of victims of sexual assault, frequently interrupted my questions as the only female speaker in the room, and became visibly agitated in their expression of linguistic and body language features. The female participants had very few instances of interruption, used less terms carrying negative connotations, and maintained a consistent demeanor throughout the course of the conversation. Something I found striking in this data was the tendency for the men to exert a large amount of power over women in their ideas about sex. For example, when the male participants' beliefs in sex and sexual activity were challenged they felt very threatened, which in turn created a somewhat hostile linguistic environment, at least for me, as a female listener through their agitated hand gestures, dismissive interruptions, and use of pejorative gender-specific terms. These conversational practices can be viewed as supporting the idea that, "dominance is one of the cultural discourses of masculinity, so we would expect men to use linguistic features that create or index power and dominance" (Keisling 662).



Men and women use language differently, and language can act as an important tool for achieving dominance and gaining power in a situation. As language is used as a primary tool used to negotiate consent, it is important to recognize the dominant tendencies of males in conversation when looking at potential constructive solutions.

When reflecting upon the findings in this data, I believe it is important to identify the need for constructive conversations that are inclusive of the activities that are taking place on campus, with language that recognizes and equips students to better understand

the complex layers that comprise giving and accepting true consent. By generalizing the nature in which consent is constructed, the current policies on sexual consent do a disservice to the campus population by ignoring or excluding how students talk about consent, and also that students are engaging in sexual acts while consuming alcohol, not always in a nonconsensual manner. It is imperative for the health and safety of all students that further action be taken to provide a realistic and comprehensive outline for educating students on how to actually practice and talk about consensual and nonconsensual sex.

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HOLLY NEYER is a recent graduate of Boise State University Class of 2018, where she graduated cum laude with bachelor's degrees in Linguistics and French. Throughout the course of her years in undergraduate, Holly was highly involved on campus, serving as a Peer Advisor in the English Department, a student instructor in the Intensive English Program, an active member of Alpha Mu Gamma, and a contributor to several Service Learning projects on campus. Outside of campus, Holly assisted in establishing an educational service program for refugee youth of the Boise community. A passionate writer and researcher, Holly has written and presented numerous bodies of research during her undergraduate years, focusing primarily on language and film. Holly is now attending Pepperdine University in Malibu, California to obtain a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

## a selfish species and its sisters

Ben Davidson / Stanford University

Aren't animals stupid? Humans use phrases like "birdbrain," "memory of a goldfish," and "herd mentality" to not only refer to the stupidity of animals, but also to debase the subject of the phrase to the level of animals. Tests of cognitive ability are simple matters like self-recognition in a mirror or pattern identification, and while an animal might be exceptional for passing some of these tests, a human who fails them is likely mentally deficient in some way. Furthermore, humans' very way of living is proof of their intellectual prowess: we live in vast cities, surrounded by technology, art, innovation, and culture. Animals peck and scratch at dirt.

Is this a legitimate perspective? Cats likely see humans as just large, stupid cats (Bradshaw J.)—not another species, in the usual sense of the term—and so judge them by the standards of cats, so to speak. Of course, humans know this to be ridiculous, because humans should be judged by human standards, not by cat standards. But do humans apply this same logic when dealing with animals? The way that humans (here, specifically how scientists and researchers treat animals for testing and experimentation) treat other animals varies depending on how "human" the animal species appears to be: insects are treated with without regard; dogs, cats, and rats are given more ethical consid-

eration; chimpanzees, the most "human" of these, are the subject of many safeguards and regulations to ensure that testing is careful and humane (Bradshaw G). One basis for this difference is the degree of intelligence possessed by each species, which is loosely associated with the capacity for self-awareness, learning, problem-solving, planning, and abstract thinking. It is these markers of intelligence that have allowed humans to produce technology, art, innovation, and culture—in a word, something like "progress." In short, humans are intelligent by their own definition and this definition is the basis for varying attitudes towards animals.

But this perspective is based, explicitly or implicitly, on the notion that what gives humans value is also the source of value in animals. For example, researchers have attempted to teach horses and parrots how to count (Hövelmann, Dawkins), a skill that has in biological history been much more useful for humans than any other species. If intelligence were measured in, say, navigational ability, then pigeons would be the geniuses of the earth while humans who rely on maps, GPS, and road signs would be somewhere much further down (Bingman). Instead, humans tend to dismiss skills like pigeon navigation, dogs' phenomenal sense of smell, or the complex mathematics that sharks perform

while swimming (Reynolds) as "innate" and "instinctual" because our conventional definition of intelligence excludes those behaviors from its scope. This demonstrates a pattern of anthropocentric (defined here as the position that holds humans as the most important) thinking and behaviors that is convenient but much more likely dangerous.

In this essay, I aim to discuss two subjects where anthropocentric thinking is particularly pronounced and significant: animal suffering and animal suicide. After drawing conclusions—not on the topics themselves but on the treatment of these subjects—and critiquing and establishing the negative effects of anthropocentrism, I will describe and advocate for an alternative to current ways of thinking that draws some of its ideas and inspiration from the *Zhuangzi*.

### Animal Suffering

In a centuries-old tradition, scientists have thought that the "machinery" or biology of animals may be similar to humans but not their "soul" or subjective experience (Descartes). Essentially, animals do not feel pain and other sensations as humans do—though they may exhibit signs that they do, this is only like how a robot reacts to the environment but does not "feel" anything (Fudge). This difference allows humans to treat animals as the suffering victims of experimentation, as humans can learn much about their own biology and psychology through experimentation and other forms of scientific inquiry while inducing neither human nor animal suffering.

This view has been challenged. It is

thought that most animals feel pain, even more "primitive" creatures like crustaceans: for example, Switzerland has banned boiling lobsters alive because of research that suggests that they may feel pain during the process (Street). To what extent each species feels pain is not clear, but many scientists are still conducting their research and performing experiments as if animals were still as insensitive as previously believed to be. While there are more ethical and legal safeguards today against inhumane experimentation performed on certain species, the overall justification for experimentation still often lies with the notion that animals "feel" less than we do regarding pain and suffering, making the action more morally justifiable (Fudge).

While experiments that attempt to show the degree that animals feel pain may be useful, the topic has other facets such as self-mutilation or self-harm. Self-harm has been observed in a variety of animal species. In one case, bonobos in captivity pull their own hair out in a grotesque exaggeration of ordinary grooming behavior (Breuning)—a repetitive action that is thought to be the result of the buildup of stress in a life in captivity (Pizzutto). Of course, life in the wild is also stressful, but that stress tends to be channeled into more productive behavior; in captivity where needs are already met, there is nothing for animals to do but to engage in repetitive behaviors that they instinctively see as productive but that are harmful when taken to the extreme. Similar behaviors can be observed in birds who pluck their own feathers out or dogs who lick themselves to the point of forming sores

(Smith). Studies also show that self-harming behavior has also been observed in leopards, opossums, jacks and hyenas, marmosets, and other species of monkeys (Jones).

Perhaps nothing significant can be concluded from these examples other than that animals can exhibit behaviors that neither contribute to nor detract from their ability to survive. On the other hand, it can be argued that these behaviors are instinctual and are nothing more than a biological “glitch,” as opposed to human self-harming behaviors like cutting or burning. But what do we know about these human behaviors? Are they fully reasoned and intentioned like we imagine humans to be compared to animals, or are they also “glitches,” the human brain making the wrong decision for the right reasons when confronted with stressful circumstances or chemical imbalances? If this latter view is closer to the truth as modern science suggests (Ramsden and Wilson), then there is no fundamental difference between the self-harm in different species. If self-harm—a manifestation of some sort of suffering—is similar or identical, then suffering itself could also be the same.

From an analytic point of view, I find it difficult to be overly critical on the intentions of scientists who research the degree to which animals feel pain. After all, results either justify status quo treatment of animals or show that we should be kinder towards them. However, their methodologies leave much to be desired. There is the obvious issue of researchers causing a great deal of pain during these ex-

periments—animals have been subjected to, for example, stressful environments, injections of various drugs, and induced nervous system lesions (Jones). A researcher has good reason to ask “how else are we supposed to produce data and find results?” But this has not stopped others from pointing out that “knowledge, although important, may be less important to a decent society than the way it is obtained” (Angell) as in the case of the horrific Nazi experiments that tested the limits of human endurance and pain. Is there a fundamental difference between the two types of experiments besides their test subjects?

The ways that scientists view self-harm in animals is also troubling, to say the least. Oftentimes if an animal is observed to harm itself then the solution is to remove or disable the means by which the animal is performing that behavior, as is the case when over-grooming birds’ beaks are modified to make them unable to groom themselves (Smith). Perhaps this is better than doing nothing at all, but it utterly fails to address the cause of the behavior—stress from captivity. It is like taking the razor out of the hands of someone who is cutting themselves but doing nothing to help that person’s circumstances or mental health.

My final objection is aimed at the underlying mentality of pain research. What scientists look for in their research is something like how pain is identified and described in humans—effects on body functioning, physiological responses, and behavior like vocalizations (Weary). But just because humans

react a certain way to pain does not mean that animals will do the same or something similar. There is admittedly good reason to believe in the assumed parallels due to evidence that links pain in humans and animals to nervous systems and pain fibers and receptors (Bateson), for example, but because we are not animals, we simply *cannot know* if our pain is experientially or otherwise like their pain. Humans have defined pain and what it does to them in a certain way and implicitly expect to see it manifest similarly in animals. It is easy to see something that we already expect to see (Nietzsche). This methodology may not be *wrong*, but it is certainly both anthropocentric and anthropomorphic in that we see humans as the center of things and expect to see ourselves in others in a “metamorphosis of the world into man” (Nietzsche).

“Humans tend to dismiss skills like pigeon navigation, dogs’ phenomenal sense of smell, or the complex mathematics that sharks perform while swimming.”

We are fundamentally incapable of understanding pain from animals’ perspectives. Acting as though we do have this knowledge is the sort of reckless arrogance which has led to the issues discussed above. However, we should not necessarily jump to the opposite conclusion that animals should be treated more ethically because they might feel more

pain than humans seem to think they do—because again, this is presuming inaccessible knowledge. Researchers may attempt to study the symptoms of pain, but this operates in an external realm, so to speak, where understanding is internal. Both the assumptions about what animals feel and what pain is are wrapped up in anthropocentrism and should be treated with due skepticism.

### Animal Suicide

Suffering is one thing, and suicide is another. This is also represented in the way that scholars look at the two subjects when it comes to animals: many are warming up to the idea of the emotional and feeling animal, but far fewer are willing to entertain the notion of the suicidal animal. The center of this argument lies with the definition of suicide, as the act is thought to require intentionality and a concept of death. Most scientists doubt that animals possess either or both of these (Jones, Preti). One prominent reason for this disbelief is scientists’ fear of anthropomorphism in research (Fudge), as misattributing human capacities for emotion or experience is considered unprofessional but more importantly can lead to misleading or inaccurate data. Of course, the opposite—underestimating animals’ capacity for emotion and experience—is possible too as I have addressed previously, but researchers seem less anxious about this compared to anthropomorphism.

This attitude reflects the general skepticism surrounding the idea of animal suicide. While anecdotal accounts of dogs, horses, and even scorpions killing themselves are



plentiful, these are largely explained away as being the result of anthropomorphism. To the credit of these skeptics, the vast majority of these cases when investigated revealed that there was a rational cause for the apparent suicide of the animals in question or yielded reasoning for why the deaths in question were not the products of intentioned, self-aware suicide but some accident or mistake (Ramsden and Wilson). Scientists also doubt that even intelligent animals like chimpanzees have an understanding of intentionality in general (Racine) or a fully-fledged concept of death (Stoff and Mann).

However, there are powerful and compelling arguments to the contrary that do not necessarily prove the existence of the suicidal animal but are meant to cast doubt on the dominant skepticism. I echo arguments in the previous section when I say that we cannot hope to truly understand even other human beings, let alone experience of a member of another species (Nagel). We cannot really even know if the experiences of others are fundamentally similar to our own even if external evidence seems to indicate some sort of similarity or parallel between them. We can confirm very little, if anything at all, about the way that we or others experience life.

More specifically, David Peña-Guzmán's paper "Can nonhuman animals commit suicide?" provides various arguments for a more "optimistic" take on animal suicide. He argues that self-awareness is a matter of degree, not category, that certain animals have an understanding of death and perform burial rituals or

appear to grieve, and that if suicide is considered to be a result of circumstance, not choice (Ramsden and Wilson), then free will or the ability to choose cannot be considered a criterion for the capacity for suicide. Peña-Guzmán furthermore believes that because of evolutionary continuity between humans and other species, there should be no biological reason why humans can commit suicide and animals cannot. In response to this last point, it is thought that suicide in humans could be at least in part a learned behavior or a product of culture, which may help explain why suicide is not commonly observed in animals. However, as animals are also capable of exhibiting learned behavior and producing culture (in the sense of culture as "a form of behavioral transmission that doesn't rely on genetics") it is possible that if suicide were taught or if it emerged, we would see suicidal animals (de Waal).

On a broader level, Peña-Guzmán addresses the mindsets of other scientists on the topic and the implications of a suicidal animal. He points out a significant contradiction: mainstream thought believes both that humans have some sort of distinguishing characteristic that makes them superior to animals and that animal research can lead to greater understanding of humans (Peña-Guzmán 12). If a scientist accepts that there is a link between negative emotions and suicide in both humans and animals, though, then they accept that animal models are valid while upsetting assumed human exceptionalism. If they reject the link, they affirm human exceptionalism while questioning the usefulness of

animal research. This may make scientists hesitant to make any conclusive judgements on the subject in either direction. Finally, Peña-Guzmán argues that humans should assume a position of "epistemic humility" where they do not think so highly of human definitions, perspectives, and framing. He believes that by giving animals "the benefit of the doubt" we are better equipped to address the enormous ethical issues concerning the treatment of animals by humans in being test subjects, clothing, food, slaves, nonconsensual companions, entertainment, and more.

Succinctly put, the problem with how many look at animal suicide is twofold: by saying that animals are incapable of suicide, one risks treating them as "less" or "other"; and the standards for suicide are limited and anthropocentric in the first place. The host of philosophical questions linked to suicide—free will, self-awareness, and reason for life, to name a few—may be wasted on animals if we prescribe for them the same definitions and requirements for suicide that we have come to associate with human suicide. We look for human symptoms of suicidal behavior—anxiety, depression, self-harm—and deem animals less than us when they fail to meet our arbitrary human standards. Whether animals suffer or commit suicide in a manner similar to humans or not is not a basis for treating them differently than we would treat other humans.

### Advocacy

What, then, should be done about the way animals are treated, if anything? Human treatment of animals is at best problematic

and ridden with contradiction, and at worst abhorrent. One option involves a more traditional moralistic take on justice, virtue, and duty: that we should respect the integrity and dignity due to all other living beings, to treat them in a way that is morally permissible, and to treat them not only as a means to an end but an end in themselves (Kant). Besides the problem mentioned above that treating animals as equal to humans is incoherent, I find this view to still be anthropocentric—and therefore still subject to all of the problems and inconsistencies that plague the present day. By saying that humans should treat animals a certain way, it becomes humans' responsibility to ensure that moral action is practiced. When moral agency is in the hands of humans, not anybody or anything else, the situation again becomes one of implicit superiority and domination. Furthermore, by treating an animal kindly, we are ethical only in terms of human-defined kindness. We define kindness a certain way and then identify kindness when it is seen in action. By projecting human definitions onto the world and seeing what we expect to see, we obscure the inherent anthropocentrism of our worldview.

The problem, then, is not only with human treatment of animals but *human* treatment of animals—the idea that human-ness has anything to do with the way that the world should be understood. The human perspective is dangerous: knowledge and technology produced by civilization have expanded alongside the capacity for destruction. In light of the catastrophic damage that has been done and continues to be done to the environment, it is

not unrealistic to expect that most animals, if able to speak, would speak at length about the horrors that humanity has inflicted on life. Therefore, I propose an alternative to both anthropocentric ways of thinking and living and a traditional moralistic view on the topic. First, though, I will lay a little groundwork for the sort of thinking that I suggest.

“...this example suggests in real, practical terms that the line between human and animal is not as clear as it has been portrayed.”

Consider guide dogs. Many people who use guide dogs say that it is nonsense to ask what their relationship with their dog is, because the dog is one part of a single unit, not another entity (Sanders). What is your relationship with your eyes? Whether or not this view demonstrates the use of guide dogs as a tool or a particularly admirable kind of closeness that cannot be discussed in ordinary terms is a topic for another day, but this example suggests in real, practical terms that the line between human and animal is not as clear as it has been portrayed.

To consider another example, the way human race is dealt with is a political and cultural construct. Certainly, some humans have darker skins than others—but it is the

classification and distinction between these skin tones that are the roots of discrimination and segregation, not the skin tones themselves (Hall). Racial prejudice stems from the *meaning* ascribed to superficial qualities, not the qualities themselves. A hurricane exists in itself without human observation, but the name and definition “hurricane” fits into categories and contexts of its own (Grazian). Similarly, there are differences in biological gender, sexuality, culture, age, social status, and a thousand other human characteristics that exist in themselves but are only divisive because they are seen in a way that makes them so—again, people see what they want to see: in this case, difference and hierarchy. In the same way, humans and animals are sorted into their respective categories. The only way to recognize the illegitimacy of taxonomies like “human” and “animal” is to divorce ourselves from and reject anthropocentrism. In short, I would have humans treat the world with benign indifference. One would cease to differentiate between other people, animals, and the self, and one would cease to even differentiate between concepts of the self and other, and similarity and difference. Other beings entering our experience of life may be accepted and passed up as easily as objects entering and leaving a mirror are. We might see ourselves and the world like spectators of our own experience while a part of it: like a wheel and axle, immersed in the activity of the world but simultaneously unaffected by it. We should not let the habit of discriminating between this and that enter ourselves and alter our worldview, but let things be the way

they are and not disturb the processes of the world. Ideas of humanity and animality are no longer coherent as there is no longer any recognition of similarity or difference between the two.

“Courses have never had any sealed borders between them, and words have never had any constant sustainability. It is by establishing definitions of what is ‘this,’ what is ‘right,’ that boundaries are made” (Zhuangzi). This is not compassion in the ordinary sense of the term, but possibly a sort of cold religious compassion. It is like seeing a baby drowning in a river and letting it be—not because one does not care about the baby, but because one is not afraid of death. It is like a Christian who is charitable not because of empathy for the poor but because of Christian tenants and the command of God (Lear)—though the compassion that I refer to should not be confused with simple prescribed duty. People would not be forbidden from harming or eating animals for fear of violating their autonomy, but neither would there be arbitrary distinctions between killing non-human animals and killing humans or eating non-human animals and eating humans. Distinctions themselves—between good and bad, between the other and the self, between “this” and “that”—cease to exist.

It is not that we should not “mistreat” animals because they are more like us than we thought. It is that we *can* “mistreat” them because there is no difference between them and a human—but we wouldn’t. If there is no categorical distinction between humans and animals and between the self and other, there

is no reason to inflict harm on anything—but if harm *is* inflicted, then moral consequences and responsibilities are equal in weight in consideration no matter who or what the subject of harm is—if it even makes sense to speak of moral judgments in this world.

The term “animal” is itself confused. It is used to refer to pets, food, labor, entertainment—all of which may overlap but which are generally quite different. We treat different creatures “kindly”—feeding, petting, housing—and “cruelly”—enslaving, skinning, butchering—but both fall under the term “animal.” More broadly, any distinction or comparison made explicitly or implicitly by people is confounded. It is true that being able to differentiate between things may be useful in ordinary and practical senses. When inspected, though, this classification of things is both impossible and damaging.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have only discussed the ways that people see animals and fail to consider them regarding animal suffering and animal suicide—two relatively niche topics. The impacts that I have outlined in those two areas alone should tell the reader that what is at stake is much larger than what I have examined, given that the ways that humans use and interact with animals are so broad. The issues here are not only the global traditions of objectification, slavery, and slaughter of animals, but the very *identity* of animals as animals—and humans as humans.

All of this is only a single option for “solving” the problems that I have outlined earlier.

There are certainly others that are likely more plausible and effective than the one discussed here: and above all, I invite the reader to be skeptical of my perspective as it is (anthropocentric) perspectives themselves that I believe we should be skeptical of. However, it does not matter what is said about what I am advocating or how convincing it is. All that is significant is that humans begin to see that the distinctions that they create (not only regarding animals but also generally) are incoherent and that they begin to see themselves as strangers and those in the world as sisters.

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BEN DAVIDSON is a sophomore at Stanford University. He's still frantically floundering around in his life like an incompetent fish that's been dumped on the beach by a particularly malicious wave, so he hasn't figured out what major he's going to declare, though he hopes it'll be something like creative writing, religious studies, east asian studies, philosophy, english, comparative literature, or something like that. When he's not making awkward animal metaphors, you might find him writing for the campus equivalent of the *Onion*, the *Flipside*, looking for something even though he doesn't know how to find it or really what it is at all, trying to do some writing of his own, sticking his nose where he doesn't belong, or playing D&D with his Friend Group.

## CULTURING THE MIND: A Policy Brief to California's Asian American Mental Health Allies

Melisse Claireneth Liwag / University of California, Davis

### Introduction

Mental health is an issue for all, but mental health support is not a one-size-fits-all. In this report, I provide information on the mental health status of Asian-Americans, and discuss some of the challenges they encounter in seeking help.

"Asian-American" describes a panethnic group that encompasses "groups of different national origins that continue to be divided along class, linguistic, and generational lines." Members of this group are from different cultures despite the oft-perceived homogeneity attributed to them by non-Asians. The designation of "Asian-American" can be difficult to navigate because of the multitude of ethnicities that may fall under this category (Cambodians, Chinese, Indians, Japanese, Koreans, Malaysians, Pakistanis, Filipinos, Thai, Vietnamese, etc.). In this policy brief, statistics and sources that use the term Asian or Asian American refer to individuals who possess Asian and Pacific Islander (API) ancestry. Hence, this policy brief is meant to be as inclusive as possible of the groups that identify as and are identified as Asians, Asian American, and/or Pacific Islander. Although it is imperative to acknowledge that Asian American subgroups do *not* have monolithic experiences in America, they share a long "history of

exploitation, oppression, and discrimination."

Although there are no current laws discriminating against Asians, there are socio-cultural forces that work against Asians' ability to participate in American society equally, such as racialization as foreigners regardless of actual legal status and stereotypes of model minority that obscure underlying problems faced by groups within the Asian community.

“Case Study: A Khmer woman in her mid 40's

I lost my husband... I lost my property/fortune we owned. I can't learn to speak English and the way of life here is different... I feel crippled... I don't know what I'm going to do once my public assistance expires. I may feel safe in a way – there is no war here, no Communist to kill or torture you – but deep down inside me, I still don't feel safe or secure.

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2001)

Aside from discriminatory practices, in particular, Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Laotian, Mien, and Hmong) refugees are more likely to be at risk for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – an illness associated with psychological and physical trauma before and after

immigration to the United States. Of note is that suicide is the 9<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death for Asian Americans.

According to the 2010 national Census “the Asian alone population [has] increased more than four times faster than the total U.S. population”, with California having the largest Asian alone-or-in-combination at 5.6 million people. Given that Asians are concentrated in California and given California’s history with Asians, it is crucial for Californian mental health practitioners to have a working knowledge of issues mentioned above in order to effectively serve the needs of their growing Asian community. While the Asian community is not homogeneous, a general trend is that stigma, acculturative stress, and limited-English proficiency may contribute to mental distress issues and lack of help-seeking behavior.

**Prevalence**

As of July 1, 2017, California has approximately 39.5 million people, consisting of 39.1% Hispanic or Latino, 37.2% White alone (not Hispanic or Latino), 6.5% Black, 1.6%

American Indian and Alaskan Native, 15.2% Asian, and 0.5% Pacific Islander. Asians and Pacific Islanders make up over 6 million people, many of whose mental health needs must be served. Yet, many are reluctant to seek help.

The following tables (1, 2, and 3) highlight a discrepancy in which Asian Americans match Non-Hispanic Whites in the percentage of mental distress but have a far lower percentage of usage of mental health treatment. In other words, Asians who need mental health attention either do not seek help or are unable to access mental health treatment. Furthermore, only Asian Americans are included in national data. Groups such as Asian refugees, recent immigrants, permanent residents, and the undocumented, need to be included in demographic research to improve accuracy of information on mental health issues. A picture of mental distress, suicidal ideation, and mental healthcare use (respectively) of Asian Americans compared to Non-Hispanic Whites is illustrated in the following:

Table 1

Percent of population with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, or that everything is an effort, all of the time, among persons 18 years of age and over, 2014

	Asian American	Non-Hispanic White	Asian American/ Non-Hispanic White Ratio
Sadness	2.4	2.4	1.0
Hopelessness	1.4	1.7	1.0
Worthlessness	0.6	1.5	0.4
Everything is an effort	3.3	5.0	0.7

Source: CDC 2016. Summary Health Statistics: National Health Interview Survey: 2014. Table A-7. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/shs/tables.htm>

Table 2

Suicidal ideation among students in grades 9-12, 2015  
Percent of students who seriously considered suicide

	Asian	Non-Hispanic White	Asian/ Non-Hispanic White Ratio
Men	14.9	11.5	1.3
Women	21.3	22.8	0.9
Total	17.7	17.2	1.0

Source: CDC. 2016. High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. [Accesses 06/20/2016] <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline>

Table 3

Percent of Adults age 18 and over who received mental health treatment or counseling in the past year, 2014

	Asian American	Non-Hispanic White	Asian American/ Non-Hispanic White Ratio
Total	6.8	18.0	0.4

SAMHSA, 2015. Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Detailed Tables. Table 1.22B <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/population-data-nsduh/reports?tab=38>

**Obstacles to Seeking Mental Health**

**Treatment**

A recurring theme found in the research literature is a lack of help-seeking behavior that is attributed to cultural perceptions of mental health and a dearth of cultural and linguistic appropriateness of mental health services. These include stigma, acculturation, language barriers, and ethnic and linguistic match.

**Stigma**

Stigma is “an attitude that is deeply discrediting... [resulting in] prejudice, avoidance, rejection and discrimination directed at people believed to have an illness.” Particularly

in Asian cultures, there is “guilt, shame, and loss of face associated with breaching family privacy norms.”

Preservation of family reputation and negative association with mental illness discourages disclosure. Also, when in a treatment session, many are not used to sharing interpersonal problems about family members with strangers and thus, feel face loss. In addition to the stigma faced by those with mental health illnesses, Asian Americans face social discrimination in their racialization as perpetual foreigners and their depiction as model minorities.

The idea of being perceived as foreigners in their own country suggests Asian Amer-

icans are second class citizens and not a priority in terms of federal or state assistance. Their needs are not recognized as warranting urgency or attention. On the other hand, being thought of as the model minority, or the group recognized for academic and economic achievement, Asian Americans are stereotyped to work hard in the face of the odds against them in pursuit of the American dream. This categorization is deeply problematic because it obscures the internal and external struggles faced by the Asian community, particularly groups from historically low-income backgrounds. This myth perpetuates the attitude that there is nothing wrong in the Asian community and thus, no immediate effort should be done to address existing issues. As shown by the statistics above, there is an issue with the discrepancy between mental health illness prevalence and likelihood of help-seeking behavior for the illness.

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation, too, is an important consideration for mental health. Acculturation is an “adoption of worldviews and living patterns of a new culture.” There are different rates of acculturation among Asian groups due to varying immigrant histories. One way an immigrant community deals with acculturative stress is “to adhere more tightly to the culture of its home country.” Some may turn to alternative healing methods such as traditional healers and religious leaders, and may only use mainstream resources as a last resort.

Mental health professionals need to be aware of some Asians’ potential use of these

methods of healing and the existence of differing diagnoses in Asian countries such as Neurasthenia in Chinese and *hwa-byung* (suppressed anger syndrome) in Koreans, neither of which are listed in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V).

### **Language Barriers**

Most Asian American and immigrant children are fluent in English, owing to children’s ready capabilities to learn new languages and their education. However, their parents, grandparents, or older generations may not have the education or time to learn English as their second language. This is unfortunate because limited-English proficiency hinders some Asian Americans and recent Asian immigrants from seeking help from social services that use English as a primary mode of communication.

As for the adults who do speak English fluently, they may still be more comfortable in communicating in their first language about problems affecting them or interacting with health professionals from their ethnic background. The multitude of Asian languages and dialects make the duty of providing language assistance to all Asian groups more difficult, but not impossible.

### **Ethnic and Linguistic Match**

A way to circumvent the issue of providing minority languages is to hire qualified interpreters and culturally diverse staff in clinics. There have been “increased utilization rates when ‘bilingual/bicultural staff provide visible,

culturally relevant services.”

Having a doctor with whom clients can identify increases treatment credibility and decreases premature dropout of treatment. This is especially true for limited-English proficient Asians who are less acculturated and less familiar with mental healthcare. Asian practitioners themselves defy cultural traditions of silence around mental health issues and can provide proper support for clients to live fuller lives.

### **Obstacles to Delivering Federal & State Mental Health**

#### **Federal: National CLAS Standards**

To address the mental health needs of a diverse population, the United States has enacted standards whose goal is to acknowledge and support cultural uniqueness in distinct populations. The National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care aim to “provide effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health

literacy, and other communication needs.”<sup>1</sup> These standards are federal guidelines that state and local organizations must follow to provide culturally competent services.

#### **Case Study: Dr. Sam Keo**

For Cambodians, it is a difficult thing to talk about mental illness. When I talk to my clients, I tell them I have gone through that situation as well. The client begins to feel better and I do, too. If you have this type of problem, please seek treatment. Then, we can enjoy a meaningful life together.

(Keo)

However, because of the potential costs involved with hiring translators and circulating linguistically appropriate materials the policy may not be able to fully cover the many dialects spoken in the Asian community. The prohibitive cost may be offset by increased funding from the federal and state governments and/or unfortunately, the costs may be a financial burden to the clients seeking mental health services. This is a critical limitation that needs addressing because many

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, *National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care*, (Washington: DC, 2000), <https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/assets/pdfs/EnhancedNationalCLASStandards.pdf>.

In 2000, 15 National CLAS Standards aimed to improve quality of services to racial minorities and to reduce disparities in healthcare access. The Standards provide a framework for health care organizations to include appropriate language resources and staff in order to serve their community more effectively. The sub goals target the leadership and workforce of organizations, communication and language assistance, and engagement with the community.



limited English-speaking Asians tend to be low-income,<sup>2</sup> which means that both the lack of mental health coverage and the presence of language barriers have to be addressed simultaneously.

### **State: California Mental Health Services Act**

Through the Mental Health Services Act, enacted in 2004, the California Department of Mental Health (DMH) supports county mental health programs with increased funding and staff.<sup>3</sup> A guiding principle of this Act that follows National CLAS Standards is the need for

cultural competence.<sup>4</sup> Cultural Competence Plan Requirements (CPPR) mandate each county's mental health system to create and submit a cultural competence plan aligned with CPPR criteria.<sup>5</sup> This standardizes the definition of cultural competence across counties, while ensuring that each county is meeting the specific needs of its community.

While the needs of all groups in California need to be addressed, culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services for Asian Americans should be delivered to counties with the highest concentration of Asians. These counties include San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara counties with more than 25% Asians in their population, followed by Yolo, Sacramento, Contra Costa,

4 California Department of Mental Health (DMH), *Vision Statement and Guiding Principles for DMH Implementation of the Mental Health Services Act*, (Sacramento: CA, 2005), 4. [http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Documents/Vision\\_and\\_Guiding\\_Principles\\_2-16-05.pdf](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Documents/Vision_and_Guiding_Principles_2-16-05.pdf).

Cultural Competence is one of the department's guiding principles to implement its community services and support. It aims to provide "outreach to and expansion of services to client populations to more adequately reflect the prevalence estimates" and to have services "responsive to a client's and family's culture, race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and religious/spiritual beliefs" (California Department of Mental Health 2005).

5 "Cultural Competence," *California Department of Health Care Services*, last modified on December 28, 2015. <http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/mh/pages/culturalcompetenceplanrequirements.aspx>.

The 8 criteria to fulfill under CCPR include: 1) Commitment to cultural competence 2) Updated assessment of service needs 3) Strategies for reducing mental health disparities 4) Client, family, and community involvement 5) Training 6) Hiring of culturally and linguistically competent staff 7) Language Capacity 8) Adaptation of Services

San Joaquin, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties with 10% to 24.9% of Asians in their population.<sup>6</sup>

### **Two Models of County Mental Health Systems**

Crisis Support Services of Alameda County (CSS) and Richmond Area Multi-services (RAMS) work in counties, Alameda and San Francisco respectively, that contain a large Asian population. Their ongoing efforts to reduce linguistic barriers and stigma provide excellent examples of how county mental health systems may cater successfully to the mental health needs of a prominent cultural community. More specifically, CSS demonstrates the crucial need for linguistically/culturally competent services and staff in Alameda. In addition, RAMS's engaging community events dispel the silence around mental illness in San Francisco's Asian population by bringing this issue to the forefront in a space that is supportive and encouraging of group cohesiveness. Direct involvement with the local community in this way honors both the struggles of those with mental illness and their ties to the community they belong to.

### **Alameda County: Crisis Support Services of Alameda County**

Crisis Support Services of Alameda County (CSS) reaches out to people from diverse backgrounds, actively prevents the suicide

6 U.S. Census Bureau. *The Asian Population: 2010*, by Elizabeth M. Hoeffel, Sonya Rastogi, Myoung Ouk Kim, and Hasan Shahid, 2010 Census Briefs (Suitland: Maryland, 2012).

of those who are currently suicidal, and provides hope to those feeling helplessness.<sup>7</sup> CSS offers a free 24-hour Crisis Line and text message support for youth.<sup>8</sup> Interpretation services for Crisis Line are available in Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and Vietnamese, while English is the only language available for text service. Although CSS's staff is diverse, its services are limited in linguistic capacity, especially considering that around 27% of Alameda County's population is Asian and Pacific Islander<sup>9</sup> and that the main form of CSS counseling is through phone. Furthermore, although CSS is funded by the Mental Health Services Act, there is no mention of how CSS supports state cultural competency requirements on its website, beyond a brief explanation of the value of their culturally diverse staff.<sup>10</sup>

7 "About: Our Life Saving Mission," *Crisis Support Services of Alameda County*, accessed on March 21, 2017. <http://www.crisissupport.org/about/>.

8 Teenagers text the keyword "Safe" to 839863 and can speak with a trained counselor. The service is only available from 4pm to 11pm, 7 days a week.

9 "Alameda County," *Bay Area Census*, accessed on March 21, 2017. <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/counties/AlamedaCounty.htm>

10 In a section about Crisis Line Counselors on its website, CSS states that "We value diversity in our crisis line counselor community. Contact with people who have different backgrounds than their own strengthens crisis counselors' ability to work with callers from diverse communities. Diversity in our pool of crisis counselors fosters a richer experience for our community who calls the crisis lines. Each connection is unique. Each connection is valuable. Alameda County is a very diverse county, and we would like our counselors to reflect that diversity."

"24-Hour Crisis Line," *Crisis Support Services*, accessed on March 21, 2017. <http://www.crisissupport.org/programs/crisis-line/>.

2 According to Ancheta in *Race, Rights, and A.A.E.*, close to 40% of Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese, and the majority of Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong are not English-proficient (108). In this group, high poverty rates, low median incomes, and low educational rates are prevalent in Southeast Asian groups, especially since they are concentrated in the service sector as operators and laborers, which are among the "lowest paid workers in the economy" (133).

3 "Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)," *California Department of Health Care Services*, last modified on August 20, 2015, [http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/MH\\_Prop63.aspx](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Pages/MH_Prop63.aspx)

The California Mental Health Act (Prop 63) is funded through a 1% income tax on personal income over \$1 million. The Act covers prevention, early intervention, service needs, infrastructure, technology, and training to support the Californian public mental health system.

The work of CSS with mentally distressed individuals should be applauded and modeled; however, it should hire more Asian and Pacific Islander interpreters to broaden its language base and should provide services that are more accessible to the population they represent.

### **San Francisco County: Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS)**

RAMS is a non-profit mental health agency that provides comprehensive and culturally competent services, using about 30 languages in over 90 sites. Some of its services are family outpatient clinics, wellness centers, and workforce development. In 2016, RAMS honored May as Asian American Pacific Islander (API) Heritage Month and Mental Health Awareness Month with a public “Frames of Mind” photography exhibit.<sup>11</sup> The photos, by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, told personal stories about mental health. In effect, this event reduces stigma about mental illness, one of the barriers to mental health help-seeking, by encouraging community education with an interactive and creative medium and by normalizing the conversation around mental health in the community. RAMS’ initiatives are a model of cultural competence for

11 Richmond Area Multi-Services, Inc., *News Release: RAMS Honors National Mental Health Month and May 10<sup>th</sup> Asian Pacific Islander Mental Health Day*, (San Francisco: CA, 2016). [http://www.ramsinc.org/pdf/News%20Release%20-%202016%20APA%20MH%20Day%20\(May%2010\).pdf](http://www.ramsinc.org/pdf/News%20Release%20-%202016%20APA%20MH%20Day%20(May%2010).pdf).

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders participated in a 7-class workshop series before telling stories of mental health through photos. This exhibit is inclusive, well-informed, and creative. It is open to the public, so it encourages community involvement and cohesion.

other Californian county mental health organizations to heed.

### **Conclusion**

Cultural competence is essential to delivering mental healthcare that makes an impact. For mental health professionals to be more culturally competent in accordance with CLAS standards, they must consider the aforementioned obstacles to help-seeking: stigma, acculturation, language barriers, and perception of ethnic and linguistic match between the client and the health professional. These are important factors that may affect a client’s decision to seek help in the first place, which is why CSS’s dedication to cultural and linguistic diversity is commendable. Hence, health professionals must be understanding of the client’s reluctance to seek help. When the professional and client are actually in conversation during therapy, the professional must take into account the client’s potential worries about face loss, insecurities about language capabilities, trust in the doctor, and ultimately, perceived effectiveness of the treatment. These are underlying worries that do not make sense without the necessary knowledge about shared Asian American historical issues that impact the current state of the group’s social status today.

Hence, when mental health professionals need more precise clarification on these critical topics, they could easily consult Asian American Studies scholars to be more informed about past and current Asian immigration, citizenship, and racialization issues. In California, there are prominent Asian Ameri-

can scholars in state universities, such as University of California, Davis and Sacramento State University.<sup>12</sup> Being more knowledgeable about Asian American and immigrant cultural beliefs about mental health is beneficial for mental health practitioners in determining the best course of treatment to help their clients recover and sustain mental improvement over time.

Just as importantly, dedicated mental health professionals should consider being directly involved in their community by empowering county members through community action. A successful example to follow is the Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) in Richmond, CA,<sup>13</sup> that developed a multilingual warning system for toxic gases and inspired leadership in second-generation Laotian girls.<sup>14</sup> Guided by their adult mentors, these girls showed that youth of color can use their language to connect with older immigrant generations as a way to create a more inclusive and safe community. Hence, mental health professionals have the option of engaging with community members and non-profit organizations in order to have an even better sense of what the community requires in

12 Other state universities with Asian American departments include: UC Berkeley, San Francisco State, UC Irvine, UCLA, UC Riverside, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, CSU Long Beach, CSU Northridge, CSU Fullerton, and University of Southern California.

13 Julie Sze, “Asian American Activism for Environmental Justice,” *Peace Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 154.

14 Bindi Shah, “Politics of Race: Political Identity and the Struggle for Social Rights,” in *Laotian Daughters: Working Toward Community, Belonging and Environmental Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 80.

terms of their mental health needs. Events such as the community photo exhibition by RAMS unite members of the community from all walks of life toward a common goal of mental health wellness. In the process, health professionals build trust with community members and foster an environment where Asian Americans and immigrants are more comfortable with entrusting their vulnerabilities to the professionals.

The skills and training of medical professionals are indeed valuable but limited. It is hoped that more professionals have the courage to be more flexible in their practice to experiment with working from the bottom-up with Asian American scholars and community organizations.<sup>15</sup> This way, counties themselves are empowered to accomplish their goals of increasing mental healthcare access, decreasing stigma about mental health, and fostering a climate of mental wellness in Asian American populations. The cohesive efforts of mental health professionals and Asian Americans will be a testament to the strength of the community to call America home.

15 Alexi Nunn Freeman and Jim Freeman. “It’s about Power, not Policy: Movement Lawyering for Large-Scale Social Change,” *Clinical Law Review* 23 (2016): 151.

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MELISSE CLAIRENETH LIWAG is currently pursuing a double major in Cognitive Science (Neuroscience emphasis) and Psychology at the University of California, Davis. A deep passion of hers is to connect to her Filipino roots while learning more about other cultures' languages and customs. Her other interests include going on exciting food adventures with family and friends, and watching funny online videos in the comfort of her own home. A second article, "Singlish: That's Bad English" can be found on pg. 12 of this issue.

## Spoken Word: “Dialogue Makes More Dialogue,” and “i wanted to hear this”

**Bilal Boussayoud / Colgate University**



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BILAL BOUSSAYOUD is a computer science major at Colgate University. He really just likes rap and sunsets because both have enabled him to like in general, and not like selectively. If that makes sense, he says to have a good day.

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