The Chicana Experience In Indonesia: An Autoethnography And Dialogic Performance Evaluating The Influence Of Cultural Identity And Gender

Bianca Ramirez

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THE CHICANA EXPERIENCE IN INDONESIA: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND DIALOGIC PERFORMANCE EVALUATING THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND GENDER

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Dean of the Graduate School
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By

Bianca Ramirez

2013
DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the numerous individuals and family members who have supplied me as a collective, with the knowledge, love and strength to accomplish my goals.

For my beloved father, Victor Ramirez, who instilled in me the passion for attaining higher education and pride in being an American Chicana. Even though you have passed, your words and loving lessons continue to make me the person I am. I love you daddy bear. To my mother, Imelda Ramirez, who was always there for me even when I did not believe in my potential nor my success. I will always embrace my Mexican roots and continue to carry on the beautiful traditions you have given me. For my mothers’ progressive and supportive ideologies that allowed me, as a female, to flourish and conquer any goal I established for myself. These goals were also accomplished by the guidance of my loving sisters. You all were my rock in times of great need and the voice of never ending wisdom. I am here because your devotion and nurturing love always encouraged me to achieve my best and excel in all that I applied myself to. Thank you once again, for being great role models!

Lastly, to my husband, Jaime Parra Jr., for being my soul mate and encouraging me to follow my passion; a concept that used to be foreign to me. Your love and support has aided me in the most difficult times allowing me to succeed in all of my endeavors. Thank you my love.

To my in-laws for giving, my husband and I, a roof over our heads and accepting my spunky and crazy personality. Thank you for the devotion and love you shower on us with every little thing you do. I am proud to call you family!
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By

BIANCA RAMIREZ

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge first and foremost my thesis chair (Dr. Stacey K. Sowards) and members (Dr. Frank G. Perez, and Mrs. DeAnna Varela) for taking the time out of their schedule to mentor and contribute to my learning experience here at the university.

Thank you Dr. Stacey K. Sowards, for you undying dedication as you acted simultaneously as my mentor and friend. Since my inception into the program, you have expanded my knowledge of conservation education and opened my eyes to an entire new world; that was once obscure due to my socioeconomic status. Thank you for allowing me to learn from such a pivotal role model, so that I too, may one day embody the same success you exude on a daily basis.

The second person I would like to acknowledge in this paper is Dr. Frank G. Perez, for encouraging other Chicanos/as in the community to attain higher education. Two years ago, you gave me the advice of the lifetime and to follow my passion in film. As an undergraduate, your lectures made me proud of defining myself as a Chicana. We may still be marginalized in society, but it is through actions of individuals, such as yourself, that has helped resolve some of the disparities Latinos face on a daily basis. Thank you and remember: “¡Viva la raza!”

Thank you Mr. Robert D. Gutierrez for allowing me to join your Media Change Makers and ultimately encourage me to apply for the research abroad program in Indonesia. You have challenged me creatively and mentally, and have ultimately demonstrated what working in my field entails. I thank you for always being there acting as the catalyst that “lights the fire under” me since no one else would. These past two years, you have cultivated my knowledge in articulating my thoughts, constructing and managing projects, and personifying my qualities to other professionals. Thank you Bobby, I will never forget you!
ABSTRACT

This study seeks to evaluate how aspects of cultural identity, gender and religion play a role on a Chicana’s (mestiza’s) experience of studying abroad internationally through an Indonesian conservation program. The experience of traveling to Indonesia, engaging in cross-cultural dialogue, and experiencing adversities prohibiting multiculturalism, influences the ability of the Chicana/o ethnographer to examine cross-cultural parallels in dialect and behavior. I also analyzed the rhetoric contained within the dialogic performances of the mestiza ethnographer’s documented experiences. Lastly, the intersections of cultural identity, gender, and class were evaluated to determine their influence on the mestiza ethnographer’s ability to successfully engage in conservation campaign initiatives in Indonesia.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction: “The New Chicana”

On July 9, 2012, I was the first in my family to depart from the Los Angeles airport in California, to my destination thirteen hours away in Indonesia. I did not know what to expect, but I was determined to make my family proud of my accomplishments. My family was also elated that I, a child from an impoverished and marginalized background, was selected from a pool of university applicants to partake in a one month long research-based study abroad program. The program focused on the importance of analyzing the rhetoric within several conservation campaign materials to assess the best way to convey a green friendly message to Indonesians (both locally and nationally).

During this program, there were various life altering experiences, which intersected with my cultural identity, and gender, and influenced my social interactions and ability to successfully contribute to the ecotourism projects and conservation campaigns. Another influential factor was the prospective phenomena that were mentally constructed after reading rhetorical content found in various forms of literature and media (National Geographic magazines and various travel brochures, and online travel websites). The last two influential factors were the first-hand encounters with the anticipated phenomena, and the overall memories that were forged after the trip. These were basically the “expectations, experiences, and memories” Sowards outlined in her article, targeting the influence of rhetoric in travel guides, experiences of the individual and memories formulated after the ecotourism event (2012a, p.175).

My first experience in Indonesia was my arrival to the airport in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. I was thrust into an unknown environment that bustled with several faces that
paralleled my dark complexion yet differed from my ethnic facial features. I was the *mestiza conscious* (Anzaldúa, 1987) individual who was uprooted from her comfortable habitation on the border, and immersed into a foreign place that immediately recognized me as *the* exotic alien to their land; a minority. I was once again just another individual who belonged to a “subordinate group of members who had significantly less control or power over their own lives than…members of a dominant or majority group” (Schaefer, 1993, p.6). Yet, it was an issue I recognized would be reoccurring theme encountered through the duration of my trip.

At that moment I felt the stress of being a minority once more in this unknown social situation. The stress culminated as I walked uncomfortably around people who stared, pointed, and even asked to take their picture with me, as if I was some kind of a rare and unidentified species. Meyers (2008) argued that when individuals who are the minority in a social setting - due to their race, color, creed, marital status, age, etc., they eventually develop chronic stress and poor health. It was a bit disconcerting but I decided to brush the overall experience off since I was there like some kind of self-appointed savior to help the Indonesians preserve their land’s biodiversity! It was extremely arrogant and pompous to think that way, but somehow I needed to embody a sense of importance just so that the next month was not an intimidating and daunting task.

At times, I noticed how “feeling different” (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012, p. 217) or being the minority limited my performance when collaborating in small-group settings. My knowledge of reviewing and conducting rhetorical analyses on Indonesian conservation materials faltered, as I second-guessed my potential. Inevitably guilt, stress and anxiety were the products of my insecurity and impinged on future collective decision-making with Indonesians. Another contributing factor that added stress to the entire experience was the inability to effectively
collaborate in fluent Indonesian. It was also a bit naïve to think that the pressure of being unable to communicate in fluent Indonesian would hinder my ability to actively engage in the campaign efforts.

Learning Indonesian was just as pivotal as understanding and acknowledging customs of the Muslim faith. No experience highlighted the intersection of my gender and cultural identity on conservation issues more than my trip to the largest mosque in Southeast Asia called the Samarinda Islamic Center Mosque located in Teluk Lerong Ulu, Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia (Hananto, 2010). While at the center a woman talked to me about the Islamic religion and its stance on conservation. She then asked me why I was so interested and I told her why to which her response was, “but you are a girl, what change can you do?” Once again, I was left with a feeling of inadequacy that as a female, I could propose resolutions to conservation issues and enact change with the support of the populace regardless of my gender. Yet, throughout my travels, I also noted how Indonesian females did take part in the activities. Although a few were more outspoken than the majority of Muslim women students participating in the conservation program; each possessed a valuable standpoint epistemology as to how to assist in conservation efforts in Indonesia.

The last important experience that highlighted my trip was snorkeling in Karimunjawa Island located in Central Java, Indonesia. This was when I realized that although the university students were taking part in the tours to examine the pristine beauty of the marine ecosystem, some students inadvertently damaged some of the coral by touching it. Although the incidents were absent of malicious intent, Pezzullo (2007) asserts that many tourists can unknowingly pose a potential detriment to their environment.
In the rest of this thesis, I build on scholarship related to how the rhetoric of ecotourism promotional materials (Sowards 2012a & b; Diehl & Poynor, 2012), cultural identity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Martinez, 2003; Krameræ, 2011; Shih et al., 1999), gender (Tannen, 2011; Collins, 2011), and language barriers influenced my ability to successfully engage in the Indonesian conservation study abroad program. I also incorporate the performance of Latina/o identity, gender and experience (ethnography and auto-ethnography) through dialogue (Calafell 2007, Anzaldúa, 1987).

The second chapter includes an in-depth literature review of scholarly studies discussing the above communication events. The third chapter includes a synopsis of how data were collected, recorded and analyzed. The fourth chapter includes a four part analysis discussing ethnographical accounts pertaining to cultural identity, gender, religion and conservation education. This chapter aims in examine certain events that define a Chicana’s new world experience and methods utilized to navigate through a foreign environment in order to promote education relating to conservation as well as a first-hand experience for other Latinos to learn from. The last chapter concludes with a review of findings from the ethnography along with potential uses and implications of the data and experiences documented.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conservation Education: “Expectations, Experiences, and Memories”

Rhetoric in travel guides plays a factor in priming the audiences on what to expect as a tourist in a foreign destination. This does not necessarily mean that the travelers themselves are the only individuals whose opinions and/or stereotypes of the region are shaped by the rhetoric in this type of literature. I also advance the idea that rhetoric in this literature is read and interpreted across various cultures which may inevitably stop or promote better communication based off the rhetoric contained within the informational travel material. According to Sowards (2012), the tourist’s overall perception of an ecotourism location is shaped by the rhetoric of “expectations, experiences, and memories” (Sowards, 2012a, p. 175) that they encounter before, during and after their trip.

Countless studies analyze the influence of expectations on the experience, yet fail to examine how expectations are formed and altered after encountering the said experience (Sowards, 2012a). The expectation itself is also constructed through the everyday rhetoric individuals read pertaining to their destination of interest. For example, individuals reading an online article about Great Britain may primarily see extravagant palaces and elegant museums that may prime their overall perception of what they will encounter on their visit. In addition, there are at least three distinct categories of expectations (sublime, exotic, dangerous adventure) that individuals encounter while evaluating the rhetoric of travel brochures and materials (Sowards, 2012a). The author also states that during “the process of communicating, people develop anticipations based on prior experiences and what they know about the world” (Sowards, 2012a, p.177). Furthermore, Richards (1976) states that expectations are created
through the activities individuals engage in that consist of preparing themselves or constructing a plan to predict phenomena they may encounter.

The phenomena encountered, are also referred to as the term “experience.” According to Sowards (2012a), the ideas that the “experience itself cannot be fully described in words or images; experiences exceed expectations through astonishment, disappointment, or surprise” (p. 183). When dealing with the experience, Diehl & Poyner (2012) introduced the term “expectation disconfirmation” (p. 313) during a consumer study, to describe the phenomena consumers experienced after the rhetoric they read pertaining to a product did not coincide with their expectations. The authors stated that when expectation disconfirmation was present, the consumer’s perception of the product was either negative or less than favorable, but never positive (Diehl & Poynor, 2012). This inevitably translates into individuals who only see the negative aspects of their trip since it did not live up to their preconceived expectations they formed when reading certain promotional travel materials.

If an individual formulates opinions based on a negative experience, then their overall perception of the event may be unfavorable. This idea is also supported within the study conducted by Diehl & Poynor, in which a consumer’s “satisfaction was intimately linked to expectations” (2012, p. 313). This meant that if the consumers’ expectations were met during the experience, then there was a sense of satisfaction. In other words, satisfaction and consumer expectations were connected during the absence of expectation disconfirmation (Diehl & Poynor, 2012). Oliver (1996) states that “expectations are predictions about the future, the focus of which can range from general beliefs to specific product characteristics” (Diehl & Poynor citing Oliver, 2012, p. 313). The last factor involved in forming the tourist experience is referred to as the active process of the individual to document their adventures through “photographs and
conversations… postcards, letters, emails, journals, videos, souvenirs, and storytelling” (Sowards citing Lury, 2012, p. 185).

2.2 Conservation Education: Toxic Tours & Toxic Tourists

Another important aspect about conservation education involves the first-hand experience gained by participating in tours of areas damaged by pollution which may be the direct or indirect cause of tourists or residents. Pezzullo (2007) introduces readers to Chester, Pennsylvania resident, Ms. Zulene Mayfield, and her challenge to the Pennsylvania Environmental State Board to take part in a toxic tour of her area. This challenge illustrates the irony of engaging in toxic tours, since tours are associated with notions of a pollution-free, serene, and healthy environment (Pezzullo, 2007). At times, individuals may avoid certain destinations that could pose a possible detriment to their health and others may view it alluring to experience a new environment diverse from their own. These tours function as both a visual and physical demonstration highlighting the various health-hazards the residents and environment are subjected to on a daily basis. Pezzullo (2007) asserts that tourists are the primary source of contributing pollution to designated ecotourism areas (p. 1). She states that these individuals are “invasive and ignorant” (Pezzullo, 2007, p. 1) to the impact of their actions on their surrounding environment. Pezzullo’s example parallels my own experience at Hueco Tanks state park in El Paso, Texas in which visitors are prohibited from roaming around the park near the ancient cave dwellings. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department released a statement online issuing sanctions “For the protection of natural and cultural resources at the park, visitation is limited” (2012). In addition, visitors and tourists are required to pay an entrance fee, register at the front desk and watch an informational eco-friendly video discussing the importance of maintaining the park and then taking part in guided tours. Pezzullo also asserts that the primary objective in
coordinating such political events is to acquire support from the general population to take an active part in generating awareness regarding tourism (Pezzullo, 2007). Toxic tours also furnish the means for the community located in the toxic environment to express their anguish, achieve justice for the harms committed against their land’s biodiversity, and investigate the processes and name the predecessors involved with polluting the environment (Pezzullo, 2007).

Prior to the creation of these tours, communities could not seek relief from the government for harms committed against their environment. However, the environmental justice movement was the product of a 1982 toxic waste landfill dispute in Warren County, North Carolina (Pezzullo, 2007). The Warren County citizens unsuccessfully opposed the establishment of the toxic landfill in their area. The major demographic of individuals residing in the rural area were black and impoverished (Pezzullo, 2007). The story soon gained international recognition, and activists commented on how these marginalized communities were being racially targeted by Anglo state officials to construct such filthy landfills (Pezzullo, 2007). This was the first example of environmental activism on behalf of environmentalists who were not only active in the preservation of national parks, but of local communities as well.

An important aspect to examine is how cross-cultural communication can engage individuals to learn about conservation education. Milstein (2008) explored the role of utilizing communication as a means of joining individuals of diverse cultures to resolve issues related to conservation. This study is essential since it also pertains to another aspect of toxic tourism concerned with individuals watching wildlife and their habitat. Another aspect Milstein analyzed pertained to rhetoric contained within informational travel material may influence how a person ultimately engages in conversations about ecotourism with individuals from a culture and nation different from their own. Milstein (2008) asserts that there exist intersections of rhetoric, cultural
identity, and gender (belonging to a muted group in society) upon the perceptions of the researcher, influence either a promotion of communication on issues pertaining to the protection of land biodiversity, or a restriction on these types of conversations due to their foreign settings. Other restrictions may relate to how certain factors or values intrinsic to the researcher, are perceived by an individual of another culture. Some of these factors include an individual’s cultural identity, gender and or religion.

2.3 Cultural Identity: Muted Group Theory & Genderlects

Discrimination, segregation and oppression are not unfamiliar to the individuals comprising a muted group in society. A muted group, according to Griffin (2011), is described as “people belonging to low power groups who must change their language when communicating publicly, thus, their ideas are often overlooked; e.g., women” (p. 461). Kramerae (1981) asserts that since language was created by men, subordinate groups do not possess the same freedom to express their views, obtain opportunities or receive equal treatment in comparison to their male counterparts in society. Griffin (2011) suggests that Kramerae’s (1981) feminist perspective regarding the division of work between males and females was created through the differing labor experiences of both sexes.

Such differences are ultimately constructed by language. Griffin (2011) states that not only is language the creation of man; but that men also assigned the meaning and stereotypes to the varying activities linked for each muted groups. For example, he cites a personal testimonial of a female graduate student who received various comments from men on her choice to knit for leisure (Griffin, 2011). The Purdue University graduate was astonished on how vocal the men were while constructing opinions of her knitting as correlating to her “preparing to be a good wife, or looking for her husband” (Griffin, 2011, p. 461) while she knitted. Kramerae states that
the construction of this Anglo-centric language was and is currently maintained by a select group referred to as the gatekeepers of information. Gatekeepers are identified as the individuals who are the “editors and other arbiters of culture who determine which books, essays, poetry, plays, films, etc. will appear in the mass media” (Griffin, 2011, p. 463). Kramerae contends that even if an elaborate vernacular existed to explain the experiences of females, their viewpoints would still be censored by these gatekeepers (Griffin, 2011).

Females may also experience other forms of marginalization including symbolic annihilation and the sexual objectification of women in mainstream society. Griffin (2011) also cites the work of Tannen who asserts that the marginalization of women is a cross-cultural concept and suggests that the differences in communication between males and females exists cross-culturally. Genderlect is a word used to explain how the dialogue of males and females are best understood as “two distinct cultural dialects” (Griffin, 2011, p. 436). Tannen refers to the style of female discourse as rapport talk and male dialogue as report talk. Tannen explains that women seek to create a form of intimacy or connection through discourse while men try to dominate discourse or start comparing one’s credentials and skills to their counterparts. Report talk is used to make concise statements and command respect while rapport talk seeks to illustrate the kindness of the person by highlighting the various benevolent characteristics of the person. Rapport talk usually includes tag questions, that the individual will pose to their listener in order to reduce conflict or minimize doubt within their claims.

Rapport talk may be a cross-cultural concept according to Tannen, but cultural identity of the individual influence how they engage in conversations with others. For example, if an individual identifies as being a Chicana (which at times is viewed negatively since they are paralleled to a gangster) within the Latino community, she will approach communicating with a
person who does not identify as a Chicana in a different manner. Cultural identity is an aspect that needs to be dissected more in detail to understand the epistemologies and ideologies the researchers possesses while conducting research on environmental issues. This issue is pertinent to the research since it discusses the complexity of the Chicana or *Mestiza* cultural identity.

### 2.4 Cultural Identity: *La Mestiza* Consciousness

*Mestiza* consciousness, as defined by Anzaldúa (1987), is best described as a way of thinking that enables one to adopt and embrace multiple cultures from living in the diverse environment of the borderland. This “consciousness” results primarily from the fact that *la mestiza* has built an awareness of distinguishing her place within the hierarchies of the predominantly Anglo society and Latino society. Essentially, the *mestiza* is an innovative person who constructs an identity of her own by “straddling two or more cultures” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 630) to create a tolerable environment for herself. *La mestiza* is someone who has harnessed the pain of rejection (Anzaldúa, 1987), by her people for being an American of Mexican ancestry, and created a strong sense of self capable of sustaining multiple blows to her cultural identity. It is the *mestiza* who experiences discrimination and reverse discrimination simultaneously by individuals who deconstruct her cultural identity daily (Anzaldúa, 1987). The *mestiza* acknowledges she will never be American enough for her white-American counterparts nor Mexican enough for the Spanish-speaking individuals in Mexico. Instead, *la mestiza* merges language barriers and creates a dialect of her own (*Caló* or *Spanglish*) to describe her people’s trials and tribulations. As Castillo observes, a Chicana “…won't fight, she won't even scream--taught as she's been to be brought down as if by surprise” (1998, Lines 52-54).

Other scholars have also written about the disparities in education they received in the US and how it affected their perception of their cultural identity. Martinez (2003) described how as a
bi-racial child, she was told only to acknowledge being white rather than ethnic. She asserted that after a long trials and tribulations she was able to construct an image of her own that acknowledged all aspects of her identity. She stated that at times she was thrown into a “continuous swirl of confusing and often conflicting feelings” (Martinez, 2003, p.110) about what her identity was or should be. Over time, it was through her actions of constantly questioning her identity that she was able to draw a conclusion of her identity: which she defined as a Chicana (Martinez, 2003). Martinez’s accounts as a middle-class Chicana residing in a borderland community of Southern California, paralleled some of my own as a Chicana living in an impoverished household in the El Paso, TX border community. Yet, we did possess differences in our experiences, in that I chose to define part of my identity as heterosexual and Martinez chose to define part of hers as lesbian.

Sandoval (2000) like Anzaldúa talked about Chicanas in American society as being a part to whole model. In the text she asserted that Chicanas are the oppressed and are limited to distinct roles within society. Sandoval also described this as the phenomenon due to “oppositional forms of consciousness …[that] add up to a host of distinct forces that are equalized ultimately by their similar lack of effectivity” (2000, p.72). In addition, the author mentions how this dual consciousness is what ultimately influences the perceptions of Chicana feminists in society. Chicanas have a distinct consciousness in comparison to their male counterparts since each gender encompasses a unique history of conflict. Sandoval ultimately described how Chicanas are limited by power structures within society aimed at limiting their influence and restricting beneficial opportunities to this subsection in society.

In contemporary U.S. American culture, the distinctions among various Latino ethnicities and nationalities have become blurred to the extent where individuals are labeled according to a
product of an Anglo-centric system consisting primarily of: Hispanic, Latino or Mexican. The creation of the la mestiza or Chicana identity is a means to formulate an identity that best explains her heritage (Anzaldúa, 1987). Heritage is pivotal in building bridges between cross-cultural experiences that allows individuals to engage in social situations. However, when someone feels that their heritage is under attack, they may ultimately refrain from communicating with those individuals, which in this case, means refraining from collaborating with other researchers.

2.5 Cultural Identity: Stereotypes, Minority Anxiety, and “Feeling Different”

Some examples of how individuals may feel attacked is by encountering certain racial or gender specific stereotypes pertaining to their cultural identity. Griffin (2011) distinguishes stereotypes as the harmful descriptions of an “out-group” which people relate to the “social identity” of the group which results in the individuals who stereotype to “resort to divergent communication” (p. 400). Griffin asserts that these negative labels impede the ability of cross-culturally sensitive communication to effectively span across future generations (2011). Laidlaw (2009) states that social anxiety will ensue after an individual perceives themselves to be out of place or not accepted by the dominant group. Campbell conducted a study involving “247 medical students (three year groups, 60% female) from the University of St Andrews to complete a questionnaire survey measuring levels of social anxiety and attitudes to communication skills teaching” (Laidlaw, 2009, p. 649). Students who felt anxious during social situations in medical school expressed how language barriers, gender, and cultural identity were the key issues that contributed to their anxiety (Laidlaw, 2009).

This anxiety is also attributed to the perception individuals may formulate after individuals of the dominant group seclude them or categorize them as the minority of the group
with their actions. Ożańska-Ponikwia (2011) also introduces the idea of “feeling different” to describe the emotional response individuals experienced when “immersed in a foreign language and culture” (p. 217). This theory was used to investigate the emotional response in European individuals attending school in the United States. The research yielded from this study was extremely helpful in remedying the problems specified by students who possessed a color of privilege (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2011). The data from this study should significantly differ from the experiences of colored individuals from a marginalized section of society.

Minh-ha (1994) also described this feeling in individuals as residing in a type of “double exile” (p. 10). This exile is due to the fact that individuals traveled to a foreign setting that differed greatly from their own culture and traditions which makes it extremely difficult for the individual to create similarities through shared cultural experiences. Her work also describes how language itself plays an influential role in how individuals engage in communication with other individuals. At times individuals may refrain from engaging in cross-cultural communication since they are unsure whether or not important concepts may get lost in translation or may possess an offensive element. This inability to express your-self, creates a sense of that individual feeling like a stranger to their environment (Minh-ha, 1994). This feeling will make individuals feel vulnerable due to feeling like an outsider to the predominant group they are immersed in. Minh-ha states that our identity is ultimately produced by “articulation” (2000, pg. 14). Language is what creates our identity and cross-cultural communication helps define the experiences in that surrounding as well. This means that individuals who are able to engage in cross-cultural communication have a better understanding of their identity with foreign settings.
2.6 Dialogic Performance: “A New Pioneer in Communication Research”

This area of communication study is relatively new and pushes the boundaries of acceptable scientific ethnographical research. Calafell’s (2007) publication of *Latina/o Communication Studies*, utilizes the method of theorizing performance as a means to describe personal narratives, textual analysis, and examples of auto-ethnography. This practice allows and encourages the researcher to express and perform the lived experiences of Latinas/os in order to successfully construct their identity and marginalized status within society. Calafell (2007) performs her auto-ethnography experiences by intertwining poetry with personal narratives, discussions and interviews into her analysis. The technique in communication studies is unique since it not only highlights an individual Chicana’s experiences, but rather unveils the “history…of a strong woman with an illustrious yet silenced history” (Calafell, 2007, p. 4) by weaving together a series of distinct standpoint epistemologies of minorities residing in the United States. This is extremely useful considering that few accounts exist detailed the lived experiences of young professionals working in collaboration with other professionals, on issues regarding the preservation of overseas land biodiversity. Instead, the majority of the Chicana/o scholarly texts are published by members born in an era previous to the 1980s. Although scholars contribute a multitude of valuable texts, the voice of the young Chicana growing up in the 21st century seems to be infrequent in academic research. In addition, the performance of dialogue allows individuals to engage in “intimate conversations with other people” (Calafell, 2007, p.19) allowing a steady flow and exchange of cross-cultural experiences. In the field of communication research, it is rare for researchers to incorporate dialogue performance within their analysis due to the differences in opinion regarding the legitimacy of scientific research yielded from these types of ethnographies.
2.7 Proposed Communication Issues

The rhetorical value and performance of intersecting values such as cultural identity, gender, education and language, will be evaluated within this thesis as a way to contribute more to the body of literature on Latina/o studies as well as the study of the environment and travel narratives in the communication discipline. The ethnographer’s (participant observer) rhetoric while engaging in the conservation campaigns will be examined to assess how the environment, cultural identity, gender and language of the researcher influences their ability to effectively collaborate with their colleagues. It is crucial to distinguish what issues pertaining to the ethnographer’s demographics and experiences as a marginalized individual, inhibit them from successfully engaging in not just conservation issues, but foreign travels well. Creating an understanding of these causes creates an expansion into the discipline of Latina/o communication and education.

Furthermore, countless studies have been conducted examining the same intersections of identity on the performance of individuals who were predominantly Anglo. The same area of study is needed for other ethnic groups because, as previously mentioned, they will soon occupy the majority of decision-making occupations in the United States. This will aid individuals in becoming marketable in an increasing industrialized society. This industrialization occurs through advancements in technology, which requires innovators to possess an immense amount of intellect, crucial decision-making, cultural sensitivity and effective communication. By identifying the overlapping concepts that inhibit communication, individuals will be able to recognize how it affects collaboration and in turn apply the research to their own personal use. Communication is universal, but effective communication and collaboration is an art that requires knowledge of all factors that could inhibit it.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Logistics: Study Information & Study Area

The methodology that was carried out for this project focused on collecting data as a participant observer while traveling to various sites within Indonesia. The sites include: Kebun Raya Forest in Samarinda, East Kalimantan; Prevab in Kutai National Park, Universitas di Mulawarman in Samarinda, East Kalimantan; Sangatta, East Kalimantan and Denpasar and Seminyak, Bali. The Kebun Raya forest is a site maintained by the Universitas di Mulawarman in Samarinda East Kalimantan. This forest serves as a park and research facility that houses several orangutans, exotic reptiles and some rare plant species. The Prevab site in Kutai National Park is a location that took approximately four hours to travel to by bus and an extra hour by boat from Samarinda. Sangatta is a city that is becoming a burgeoning mining town near Kutai National Park in East Kalimantan. Students passed through this town also by boat when staying at the Prevab site. This site is in close proximity to several coal mining and logging companies and serves as the natural habitats for several species of plants and animals. Universitas di Mulawarman is the state university of East Kalimantan in Samarinda. The faculty and staff work on methods to promote an appreciation of the forest and synthesize bug repellants, honey, and other items from plants grown in their labs native to Indonesia.

In addition to acknowledging and studying the above sites, it was best to conduct a textual analysis as an instrument to detect the presence of conflicts among cross-cultural discourse. In addition, historical content was presented to illustrate the importance of examining the Latina/o educational experiences and studying abroad. This background information acted as a supplement to the study but was not be the focal point of the research. A series of personal
observations, personal narratives, and personal communications between participants of the program (as a participant observer to the phenomena), was incorporated into the study to depict the experiences of the students who participated in the Indonesian study abroad program. The variety of experiences provided substantial examples of anxiety in social situations and difficulty to effectively collaborate with Indonesians on conservation initiatives. Although this study is concerned with the experiences of Latina/o students from the Indonesian study-abroad program, the aim of the research gathered in this paper can be applied to other international venues visited by Latina/o individuals. Thus, this research will act as an extension of the Latino education from a contemporary perspective.

3.1 Logistics: Data Collection

The majority of data collection was derived from personal communication between the students who took part in the program as well as from a 2013 trip to Indonesia in January with a group of professors and another student. The information was presented using information disclosed both by faculty members, Indonesians and individuals from Indonesia who engaged in cross-cultural communication related to conservation, tourism, and etc. These ethnographies include personal experiences with the above members, as they examined and openly discussed how communication issues pertaining to their cultural identity, gender, religion and contribution to conservation education program. Members willingly engaged in casual conversations discussing certain issues, and sought advice in group settings to cope with certain situations. Individuals were aware of what my research entailed, and understood the main research was collected from my experience as a participant observer to various phenomena on the trip. Names have been changed to ensure that the primary data is not centered on the identity of the participants, but rather, the crucial factors that inhibited communication on the trip regarding a
diverse group of researchers. This research assessed communication events gathered from this ethnography in order to identify certain factors that can be dealt with in the future.

Early communication scholars such as Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, Toulmin, and Grassi argued over the adoption of a scientific method to implement within their research or the usage of philosophical elements as well. Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1979) drafted what they perceived as an acceptable means of drafting an argument that included fourteen tenants. Toulmin argued that two different types of arguments were present within the study of rhetoric and communication. He classified them as the “substantial and analytic arguments” (Foss, 1985, p.120). The substantial were arguments that relied on inferring what the conclusion would be based on data that was collected within the argument. The data that is being referenced here are the ones that relied solely on presenting the argument without considering what caused the phenomena to happen. Grassi (2001) asserted that rhetoric was already viewed merely as a tool of persuasion, rather than an actual prescribed scientific method of reasoning; one that considered philosophy as equally important as science. Hooks (1992) was another scholar who felt that incorporating cultural problems, such as racism, could be analyzed in a scientific manner as well. They were some of the first rhetoricians to discuss the role of rhetoric in defining the term man However, as previously mentioned, the work pioneered by Calafell serves as a novel perspective expanding the communication field’s various forms of expression and documentation of phenomena in communication.
CHAPTER 4

Analysis

Some of the major themes that will be discussed in this paper focus on issues that inhibited communication within the groups. The research documented how these intersecting factors pertained to cultural identity, gender, religion, and cross-cultural experiences. In addition, the research identified how participation in certain forms of tourism broadened the perspective and knowledge of researchers to the detrimental behaviors and pollution that affected a society. The last part examines the unique cross-cultural experiences that sought to bridge gaps and create similarities between two diverse cultures. This was essential in understanding how communication acted as multipurpose instrument for diverse issues or topics.

4.0 Cultural Identity, Gender and Religion; Influence on Conservation Education in Small Group Communication

This analysis focused on the relevance and connection of cultural identity, gender and religion on small group communication relating to conservation education. More specifically, I analyzed how these factors influenced or hindered collaborative efforts relating to the protection of land biodiversity. These factors were examined in order to help future Chicana/o or Latina/o researchers studying abroad who may encounter the same conflicts during their research. Latinos comprised 52 million people for the year 2011 (US Census, 2012) and are expected to become the majority in the year 2033, yet they still experience marginalism in “economic and social equality” (Alaniz & Cornish, 2008, p. 23). In addition, some of these inequalities have stemmed to reducing educational attainment and opportunities (Alaniz & Cornish, 2008). Sandova (2000) also defines this as a restriction placed upon Chicanas and Chicanas due to the power structures within society.
For the purpose of this study, the individuals who were evaluated in this study took part in a study abroad program to Indonesia. This program focused on recruited students from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to partake in a one month study abroad program analyzing conservation issues in Indonesia such as deforestation, the promotion of conservation education, and examining the detrimental effects of mining, logging and industrialization on the environment. In addition, events from a following trip to research abroad in Indonesia in January of 2013 were also analyzed. The majority of the students who partook in the program were undergraduate students from the Department of Communication specializing in diverse field relating to public relations, social media, graphic design, journalism, and digital media. The remaining students were doctoral students in biological sciences and one student possessed a background in political science that helped her analyze the politics behind the deforestation of Indonesian forests and the logging and or mining of precious resources. Given that the majority of students who participated in the study where predominantly Hispanic or Latino, various issues relating to cultural identity, gender, and religion ultimately surfaced during the trip.

4.1 Cultural Differences & Cultural Identity: “Being a minority of the bunch”

As a child, my father always proudly asserted that he was the last of his kind; a Chicano concerned with attaining education to resolve social injustices he endured as a marginalized member of society. My father expressed the same feelings held by Acuña (2008) regarding Chicano self-concept with relation to the placement in American society. Acuña asserts that Americans of Mexican descent encounter an identity crisis due to the Eurocentric manner of categorizing these marginalized groups; with terms such as Hispanic and or Latino. Instead, individuals should be given the right to assert their own cultural identity according to a system they approve of, which truly defines the basis of their ideologies and or experiences and concepts
of self. Phinney (1990) asserts that “ethnic identity is central to the psychological functioning of members of ethnic and racial minority groups, but research on the topic is fragmentary and inconclusive” (p. 499). Furthermore, the ethnographic research of the participant observer accounts serves to contribute a perspective on an area of Chicano studies related to the educated Chicana experience of examining cross-cultural discourse, and overcoming adversities in the field.

For me, it seemed quite odd that my father would consider himself the “last of his kind” given on how I perceived the individuals in my surroundings to be just as homogenous as the next, due to their shared ethnic features and Hispanic origins. Yet, just like Cisneros’ “You Bring out the Mexican in Me,” (1994) the stark contrasts became apparent when certain faction-like groups within my borderland community of El Paso, Texas (See figure 1), began to distinguish

Figure 1: Map of El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. (Photo Courtesy of Justin Cozart)
defining characteristics and ultimately separated the very core of our ethnic similarities. In the process every time these phenomena occurred, so did the unthreading of an exquisitely woven tapestry of Hispanic, Latino, Mexicana American, and Chicano traditions of life, gender roles, and religious ideologies. All of these factors ultimately influenced an individual’s perception of self, cultural understanding and lived experiences. For many Americans, it may seem curious how each group labeled numerous distinctions for their cultural identity given it originated from the same shared heritage yet varied in experience. Although this may appear benign to some, my experiences traveling abroad led me to encounter these same situations, that inevitably broadened my perspective on the issue at hand and acted as a catalyst to resolve the reoccurring conflicts of cultural identity, gender and religion. The analysis extends to evaluating not just interpersonal communication among a group of UTEP students, but also examining the themes of culture, gender, and religion when collaborating with other Indonesians on conservation education projects. This contemporary take on performing the Chicana experience and understanding the adversities faced by Latinos like Martinez (2003), highlight how conflicting values and interpretations of the culture, gender and religion ultimately influenced how well students were able to successfully engage in communication relating to the protection of Indonesian land biodiversity.

My first encounter with adversity relating to cultural identity was experienced on a July 2012 trip to Indonesia. Within this group, I was the only ethnic minority who chose to identify as Chicana out of a group of 13 students, 11 of whom were of Mexican descent and one of whom was of Puerto Rican descent. Being different was a concept and experience that I had grown accustomed to on various occasions. For example, while growing up and attending school in El Paso, Texas, many of my educators based my success not on my scholarly achievements or
academic endeavors, but rather on my socioeconomic status. Instead, the majority of the education I received focused on acquiring vocational degrees, marrying into the success and wealth of another, and/or applying to the military since young Chicanas/os were seen as unqualified for high school or college. Some of these adversities increased every time I disclosed my preferred choice of cultural identification. One of my grade school teachers told me at the early age of ten, that I was not a Chicana but an American, because to identify as a Chicana implied that I was unpatriotic (which meant the system would not favor me). I realized the system did not care if I chose to define myself as American, because the insidious disparities were still prevalent within society.

This same educator made it a point to purge any reminder of my heritage from the classroom and our personal lives as well. For example, the repetitive concept of Western pioneers discussing the elimination of pesky Native American “savages” from the prairies in Laura Ingalls Wilder’s books, demonstrated an immense hate towards the outside group. This language made it clear that identifying with a certain ethnic heritage was viewed negatively by my educator. It was interesting to understand how much “the degree and quality of involvement… is maintained with one's own culture and heritage and ways of responding to and dealing with the dominant group's often disparaging views of their group” (Phinney, 1990, p. 499). As a member of a minority group, the main problem I encountered, since my introduction into the U. S. educational system, was being an ethnic minority in an American border community. As previously mentioned, this stemmed from my choosing to define my cultural identity as a Chicana. From this ethnic identification originated several disputes and debates from others as to why, I, the American brown girl should label myself as something better than what they perceived as a gang banger.
The issue of being a “minority of the bunch” became all too relevant after conversing with some of the students on July 23, 2012 while staying in Prevab site in Kutai National Park. After taking a one-day journey to the park, a group discussion took place after our professor asked for students’ perspective on an article written by Peter Singer on the topic of Islam and the justification of not consuming animal by-products. After much debate, some of the students highlighted various reasons as to why they were not convinced by the argument posed by the scholar in the article. A female UTEP student questioned the relevance of the debate since she could not detect the relationship between the consumption of animal by-products and the detrimental effects it has on nature. Our professor ultimately stated the various impacts on the environment due to growing the animal factories and the increase in global warming of methane, and pollution produced by the companies. One male UTEP student followed up the discussion by asserting that yes, it was a Muslim tradition not to eat pork, but the overall rationale of denying all animal by-products did not hold up since Muslims also eat chicken and beef. After his statement was made, another UTEP female stated that she could not associate with the argument posed within the article since she did not identify as a Muslim. Afterwards, another student questioned what she chose to identify as her cultural identity considering that she was multiracial. Afterwards, several discussions took place with various members of the class as they began to break off into separate groups discussing problems they had with members of a different ethnic minority. The following was a discussion that took place between another UTEP student and I while on the trip:

As both of us stood off to the side near the corner of the room, the student inquired as to what I was. I was unsure what the student meant so I asked if they were referring to my classification as a student at the university. I responded stating that I was a graduate student. Yet,
the student shook their head fervently and asked me what my ethnicity was. It was then that the student asked if I was from India or of Indian descent. I laughed lightheartedly and responded that I was in fact Chicana. I explained to the student how my mother was born and raised in Jimenez, Chihuahua, Mexico and my father was a native El Pasoan of Mexican descent. The student looked at me a bit perplexed and asked what that term meant. It was then that I became a bit confused once more, as I was unsure as to what the student was referring to. Then, he asked once more, and stated that he did not know what a Chicana was. He asked if it was a kind of race or lineage that belonged to my father since he was of Mexican descent. For me, this seemed to be a little bit hard to define them, so I tried to explain my ethnicity in terms of experience.

I then asserted how the term Chicana defined my cultural identity according to my experiences and those of my relatives residing in Los Angeles, California and El Paso, Texas during the 1940s and 1960s. The student still seemed confused and asked again what I meant by that. So, I felt that I needed to break down the meaning into smaller workable components. It was then that I asserted how I was an American of Mexican descent that chose to acquire higher education in order to help alter my marginalized status in society and possess more influence over the system. Yet, the student seemed confused and then asked if my Masters of Arts degree would really help my situation. The student then stated how Anglos tend to be the primary individuals who succeed in the field of arts and did not think I would acquire success due to my race and gender. The student even stated how César Chávez always fought to have influence in society but died living poor. Afterwards, I helped remind him how even though César Chávez died in that condition, he made substantial gains for the Latino community (especially the farm laborers in the US) by helping to remedy social injustices and inequalities present within the system.
It was then that the student stated how they chose to identify their cultural identity as being Mexican American. The student stated how he used to live in Mexico, but once they moved, they felt like they did not have much in common with the culture over time. My confusion may have shown on my face since it was a bit hard for me to understand what they were trying to say. The student seemed to have sensed my confusion and tried to rephrase the meaning of the message they were trying to convey. The student then restated how it did sound a bit arrogant, but over time as they visited relatives in Mexico, it seemed like the two cultures shared different perspectives of the Mexican culture given the situation that they lived in. I asked why the student felt that way and if they could ever feel 100% Mexican. The student then illustrated that although my mother may have been born in Mexico, I do not really know what Mexican celebrations or traditions are like in that social construct.

The main traditions that popped into my head were the language and día de los muertos. My mother always told me extravagant stories of waking up early, traveling to the local cemetery with members of her town, cleaning the tombstones, decorating them and then hosting a large party at their house in celebration of their loved ones. At times my mother adorned our tiny house with tiny sugar candied skulls and an altar with the photographs of deceased loved ones as a sign of respect for them. Even though my mother did this, I never truly knew what life was like in Mexico and why my mother spoke so fondly of it given the low socioeconomic status she occupied while in Mexico. The student even confessed how they were not proficient in Spanish in comparison to their relatives in Mexico. I understood and told the student not to feel bad since our parents knew mastering English equated an easier time navigating through American society. Afterwards the student could identify with me and then talked about reverse discrimination in the culture as well (Field notes, 23 July, 2012).
The majority of the conversation highlighted issues that many Chicana/os face about cultural identity. It was true that my family worked hard but even their pay reflected their status and culture in society. Mason (2008) argues that there are “strong incentives favoring … Mexican- and… Americans of Mexican …descent…[that] are able to increase annual income and hourly wages by assimilating into a non-Hispanic white racial identity” (p. 817). My family refused to assimilate while living in the U. S. which made it difficult for them to receive promotions in comparison to their coworkers who did assimilate more. The conversation itself demonstrated experiences shared between members of two unique cultural identities.

Usually, it has been my experience in the past that members will try to continue drawing distinctions among the two groups instead of drawing similarities from the situation. The following is a conversation that illustrated how even cultural identity acted as one of these boundaries to effectively exchanging communication. The conversation started as one student approached me from the group and stated how they could not believe a statement made by another individual on the trip. At first, I was unsure what the student was referring to until that person looked over in the direction of the other individual. I then asked them what got them so mad and the student confessed it was because that individual had made a comment about a white person giving birth to a black child. The student asserted that Anglos could have multiracial children if one of the parents was Latino. After listening for a while, the issue became clear that the student no longer wanted to associate with the other individual due to this one isolated event. It was obvious that if the two did not conduct research together, certain noticeable rifts in communication between the group members would take place. So, I tried to bridge the communication gaps by asserting how my experiences as a Chicana compare to the situation as hand. The student was not receptive at first since it did not pertain to multiracial children but
rather to the cultural identity of the person. Then, I had to point out a bigger aspect of the situation to the student to help them deal with the situation so that future research would flow smoothly. I told the student to remember that the primary premise of the program was to conduct research relating to conservation and to help the rare species of plants in that unique and diverse ecosystem. The student stated that she would still conduct research but not with that individual. I then asked the student how she might potentially affect the research given that the majority of the exercises and research were done in small groups. The student then stated how she would just not conduct any research and would instead refrain from future activities with the group as a whole since individuals in the group did not understand their point of view and how certain comments dealing with multiracial students were a bit insensitive. I then told her that I knew exactly what she was going through since as a Chicana, not many Mexicans or Mexican Americans view the term favorably. Instead, I questioned whether or not the student knew what it was like to be ridiculed by members of their same heritage, to which the student stated that they did. We continued the discussion and I stated the importance of letting go a lot of the things people say since they may not necessarily know the experiences of the group they may laugh at or joke about in the future. The important thing that needed to be understood was that they were experiences that could be used to a person’s advantage if they chose to look at it as a learning experience. The student thought for a while and finally admitted it was the best solution for their situation and for the group dynamics as well (Field notes, 12 July, 2012).

Although the student felt segregated herself from the students and her group, the main thing she needed to hear was that someone identified with her situation and understood that her ethnic identity was defined her experience and identity in society (Phinney, 1990). Eventually the student made an effort to try and bridge differences rather than pointing the various issues
out. An enduring concept of this conversation that I encountered on my next trip to Indonesia in January of 2013, dealt with being a minority among professionals. Although the student (from the above conversation at Prevab), perceived the unfavorable situation of encountering individuals who ridiculed their ethnicity or demographics, would cease to exist once she acquired higher education, the opposite occurred in my situation. It was fascinating to think that as a student conversing with educators of higher education, they would be receptive to my experiences and acquainted with the adversities countless minorities face in the United States of America. Yet, the following conversation between me and a few colleagues of mine (all of whom were of Anglo descent) during dinner illustrated themes of racial stereotyping and at times racism.

The conversation began after I was offered an alcoholic beverage which I politely turned down due to the fact that I was not fond of it in the first place. Afterwards, one of my colleagues stated how amazed and shocked he was since I refused the drink. Then, another colleague jokingly added that since I was a Chicana, I should ultimately like beer and be drawn to it like flies on sugar. Afterwards, another colleague agreed with the statement, adding that Budweiser was the staple beverage for Latinos in El Paso, since it could almost always be found at their parties. The words seemed to sting, as I recalled numerous Chicanas and Chicanos who did not consume alcohol; the primary person being my father. He always stated that he refused to consume beer because his peoples’ heritage and culture were marred by the very corrosive effects of it. I witnessed first-hand the detrimental effects of maintaining an unhealthy dependence on the substance. Many forgot to live and lived only to drink to forget their marginalized status in society, instead of taking an active effort to alter their living situation through education and attentiveness to their health (Field notes, 22 January, 2013).
Although my colleagues made these statements, I brushed it off as ironic, considering as a student, I was able to identify the racial stereotype as an element of the conversation. Also, it was inevitable that someone would have formulated the same view of my culture considering how American media constantly perpetuate the same image of Chicanas/os or Latinas/os. My colleagues only possessed peripheral information of my culture and could not identify with it since, my experiences as a marginalized member of society differed from their own experiences.

My experience as a Chicana living on the borderland inevitably influenced the person that I was. Yet, traveling to Indonesia took my cultural identity to a whole other level. At times I questioned the relevance of analyzing and incorporating my cultural identity into my research. Yet, I soon found out that I was not the only one who questioned the relevance of my research. Another colleague and I engaged in the following conversation after dinner one night. As both of us made our way to our rooms, we began to discuss each other’s research. My colleague excitedly mentioned the numerous data acquired from their experiment and how it could impact future biological research in the area. My colleague highlighted how the data collected from their experiment contained obvious contributions to the project. Afterwards, my colleague followed up that assertion by questioning what obvious contributions my research could have on the entirety of the program. Afterwards, I responded that my research analyzed how certain factors may inhibit a researcher’s ability to conduct research in these foreign surroundings. My colleague looked at me a bit bewildered and then asked once more how that kind of information was useful and pertinent to the program. I detected a hint of sarcasm but decided to highlight how as a Chicana researching in a foreign environment, I would use my experiences to encourage other Chicanas/os to know what to expect when interacting with other cultures in their native land. For me, I was so used to dealing with other cultures, but had the privilege and
comfort of doing so in my own surroundings with individuals who associated with me in the same manner. Yet, these experiences were so different from my own that at times, the culture shock seemed to inhibit my ability to concentrate on conservation or even socialize with other individuals. In addition, I mentioned to my colleague how other Chicanos, Latinos, Hispanics could use the research as a tool to understand what not to do with other cultures or when immersed in social situations. For example, I noticed that I times I became extremely defensive when other members referenced my cultural identity in a joking or negative fashion. Sometimes, I began to seclude myself from group interactions involving individuals who referenced my culture in such a fashion. I was always taught to fight for my culture and stand up for what it stood for; even if it meant removing myself from situations in which individuals disagreed with my cultural identity. However, I realized that individuals were more receptive to my cultural identity when I educated them instead of reacting defensively (Field notes, 22 January, 2013).

The above conversations shed clarity on the relevance of the Chicana experience in Indonesia. Although various students and colleagues chose to define their culture in a manner different from mine; the fact remains that in the future, participants may identify the same way as me and encounter the same adversities. It was difficult to work with individuals on projects that spoke about conservation given that at times, I felt like an outsider; someone whose contributions did not matter. Being that my colleagues were looking at peripheral accounts of individuals from my culture, they seemed to generalize the same stereotypes to my personality concluding that it defined my innate will to consume alcohol on a daily basis just because I was a Chicana. Many people consume alcohol; but the primary individuals who have a stigma placed upon them are individuals that could be classified as a minority within American society. Instead, this kind of communication becomes the defining characteristic of the group in question.
It was interesting to observe how these professionals conducted themselves in an all-knowing fashion to the perils of individuals oppressed by society, yet failed to recognize their own actions coincided with the very system of inequality they were trying to challenge. Although the events that are described above only touch on being a minority among other colleagues and peers, another issue soon developed once conversing with other Indonesians: being a minority due to my gender as a female. It seemed as if many Indonesian women felt they were powerless to the system yet gave me perspective on certain information that was erroneous in nature to their cultural customs in relation to gender.

4.2 Gender: “Is this fair?”

It was July, 11, 2012 and I had successfully traveled to Semarang, Java, Indonesia, and woke up ecstatic to tackle my first day with the group in my foreign surroundings. By this time, several students were extremely exhausted of traveling within Indonesia, since they had been there seven days before my arrival. So, I decided to explore my surroundings and noticed a reoccurring theme: Indonesian women and men seemed to fulfill certain stereotypical gender roles and stereotypes. The most recent account of analyzing gender disparities within conservation efforts took place during a January 2013 trip to Indonesia. During a portion of the trip we traveled to the University of Mulawarman to discuss a tentative itinerary of potential conservation campaign issues and conferences for the next cohort of UTEP students to research abroad during summer of 2013. It was during this conference that the issue of allowing two female researchers to participate in future research was discussed. During this time, management of the university was undergoing a new change, which created some miscommunications and ill-feelings towards the two female researchers. After a heated debate took place, one of the women demonstrated commitment to her research, by deciding to give us a tour of the Sungai Wain
River she was researching, even though she was unsure management of the university would allot the research funds for her work. It was interesting how instead of asserting what areas she would research, she stated what potential projects others could make in case she was given the funds to continue her research. During the tour (which took place on a different date than the conversation), she mentioned that the importance of the research relied on the fact that the majority of Indonesians are exposed to toxic wastes from the river since they depend on it to sustain their lives (See figure 1). She added that children play in the water and unknowingly expose themselves at a young age to various infectious diseases and toxic wastes. In addition, she stated that the overall maintenance and repair of the province’s infrastructure is difficult to maintain since the individuals living in the area do not possess the funds to purchase safety gear and durable instruments for workers to utilize.

Although the country contains a democratic legislative system, widespread corruption and embezzlement of funds by government authorities persists and has put the current economic state of affairs for Indonesians in great jeopardy. The results of this translate into a lower standard of living for residents who are then tightly packed in overpopulated cities due to the tremendous amount of immigrants arriving from Java and other parts of Indonesia. Workers themselves are forced to use whatever means they can to complete a public construction project, and in the process are exposed to the hazardous and toxic wastes contained not only within the soil but sewer and water lines as well. The following figures in the text are some photographs that depict the same situations encountered on the tour and illustrate the living standards Indonesians face on a daily basis (See figures 2-5).
Figure 2: Indonesian bathing Sangatta River. (Author’s Photo)

Figure 3: Indonesian woman selling merchandise. (Author’s photo)
Figure 4: Children playing near Sungai Wain River with trash. (Author’s photo)

Figure 5: Man repairing sewer line in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. (Author’s photo)
After the tour, my colleagues and I reiterated the events that occurred earlier that day to the members who were missing. We mentioned how the majority of the male faculty members did not vouch for the two female Muslim researchers and instead seemed to side with some of the statements made during the meeting about their two colleagues. Afterwards, I recalled another intimate conversation I had with both of the women after their male colleagues left the room. The conversation started after I tried to gain some insight as to what their feelings were on the issue. I approached one of the women and asked whether or not they knew that the previous ordeal was going to happen. The woman then looked down at her hands on the table and stated that she had no idea all of that was going to happen, but had a feeling that the main reason it happened was because of the new management in charge of the facility. It felt as if some of the male faculty members felt this way before, but never really expressed their feelings until now. So, I then asked her if the group dynamics were like that before, or if a change in treatment was only noticeable until now. She thought long and hard and then admitted to me how it she was unsure and could not tell if it really was different before they came. Instead, it seemed like the real daunting question at hand was understanding, whether or not the faculty members could take their research money since they did not possess the same credentials as their male colleagues. That was when she stated that the male colleagues were in fact the individuals who held the power within their field of work. It was then that I felt compelled to tell the her how it was also like that for many individuals in the United States. There will always be someone in power who may or may not approve of their work. However, she seemed to remove the gender element from the conversation by stating that their coworkers were doing it because it was in fact Indonesian law; a law they were not privy to from the beginning.
At that moment my colleague came by and began to sort out the logistics of the conversation that occurred earlier to clear out some facts and straighten out the entire picture. My colleague began to ask about the Indonesian law, and why it prevented them from attaining money for their research. The women remained a bit silent and just stated it was the law with a sad tone in their voice. Both of us continued to question where this Indonesian law was and how they found out about it. Instead, one of the women just reiterated once again how it was an Indonesian law that existed but wanted to know if one of the other male faculty members were going to take credit for their work or just take over their research in general. It was then that my colleague assured the women that no one else would take over especially since she did not know who that male faculty member was. In addition, my colleague stated that these two women were part of the research since the inception of the program and were the only women taking part in the program. She also added that it was quite sexist for their male counterparts to do that only to them. The women seemed to pep up a bit and began to state that if no one can get their money, then they would be happy; and if they did not get their funds allocated to their research, then it was okay as well. My colleague then stated that funds would not be given to individuals who did not take part in the research or project (since it would not be fair). The women then agreed and asserted how it was only fair to keep taking part in the research and how it was okay to stand up for their position (Field notes, 18 January, 2013).

At times, it seemed as if the women followed the orders of their male counterparts since it was part of their religious values, and customary traditions. However, after conducting a short meeting and round tabling the entire situation, their true feelings seemed to come out as they seemed to gain confidence and used it when the main staff member walked into the room after conducting an undisclosed meeting with the other male faculty members. The man pretended to
be disinterested in our conversation but would interject every now and then from the corner of the room about his opinion on the matter. It was then that he brought up the women’s research. He tried to dismiss the women with a wave of his hand and even raised an authoritative voice towards the women. What was interesting was how he lowered his voice when arguing with the other males, but with the females he adopted a loud tone coupled with aggressive facial expressions and body language (i.e. pointing at the women when asserting a point). One of the women seemed to cower in fear for a second, but after talking with her, she told me she felt like there was no use in arguing with someone like him. She said he was like a child always trying to prove he was right.

During the workshop that we attended at the University of Mulawarman on the 15th of July, 2012 I had the privilege of meeting a handful of Muslim college students from the Universitas Mulawarman. It was during the first break of the conference that I was allotted ample time to engage in conversations with some of the students I perceived as timid. There were two students who spoke quite extensively with the group since they were skilled in the English language (one a male and the other a female). During our conversation when the topic of women in forestry came up, the other three males in the group began to laugh. I questioned what was so funny, after seeing the female students bow their heads in what looked like shame or embarrassment, and one of the male students responded that women did not work in forestry since the males executed the work that the women could not do. It caught me off guard due to my contemporary American perspective; yet I wanted to understand why this was the case.

I then prompted the response with another question: “How are women considered for jobs in forestry?” One of the male students began to discuss the issue with me and asserted that females are sometimes considered for the jobs, but usually are not due to their gender. I was not
sure whether or not the student was referred to discrete differences in job opportunities between males and females and wondered whether or not it dealt with the element of sexism. However, I needed to figure out if these inequalities in job opportunities were linked to the overall education of the women in Indonesia. So, I decided to use myself as a reference point to understand where I, an educated female and assertive female, would land on the pendulum. The male student nervously asked what I meant by what position I would get and asked me to clarify my statement. I then stated once more with a bit more detail as to what kind of job I could in forestry. The student happily stated that I could essentially work a desk job greeting people and having the opportunity to meet important individuals from the public. Then I stated, once again what kind of job would I get considering if I had my master’s degree (if it would be the same kind of secretarial job or a different kind). The male student then stated that it would still be the same situation since Indonesians let the men do the hard work in business. I then asked what kind of a job a male with a master’s degree would get if they applied to a position in Indonesia. The student then stated that I would more than likely be the owner of a business or at least work in some kind of managerial work consulting with the clients directly. I did not understand the deciding factor between two individuals with the same education, so I asked him why one would be considered over the other considering their likeness. The male student nervously responded that the primary reason was because the male applicant would be more skilled than I for the position due to my gender (Field Notes, 15 July, 2012).

After the conversation, it became apparent that the resounding factor when being considered for job placement was due to gender. In addition, some pieces of crucial information may have been lost in translation due to the language barrier, which at times made it difficult to ascertain the true meaning behind a statement. What one may interpret as sexist may not be what
another regards in the same fashion. According to Mwangi & Mai (2011) regarding females in Indonesia and Indonesian forestry, “…women may not have power or control in the traditional sense (such as due to status and wealth), their organizing increases their bargaining power and influence over policy processes” (p. 119). The fact that women are not occupying positions with more responsibility, causes female voices and power to be limited. Yet, it was a bit comforting that even though the female students in the group did not openly discuss their opinion of women in forestry; their overall presence demonstrated a growing participation in the field (Mwangi & Mai, 2011).

During my conversation with Male #1 (same male from the previous conversation) I noted how some of my fellow UTEP classmates began to make certain facial expressions towards the Unmul males that expressed disgust and/or contempt. It became evident after awhile when one of the UTEP females students stated in an assertive tone to the males that in the United States, women were free to choose their careers. Even though the student had good intentions, the message was lost in translation due to the strong delivery. It was intriguing to see the responses of the females who became almost defensive after hearing their classmates translate the message in Indonesian to their classmates. The girls began to chat quite animatedly with one another and ultimately told one of the female students to state their opinion. Female #1 responded by stating that although we may think females are not free, they liked the fact that the males in society do not let them obtain what would be considered dangerous jobs because they care that much about the women in their society. In addition she mentioned that women do work hard in other aspects of life such as selling items to the public or passing their religious ideologies unto their children (See figures 6 & 7).
It was intriguing considering that the U. S. American perspective has been consumed with asserting the female presence in society. Our society was no different from theirs. Although we live in the 21st century, it was reported that females were paid less than their male
counterparts in approximately “97 Percent of Congressional Districts” in the United States (Kliner, 2012). However, after hearing the opinion of the female and male students, it became apparent that they perceived skewed job placement as a means of protecting women in society. An observation can be made based on this singular experience that limiting the roles of women to prevent them from advancing or becoming a dominant force in society is viewed also as a form of protection. Furthermore, it was inferred from this solitary event that the Indonesian women exert some influence on how they engage in conducting themselves in society based on their ideologies.

4.3 Religion: “How am I any different?”

In U.S. American media, Muslims are portrayed in several stereotypical forms that depict the population as derogatory war-mongering individuals concerned with maintaining the oppression of women in their society and willing to ruthlessly sacrifice anyone for the will of *Allah*. At times, imagery of women wearing the Hijab (See figure 8), incites various Americans to perceive the females as oppressed, hated, and required the help of Democratic nations to resolve this inequality. According to Yasin (2013), “Muslim women…defend the hijab, or veil, as an empowering symbol” and question whether or not the debate pertaining to the hijab is even worth arguing about. The writer even states that although the hijab may not feel like a women is free, the fact that women are given the freedom of choice to wear the hijab, is a liberating act of its own (Yasin, 2013).
I will admit that my perception of Muslim females paralleled the ones expressed in the opening paragraph until given the opportunity to actively engage in various conversations with devote Muslims from diverse walks of life. At times there were moments when I began to judge the men as all conniving and hateful individuals who hated Americans and especially American women.

According to a one woman (Bogor Female #1), the hijab is worn to symbolically cover the beauty of the females to stop male individuals from wanting to take advantage of them because of their beauty (personal communication, December 15, 2012). She did mention that, even within her culture, females seem to have lost the valuable meaning of why hijabs and the traditional long skirts are worn. She stated that some females will wear a normal plain hijab, yet their clothes were skin tight and revealed the natural curves of the female body (thus attracting negative attention from men). Then she elaborated a bit more and stated that another purpose of donning the hijab, was for women to recall the teaching of the Qur’an by leading a humble life.
free from the materialistic constraints prevalent within modern society. However, she mentioned that a lot of the youth seem to adorn the hijabs with alluring and expensive accessories which draw negative attention from males with bad intentions. Also, Bogor Female #1 stated that the ornaments displayed on the hijabs, have transitioned from a symbol of self-respect into that of socioeconomic status and an increased emphasis on beauty. She asserted that the main purpose of using the hijab was to ensure that an intersection of the two factors never occurred in the first place. She began to discuss how it is through the doctrine of Islam that individuals maintain the six pillars of faith which include but are not limited to praying six times a day to the East and taking part in puasa or fasting during Ramadan. During this time, individuals cannot eat, drink liquids or swallow their own saliva from six in the morning until six at night (Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 185). I thought it was interesting and wanted to know a bit more about Islam.

I went over to the individual once more and asked whether or not Americans or Westerners in general ever chastised her for choosing to wear a hijab. The individual did not hesitate in stating how several individuals have done this before, so it was not something new to her. She even mentioned how sometimes these people would treat her like an unknowing child who needed to be scolded or reared in the direction of their ideologies. I wanted to know a little bit more about how they treated her like a child so I pretended not to understand her question so that she could clarify it a bit for me. She then stated how some individuals will tell her that as a grown woman she should stand up for herself and find a way out (implying that she was oppressed by her cultural norms and traditions of Indonesian society). Instead, she stated how she then asserts to these individuals that at least she has the freedom of choice to wear it and would not take it off. The individual added that she chose to wear the hijab as a sign of respect for herself and for her God. She then stated that no one needed to see that except for her
husband. In addition she commented on the fact that many young American women have the freedom to wear whatever they like, but also end up getting pregnant in the process. She then stated how the hijab was a valued means of protecting a woman’s innocence and beauty. I then mentioned to the individual how there was a show in the US entitled *16 and Pregnant*, which highlighted the lives of many pregnant teenagers in the US. The individual was very surprised and stated how they could not believe a show like that existed and wondered why any young female would aspire to wanting to be featured on the television show. She mentioned how if a young Indonesian teenager got pregnant before marriage; it would be considered a great shame to the family. She stated that in Indonesia, the community is united through their faith; and found it peculiar how they are always the pinnacle of ridicule for most western nations as being oppressive even though Indonesians strive to be devote Muslims (Field Notes, 16 January, 2013).

After discussing the Muslim religion with this woman from Bogor, an irritating question kept popping up in my head as to what caused Indonesians to ultimately engage in deforestation considering their religious ideologies. We began to discuss the types of moral implications on individuals who engaged in activities that promoted deforestation or the destruction of natural resources. She stated how there was an area within the Qur’an which discussed how individuals must respect the land since it is a gift of their God. That anything given as a gift is meant to be seen as precious and respected. I then began to ask her a series of questions discussing the correlation of Islam and conservationism. First, I thanked the individual for sharing details of her religion with me and gained perspective onto why Muslim women wore the hijab. I initially thought Indonesian law mandated all women to wear the hijab, but it became apparent that it was the contrary. However, I wanted to know if there was a certain area of the Qur’an that discussed
conservation. The individual then responded by stating that there was certainly a part that discussed that topic. She also mentioned how unfortunate it was that not all people would follow the Qur’an according to how it was intended to be and chose to cut down the forest in order to make fast money rather than trying to work on creating a more efficient means of generating funds over a long period of time. She then gave the example of a project that dealt with trying to create sustainable fishing in Karimunjawa Island National Park in Central Java, by repopulating the areas with dwindling fish species through the enforcement of laws that would make it illegal to fish in certain designated areas. Yet, I did not understand how religion applied to this last example, so I asked her to clarify it a bit more for me. She explained that certain individuals will choose only to acknowledge certain tenants of the Qur’an if it meant that they could acquire some kind of monetary profit from it. However, the explanation still did not seem to connect to me given that the individual stated how Indonesians were united by their religion and strive to do good to avoid causing shame. Yet, it felt as though conservation was not really embraced by the individuals paid to kill orangutans for money or by logging and mining precious and scarce resources. I then disclosed my feelings to the person so that they could help explain it a bit more for me and they simply stated those individuals were corrupted by the allure and temptation of money. Yet, the growing norm for some Indonesians was to take certain parts of the Qur’an and manipulate it to justify their actions. She stated how some men justify beating their women by asserting they have complete power over women and are therefore justified in hurting them. She then stated how the same thing occurs in the U.S. even if they do no pledge allegiance to Islam (Field notes, 16 January, 2013).

Her words highlighted the events that ultimately tainted the perceptions of American culture, I could not help feel that the statements made by Bogor Female #1 were partially correct.
As a Chicana growing up in a predominant Catholic community, my traditions posed a stark contrast to that of the ones portrayed in mainstream American media. Much like the Muslim faith, my mother instilled in me Marianismo, which was the tradition of leading my life according to how La Virgen de Guadalupe led hers (See figure 9).

Figure 9: Shrine of La Virgen de Guadalupe in El Paso, Texas. (Author’s photo)

In Catholicism, La Virgen Maria, or the Virgin Mary was viewed as the mother of God and Jesus Christ who appeared in an apparition to Juan Diego in Tepeyac, Mexico asking him to profess his faith to God and construct a church as a memorial to her for others to pray at. In addition, La Virgen was recorded to have appeared countless times after telling individuals to live their lives according to the will of God in the bible (Marianismo). The Virgin Mary is a highly revered symbol for Mexican women, and she is sometimes given more emphasis than other aspects of the Catholic religion. Villegas (2010) advances the idea that Marianismo “is a gender role theme that determines the ideal woman: a giving and generous mother who denounces personal interests in favor of those of her children or husband” (p. 329). In addition, Marianismo places an emphasis
on living a materialistic-free life centered on the well-being of others based on the teachings of the bible. An aspect not discussed within Villegas’ study pertains to examples when a woman (practicing Marianismo) will not follow her husband’s wishes. For example, a woman will not wear revealing clothes in public or around her children because her husband tells her to dress in that risqué fashion. The woman instead must set an example of Marianismo tenants (derived from biblical text) by demonstrating for her children that showing respect for oneself is to eliminate harmful substances, corrosive habits and promiscuous styles of clothing. A woman is to do this even if her husband tells her to, since according to Marianismo, both males and females must live according to the tenants found in the bible.

Instead, a shift in the paradigm has occurred to where individuals (just like in Indonesia), will manipulate the teachings to exploit the system for their own advantage. However, growing up in a devote Catholic household translated into the acts of paying homage to the religion by attending mass every Sunday, giving thanks by serving as an altar girl for seven years, maintaining evangelism as a catechist instructor for three years and practicing humility by volunteering my time for local non-for-profit organizations. As a child, I never had the opportunity, nor did I question the act of practicing my faith. Yet understanding the true Mexican experience of La Virgen de Guadalupe evaded me. At times, my mother would cry during the pilgrimage up Mount Cristo Rey while holding a picture of La Virgen in one hand and praying the rosary with the other. Like Calafell, I was “moved by the emotions and beliefs of other pilgrims who cried in her presence” (p. 36). However, unlike Calafell, I did not feel “nothingness…or numbness” (p.36); instead, I felt proud of being part of a legacy that seemed to emanate love. My experience of being a Catholic paralleled the dialogue performance accounts of Mario in which he stated he always wished the services given during mass would last longer.
than the one hour (in Calafell, 2007). For him, it was as though he was home, while he attended mass. Listening to the words expressed by the priest during each homily seemed to resonate with the very experiences he encountered as a youth in North Carolina.

It was through the teaching of the gospel in the homilies and pilgrimages up Mount Cristo Rey that ultimately led me to begin volunteering at a local convent (See Figure 10). While there, the nuns maintained placing an

![Figure 10: Author with two nuns from Sisters of the Good Sheppard. (Author’s photo)](image)

emphasis on Marianismo by praying to La Virgen of Guadalupe three times a day. It was through the interpretation of the bible that and this participation at the convent that my respect for not only others but nature itself increased I realized after recounting my involvement with the Catholic Church, that both religions contained distinct doctrines yet simultaneously practiced the same forms of respect. It was then that I realized I was not an outsider as Calafell (2007) felt after venturing to Mexico on her pilgrimage, but rather an equal with other Indonesians.

An interesting aspect of travel to Indonesia was how the UTEP students identified with a certain religion and how aspects of their faith contributed to their understanding of
environmentalism. The majority of UTEP students would engage in conversations about Islam with the students from the other university to discuss the influence it had on conservation. The following is an observed conversation amongst three Muslim students and four UTEP students that occurred during a three-day trip to the Kutai Taman National Forest. The conversation started as one of the UTEP students stated to one of the UNMUL students (who was Muslim) how pretty the scenery was at the camp and if they loved traveling to this place every time they went out to research. The student excitedly stated that they did and asked the UTEP student if they did as well. The student said that they did since in El Paso, Texas there were no trees as big and green as the ones in the forest. The student then added that the plants in El Paso were ugly since the desert was dry and just unbearable.

Then another student from Indonesia chimed into the conversation and asked what the student thought was ugly. The student then responded that it was ugly since it was not pretty like the environment in Indonesia. Two other UTEP students joined in the conversation and stated how fresh and green everything was in the forest, and how EL Paso did not resemble the forest and asked if the Indonesian students knew where El Paso was located. The first Indonesian student said yes but wanted to know why the UTEP students thought El Paso was ugly even though both areas were the creation of God and therefore a gift to be cherished. The second student from UTEP decided to answer by stating that it was not necessarily ugly, but that it was not nice in comparison to Indonesia. Another Indonesian student joined the conversation and asked if the reason why the student said it was not nice was because some of the residents were bad or mean in some manner. Then the UTEP student responded by saying that they thought it was not nice since it was very hot. Then the first Indonesian student asked the individual if that was the only reason why they considered it ugly. The student then stated that everything is pretty
if it is a gift from God. The UTEP student seemed to be taken back a bit and asked how they did not literally mean that the overall city and scenery was ugly in El Paso, but figuratively that the scenery did not match that of Indonesia.

The next part of the conversation became a bit interesting since even though the Indonesian students kept asserting the need to establish how the UTEP student was wrong in considering EL Paso ugly, they were inevitably going to work for a logging company after their graduation. I then asked if it was okay for them to work in companies like that considering it was a gift of God they would be destroying. The student somberly stated that he was in dire need for money and had no other alternative (Field notes, 24 July, 2012). The response of the Muslim student seemed to touch the hearts of the UTEP students as each member slowly walked away to get some food, or write in their journals. One of the students came to me and stated that she realized how petty her “1st world problems were in comparison theirs” (Field Notes, 24 July, 2012). She said she admired the bond the student had with their religion and expressed immense grief when she heard his solemn response to finding work for a logging company. She stated repeatedly to herself what an emotional battle it must be for other Indonesians (who are struggling with the moral implications (according to the Qur’an) of their actions as a worker for the company causing the destruction. She praised the students for their devotion to Islam and the immense discipline they possessed in maintaining the six pillars of faith. She felt that the overall act of praying six times daily alone was admirable.

In addition she mentioned that she felt it was highly esteemed for Muslims to dedicate their bodies to *puasa* (or fasting) during Ramadan in which individuals refrain from consuming food or water from six in the morning until six in the evening. She felt that the majority of Americans have been so blind to the realities of poverty across the globe. It was through this
cross-cultural dialogue that she was able to understand a different aspect to the problem of deforestation. Milstein (2008) asserts that examining the “…everyday discourse in a charged and visceral… site of relations between humans and wild nature” (p.175) is essential to analyzing the various legislative regulations, standards and conditions that are connected to the culture in study. In addition this cross-cultural discourse helps to construct a practical means of discussing certain inequalities pertaining to economic, environmental and social issues that create disparities in subsidiary groups (Pezzullo, 2007).

4.4 Conservation Education: “Toxic Tourism for the Bules”

Before traveling to Indonesia, our professor had light-heartedly stated that as a foreigner, we would be identified by the locals as *bules*, a slightly derogatory term that means foreigner or white person in Indonesian. The primary premise of traveling to certain areas within Indonesia was to gather an understanding of the potential detriments *bules* and locals pose to the environment. These tours emphasize sites that tourists rarely see (See Figures 12 & 13).

Figure 12: Typical housing arrangement for Indonesian families. (Author’s photo)
Tourists, tend to encounter an experience different from the living standards of the locals (Pezzullo, 2007). Although Pezzullo’s work focuses on toxic tourism, another aspect we detected did not deal with toxic tourism, but rather highlighted the living conditions some Indonesians deal with on a daily basis which makes life a bit more challenging for them. An example of this was experienced through the Indonesian transportation system when students utilized a ferry to travel from the archipelago of Karimunjawa to Semarang. It was the first time I rode in a ferry boat and I felt a bit confident considering that it was a trip sponsored by UTEP. Yet, when I saw the overall condition of the boat coupled with the fact that there were multitudes of individuals squeezing into what looked like a tiny wooden frame, I became anxious due to my surroundings. Soon our turn came up, and we bounced ourselves inside the interior of the boat about 10 feet from a visible exit door. After awhile I examined my surroundings and noticed that there were some life vests held behind a film of plastic wrap on the shelf and there was a water residue on the floor. At first, it did not strike me odd considering we were near water; it was not until the boat disembarked for Semarang that it took a turn for the worse. The waves were high during
that portion of the season so the boat began to crash down upon the waves. Many individuals were vomiting and panicking because the frame of the entire boat sounding like it was caving in. At one point during the ride, I looked over to my advisor to see if this was normal but her head was tucked down and her eyes were tightly shut. That was the moment panic began to set in. Then, the boat slammed one more time into the waves and the frame of the boat cracked on the side causing the television to shut off. The only sounds that were made were the wrenching of individuals puking in the corners and some people wimpering or children crying. Afterwards, when we had arrived safely to the shore, we fled from the boat and ran to our buses.

Before we left, we made a quick pit stop at the bathrooms, in which a pivotal conversation took place describing the feelings of two peers of mine about the entire ordeal. After disembarking from the ferry boat, I confessed to one of the students about how sick I felt from riding the high waves a few minutes earlier. I even stated how I was surprised that we survived the entire ordeal considering how it felt during the entirety of the ride. The student seemed to agree and asserted how they felt as if they were going to die on that ride as well. It was then that another student joined the conversation and angrily asserted how they just wanted to be done with the entire research experience in Indonesia. I tried changing subjects and stated how at first the ride seemed fun but then turned a bit scary towards the end. Then, the first student I was originally talking to stated that it turned real and not scary. Both of us expressed how surprised we were that Indonesians dealt with that transportation on a daily basis (considering it was one of the nicer boats). Instead of focusing on the boat ride itself it was essential to realize the daily adversities most Indonesians have to go through in order to get by in their country.
We then began to discuss the overall living arrangements of most Indonesians and how the majority or their restrooms do not contain running flushable water, soap or even toilet paper for that matter. At least the majority of establishments in the United States possessed these amenities and helped decrease the incidence of disease. Then the other student stated that maybe those extra amenities were the reason why global warming was occurring at such a rapid rate. The student stated that Americans are so used to living with electricity and technology that we do not realize the damaging effects it has on the environment. Then I talked to the student and stated that Americans were not the only ones who did that. In fact, Indonesians and everyone around the world want a better quality of life. They do not want to eliminate these types of technologies from society, but to instead create an energy efficient technology capable of sustaining the environment and well beings of citizens simultaneously (Field notes, 13 July, 2012).

This conversation revealed a lot about the reflections on another culture’s struggles to live an ordinary life. If these students had not actually felt the same perils of transportation by not riding on the ferry, then their overall perception as a tourist on the matter would be limited. Being a tourist allows the individual to compare the cultural realities (Pezzullo, 2007). In addition, being a tourist implies to some extent that, the individual will possess more monetary funds, to indulge in sightseeing activities that locals may not have the privilege of doing themselves (Pezzullo, 2007).

After gaining insight experiencing the effects of tourism on certain environments, it was interesting to analyze the thriving tourism prevalent in Bali. It was through this experience that I was able to view disparities in living standards between tourists, the locals and the daily wear and tear of tourism on the environment. This all started after we arrived by plane to the predominantly Hindu province of Bali, we noticed immediate contrasts to the other Muslim
provinces of Indonesia we previously had visited. The overall atmosphere of the environment bustled with swarms of foreign individuals clad in revealing garments that navigated the crowds while shouting publicly at their children for lagging behind. The majority of these tourists seemed oblivious to the feelings of the local workers and treated them as if they were mute, deaf, or mentally incapacitated. What struck me odd was how several tourists sat at outlets in the restaurants lining the outdoor portion of the airport where they plugged their phone chargers, computers, and ipads. Numerous individuals seemed to repeat these behaviors throughout every part of the airport, an expression of self-concern rather than other-concern.

An interesting observation that the majority of the students noticed while heading to our hotel was the lack of evidence that poverty existed within the province of Bali. For example, the overall infrastructure of the streets and buildings were well-constructed and seemed to be maintained on a daily basis. The majority of the buildings lining the streets were comprised of ritzy boutiques selling the latest fashions, elegant lofts, lounges, nightclubs and cafes. Soon, we came to our accommodations which were located a few blocks down from the beach with an extremely westernized look to the architecture of the buildings. The hotel contained a spa, lounge, patio café and night time bar that played music that was not native to the cultural surroundings (Salsa music, American and or British singles were played instrumentally). It was not until we ventured to the beach for dinner that Balinese individuals were seen trying to make a living by selling hand-crafted items for the tourists that traveled to the beach. What was interesting was how some members of the program seemed to have forgotten the other locations we had visited witnessed and would throw away gum wrappers in the street or would leave small tips for the hard-working staff members at restaurants or cafes. It was as if they seemed to adopt the general mindset of the environment they were immersed in.
The following describes a conversation that took place on the beach with a fellow peer of mine during our dinner on the beach with our research colleagues. One of my peers from the group walked over to the side with me and stated how shocked they were by the conduct of the other individuals while in Bali. I agreed and stated how surprised I was as well considering that was not how things were during the beginning portion of the trip. The student then mentioned how disgusted they were after witnessing one of their peers mistreated a waiter for not getting their order right during dinner. My peer added how that same individual was extremely courteous to Indonesians in Samarinda, East Kalimantan whenever individuals would mispronounce their name or confuse whatever they ordered. I thought this was interesting as well considering how maybe it was also due to the climate of the areas (Bali was more Westernized than East Kalimantan).

Yet, I also figured it was due to the fact that the majority of the students on the trip were probably just ready to go home since they may have been exhausted from traveling. I mentioned this to the student, but they did not seem to feel those participants were justified in acting that way. My peer also felt that they were being hypocritical considering how they had stated they had changed for good and realized the impact of their actions on others. After awhile, the student seemed to just focus on the traits of the individuals rather than their overall actions at dinner earlier that day. I then questioned my peer as to why their actions seemed to offend them so much. The student then expressed a feeling of frustration since all the life lessons that were experienced on the trip seem to have been done in vain because they ended up acting like they did in the beginning. It was then that I mentioned how the student was devoting way too much attention to others rather than viewing the change it made in their own life. The student seemed to agree and then began to think for a while about the opinion I expressed. However, the student
then expressed that there was relevance to my statement, but the fact remained that certain students were not as impacted as my peer. Yet my peer began to state once again the hypocritical actions of one student who mentioned how they were newly converted environmentalists yet indulged in utilizing various products from companies that caused the destruction of the environment in the first place. My peer felt that it was basically useless for those students since they were still going to commit the same habits and mistakes that affected the daily lives of Indonesians and other parts of the world. She then told my classmate how it was wrong to classify it as useless since she was not sure if they would do the same thing once they got home or if they were not impacted on some other level. The primary issue to focus on was the fact that some kind of change had occurred. I even added how one of the students my peer referred to was actually picking up wrappers from the other members and tossing them in the trash. It was not necessarily the change my peer wanted to see, but it was change nonetheless (Field Notes, 29 July, 2012).

Another conversation took place the following day during a eco-bicycling tour ride through a traditional Hindu Balinese town. After leaving the city area of Denpasar, we ventured into the forests of the mountain to start our journey biking down to the villages. While on our biking tour, the first place we stopped at was a traditional living establishment in Bali that housed several individuals. The following is an excerpt of the conversation that took place between a tour guide, student and I during the biking tour. Our tour guide called out to everyone to gather in front a traditional Balinese home that stood in front of us. At first the man just said to look inside the archway and pointed to the intricate designs surrounding the whole of it. Then, the guide motioned to the students to enter inside the home. I then asked the tour guide in disbelief if he really wanted us to go inside the hut and the tour guide merely stated that it was
okay since the family was reaping some form of monetary compensation for the intrusion into
their households. I then asked him how much they would receive and the man then stated that the
family accrued 2000 rupiah for each group taken and another 1000 rupiah if the tourists used
their personal bathrooms. I asked my peer in disbelief if the tour guide actually stated that and
my peer agreed that he had in fact said that. My peer stated how they felt as if the tour guide
treated the Balinese family like caged exotic animals in a zoo. My peer then stated how guilty
she felt taking pictures but felt as though the family was being exploited. I agreed and mentioned
how maybe we were going to stop and purchase arts and crafts. Then another peer of ours joined
the conversation and stated how maybe our research could highlight the living condition of the
Balinese families and hopefully generate some kind of funding that could be distributed to them.
Afterwards, both of us figured that it important research could be used as means of identifying
potential areas of improvement (Field notes, 30 July, 2012).

Before walking into the house my heart was heavy with guilt considering that the family
would make less than 20 cents for our group trip and about 10 cents if we decided to use their
bathroom. It was then after seeing the women of the house working tirelessly on weaving
together bamboo for their roof, I felt compelled to tell their story to their world. This proved
problematic for me considering that I was also taking part in what felt like the exploitation of
impoverished Balinese families. Yet, it was through this action that others could view the
struggles of another society to hopefully create innovations in living for these individuals in
sanitation and living. Yet, after collecting my data, I was unable to take part in the remainder of
touring their homes, since it felt invasive and unwanted. Below are a few of the photographs
taken from one of the wealthier Balinese families’ homes (See figures 14-18).
Figure 14: Balinese women trying to repair their floor. (Author’s photo)

Figure 15: Pictured here is a typical kitchen in a Balinese household. (Author’s photo)
Figure 16: Shows the metal drum that holds the family’s water. (Author’s photo)

Figure 17: Traditional Balinese stove (left), Balinese woman cooking. (Author’s photo)
After the tour, several students mentioned they were displeased with the fact that we invaded the Balinese family’s home. Although my peers were frustrated with their situation, it served to highlight the disparities in wealth in comparison to Americans, also something I noticed in Balikpapan, Samarinda, and Semarang. The U.S. has its share of urban sprawl that paralleled the phenomena in Bali. According to Cantrill (2007) urban sprawl (which accounts for “over 47% of the United States’ population” [p. 123]) in the US occurred as a result of individuals moving into the suburban areas due to the deterioration of living establishments within the metropolitan areas. Yet, that was not the only issue that tourism seemed to give us perspective on. Tourism shows the widespread poverty, and it also demonstrates what individuals have to endure because of their status when trying to correct environmental damages caused by tourists or other Indonesians.
These photos illustrate a daily lifestyle and transportation (Figures 19 & 20) that are in part affected by the actions of tourists who unknowingly cause damage to their environment. Although Indonesian society plays a part in the damage, the main premise of this research is to illustrate the potential effects Americans as tourists can have on the environment as well. However, another theme my thesis aims to accomplish is ultimately bridging differences and drawing solutions from shared personal experiences to assist another group with a similar problem. This is crucial because it aids in the facilitation of dialogue, shared cross-cultural experiences and the diffusion of knowledge related to the ecosystem in study. This is ultimately deemed as the act of helping to resolve reoccurring conflict themes that limit this diffusion of knowledge and shared experiences as a researcher. A researcher must immerse themselves in their surroundings to gain a broader perspective of the issue.

Figure 19: Two men fishing. (Author’s photo)
4.5 Bridging Differences: “The Resolution of Reoccurring Conflicting Themes”

During numerous occasions on this trip, I encountered the need for dialogue between the two groups (Indonesians and UTEP students) to help conservation projects. The most feasible way to accomplish this goal was by bridging differences between the two groups in which both groups could relate to each other’s problems. There were several instances in which creating dialogue with Indonesians helped solidify my knowledge of vegetation and natural resources they were trying to conserve. Milstein (2011) advances the idea that conservation education is strengthened when individuals construct learning methods based on conceptualizing objects by associating them with elements familiar to their experiences. For example, during the program, a group of graduate school students were selected to participate in a tour exploring the various non-government funded local reforestation and farming projects on the outskirts of Samarinda.
While there, students were led through a tour of the various species of plants and crops planted in the farms by Indonesian educators. An interesting concept that aided in bridging gaps was through the language. The educators took into consideration that the majority of the UTEP participants were not fluent in Indonesian but made sure to state the Indonesian term for the plant, followed by the scientific name and lastly by the American term (See figures 21 & 22).

Figure 21: Pepper & vanilla plant grown in local conservation project. (Author’s photo)

Figure 22: Indonesian fruit & Jasmine plants harvested at the local project. (Author’s photo)

Afterwards, some students even helped in the cross-cultural exchange of discourse by specifying the object’s name in Spanish. According to Milstein (2011) the act of “Pointing and naming is a basic practice of using communication to discern nature…and ecocultural relations” (p. 3). Although Milstein’s study focuses on the rudimentary act of pointing and naming plants within a shared culture, this research seeks to draw a correlation between cross-cultural dialogue
as well; by allowing the flow of discourse to take place, individuals can apply familiar terms to a specific object in order for it to become ingrained in their memory through a personal experience with the object. This is unique in that it helps to draw similarities between diverse groups that improves cross-cultural communication.

These cross-cultural exchanges of plant knowledge were extremely effective when members were similar in age, education and interests. During our stay in Samarinda, one male Muslim student made it a point to teach us more about his culture. He talked to us about Indonesia’s colonial history and the Dutch influence and the purpose of *puasa* (or fasting), but primarily engaged in conservation education. The following are a series of conversations that took place with the student who acted as a mentor to the majority of UTEP students who participated in the field group activities in Kutai.

I began by asking the student if they were ready to go into the forest with the group. The student then asked me as we were beginning to walk in if the scenery in the US resembled the Indonesian environment. I then told him how the area that I lived in was not as green since it was the desert, but it did have beautiful plants native to the area like cacti, agave, ocotillo and creosote bushes. The student seemed to have a bit of trouble understanding what those terms meant and then asked me what they stood for. I told them how the majority of the plants were very good at conserving water. I also added how my city promotes the idea of using xeriscaping within their gardens in order to save on water. The student seemed a bit impressed but wanted to know whether or not the US had any flowers. I stated that the US did have flowers, and some of them were even pretty like the ones that were in Indonesia. The student then wanted to know whether or not there were any anggrek hitam (Indonesian term for black orchid) in the state of Texas. I did not know what it meant at first and asked him, so he just said it was a flower from
Borneo that was also classified by its scientific term: the Ceologyne pandurata. I had to ask him once again what he meant and he stated that they were orchids. I was lucky that the student was so accommodating and knew the English term for orchid. The student then asked if I liked the orchids and I admitted that I did not really like them since I liked the rose. The student did not recognize the term rose and asked what is was. So I told the student that unfortunately I did not know the scientific term for it, but in Spanish, they were referred to as “las rosas” and were usually given out during Valentine’s day. I then stated how Valentine’s day was a holiday that people in the United States celebrated in which individuals give people they love or have a crush on, as a special gift. I also added how the main gifts that are given are usually expensive bouquets of roses or exotic flowers. The student looked at me stunned and stated how flowers were protected and not chopped down to be sold to people (Field notes, 24 July, 2012). Although the student was shocked, most Indonesians possess a different cultural perception of flowers, much like most Americans who may perceive the student’s reactions as outrageous or shocking.

This conversation helped put into perspective the many terms used to bridges gaps in learning in order to create resolution to a situation. In this instant, the two of us essentially worked to engage in learning of precious vegetation by associating it with an aspect exclusive to American culture, that coincided with the conversation. At times, the student hesitated due to his English, but was encouraged every time he gained perspective into my culture as well. Milstein (2008) advances the idea that the inability to communicate any underlying frustrations with another culture is due to a language barrier. Milstein states that the act of engaging in “Nature identification,….exemplifies one such strategy of action, at a minimum transforming both Western lexicon and syntax and their associated cultural meanings” (2001, p. 5).
The individuals not only create an identity for the people of Indonesia, but of the overall ecosystem and environment that they partake in informing themselves about (Milstein, 2011). An example of this was experienced upon meeting the orangutans in the Kebun Raya forest and talking to the student about them. As we ventured into the park, I excitedly asked one of the Unmul students if we were actually going to see the orangutans. The student then replied that they were unsure whether or not would be able to since they sometimes hide. Then all of a sudden, the student pointed to the top of the trees where a series of cages were lined up which held a few orangutans. The student excitedly asked if I could see them, which I could. Yet, it was a bit sad watching them in their tiny cages. However, the student’s excitement seemed to offset the entire experience. The student began to ask whether or not I could see the orangutans and if I felt like they looked like tiny little humans. One of them was hard to see behind the thick bars, but after a while, the orangutan just sat near the front of the cage watching the students. The orangutans in fact did look like a human. The eyes and hands felt as though a human was caged behind the bars and looking sadly out at the group of students. I then asked the student why one of them in the other cage looked a bit sad and the student then confessed that it had hepatitis. I then stated maybe it was because the place looked too small for the orangutan and that it needed better living arrangements. The student then replied that it was better for the orangutan to be there since many of the palm tree oil companies were paying the locals to kill the orangutans in exchange for a few rupiah (Indonesian currency). It was then that I felt like my previous statement was a bit arrogant since they were doing the best they could with the resources they had (Field notes, 22 July, 2012).

At first, I was extremely critical in analyzing the overall state of the establishment and the tiny structures in which the orangutans were kept, but the discourse helped shed light on a major
issue to the problem; had these orangutans habitat not been threatened, then they would have to live in cages. This exchange of dialogue helped create an identity for the orangutans that stood before my eyes as I looked over their tiny cages. (See Figures 23 & 24).

Figure 23: Orangutan at Kebun Raya Forest. (Author’s Photo)

Figure 24: Orangutan infected with hepatitis. (Author’s Photo)

They were saving the orangutans and had no other choice but to leave them confined to their spaces once they were discovered to be carriers of diseases such as hepatitis. Had their territory not been encroached upon by logging companies, palm tree oil companies, and mining
operations, then these orangutans would not have to endure living in these tiny structures. Other species affected by these activities include exotic birds essential to aiding in the distribution and fertilization of seeds the Indonesian forests.

The following is a conversation between a fellow Indonesian and I on our perceptions of the roles of birds in our environments. The male student asked whether or not I had any birds in the US. It was interesting to watch as his face seemed to get sad when I told him I did not; that the only birds I had seen were a few pigeons and how the only pretty birds I saw were the cockatiels and parakeets that my aunt owned. The student then asked what the birds looked like and if they were similar to the species of birds native to Indonesia. I then responded that the main birds I had seen were not as vibrantly colored like the Kingfisher we saw by the river in Prevab in Kutai National Park, but were equally pretty in their own way. After a long silence, the student then pointed to a net and stated that the sole purpose of it was to safely capture birds in order to study them in their natural habitat. He then pointed to a bird flying near the net that resembled a hummingbird. It was then that I told him what it reminded me of and how it is referred to as a *colibrí* in Spanish. The student sounded amazed and then stated that the term *colibrí* sounded very pretty and how he liked that term better than hummingbird (Field notes, 22 July, 2012). By engaging in this type of cross cultural communication, an aspect of my identity was articulated and thus a shared experience was formed through the dialogue (Minh-ha, 1994). Minh-ha states that language is used to understand various concepts by generating an experience through shared elements in language.

After talking for awhile about birds, my peer leader then began to tell me the purpose of utilizing a certain type of net so that it was not too heavy to where the birds were injured by flying through the apparatus. Afterwards, he began to specify the various species present within
the forest and how many were near extinct. It was by chance that the group was able to catch a
glimpse of three different species of birds the forestry researchers were cataloging. My initial
thought was that the methods of cataloging the birds would be detrimental. I asked if it was safe
and the students instructed me that the net was only erected for short periods of time, while
someone was there to monitor it. After a while, we began to see the contraption in action as birds
began to draw near. The first was a grey bird and the third flew past the researchers avoiding the
net. The last was a tiny yellow bird that flew directly into the net (See figure 25).

![Image of a yellow-bellied longbill](Author’s photo)

While touring the forest with the group the student helped in pointing out other species in
the area that were both rare and common. For example, there were several species of caterpillars
that were poisonous due to their spiky texture and vibrant color. After talking with the students
about the plants and species present within the ecosystem, the young man soon became the “go-
to-guy” for expert knowledge. Milstein asserts that this event is crucial to the learning ecology
since it acts as “the basic entry to socially discerning and categorizing parts of nature” (2011, p.
4). This active learning helps to put the person in charge of what pieces of information they
choose to integrate into their understanding.
After exploring the forests of Kutai National Park, students took part in researching the various ecosystems that ran along the Sangatta River. While there students witnessed children swimming in the polluted waters that had decomposing rat carcasses, non-biodegradable trash, crocodiles and rotting wooden boats. After passing by the city, students ventured near the habitat of the proboscis monkey (See Figure 26 & 27), and other wildlife in the area to observe animals that were not affected by the pollution from the nearby urban sprawl.

During that moment, students were awestruck as they gazed at the various wildlife but could not formulate a statement to express their feelings with regards to the juxtaposition of beauty between the two areas. Milstein (2008) states that this phenomena is intrinsically valuable since “silence is communicative of a co-expressive existence with nature” (p. 174). Students seem to identify with the wildlife in the area as they began to assign human characteristics and behaviors to the wildlife with statements like “Look at that one, he looks like a cute grumpy old man” or “that bird looks like a ballerina when it swoops down on the water” and “That little monkey looks like a rebellious little teenager swinging from that tree” (Field Notes, 24 July, 2012).
For the remainder of the trip, tourism in Kutai remained an enduring theme during conversations of healthy examples of wildlife habitats and potential factors that could pose a danger to the wildlife. Students began to articulate their thoughts a bit more when faculty members asked them to identify areas that could be substantially improved by the efforts of the university and other wildlife conservation organizations headed by dedicated environmentalists. In turn, students were a bit more conscious of their actions and recognized how impoverished communities have a harder time eradicating pollution and toxic wastes due to the lack of running water and other helpful resources. Instead, the majority of excrement was washed directly into the water Indonesians utilized on a daily basis to bathe, wash and even cook their food with. As students watched the numerous children who were exposing themselves to the toxins, they began to investigate ways to get more involved within their own communities and other outreach.
groups to potentially help others in their community or in Juárez, Mexico who were experiencing it.

After experiencing the many distinct destinations and analyzing the role of communication when engaging other individuals, it became clear that this unique experience offered much more to the researcher. This unique experience opened my eyes to a society and world that was once viewed narrowly in an arrogant manner. Many of the participants maintain contact with students from Indonesia and have even offered educational advice on how to apply for other programs in the US to also expand their knowledge of US culture, if they are immersed in the society as well, instead of just conversing with a few students in their Indonesian environment. All in all, the Indonesians we collaborated with were extremely hospitable and went out of their way to provide superior attention and service to all of the research participants from UTEP. There were some many experiences that surpassed my expectations before I initially traveled to Indonesia; some negative and the majority positive. As a child who grew up in a household of six, in an impoverished area, I was granted the opportunity of a lifetime to experience a culture diverse in tradition and language. There were numerous similarities between my culture and Indonesian culture. For one, the Indonesia language contains a lot of phonetic sounds similar to Spanish. One Indonesian lady even remarked that I had an “Indonesian tongue” (Field notes, 24 July, 2012). It was interesting to see how both cultures used their own as a basis of interpreting each others’ customs and traditions. Some areas in Indonesia even shared Western music and styles of fashion. For example, some students had an ipod and would decorate it with pictures of Justin Bieber or Maroon 5. It was comforting to use these universal items to communicate with other Indonesians and learn more about their culture by concepts related to my cultural identity and language (Minh-ha, 1994), a culture that is at times looked down upon
as a mere “third world” country (Field notes, 15 July, 2012). Minh-ha asserts that language is
used as foundation for comprehending elements in a foreign surrounding.
5.1 Conservation Education: “Era of the New Chicana”

Although the interpretation of promotional travel materials serves to influence the expectation of the individual, the overall experience is formed by the active effort to engage in cross-cultural dialogue that examined issues (relating to cultural identity, gender, and religion) which served to act as a platform of knowledge and identification (Milstein, 2011). Not only is the examination of rhetoric within conversations key to contributing to the experience (Sowards, 2012b), but by witnessing visual aids and utilizing other sensory factors can an individual’s knowledge of the ecosystem gain a unique sense of clarity and perspective. The majority of the travel materials I read prior to departing on this trip only highlighted the night-life of Bali clubs, the Dayak cultures, and farming methods utilized in Bali. Yet, none of them documented the widespread poverty and conflicts for local people (relating to the control of oil) that persisted within regions of the country. These issues were only revealed once I engaged in tours of the many provinces that contained widespread water contamination, air pollution and unsanitary waste. My experiences of analyzing tourist experiences and my own Chicana identity revealed examples of environmental pollution in Indonesia as well as my borderland community surroundings (Pezzullo, 2007). An example includes how tourists to the Hueco Tanks Historic Park implementing rules and regulations for the public to follow in order to halt the destruction of the park. After recognizing examples of toxic tourism, it was easier identify other forms of toxic tourism since I had the guidance of experienced professionals educating us on the potential harm each potential issue could pose. Some of these examples included the contamination of water resources from the run-off of coal mining companies, air pollution from the various forms
of transportation methods and the deforestation of wildlife habitats. In addition, the majority of the students took part in documenting their experiences online through social media highlighting the numerous issues associated with every area they visited. Each place served as a unique experience which may or may not have coincided with the initial expectation, but in the end served its purpose by expanding the knowledge of the various students who participated in the program and allowed them to identify with their surroundings in an intimate level (Milstein, 2011). The Indonesian language also served as a factor that influenced the experiences of several participants who may or may not have felt some frustration from the inability to communicate effectively with other Indonesians. Yet, it was through this collaboration that issues relating to cultural identity, gender, and religion were discussed in order to ultimately bridge differences.

My first impressions may have been negative based off of my American perspective of what it meant to be liberal. However, it was through conducting various conversations with several Indonesians that allowed me to implement another perspective into my understanding; one that made the previously mentioned factors trivial, when compared to the broader picture of dealing with conservation education. Once the issues were dealt with, did I truly feel the ability to express myself in group settings and focus on improving conservation through education. As previously mentioned, these overlapping issues dealt with my cultural identity, my gender and religion. My ethnic identity was complex and at times rejected by other ethnic groups residing on my borderland community (Anzaldúa, 1987; Martinez, 2003); but my experiences in Indonesia helped to define some aspects of my identity. Some aspects of my identity pertained to examining who could identify with my experiences as a Chicana, and whether or not I was capable of successfully completing my research within the program. It was through hiking through the forests of Kutai and navigating a foreign setting that my true capabilities as a
Chicana were tested. Over time, I began to gain confidence by clarifying these aspects of my identity, instead of feeling uncomfortable or anxious (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2011) about being a minority in how I chose to define my cultural identity. It even demonstrated that I was privileged in comparison to other Indonesians, when one Unmul student remarked that I was so lucky to travel to Bali, a place he always dreamed of visiting. These experiences made me a stronger person in the long run and soon I no longer felt like I was a minority, but part of the bigger plan in the research. Even a female who grew up on the borderland could make an impact on other people’s lives and engage in cross-cultural communication to help with conservation education. Although I am comfortable with how my cultural identity is defined, the concept is ever-changing due to my past, present, and future life experiences. The way I choose to define myself will not necessarily remain the same. Cultural identity fluctuates based on one’s experiences and thus allows them to navigate through certain situations and expands their knowledge according to their situational surroundings and experiences.

Another intersecting theme regarded my gender as a researcher traveling to an area diverse from my cultural surroundings. Although Griffin (2011) asserts Kraemerae’s work on muted group theory focuses on the idea that females are oppressed within society by inequalities in pay and educational opportunities, it was noted how Muslim females were attending school and did possess jobs. Prior to departing to Indonesia I remembered listening to a conversation a relative had with regards to Muslim nations. She stated that the women in these nations were so oppressed that they could not even acquire higher education. Yet, it was obvious that these females were not oppressed and that the term ‘oppression’, was constructed from one singular perspective that had no insight into the beautiful aspects of Muslim Indonesian culture. After September 11th most Muslim individuals are viewed negatively in the media. Women who wear
hijabs tend to be viewed as oppressed and Muslim men as their oppressors. However, after immersing myself in a culture that was once perceived as oppressive, did I truly begin to understand the roles women embraced within their culture. These women were given the opportunity to define their religious ideologies. Women who were not Muslim, did not receive any treatment different from Muslim women by Muslim men. Instead, all females were viewed as individuals to be protected and the women themselves felt honored that a man would want to care for them in that way. Lots of Indonesian women stated how the divorce rate in Indonesia was low compared to that of the United States. As stated by the Muslim female from Bogor, someone should not complain about one culture, if their own culture contains issues as well. It became apparent that although we were researchers, we were not impartial to some aspects of Indonesian culture. Instead, UTEP participants were asked to draw parallels between the two cultures in order for cross-cultural communication to take place. Once this was done, female students began to note that some males were not as receptive to their input as other Indonesian males were. One UTEP female joked that Indonesia was not so different from the United States after all, since some of the males would talk to her in a dismissive tone. She also noted that maybe it had something to do with the language barriers considering how some of her Mexican coworkers would do this as well, but did not mean to since they were struggling to explain themselves in English. Instead, she stated that as a female, she would implement different methods of communicating with the men in order to collaborate on team projects.

Although the muted group theory focuses on the roles women play in society, an interesting aspect also analyzed was how males and females used various types of discourse to collaborate with each other. Griffin (2011) also states that Tannen’s genderlect theory centers on the different methods males and females use to communicate with each other. He asserts that
women tend to build rapport within their conversations; Indonesian males did this as well within their conversations. At times, they seemed to be a bit more timid (due to the language barrier), yet when the UTEP participants began to talk about life in the United States and life in Indonesia, they used the same dynamics. Some Unmul students would ask about our philanthropy and if we helped out many Americans in the US as well. The men did not try to demonstrate they were dominate over one group, but instead wanted to learn. They always referred to the students as ‘Miss’ or ‘Ibu’ and would go out of their way to meet the UTEP students on each of their excursions into the forests. This may not seem like much for most Americans, but in Indonesia, traveling by motorcycle to one destination could take hours and would become costly after awhile. Some of the students even accompanied us on our trips to the forest even though they were weak from paying homage to their religion by fasting for Ramadan.

There were so many beautiful aspects of Indonesia that were highlighted once individuals stopped focusing on the differences encountered when discussing the intersecting themes of cultural identity, gender and religion. Once all of these intersecting issues were discussed, several students noted a substantial improvement of the role they played in the program. Conservation education is pertinent to both the scientific and social aspects dealing with the researchers and the surrounding cultures being observed. Only then can science maintain an objective view that considers all factors that may inhibit the overall performance of researchers studying abroad within a foreign community diverse in cultural identity, gender and religion.
Bibliography


VITA

Bianca Ramirez was born in El Paso, Texas and the youngest of four children to Victor Ramirez and Imelda Macias Ramirez. Bianca graduated from Silva Health Magnet in the Spring of 2007. Her mother was a native of Jimenez, Chihuahua, Mexico and then immigrated to the states at the age of 12 with her seven siblings and both parents, and graduated from Park University at the age of fifty-two. Her father was a native of El Paso, Texas and acquired a Bachelor’s degree at the University of Texas at El Paso. Bianca’s siblings consist of Christine Ramirez Adame, Danielle Ramirez Sanchez and Angelica Ramirez. Bianca was the fourth to graduate in her family with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and a Minor in Legal Reasoning the spring of 2010; and was the first of her siblings to graduate with a Master’s degree in Communication in Spring of 2013. Bianca has been involved in various student organizations over her time at the University of Texas at El Paso, and has occupied several prestigious leadership positions such as President of the National Political Science Honor Society, editorial assistant to the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Organizational and End User Computing (JOEUC), and as teaching assistant to various professors at the university. Bianca is also active in the Media Change Makers organization at the university and has been selected on multiple occasions to research abroad in Indonesia, and present a conference paper in panel at the COCE 2013 convention in Uppsala, Sweden.

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