



**may 2011**

**CSW**update

Staff

# Q&A with Jessica Gipson

CSW Faculty Research Seed Grant Recipient investigates women's choices regarding prenatal and delivery care in a rural area of western China



JESSICA GIPSON is an Assistant Professor of Community Health Sciences in the School of Public Health at UCLA. She received a CSW Faculty Research

Seed Grants for 2010-2011 for a project titled "Investigating Tibetan Women's Pregnancy Care Preferences in Rural China: A Collaborative Pilot Study to Promote Safe Motherhood." Investigating women's choices regarding prenatal and delivery care in rural, western China, an area with high maternal mortality and morbidity, the project will also develop a clinic data collection system to track women's knowledge, perceptions, and use of a newly constructed Tibetan

Birth Center in this area. Recently, Professor Gipson very kindly responded to some questions about her career path and research activities.

**What led you to your academic career? How did you become interested in public health and reproductive health?**

*I first discovered public health while pursuing my undergraduate degree here at UCLA. I started out as a biology and pre-med major but felt a deeper need to blend the biological processes with the realities of human lives and behaviors. I switched to medical anthropology and stumbled upon public health, as several courses were cross-listed with anthropology. I was enraptured by my first public health course — CHS 100. That course set me on a whole new path.*

*I interned with a community organization working with Asian-American/Pacific Islander adolescents, then after college worked at a non-profit community clinic in East Los Angeles and then with RAND in Santa Monica. While there, I decided to pursue more intensive and hands-on experience in public health. I enrolled in the Masters Internationalist program with Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, completed my Master's in Public Health coursework, then spent 2+ years in the Dominican Republic (DR) with the Peace Corps.*

*While in the DR, I was able to both broaden and focus my public health interests. I was assigned to work with a non-governmental organization on HIV prevention on the Dominican-Haitian border;*

however, I soon learned after settling in to my new town that HIV wasn't on the top of their health priority list. A clean and safe place to go to the bathroom was...so, we built latrines!

Simultaneously, though, I saw how access to basic reproductive health information and services could significantly alter the health and well-being of women and their families. I was also faced head-on with the realities of working in the reproductive health field. In my attempts to collaborate and work with a variety of community members on reproductive health issues, I came across many opinions, as well as myths and misconceptions. One particularly memorable incident was a disturbing conversation with a nun in my town in which she indicated that condoms were ineffective in preventing HIV due to "microscopic holes." The next time I was able to access a computer with an Internet connection, I rounded up all of the scientific literature I could to bring back to her to show her the scientific evidence. In spite of the mound of studies I showed her, there was no convincing her otherwise. This was one of my first insights in to how challenging working in this field could be. Unfortunately, throughout the world, reproductive health is one of the most contentious areas of research and one in which politics and ideology sometimes trump science.

### **What are some advantages of basing your research in community health science?**

*Where do I start? I really appreciate the vast experience and varied backgrounds of my colleagues and the students in CHS. My fellow faculty members include policy experts, clinicians, mental health specialists, demographers, sociologists, and anthropologists. Exposure to and interaction with colleagues representing different disciplines and perspectives has been really gratifying and, I think, contributes to a more holistic approach to the health issues we address. Despite the variety of interests and populations with whom we work, I also appreciate that there is a unifying passion and dedication to the improvement of health from a social justice perspective—that health and well-being is a basic human right.*

### **Since you teach a course on mixed [research] methods, could you elaborate on using mixed methods in health research? What is the benefit of this approach in highlighting the complexities of gender?**

*Mixed-methods research, or the integration of more exploratory, in-depth qualitative methods with more structured, quantitative methods, is extremely helpful in public health research. In addition to providing numerical estimates on the prevalence of, or trends in, particular health beliefs or practices, one can also explore the nuances behind the numbers: Why is this health outcome so prevalent? How did it get to be that way? How do people think about and make decisions about*

*this health outcome? What are the broader social influences that affect this health outcome?*

*Gender is one of the most pervasive and powerful social influences—in this country and in all of the global settings in which I work. I am fascinated by how different men's and women's health-related perceptions and experiences can be, even when they live within the same household. Mixed-methods research allows us to build on simple categorizations of sex and gender to understand why and how being male or female contributes to these perceptions and experiences at a personal and a societal level.*

### **How do different contexts of gender dynamics influence your research methods and program design?**

*This is one of many areas in which I greatly value and rely on the input of senior colleagues and in-country collaborators. This is also an area in which in-depth qualitative methods are also very useful, if not absolutely necessary, to determine the most culturally appropriate and ethical way in which to conduct a research investigation or intervention.*

*One of the key issues I face, especially when attempting to work with male-female couples in various settings, is to determine to what extent women can independently and safely participate or not participate in a health intervention or research project, regardless of their husband's or male partner's wishes. I have found that it depends on the issue at hand. For example, during my study on fertility preferences and pregnancy in*

*Bangladesh, I was warned by colleagues that husbands may need to be approached first and to be asked for permission for their wives' participation before the wives themselves are asked. However, when we tried, many of the husbands questioned why we were asking them about such issues when this was a "woman's domain."*

*This statement reflects another issue that I grapple with—the historical exclusion of males in sexual and reproductive health interventions, policies, and research. This practice has changed drastically in the past decade or two, and in many cases is a pragmatic decision based on resources and time. If there is only enough money to gather pregnancy data from 2,000 people, doesn't it make sense that we would focus on women? However, in most situations, the male partner is integral to decisions related to the occurrence and outcome of a pregnancy—if/when to have sex, if/when to use contraception, if/when to have a child, if/where the baby will be delivered, and how scarce resources will be allocated within the household once the child is born. In my work, I have tried to include the male perspective not only to learn more about men's perspectives and health issues but also to learn how males' perspectives influence the health and well-being of their female partners and families.*

**Why do you think it's important for public health professionals and researchers to genuinely consider and attempt to engage with gender and sexuality?**

*Gender and sexuality are such important elements*

*of health—not just reproductive health. Gender norms and sexual and gender identity impact how we view the world and how the world views us. How does our biology or our gendered experience impinge on how we view health, our ability to manage our health, and our access to health care and services? Another area of public health importance is the assessment of potential social, psychological, and physical repercussions when individuals challenge the predominant notions of sexuality and gender in their communities and societies.*

**Your current projects are located in the Philippines and Tibet. Can you tell us about the research?**

*The Philippines is a setting where reproductive health information and services are severely restricted. In addition to a ban on modern contraception in Manila in 2000, the most recent President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001–2010), restricted the provision and funding of modern contraceptive methods throughout the country. Meanwhile, young adults have an even greater need for reproductive health services given earlier ages of sexual debut and later ages at marriage. Given these changes, we conducted an in-depth, qualitative study to explore situations in which young adults are faced with a pregnancy that they weren't expecting and may not have desired. Although traditional ideals persist regarding the "proper" timing and order of courtship, marriage, and childbearing, the current reality is often different. Many of the young adults we spoke to had*

*pregnancies before marriage or in the context of unstable relationships. In a setting where abortion is illegal, some women who were desperate to terminate an unwanted pregnancy ingested toxic or unregulated substances and/or self-inflicted injury. Findings from this study provide insight into the realities of young adult lives and highlight the need for comprehensive reproductive health services for Filipino young adults, especially amidst intense national debate on the Philippine Reproductive Health Bill to be voted on later this month.*

*Thanks to a Faculty Development Seed Grant from the Center for Study of Women and to the UCLA Council on Research, I am also working on a project with colleagues at UCLA and with the Tso-Ngon University Tibetan Medical College. We will be working in the Malho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, a remote area which is undergoing rapid social and cultural change. We are examining the role of sociocultural factors and logistical constraints on choices made by rural women and their families about whether to deliver their babies at a new, innovative Tibetan Birth Center, in a local hospital, or at home, where babies in this region are generally born. We are also hoping to lay the groundwork for a larger, regional study by developing a population-based data collection system for the purpose of monitoring maternal morbidity and mortality, as well as other health outcomes.*

**Dayo Spencer-Walters, who prepared the questions for this interview, is a MPH student in the Community Health Sciences in the School of Public Health at UCLA and a Graduate Student**

# Q&A with Steven Spencer

Speaker in the Women and STEM series talks about how he became interested in studying psychology, dissonance, and stereotype threat

**A**S I TALKED WITH Steven Spencer, Professor at the University of Waterloo and a groundbreaking researcher in the field of stereotype threat, I was impressed by his kind demeanor and effective speaking style. He shared information about his academic career, advice for graduate students as well as discussing this research on how to dismantle the negative stereotypes that inhibit women's progression in science, technology, engineering, and math fields (STEM).

## **What drew you to this field of study?**

*When I was an undergraduate, I was a psychology major. I thought I was going to go into pre-med, but took [a class on] comparative anatomy and*

*realized it was not for me. I started an undergraduate research project in my second year and finished in my honors study my third year doing dissonance studies. I realized I loved doing research, and so I decided to go to graduate school doing research in social psychology.*

## **How did you get started in your career as an academic?**

*Well, when I was an undergraduate doing dissonance research, I began reading the new stuff on dissonance and at that time it was Claude Steele's self-affirmation theory. I loved his work so I decided to go work with him for graduate school. My first year project was a dissonance study but at that time, Claude was starting to think about*

*stereotype threat. Therefore, I had the really good fortune of starting in graduate school focusing on stereotype threat. In fact, my dissertation was the first study done on stereotype threat, and consequently it was very good for my career.*

### **Which writers, researchers, or professors particularly influenced or inspired you?**

*You don't work with Claude without being inspired by a whole bunch of people. For me, there were both social psychology influences and broader influences. As my mentor, Claude would have me read Jean-Paul Sartre, Ralph Ellison, and other really inspiring authors. Social psychology-wise, Claude was fundamentally important, but a book on stigma by Ned Jones and Hazel Markus really influenced me. Jennifer Crocker and Brenda Major also both had a huge influence on my career as well. In addition, Toni Schmader ended up at my school as well and certainly inspired me.*

### **What is on your research agenda right now?**

*One of the things I am interested in is "belonging" and an intervention for women in engineering. I think you can create a sense of belonging and connection between individuals. I also have some ideas about how to use that sense of connection through intergroup relations. Another way to say this is that in our engineering intervention, we focus on ways to help the women in this environment to feel more comfortable in their environment and give them tools to make them feel more*

*comfortable even if they don't feel this way. Women will create a bit of a virtuous circle because women are motivated to do well, so if we can help them get past these barriers, that motivation will carry them further. But it seems to me what you really want to do in the long run is create this sense of connection between people. You want to get men in the environment when it's women in STEM to change, which is difficult because they may not be as motivated to change. I think this sense of connection could create the motivation for them. So, the next part of my research will attempt to change the bad culture of certain organizations, starting with engineering programs.*

### **How do you see the field of social psychology developing?**

*There are broader things that are going to be relevant. We need to step outside and think of the major themes and influences that are affecting social psychology. Here are some:*

- *Culture really matters. We've come to appreciate that and have more sophisticated models of culture, and a better understanding of this will allow us to examine how we can better understand intergroup relations.*
- *Neuroscience. Culture and neuroscience is a society-level analysis, but we can make it part of a lower-level analysis to better understand intergroup relations.*
- *Our field needs to be better at returning to our*

*roots. We need to make the case that we matter. Research moving toward interventions is going to be important and as a field, we need to support this work.*

### **What advice would you give current graduate students?**

*Null findings are part of the game, but graduate students need to remember that it is a marathon, not a sprint. One of the things that keeps me going is the fact that I have a lot of studies going on at a given time. At the moment, I have around thirty. If more than half fail, I know that I at least will be able to write around two to three papers every year. Graduate students tend to put so much into a specific project that it can be discouraging when it doesn't work. As a graduate student, you need to be working on five to six studies at any given time. One of the nice developments in the field over the past few years is short reports. By the end of year 2, students should aim to write something up for a short report. This gives you the opportunity to get through that review process, which typically takes a lot of time.*

### **Who are the people you look to now? Your current mentors or collaborators?**

*My colleagues at Waterloo are the first people I look toward. I publish with Mark Zanna, Joanne Woods, and John Holmes, to name a few. I also talk to my friends from graduate school as well and, even more, former students.*

**Looking back at your graduate career, what is the one piece of advice you wish someone had told you that would have helped you?**

*Claude was wonderful, and so not much was left out. One piece of advice that Claude gave me (that I needed, but not everyone needs) is that writing is something you get better at with effort and time. As a mentor, Claude made me keep an ideas journal and wanted me to write every day. He cared about writing and the quality of writing. If I had to tell one thing to graduate students, I would tell them writing is not something you have or you don't. It's a very incremental process and ability that requires continuous work.*

*At the end of the day, its not about the number of articles you have. Rather, it's about the influence they have. You want to shape the field and the way the world works. Focusing on doing too many and not making the quality the best that you can is a mistake.*

**Courtney Hooker is a graduate student in the Department of Social Psychology at UCLA.**



# Q&A with Toni Schmader

Speaker in the Women and STEM series talks about how she became interested in studying educational outcomes

RECENTLY HAD the wonderful opportunity to sit down with Dr. Toni Schmader, Professor at the University of British Columbia, to talk about her groundbreaking research on stereotype threat among women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). We talked about how she began her academic career, advice she has for graduate students, and her insights into her latest research on examining the mechanisms behind stereotype threat.

## What drew you to this field of study?

*As far back as high school I was interested in differences in education outcomes, although minority groups were my original focus. It's been more recent that I've been interested in how it pertains to women in science. It was interesting to me how*

*situational factors can lead to impairments in how people think, form, and conceive of themselves. My training in graduate school was related to this and I've continued to pursue those ideas since then.*

## How did you come to study women in STEM fields?

*The study of social psychology is usually interested in fairly basic processes. The study of stereotype threat, or the idea that you would be concerned about doing something that might inadvertently confirm a stereotype about your group, is something that anybody can experience. In some sense, I first got interested because women were a convenient sample to study, as the honest truth. But it's really fascinating, too, because the more*

*you actually get into science yourself, as a woman, you realize it takes on a personal significance as you see friends of yours start on an academic track and then they don't continue. Going back, I can trace some of my personal experiences through stereotype threat, though at the time I didn't necessarily frame them in the context of these theories. It's interesting to see the way that stereotypes add pressure that shape the path you end up taking, without necessarily knowing that is what's happening.*

### **How did you get started in your career as an academic?**

*I originally wanted to do sociology in undergraduate. However, there was a psychology professor who offered a class called "Coercion," which was taught from a behaviorist perspective. She was interested in how people influence others from a stimulus-response angle, and I was just fascinated. I thought that sociology was the place where I would understand how context influences people, but after taking that class, I realized I was much more interested in the individual point of view, as opposed to the societal point of view. So I started taking psychology classes and never looked back. I knew that I wanted to go on and do a PhD, and so the question was figuring out what topic I was going to be most interested in. Once I settled on psychology, that became the direction I took.*

### **Which writers, researchers, or professors particularly influenced or inspired you?**

*I always had an interest in educational disparities. As a high school student, I remember reading a book by Jonathan Kozol, who has written several books from a sociological perspective about the poverty of schools in inner cities that then lead to educational disparities for ethnic minority students. I was fascinated with that idea. Within the field, Brenda Major was my doctoral supervisor. I was very interested in the study of stigma and how people cope with being a member of a stigmatized group. Working with her was really inspiring, I learned a lot, and it gave me grounding in studying issues of stigma and stigmatization from a social psychological and experimental perspective. Given that I do research in stereotype threat, I've been inspired by the original work of Claude Steele and Josh Aronson. The first time I was on the UCLA campus was when I was a graduate student at UC Santa Barbara and Claude Steele was giving a colloquium here and a group of us caravanned down to hear him present. Also, when I started grad school at SUNY-Buffalo, Steve Spencer was on the faculty and I took his methods class, and so I owe him a debt for teaching me the philosophy of science in what we do.*

### **What is on your research agenda right now?**

*In terms of the research we are doing on stereotype threat, we're starting to examine the ways in which conversations themselves can cue the kinds of processes that we've been studying in terms*

*of testing contexts, and seeing how this pertains women in STEM. What can we do about the dearth of female faculty members in STEM disciplines? We got really interested in the question of whether these processes play out amongst graduate students and amongst faculty members.*

*We did a study that got published last year in which we had male and female faculty members from a school of science wear an audio-recording device that came on periodically. It was a matched sample on department, rank, and productivity. They wore a device that periodically turned on and recorded ambient sound throughout the day, and they agreed to wear it for three consecutive work days. An amazing team of research assistants transcribed the conversations that we captured. Each conversational snippet was about 50 seconds. We coded those conversations to look at the conversations that take place between colleagues. We were interested in looking at when faculty members talk about research and also when they talk about social things (for example, how was your weekend?). We didn't find overall differences between our male and female participants in the amount they talk about research or the amount they socialize with their colleagues. In general, people talk more about research than social things, which makes sense because they are at work.*

*One interesting mean difference was that we were able to code the gender of the person they were talking to, and when people were talking to women they were less likely to talk about research*

than when they were talking to men. We were also able to correlate having research or social conversations with a self-report measure of job disengagement. For men, we had an expected, intuitive and non-surprising pattern: if you're at work, the more you're talking to your male colleagues about research, the more engaged you are with what you do. The more time you're spending socializing, the less engaged you say you are with what you're doing. For women, the pattern was exactly the opposite. If their conversations with male colleagues are more about research, the less engaged they say they are with their jobs. If their conversations with male colleagues are about social things, the more engaged they say they are with their jobs.

It's preliminary because it is correlational, but it's real world data. If it makes sense to interpret this data in light of stereotype threat theory, then you might argue that being part of an organization where you're underrepresented—and women are vastly underrepresented in STEM, as we know—those social connections (being able to talk about your family, your weekend, your hobbies, for example) provides a sense of community, belonging, and fit to the organization, which can help boost engagement. At the same time, those research conversations are places where stereotype threat processes can come into play—talking about your recent grant ideas, talking about the rejection you just got on a manuscript. Those are the places where even faculty members might feel tested in their conversations with their colleagues. We're following up experimentally, trying

to understand these processes better with grad student samples in STEM, where we're bringing in science grad students, pairing them up in cross-gender pairs to talk about research or talk about social things and measure the effect on levels of engagement.

### **How do you see the field of social psychology developing?**

I think we see more interest in integrating ideas across different levels of analysis. We have had an upswing of interest in neural mechanisms that underlie thoughts and behaviors. At the same time, I think there's also more interest in making sure that the ideas that we study have real world applications. I think there's been a push to measure real behavior or real people and get outside of college student sampling. I think we see an expanding of the field, into microlevel mechanisms and into how all our processes tie to the real world. When I entered the field, it felt that social psychology had a bit more of an insular feel, it seemed that the focus was to study basic processes, not necessarily for the wider public to understand or for policymakers to apply. There's been a movement in psychology more generally about "giving psychology away." I think we see more of that in social psychology, of people being more cognizant of their audience not being just other academic social psychologists but also people in other disciplines and the general public.

### **What advice would you give current graduate students?**

One piece of advice would be to have fun studying the ideas. One change that I see is that there seems to be an arms race for publishing more, faster, and sooner. Now, all of a sudden, to get a faculty job it takes many more publications than before. The problem is that it shifts so much more of what we do to a focus on outcome—What is the publication going to be? Where is it going to go? What kind of attention is it going to attract?—rather than on studying the questions that you find interesting and letting your own internal motivation monitor what's an interesting question guide what you do and motivate you to take it to the outcome of getting it published and advertised to others. Having the motivation come from external pressures makes it much less fun. I know that's easier advice to give than to take. When I think back to the project that I've been most excited to dive into, they've always been questions that I've found intrinsically interesting. Graduate school is a time when you can explore more readily and equip yourself with the tools that you'll need later in your career. For example, it's rare to get a chance to take a statistics class once you're a faculty member. All of the methods and statistics are essential tools to have under your belt and guide the type of research you end up doing later. Form collaborations with your grad school friends because they can end up sustaining you. I know a lot of people who still publish with people who were friends as grad students.

**Who are the people you look to now? Who are your current mentors or collaborators?**

*Once you are into a faculty position, the faculty members around you play a large role, even if you're not directly collaborating, and they start shaping the way that you think and it starts becoming a mutual mentorship. Jeff Greenberg, a senior member of the social psychology program at Arizona, was an extraordinary mentor to me as a junior faculty member. We did end up collaborating on a couple of projects and we're still collaborating on a writing project, not because we had similar theoretical interests but more because he is such a supportive colleague. Currently, at UBC all of my colleagues have been really wonderful in helping to shape and mentor my transition.*

**Lauren Wong is a graduate student in the Department of Social Psychology at UCLA.**



# CSWupdate

MAY 2011



# NEW MAJORITIES II

## A Cross-Country Duet on the State of Gender and Sexuality Studies in the Academy

BY KRISTA MIRANDA

*New Majorities II* had a double task: First, the day-long forum continued an initiative launched at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women (CSW), and co-conceived by CSW director Kathleen McHugh and NYU Professor Lisa Duggan, to respond to the uneven budget cuts affecting gender and sexuality departments—as well as other interdisciplinary programs, such as African-American and Latino/a Studies—nationwide. This conversation/duet began with a one-day conference hosted by UCLA in early March. Second, the NYU forum was also a celebration of the 11th anniversary of the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality (CSGS). (As CSGS Director Ann Pellegrini mock protested, “why celebrate the even when you can celebrate the odd.”)

The linked conferences proactively, instead of defensively, addressed the attacks on interdisciplinary programs in gender and sexuality studies, ethnic studies, and related fields. These programs are often derided as “identity studies” departments, and this ideological attack along

with the increased monetization of higher education has made these programs especially susceptible to budget cuts. In her framing remarks at the beginning of the day, Pellegrini, who, in addition to serving as CSGS director, is Associate Professor of Performance Studies and Religious Studies, acknowledged the necessity of learning to speak to administrators who control university budgets in the language of dollars and cents. But she also expressed the hope that the day's conversation might generate a way of talking about the ongoing value of interdisciplinary projects like gender and sexuality studies and ethnic studies that was not reducible to economic inputs and outputs. She stressed that monetary value is not the only—nor even most important—measure of value.

### **GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES AT NYU: HISTORY, FUTURES, INSTITUTIONAL POSSIBILITIES AND DILEMMAS**

The first panel, *Gender and Sexuality Studies at NYU: History, Futures, Institutional Possibilities and Dilemmas*, discussed CSGS's history and the current challenges and possibilities for gender and sexuality studies at NYU. Rahma Abdulkadir, Research Fellow at NYU Abu Dhabi, kicked off the event with unfettered optimism by discussing the interdisciplinary possibilities of NYU Abu Dhabi (<http://nyuad.nyu.edu/>) (NYU-AD). NYU-AD is a research institution with an integrated

liberal Arts and Sciences college with an international student body. In the nascent stages of its development, NYU-AD has only 19 majors. Although it currently offers only three classes in gender and sexualities, Abdulkadir believes that the open nature of the core areas of study, which includes "pathways of world literature," as well as the eagerness of NYU-AD's leadership to be in conversation with NYU's Department of Social and Cultural Analysis (<http://as.nyu.edu/page/asHome>) and CSGS, has significant space to expand its activities with a deeper incorporation of gender and sexuality-oriented research and pedagogy.

Next Carolyn Dinshaw, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis and English at NYU, founding director of CSGS and self-professed "living archive," addressed the changing nature of the center since 1999, when NYU was not yet the global institution it is today. At its inception, CSGS was linked to the Gender and Sexuality degree program in the College of Arts and Sciences, a union that gave the research group a medium to forge long bonds not amenable to the "one night stands" of CSGS events. The relationship between the Gender and Sexuality Studies program (GSS) and CSGS, Dinshaw explained, was multifold: the academic program provided an excellent foundation for the creation of a core audience for CSGS events while the political and pedagogical agenda of

the Center helped influence the curriculum of the GSS program with the creation of elective courses like "Transgender histories, identities and politics."

Don Kulick, who succeeded Dinshaw as CSGS Director and now a Professor of Comparative Human Development at University of Chicago, focused on two events in the Center's history: CSGS's shift from a Center linked to an academic program to its current "all university" status, and the permanent appointment of Robert Campbell as Associate Director. The former, Kulick, explained, meant that as a "provostial" center, CSGS represents the entire university and not just the Arts and Sciences. It was thus better positioned to forge connections across the university with faculty and programs doing work in gender and sexuality studies. Campbell's appointment, preceded by a series of temporary terms, gave the Center a permanent foundation and continuity. Because of these transitions, CSGS didn't have to legitimate itself as a scholarly institution and was able to popularize its evening programming to include speakers like Heather Boyle and Kate Bornstein, broadening its audience beyond academia.

Drawing from her multiple roles at NYU since 1998, e. Frances White, Professor in the Gallatin School of Individualized Study and SCA and former Vice Provost for Faculty Development, spoke to both the evolution of NYU's Woman's

Studies Program into the Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, now housed in SCA, and her role in increasing faculty diversity, which involved getting to know junior faculty of color in particular, and putting people together with similar concerns who were isolated in their respective disciplines.

The panel's moderator Gayatri Gopinath, Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis and Director of NYU's Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, brought the conversation full circle by addressing the historical discussion of CSGS and SCA regarding the nuances of the notion of "value" in terms of NYU's increased corporatization. Attending to this problematic project of NYU's globalization, Gopinath reminded us of the New Majorities agenda by addressing how we can "create insurgencies within the structure" by theorizing how the interdisciplinarity itself interrupts the ways institutions are formed.

A lively discussion followed between the panelists and with the audience. There was a lot of attention, and concern, focused on the possible imperial dimensions of NYU's global initiatives at Abu Dhabi and beyond. As was pointed out, NYU is not the only major U.S. university building global satellite campuses, and participants together asked about the political and economic implications of this expansion at this particular historical moment.

## **NEW PARADIGMS, NEW POSSIBILITIES**

The second panel, *New Paradigms, New Possibilities*, broadened the scope of discussion from an NYU focus to the fragile state of interdisciplinary programs nationally. The panel's speakers came from a variety of institutions: public and private, both colleges and universities. They continued and deepened the project begun in the morning, namely how to articulate why what women's studies, LGBTQ studies, and ethnic studies do matters at a time when the marketplace of ideas has been reduced to market value. Given the very real crises affecting particular programs, the panelists also sought to develop concrete and local strategies to combat the marginalization of "diversity" programs. There was a recognition that there is no one size fits all approach to the current situation.

Lisa Duggan introduced the panel by discussing New Majorities' history, which began with a questionnaire asking about the states of various interdisciplinary programs as a way to use local case studies to talk about national situations. This served as an empirical anchor for the subsequent early March conference at UCLA whose aim was to create new knowledges to talk across programs and institutions.

The panel's first speaker was Kathleen McHugh, Professor of English and the FTVD Critical Studies program at UCLA and Director of the UCLA Center for the Study of Women.

McHugh presented on how faculty demographics would be affected without the programs under attack by sharing the statistical research she compiled from hypothetical campus UCLX: without such programs, the number of white-male faculty would be unaffected; white-female employment would drop by almost 10%; and faculty of color would be reduced by about 50%. Riffing off David Letterman's daily top ten list, McHugh also shared the top ten insights of New Majorities. These insights included: New Majorities is proactive rather than reactive; rethinks the marginal; moves being entrenched modes of thinking; and produces alternative structures of university governance.

Providing a perspective from Duke University, Jennifer D. Brody, the embodiment of interdisciplinarity (and overextended academic labor) herself, is a Professor of African and African American Studies who also teaches Performance Studies, Gender/Sexuality Studies, and Visuality and Black Performance. Among other things, Brody addressed the issues of downsizing, noting in particular how funding for the arts has been slashed at various institutions. This affects diversity at our institutions in at least two ways: the creative arts offer an important site for university-community contact and have also traditionally provided a more receptive space for women and people of color. But Brody also pointed to her own position at



Duke, where she has a triple appointment, to ask what happens when one body is asked to perform diversity in multiple institutional sites? No body can do it, she said, but particular bodies are commonly asked to. Connecting back to McHugh's presentation, Brody underscored the unequal division of labor that results when white women and women and men of color are asked to be the institutional face of diversity. Additionally, she pointed out that women and people of color are disproportionately hired in diversity programs, which allows public land grant universities (and she used to teach at one) to claim they are meeting various diversity targets or goals even as they are in fact continuing to segregate the university by knowledge division and department.

Next was Laura Levitt, Professor of Religion and Women's Studies at Temple University, who is "in belly of beast" of the academic budget crunch. At Temple, five programs—including Woman's Studies, American Studies, Jewish studies—will be absorbed in the departments of Sociology, English, History, and so on. The rationale for this administrative decision, Levitt explains, was fiscal; in other words, these programs are failing and not valuable. After the five programs hand over their autonomy to departments, the continued life of the programs would depend on the voluntary labor of an already over-extended staff, most of whom were highly

vulnerable, non-tenured faculty. Levitt reminded us of an important oversight: this restructuring leaves little time for actual teaching and researching.

Following Levitt was Janet R. Jakobsen, Professor of Women's Studies and Director of Barnard College's Center for Research on Women. As a professor at a women's college where Women's Studies and feminist research are not currently under attack, Jakobsen spoke to the particular dangers of being on the receiving end of this capital flow. In the new neoliberal order, she argued, women and feminism were both now seen as good investments through which money might circulate along with imperialism. How would feminist work at U.S. colleges and universities be redefined in the light of this monetized "woman question"? Which kinds of research projects would be funded and supported and which, not? The way in which capital flows are set up to run through academic institutions, she maintained, can have serious dangers for other progressive institutions, like poorly funded activist organizations. Jakobsen's talk was a warning call against such complicity that marginalizes other projects of resistance.

Licia Fiol-Matta, Professor of Latin American & Puerto Rican Studies at Lehman College, CUNY, concluded the panel with an example of the way diversity studies play out in specific institutional sites and in relation to local demograph-

ics. At Lehman, Fiol-Matta explains, there is a radical disconnect between the faculty, which consists of mostly of white, relatively wealthy males, and the student body, primarily composed of women of color. Fiol-Matta revealed another paradox: while one would think this population would be receptive to interdisciplinary, diversity-oriented thinking, they succumb to the extreme conservatism expressed through the business model of education, where the student is the consumer, and goods are recognizable. As a result, this population is entrenched in an aspirational model toward insertion into the capitalist structure that equates "making it" with "making money." But Fiol-Matta stressed the complexity of Lehman's particular students' identification with this aspirational model, suggesting that it could be equally be seen as a vehicle of Americanization and racialized assimilation. In other words: the consumer-citizen economic circuit works differently, and demands different things, of different student bodies. As scholars of diversity, how do we reckon with this concrete situation?

In (im)proper interdisciplinary fashion, the conference closed with a performance party to celebrate the 11th anniversary of the Center. The performance party—entitled "Gender and Sexuality: A Musical Revue"—was produced by musician DeConcini and held at a local music venue, the Gallery at Le Poisson Rouge. The cab-

aret-style event was emceed by Jennifer Miller, Circus Amok founder and Associate Professor of Humanities and Media Studies at Pratt Institute. About 200 people packed the downstairs gallery space for the musical celebrations. The audience was “schooled” in gender and sexuality by: Karen Finley, Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, Geo Wyeth, Glenn Marla, Neal Medlyn, burlesque performers Darlinda Just Darlinda and Coco Lectric, and Daniel Alexander Jones (AKA Jomama Jones). There was even a surprise musical performance by CSGS director Ann Pellegrini.

If “Gender and Sexuality: A Musical Revue” showcased the serious play of gender and sexuality studies, it also offered a welcome respite from—and reenergizing bounce to confront—the crises discussed during the day.

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BY ŠARA STRANOVSKY

# Dancing at the Crossroads

## BATUKO, COMMUNITY, AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN CAPE VERDE WEST AFRICA



Nearby forest outside of Zazinha's home in Chao de Tanque, located in the center of Santiago Island

*On Santiago Island, at approximately 7 pm, Zazinha returns to her house after working in her maize field all day. Except for the distant ring from a goat's bell or chirps from the nearby forest, the sounds of Chão de Tanque are quiet, contrasting with the bustling capital city one hour away by bus. The quiet lasts until about 8 pm, when, one by one, girls between the ages of 8 and 14 start running from down street and appear at Zazinha's front patio. A slow crescendo of giggles and greetings increases as the girls say hello and form a circle of chairs. Soon Zazinha's quiet farmhouse ignites with a booming performance of batuko; girls begin to drum on plastic lap-pouches called tchabetas, singing about family abroad and Cape Verdean quotidien life.*

**Z**AZINHA lives in the lush rural center of Santiago Island, one of nine islands in the archipelago of Cape Verde, West Africa. While Zazinha's agricultural community is located in relative isolation from the capital city, she and her neighbors are part of a greater tight-knit international community. The islands are located 450 miles west of Senegal, at the geographic and cultural crossroads between West Africa, Europe and the Americas. Cape Verdeans that live in diaspora communities abroad outnumber those living on the islands, adding to this crossroads identity by creating a constant flow of cultural exchange as they return home and financially support the islands throughout the year. From influenced performance styles to incorporated languages to foreign products, cultural fragments from all over the world saturate Cape Verdean life and exemplify the crossroads culture that is readily identified with Cape Verde. For example, at a nearby general store called a "Chinese Loja," a man wearing a green and yellow "Brazil" t-shirt purchases Portuguese "Superboc" beer. His wife, clothed in the bright patterns of a Senegalese dress, waits for him outside as she sips French coffee from her

Boston College mug and sways to American hip-hop music playing from the store. Cape Verdeans are in tune with the pulse of worldwide happenings while they take pride in generating their local Krioulo culture. Batuko, an interdisciplinary performance of drum, dance, and song is one of many creole forms of expression. Not only does batuko show how Cape Verdeans are a part of a local-global paradox, where lines that separate the local from the global are hard to define, batuko also serves as a community-building mechanism for women who have endured especially difficult hardships living at the crossroads. “Zazinha down the street,” Delta Cultura, and Raiz di Polon are some of the local performance groups using batuko to empower women on the island of Santiago. For my dissertation research on batuko variations, community outreach, and international exchange on the island of Santiago, I am working with these three groups to find out more about how batuko plays a role in the lives of women today.

After interviewing women in several dance communities on Santiago during a summer pilot study in 2010, I learned that challenges Cape Verdean women face today relate to the archipelago’s history of gender imbalance. For several centuries, Cape Verdeans have suffered from agricultural drought and financial instability, which has forced residents to emigrate abroad to find work. As residents leave, return, stay, and watch family members leave, the notion of “home” in Cape Verde has produced what Jason Deparle calls a “world on the move” (2007). Tensions form between those that stay and those who leave as well as between people who remain in the islands.

In particular, large-scale emigration that took place surrounding Cape Verde’s independence from Portugal in the early 1970s primarily included men, which made the population outnumbered by women. Women were forced to raise families on their own and were often expected to remain faithful to their partners even when men established new families overseas. Although researchers like Deidre Meintel (2002) argue that these imbalances have equalized in the last ten years, power struggles between men and women remain within the islands. For example, according to many women that I interviewed on Santiago and São Vicente islands, there remains a stigma that Cape Verdean women are victims to male infidelity and machismo (Carter-Aulette 2009, personal conversations). Batuko, which has traditionally been performed by groups of women, has played a strong role for women on Santiago Island throughout these tensions and transitions. Batuko allows women to vent their frustrations about gender imbalance and social norms, giving them a strong collective voice within a male-dominated society.

Batuko is a tradition that emerged on Santiago island, the Southern-most island of the archipelago and the island that was first colonized with West African slaves by the Portuguese in the early 1500s. Within the performance traditions that have emerged on each Cape Verdean island, batuko sways towards the polyrhythmic call-and-response structures of African performance forms, contrasting with the more Portuguese couple-dances and waltzes at the other end of the African-European spectrum (Hurley-Glowa

1997; Lobban 1995). *Batucaderas* (performers of batuko) sing call-and-response songs while slapping polyrhythmic percussive beats on plastic pouches as a solo dancer interacts with them by gyrating her hips.<sup>1</sup> The “torno” dance, which alternates circle directions, is improvised and can vary in intensity, momentum, and distance from the ground. Knowledge of batuko’s early history varies, and is based on diverging accounts of oral histories; many people have said that women performed batuko to revolt against the sexual advances of their slave owners, as a display of charm for slave owners’ selection processes, a coping mechanism for women to deal with men who had emigrated and left them behind, or a general purging ritual to free oneself from a number of related grievances (Lobban 1995, 31-32; Hurley-Glowa 1997, 89; Carter & Aulette 2009, 21; personal conversations). Today, shifting from the traditional backyard setting, batuko is also performed on stages in nightclubs and festivals and is also incorporated rhythmically and choreographically into popular Cape Verdean music and contemporary dance. Some batuko performers, like Zazinha’s group, gather informally as a way to build community without a focus on performing for an audience. Other groups, like Delta Cultura, are part of an international nonprofit outreach organization and perform all over Santiago island for festivals and education events. Raiz di Polon, as a third example, incorporates batuko in some of their contemporary dance works which are performed by the professional company for

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1. Traditionally, these plastic pouches called “tchabetas” were made from balls of fabric. Over time, using fabric was replaced by these more inexpensive and louder versions of the instrument.

world-wide tours. Each of these three groups are empowering women in their communities in different ways, and creating new batuko styles as a result of their crossroads identity.

## Zazinha Down the Street: BATUKO AS SUSTAINABILITY

Zazinha leads an informal group of twenty girls through batuko and other dances that she calls “hip-hop” and “music video.” I met Zazinha at a cultural center in the capital of Praia where she was performing with a popular *funana* music group. After her performance, she told me that she works with a small group of children in her town and invited me to visit and participate. When I visited, I was surprised to learn how she had built a tight-knit community in only five years—a community in which she is the second “mother” to all the children “down the street.” Zazinha lives without a partner, has three children, and moved to Chão de Tanque five years ago to start a new life. As she built her new home, she began a batuko group gradually to cope with heartbreaking infidelity and financial theft when her partner emigrated, leaving her for a woman abroad. He had stolen all of her earnings by secretly placing them in a separate bank account. He has never returned to visit Zazinha and their children. Zazinha’s grief is common among the women of Cape Verde, but her forceful recovery is exemplary. She attributes her “starting over” in part to a “return to batuko history.” “Here in Cape Verde we are used to coming and going, of sadness, of sodad, and being far away from one



**Zazinha’s outdoor patio becomes a space for batuko as children from down her street arrive to practice**

another.<sup>2</sup> But we forget that we can sustain ourselves here. We work on the land and come home and our children dance with me and help me feel strong so that I can rebuild my home. We can create a system that keeps us supported. This is what batuko has always been about—a way to tell each

2. “Sodad” in creole or “saudade” in Portuguese means nostalgia or longing. Sodad is often the topic of many song lyrics and is used to describe the emotional difficulties of having loved ones far away.

other stories about working with one another, laughing and overcoming hardships, and teaching girls to be strong. In my life I lost sight of that, and as a result, I was not surrounded by a trustworthy partner.” Zazinha also told me that her previous partner would not allow her to sing in her music group, which was one of her passions. When she started her new life in Chão de Tanque she wanted to make sure that community girls

knew that they should be proud to make music together and that they should never feel pressured to stifle their creativity. Playing batuko with community girls in her backyard reinvigorates her own love for making music and prevents the girls from experiencing similar misfortunes. In my dissertation research I will be returning to Chão de Tanque to work more closely with Zazinha and her group. I hope to learn more about how batuko's movements and songs reflect Zazinha's return to history as a sustainable contemporary community-building process. Zazinha's girls may not attract a "global audience" in their remote village like many other batuko groups that are performing at the geographic and cultural crossroads, but Zazinha's intentions are directly related to globalization and changing definitions of local outreach.

## Delta Cultura: BATUKO AS LOCAL-GLOBAL OUTREACH

In my pilot studies in 2008 and 2010, I was also able to interview a batuko group called the Delta Cultura Batucaderas, located in the coastal beach village of Tarrafal on the Western coast of Santiago Island. Delta Cultura is a nonprofit organization and community center that hosts soccer clubs, trade classes, English tutoring and rehearsals for the Delta Cultura batuko group. The organization's co-founder and batuko director Marisa is especially concerned about young Cape Verdean women today. In an interview she explained to me how she strives to help girls find value in staying home and living on the islands: "Women here always have a romanticized view of

**The Delta Cultura batucaderas from Tarrafal walk to a nearby school where they were invited to perform as part of a celebration of Cape Verdean education programs.**





**Members from Delta Cultura practice on the back patio at the home of their director, Marisa.**

living abroad. They want to move away to Portugal or to the U.S. for a ‘better life,’ and when they get there, they have nothing. I have seen it happen. We try to help them by giving them something that is *theirs*, here. They don’t have to leave. They have the Delta Cultura family. And if they have to leave, then they go with a sense of strength, accomplishment, and skill.” Through creating songs together with her batuko players, and with the support of financial connections to a sister-office in Austria, Marisa is trying to reinvigorate local pride in the younger generation. She works closely with her Austrian husband who is the co-founder of the organization and helps to secure funding for batuko uniforms, instruments, and other needs for the community center. Delta Cultura’s own “style,” which incorporates young performers and West African instrumentation (the jembe), has made the Delta Cultura Batucaderas the first young girl’s group to produce a DVD recording of their work. Their DVD’s success and appearances at festivals and educational conferences has enabled the group to distribute their work abroad. Like Zazinha’s group, director Marisa seeks to give back to her community and is trying to give girls a chance to feel like they have power within Cape Verde’s unpredictable economic hardships. Delta Cultura differs from Zazinha’s group in that Marisa is working with her global ties more directly; she is creating a global stage for her group through the distribution of recorded performances and through her international counterpart while simultaneously supporting batuko’s role as a community-based local practice. Furthermore, by situating batuko

among other popular forms of community outreach, like soccer clubs and English lessons, Marisa is also highlighting performance as a symbol of Santiago pride. In my dissertation fieldwork I will be returning to the Delta Cultura community to talk more closely to the girls in her group. I am interested in finding out more about how international exchange and creating a global stage for their work has affected their sense of female empowerment.

## Raiz di Polon: BATUKO AS NEW LANGUAGE

Initially, batuko dances interested me because they seemed to explain movement similarities between Senegalese *sabar* and Brazilian *samba*, two forms of performance that I had studied as an undergraduate and Master's student. In my pilot studies for PhD research I attended several batuko performances, hoping that I could prepare for a dissertation related to "traditional batuko" as the "missing link" between these practices.<sup>3</sup> This narrow objective restricted me to *only* seeing batuko's past—which I now know is one of *many* aspects of Cape Verde's crossroads identity.<sup>4</sup> When choreographer Mano Preto from contemporary dance company Raiz di Polon asked me to teach my own voice/movement class for his contemporary

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3. Scholars such as Varela (2000) and Hurley-Glowa (2009) have recently written about the musical connections between Brazil and Cape Verde, and these have influenced my ability to notice movement similarities.

4. In my training in Brazilian samba de roda and Senegalese sabar, I became accustomed to a structural setup that included a circular audience formation as well as physical coordination that required triple weight shifts to 6/8 metered polyrhythm. This training enabled me to learn batuko quickly and I noticed how these attributes were also within the batuko performance.

years. Using inspiration from dance exchanges available to him through world-wide tours, and from dancers who visit his company like myself, founder Mano Preto is redefining the language of traditional dance by using it within the context of contemporary dance. His students and company members include both men and women, but he features women in batuko-inspired choreography. For example, in his batuko piece, women dancers wear blindfolds around their faces as they travel across the floor, pounding long sticks rhythmically into the ground. As they move across the floor, which differs from the traditional solo dancer who stays in the center of a drum circle, Raiz di Polon dancers execute batuko's trademark *torno* hip-movements. This recreation of batuko reinterprets batuko history by evoking a sense of torture and rebellion, signifying the strength that women portrayed during the colonial period against their slave owners. By evoking batuko movements and combining them with his own theatrical movement style, Mano Preto believes that his approach is itself quintessential Cape Verde—like Cape Verdean creole language, this process creates new vocabulary within the context of established tradition. Misa, a Praia-based artist and founder of many youth and women's outreach groups, told me that she admires Mano Preto's work and the company Raiz di Polon. "They are doing something different. Men and women dance side-by-side, lifting one another through the air physically with equal forces of emotion. Mano Preto is creating a space where men and women can have their own voice and express themselves in ways that no one has ever seen, while using the traditional mu-





**Members of the Raiz di Polon school performance company rehearse for a performance. This image was taken when they were rehearsing a piece related to tabanka, which is another performance tradition that is historically related to batuko.**

sic and steps that we all know. Their work is Cape Verdean in this way and their work is incredibly important to the islands.”

Raiz di Polon has been well-received by the greater Cape Verdean community not only because of the company’s technical rigor, innovative styles, and new choreographic languages, but because Mano Preto is dedicated to community outreach. Raiz di Polon is also a free school for the community and company members teach a free class before their company rehearsal. It was an honor to be asked to teach this community class during my visits and the company values international artistic exchange. Furthermore, Raiz di Polon outreach is not limited to the small studio in the center of Praia. Company members travel to other parts of Santiago Island as well as to other Cape Verdean islands to teach contemporary dance classes in schools where exposure to contemporary dance is not readily available. Dedicated students in the Praia Raiz di Polon school are also given the opportunity to perform in a student company. After rehearsing in the contemporary batuko piece with the student company, I asked some of the girls how they perceived the dances that they performed. “We wanted to be a part of something new” they explained. “We have never been in a dance company, and never knew that it was possible, but here we are doing it and we love it. I love the batuko and funana pieces because they are physically powerful and not just something you learn on music videos or from being in a party. We are learning to be artists while we are learning to be a team.” While Raiz di Polon is not a batuko group like that of



**Members of the Raiz di Polon school performance company rehearse their contemporary batuko piece**

Zazinha or Delta Cultura, Mano Preto is using batuko and other traditional dances to make dance and performance available to all people in the community, regardless of gender, social class, or location. In my dissertation research I will be returning to teach and learn from the dancers of Raiz di Polon to find out more about how women are affected by the company's work and by the increased professionalization of dance within the islands. For example, as I was leaving Santiago in the summer of 2010, one of the company members had told me that she was pregnant. I am interested in returning to learn more about how gender roles may produce tensions with the rising professionalization of contemporary Cape Verdean dance, as established by Raiz di Polon.

Zazinha, Delta Cultura, and Raiz di Polon are only some of the performance groups on Santiago island that are using performance as a way of building community and social equality. Female empowerment is one component in my overall dissertation research. I am also interested in how local identity is generated by its range of past and present global interactions and how this global-to-local matrix is a paradox. Whether scholars label this phenomenon a matter of transculturation (Ortiz 1940, Taylor 1991), creolization (Hannerz 1996, Korom 2003), transnationalism (Meintel 2002, Hanchard 2002), double consciousness (Gilroy 1993; Du Bois 1996 [1906]) ethnoscapes (Appaduri 1996), or, as I termed it in my MA thesis on samba, "culture-swapping" (2009), what processes make it possible to shift from global to local? Utilizing performance studies and folklore studies, I hypothesize that Cape Verdeans resolve

their paradox by using the "global" to redefine and regenerate a local community so that local and global pulses are beating simultaneously. Batuko performance is one event that allows us to examine this global-to-local process. During eleven months of ethnographic research on Santiago Island, with trips to relevant festivals on neighboring islands, I will work with these three communities that perform batuko and seek to answer the following questions: How does batuko reveal or resolve local-global paradox today? In what ways are international exchange intrinsic to the formation of local communities? How do batuko variations as danced by these different groups embody both local and global Cape Verdean identities? How do women specifically benefit from these communities? I hope that my dissertation project will contribute to African Studies, women's studies, dance studies, and globalization studies, and add an under-researched subject to conversations within performance studies.

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CREDITS: All photos taken by Šara Stranovsky.

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– Lindsey McLean

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