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# Blurring Boundaries: Mexican-American Border Patrol Agents Performing Border Guard Roles and Experiencing Emotional Labor

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BLURRING BOUNDARIES: MEXICAN-AMERICAN BORDER PATROL  
AGENTS PERFORMING BORDER GUARD ROLES AND  
EXPERIENCING EMOTIONAL LABOR

By

Aaron Hockman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

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## ABSTRACT

As of 2008 the Border Patrol (BP) consisted of an unprecedented Hispanic majority due to heavy recruiting efforts among bilingual Mexican-American populations. Within the Mexico-U.S. border region where opportunities are otherwise limited a career with the BP provides the prospect of upward class mobility. This thesis explores the subjective experiences of seven Mexican-American BP agents from the El Paso Sector, ethnographically examining how they manage emotions to *perform* border guard roles. I argue that participants' subjective experiences offer insight into the larger structural forces that constrain role performance, the meaning of American identity, and the boundaries that prejudice division over affinity. As border guards these individuals are charged with enforcing immigration laws that maintain boundaries of social and economic inequality between American citizens and the migrant "other". Study participants are from deeply transnational communities and their responsibilities can elicit conflicting feelings between empathy for migrants and duty. As a result they must often manage emotions to suppress feelings not in-line with the unaffected masculine ideals of the BP. Experiencing and suppressing feeling for personal gain can exact an emotional toll, yet pride in their country and a sense of duty allow them to persevere.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

...I remember coming home, like having second thoughts because I thought I wasn't gonna be able to do it. But, then you get used to it...I know how difficult life is over there. I know how much they get paid, and...it makes me feel sad. They're trying to come over here and get a job, and get a better life. **-Rosa**

...this is what I'm here to do as an agent, but of course, you always feel a little bit bad, especially when you see people walking for days and then you come across them in horrible conditions...you always have empathy for them...I remember one case in particular...we caught a group out in the desert, the middle of the desert. They'd been walking for days, all they had left was a can of corn between like the 28 people and they still had a long way to go...I was talking to all the people when they were in the processing center, and I remember talking to one lady and she was just crying and it really hit home to me, it really bothered me because she reminded me a lot of my mom. **-Tanya**

You know what, I feel bad for kids...the little kids, under 5 or 8, not so much for arresting them, but I guess it would be because arresting them because you're keeping them in a crappy place. They're going back to the city on the South side, they all look like Juárez you know, they're all third-world countries, so they're just little rat holes, and you don't want to do that to a child... **-Ricardo**

The Mexico-U.S.<sup>1</sup> border is the physical manifestation of symbolic boundaries that underline the constructed divisions between American and Mexican citizens<sup>2</sup>. It separates “us” from “them”, “citizen” from “alien”, and it reinforces the deep inequalities that are inherent to these

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<sup>1</sup> Traditionally labeled “U.S.-Mexico border” I try to upend the implied hierarchy in the term by elevating Mexico to the primary position.

<sup>2</sup> The focus of this thesis is the relationship between American agents and Mexican nationals. These boundaries are no less real for Central and South Americans, but are beyond the scope of this work.

relationships. The U.S. Border Patrol (BP)<sup>3</sup>, recently subsumed under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is the government institution tasked with enforcing the physical boundary between Mexico and the U.S. The physical boundary represents more than a geopolitical boundary; it also represents social and symbolic boundaries of class and “racial”<sup>4</sup> division. The Border Patrol’s strategic directives are dictated by the U.S. government, but are implemented and enforced on the ground by flesh and blood agents. These individuals face the danger posed by drug traffickers, while simultaneously *witnessing* and *enforcing* the inequity that exists between American citizens and migrants. The duties of U.S. Border Patrol agents are not trivial and agents must *perform roles* that allow them to make it home safely at the end of the day, but these duties can also exact an emotional toll.

This investigation aimed to explore the role of emotions among BP agents. Emotions are an important facet of the work carried out by the BP agents because how agents feel about their job and duties impacts the migrants with whom they interact and reflects the boundaries that separate American citizens from Mexican migrants. Boundaries in turn impact how they perform their roles as well as in their personal lives. Emotions are often overlooked in public discourse as the public and pundits are more concerned with the “war” on this or that and intangible

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<sup>3</sup> I will use Border Patrol and BP interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> Race is a socio-historic construction (Omi and Winant 1986) and I will treat it as such. Any term used to identify ethnicity (e.g. Asian) will be capitalized, while terms referring to physiological characteristics (e.g. black or white) will be referred to in lower case.



statistics, meaning that often times we miss the human experience. I believe it is important to use ethnography to bring the individual's perspective to the fore, because the men and women on the ground give us insight into the structures and institutions that affect our lives on a daily basis. This ethnographic account is only one side of the story and an *incomplete* one. It is however a window into the lives of a small group of BP agents and provides an insider's perspective on what it is like to be a BP agent of Mexican-American descent living and working in the border region.

This thesis ethnographically explores the subjective experiences and feelings of a small sample of Mexican-American<sup>5</sup> BP agents within the El Paso Sector (Figure 1). Ethnography presents a "partial truth" (Abu-Lughod 1993:2), as individual subjectivities are complex and situated and the boundaries of being human relegate our perception to a limited scope. My own position as a researcher is situated in the discourse of sociology and anthropology. Furthermore it is influenced by my deep connections to the border region and its peoples<sup>6</sup>. I experience this world subjectively and I am interpreting the subjective experiences of others. Therefore I don't feign the myth of "objectivity." Objectivity is not possible from the human perspective, as we cannot divorce ourselves

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<sup>5</sup> I will use the term "Mexican-American" for ease of use throughout the remainder of the thesis, although a more accurate description of the participants would be American citizens of Mexican descent, because two of the participants are naturalized citizens. Either way I am forced to apply a label to individuals. This label is completely accurate, as individuals may feel more American than Mexican or vice versa. This is important to recognize because each label indexes a set of essentialized characteristics that may or may not apply to each individual.

<sup>6</sup> I was born and raised in El Paso and still have relatives in Mexico.

“from the mutual conditioning of social relations and human knowledge” (Rosaldo 1993:169). It would be impossible for me to construct, much less assert, that a coherent Border Patrol culture exists, but through the narratives I have collected, *themes* become evident. These themes are represented by common experiences, emotions, and ways of performing identity. By examining these experiences expressed in narratives one can read the larger forces that made them possible (Abu-Lughod 1993). Narratives reflect the way agents construct, order, and experience their surroundings and interactions. More to the point, narratives reflect how we *feel* about ourselves and those we encounter, and emotions are a window into the self (Denzin 1985).



Figure 1. Border Patrol sectors nationwide. From:  
<http://www.honorfirst.com/stationlist.htm>

This ethnography serves a purpose other than to advance research in the realm of the Border Patrol and its agents. In my estimation the goal of the critical ethnographer is to make complex social concepts like boundaries, identity, and emotional labor accessible to the public and to those we “study.” My goal, or one can say agenda, is to demystify the structures and institutions that pervade public life, particularly those that propound difference and exclusion rather than commonality and inclusion. When writing only for fellow scholars and failing to include the people who can most make a difference on the ground we run the risk becoming irrelevant or worst of all—complicit.

My sample consists of seven individuals of varying backgrounds and experiences, but they share a common bond in their Mexican heritage. This bond is complicated by proximity in space and place of origin, in this case the Mexico-U.S. border region. The border region is exemplified by shared ethnicity, language, food, religion, history, and to some extent the migration experience of its inhabitants. This is not to imply that agents from other ethnic or “racial” persuasions cannot or do not feel a connection to, or empathy for, the migrants they arrest. However, I believe that a deeper sense of conflict and ambiguity can exist for Mexican-American agents based on a shared history and experience of differential inclusion<sup>7</sup> in the United States. Individual reactions

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<sup>7</sup> According to Yen Le Espiritu (2003:47) differential inclusion is the process whereby a group of people is deemed integral to the nation’s economy, culture, identity, and power—but integral only precisely because of their designated subordinate standing.

depend on each agent's personal history and feelings, yet common bonds cannot be easily dismissed. Empathy is felt and expressed for only a certain class of migrants (Heyman 2001 & 2002), but ambiguity stems from knowing what deportation means for migrants and from the relationships agents have or had with "illegals" before becoming agents.

Scholars (Dunn 1996 & 1999; Maril 2004), particularly Heyman (1995, 1998, 2000, 2001, & 2002), have examined the institution of the Border Patrol apparatus and different aspects of agents' experiences. For example, focusing on citizenship<sup>8</sup>, Josiah Heyman (2002) worked with Mexican-American Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) officers exploring how the privileges, power, and the institutions associated with American identity influence the experience of empathy. He concludes that a "citizenship-based job and benefit systems restrict the scope of empathy" officers feel toward migrants. Like Heyman (2002) I consider the effects of citizenship as a boundary, but I examine how citizenship along with other relevant boundaries frame the context in which agents perform identity, and the emotional management inherent to these performances, known as *emotional labor*. Whereas Heyman is concerned with the constraints citizenship places on empathetic feelings, I consider how empathy influences emotional labor and thus role performance, affecting the actions of agents on the job.

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<sup>8</sup> According to Heyman (2002:480): "Citizenship is membership in a political collectivity, involves duties (such as military service), rights (such as not being subject to deportation), and claims to redistributed resources (such as old-age benefits)."

Themes emerged as to how agents experience conflict and ambiguity and how they manage emotions in order to perform their situated roles as boundary enforcers in the narratives of Mexican-American BP agents. Management occurs via a method that Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983, 1990) calls emotional labor—or bringing one’s emotions or emotional performance in-line with expected institutional norms. It is important to note performances of identity<sup>9</sup> are not wholly consistent with stated beliefs and it is common for agents to express beliefs that contradict role performance (Vila 2000 & 2005). For instance, study participants believed migrants were wrong to cross the border “illegally” making them criminals, but because of their familiarity with living conditions in Mexico they also conceded they would do the same thing if in a similar position. Even when they recognized this truth it did not change the way they performed their border enforcer roles, which includes assuming every migrant encountered is a criminal. This example highlights how boundaries (citizen/non-criminal vs. migrant/criminal) are fluid and blurred based on experience and perspective.

Boundaries are integral to all interactions and shape the way we define ourselves and others. We experience them tacitly, such as the social rules that guide acceptable gender roles, and we experience them

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<sup>9</sup> Identities are constructed within discourse, produced in specific historical and institutional sites, emerge within the play of specific power modalities, and are defined in relation to the “other” (Hall 1996:4).

explicitly, when we don't get a job because we speak with an accent or because we are the "wrong" skin color. Boundaries are symbolic sense-making categorizations (Wray 2006) that allow us to understand our social position and define our in-group by defining what we are or what we aren't (Barth 1969; Hall 1997; Lamont 1992; Lamont and Molnár 2002). The agents I interviewed distinguished themselves from migrants through citizenship, morality, and class, which implied their identities reflected the opposite of being a Mexican citizen, a criminal, and poor. This is because boundaries index a set of naturalized characteristics that we employ to guide interactions and reactions to those around us. For example, the social construction of race has an implied class component (Ortner 1998 & 2003) that shades the way we construct or represent the "other." Thus, the category *minority* (i.e. African American, Mexican-American, etc) signifies "working-class" and/or poverty. There are two kinds of boundaries reflected in the literature, symbolic and social.

Symbolic boundaries are part of our mental collective representations we use to differentiate things that might otherwise appear similar (Wray 2006) and they seem self-evident and natural to culture (Lamont 1992). On the other hand, social boundaries are tangible, objectified forms of social difference that manifest in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities (Lamont and Molnár 2002:168-69), such as citizenship and class (Heyman 2002). Boundaries are relevant to this ethnography, because in

collected narratives one can discern how participants use boundaries to define identity and imply difference from the migrant “other.” Social boundaries such as class influence how agents profile and judge the migrant “other.” INS officers’ judgments of incoming migrants are based on three levels of discrete categorization: moral worth, national origin stereotypes, and social class (Heyman 2001). These judgments stem from naturalized characteristics (symbolic boundaries) tied to citizenship. Moreover, the construction of citizenship is inextricably related to the construction and maintenance of territorial boundaries (i.e. Mexico-U.S. border) (Nevins 2002). As a result, BP agents are not only guardians of the physical border but enforcers of the stereotypes that reinforce migrant “otherness”, which is evident in the language used by the BP to identify migrants.

Boundaries are also produced and maintained in language and discourse primarily as stereotypes (Nevins 2002; Wray 2006). For instance, Mexican “illegals” or “aliens” represent a large percentage of undocumented migration; hence, all undocumented migration is Mexican, which confers unfavorable stereotypes to Mexicans but also Mexican-Americans or Latino/as in general, *as all brown people are Mexican*. These classifications are known as *boundary terms* (Wray 2006), which are nomenclature defined by governments (Nevins 2002). Boundary terms related to U.S. immigration law confer certain symbolic characterizations on citizens and noncitizens (Heyman 2001).

Accordingly, these laws provide a vocabulary that naturalizes migrant characteristics in the Border Patrol's ideology, shaping the way migrants are perceived and treated by agents. The narratives I collected are replete with boundary terms, which is evidence of their validity and power. These terms also seep into public discourse and constrain how we discuss immigration in the U.S. and the border region.

### Mexican-Americans and the Border Patrol

The Border Patrol is a historically racist institution (Heyman 2002) that was previously staffed by an Anglo majority until after a recruitment surge which occurred after the events of September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011. It didn't take long for the agency to gain a Hispanic majority (Pinkerton 2008) once the Department of Homeland Security began to recruit heavily in the border region. Many of the newly recruited agents were born and raised within the *frontera*<sup>10</sup>; a region defined by ubiquitous contact with Mexicans and defined by migration. This is important to note as Pablo Vila (2000 & 2005) has illustrated through narratives from the El Paso/Juarez, MX area. Local residents often situate their identity in relation to their position north or south of the boundary. Therefore, identities on both sides of the border are inextricably linked to one another. Deep connections exist between the peoples living on both sides

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<sup>10</sup> Spanish term used to refer to the border region, specifically meaning "frontier".



of the not so mighty Rio Grande River, much like the connections between a large and unruly family.

Depending on many factors some Mexican-American citizens may feel an affinity and responsibility to support and defend their migrant brothers and sisters, while others can be ardently anti-migrant (Gutiérrez 1995). For example, Susana Martinez the current Governor of New Mexico<sup>11</sup>, descended from illegal immigrants, but publicly expounds an ideologically anti-immigrant stance. As boundaries are not always clear cut, empathy and common experience can blur distinctions between “us” and “them.” The duties of a BP agent present moral and emotional challenges, because as gatekeepers an agent’s primary duty is to arrest undocumented migrants, a majority of whom are of Mexican descent.<sup>12</sup> Emotional challenges arise because it is commonplace for local agents to know friends or family that may have migrated “illegally”; in some cases a parent might have entered the country as an undocumented migrant. It then becomes a difficult decision to maintain those relationships or to end them. This presents a conflict with the Border Patrol’s construction of the migrant “other” for some agents as they recognize migrants’ humanity. Because of their experiences and relationship to the border region some participants of this study recognize that many of these

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<sup>11</sup> Not to be confused with Old Mexico, I assure you New Mexico has been a member of the Union since 1912.

<sup>12</sup> A recent report (2011) from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that 1 in 4 “foreigners” in the United States are here without proper documentation and the Mexicans make up 62% of that number; <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/121xx/doc12168/06-02-foreign-bornpopulation.pdf>.

migrants are entering the country in order to provide for their families and that for many it is their only hope for survival. At other times they encounter migrants in dire straits and occasionally discover their corpses. Agents find encounters such as these emotionally challenging. So why do so many Mexican-Americans choose to apply for and accept a position with the Border Patrol?

My findings concur with those of Heyman (2002) that the primary reason agents cite for joining the Border Patrol is economic. As I show in Chapter 2, the economic and social opportunities available within the El Paso border region are few and far between. However, upward mobility comes at a steep price, as the power afforded by becoming a border agent presents an insidious deal; individuals are afforded financial benefits, but at the cost of witnessing gross inequality and human suffering (Heyman 2002:493). Acceptance of the moral ambiguities related to their duties necessitates strategies for rationalizing conflicts and tensions in performing border guard duties.

With this in mind I postulate that the Mexican-American BP agents I interviewed perform roles that they believe are morally appropriate while interacting with migrants. Performance theory is the study of all performances whether they are large ritual events or the mundane interactions people have in any given interaction (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996; Schechner 1988; Turner 1986). Using theater as a metaphor for ritual and everyday interactions has its roots in symbolic interactionism

and the dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman (1959). By relating everyday interactions to theater, Goffman postulated that humans try to control and guide interactions by performing roles we think will be beneficial to ourselves or are appropriate for a given audience and context.

The way BP agents in this study perform identities is precisely that, a performance of self that requires acting on some level to bring their outward performance (and often their inner feelings) in-line with the role expected of law enforcement officers. Performances are self-reinforcing and reinforce group identity. As Victor Turner (1986:81) states:

...performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself to himself. This can be in two ways: the actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings.

Hence, the performance of an appropriate role is a reflexive practice, giving us feedback on who we are, and we “may come to know [our]selves better” (Turner 1986:81). This implies that by acting, BP agents in this study create/construct identity and the more they perform a border guard role, the more likely this performance *becomes* their identity. The process is reinforced by their interactions with migrants. Furthermore, the performance advanced by the Border Patrol is reproduced by its members, solidifying group identity. Since identity is also constructed in

relation to the “other”, then the expected performances of migrants shape how BP agents perform their roles.

Josue, the most mature of my participants, reflexively understands how acting is inherent to the job, using a theater metaphor to explain his role performance: “I mean you are an agent. When you are arresting someone, you are an agent. You are not the civilian person you are when you are at home. You put the front stage on the back stage.” Josue, who joined the Border Patrol as a second career, uses the stage as a metaphor to describe the process of separating his two different roles—“front stage” and “back stage.” He acknowledges “putting on” a performance when he is acting as a Border Patrol agent. His backstage identity is only for those outside of the work sphere. His metaphor illustrates that the participants of this study are performers. Eventually, if performed often enough, the associated beliefs and mannerisms of a role will be internalized, changing the person indelibly. Like a performance for a theater troupe, acting requires managing our outward appearance and often our internal feelings to convey a credible act.

In order to perform a suitable border guard identity any feelings of ambiguity and conflict require that the performer manage his/her emotions. Scholars (Hochschild 1983; Martin 1999; Pierce 1995; Sutton 1991; Wharton 1996) have found that law enforcement officers are expected to display no emotion or to manage emotional displays that are rooted in anger. Additionally, agents must exude the potential for

violence to induce fear and compliance in the migrants they encounter (Martin 1999). Performing and experiencing negative emotions day-in and day-out can result in similarly negative changes in identity.

“Idealism can become cynicism, optimistic enthusiasm can become pessimism, and the easygoing young recruit can become the angry and negative veteran...officer” (Gilmartin 2002:4). The tensions and conflicts elicited while performing the duties of subordinating Mexican migrants is further complicated due to the high level of danger agents face in the field.

The uncertain and dangerous nature of law enforcement requires officers/agents to perceive the “world from a threat-based perspective, having the mindset to see the events unfolding as potentially hazardous” (Gilmartin 2002:35). This is known as *hypervigilance*. Drug smugglers have grown increasingly blatant and the threat of violence to agents is real and palpable. Across the border in Juarez, MX and all over Mexico cartel violence has grown increasingly brazen and brutal. Since 2006 over 55,000 people have been murdered in drug-related violence including countless civilians, migrants, and law enforcement officers caught between warring cartels (Grillo 2012). Hypervigilance is an institutionally sanctioned ideology and the boundaries implicit to it are rooted in masculine gender ideals. A masculine ideal implies that agents must perform a “manly” front or outwardly exude threat and danger in order to induce the proper reaction in potentially dangerous migrants or

drug smugglers. Furthermore, they must mentally perceive all actors they encounter as potentially dangerous and untrustworthy. Both the external and internal performances are forms of emotional labor.

Emotion regulation theory is a useful model for identifying emotional labor within narratives and provides a psychological correlate to performance. Alicia Grandey (2000:98) explains the basic model: situations cue the individual and the individual's emotional response (physiological, behavioral, and cognitive), which provides information to that individual and the others in the social environment. Two modes of response are posited, which correspond with Hochschild's (1983) emotional labor model: antecedent-focused (deep-acting) and response-focused (surface-acting) regulation. Surface-acting entails acting and *impression* management (acting manly)—while in contrast, deep acting entails transforming one's emotions (perceiving migrants as a threat)—marshaling appropriate emotions and suppressing inappropriate ones (Gottschalk 2003:358). By analyzing instances of emotional labor in narratives I illustrate how it enables agents in my sample to perform the proper identity and “do their job” while mitigating potential conflict. However, the high energy required to maintain a hypervigilant state in concert with other forms of emotional labor can take a toll on agents over time.

Frequently engaging in emotional labor can increase stress and lead to physical and mental health issues (Hochschild 1983) stemming

from *emotional dissonance*—or the perception that one is behaving contrary to a central, valued, and salient identity (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993:99). Years of performing hyper-emotional strategies can affect identity and change agents' emotional dispositions (Gilmartin 2002). These changes often bleed over into home life, affecting mental and physical health, which has led to high rates of divorce and suicide among BP agents (Gilmartin 2002; Hochschild 1983; Mohandie and Hatcher 1999; Morris and Feldman 1996; Neidig et al. 1992; Schaubroeck and Jones 2000). Consequently, agents must engage in other strategies in order to mitigate stress and emotive dissonance.

For example, the Mexican-American BP participants in this study engage in black humor to normalize the tragic and heartbreaking events they experience because of their job. Black humor is defined as the ability to laugh and make jokes about tragic events that might not be acceptable in “normal” society (Martin 1999; Pogrebin and Poole 1995). Instances of black humor are frequent if one spends any amount of time with a law enforcement officer because it helps maintain the facade of masculinity—while giving BP agents a way to vent stress and emotional distress. The jokes are coarse and inappropriate and appear to the casual outsider as a casual disregard for the “other”, which in some cases may be true, but it is also a necessary survival strategy.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 frames the setting—the Mexico-U.S. border—in terms of its importance to identity

construction and performance. I present relevant demographic statistics that illustrate the economic and educational limitations of the region that make the Border Patrol an attractive option for local residents. I lay out the ethnographic methodology used, along with the challenges I experienced in the field, introduce the reader to myself, and give a brief introduction of each of my seven participants. Chapter 3 delves into the narratives of my participants, exploring how symbolic and social boundaries inform identity. Social boundaries are the root of many of the symbolic boundaries I discuss. I specifically address class and citizenship boundaries that shape identity performance. Chapter 4 explores the concept of emotional management and its relation to identity performance. I explore how agents engage in deep and surface acting to perform suitable border guard identities. I explain how hypervigilance affects identity performance and illustrate that not all emotional labor causes emotive dissonance, particularly when agents get to play the role of rescuer. Finally presenting how emotion and empathy blur boundaries on the border.

Chapter 5 illustrates through narratives the negative physical and mental consequences of emotional labor and hypervigilance. Much of the stress stems from the duties of the job itself, but is magnified by the intense scrutiny agents' experience, not only from superiors, but also from the media and public. Physical and mental health issues can lead beyond health problems and manifest in higher than average suicide



rates. All of the participants of this study know of or have lost a coworker to suicide. Finally, I explore how agents mitigate stress, specifically by analyzing the employment of “black humor.” Chapter 6 presents the discussion and conclusion of this thesis.

### Thesis Overview

In summary, the study of emotions is important, because even if they may be culturally situated and constrained, they are still the visceral and often genuine reactions to our surroundings, situations, and interactions. Emotions present us with a textured examination of identity and by studying identity we can discern the boundaries that constrain the way we perform situational roles. Feelings evident in narratives are a closer estimation of “true” selves and our relations to others.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BORDERLANDS

...if you were to ask someone from an Anglo ethnicity, the stereotypes, and I've seen them personally... "oh, they're dirty... they're carrying some sort of illness," something along those lines. Someone who comes from a Hispanic background and is raised along the border will be able to relate a little bit more to it and be, like, really, in fact, they're not that dirty, really, they're not that sick. **-Felipe**

The Mexico-U.S. border is distinct from any other border in the world; nowhere else in the world illustrates such a disparity in relative power, economy, crime, and general health. Characterizations of the region and its people (e.g. poor, dirty, diseased, etc.) have changed little as Felipe's explanation of Anglo attitudes toward Mexican migrants illustrates.

These characterizations are directly related to the representations of border residents, many of whom are of Mexican ancestry, including a large migrant population. Negative representation is historically rooted in governmental attempts to exclude Mexicans and Mexican-Americans from basic sanitation and health rights leading to filthy living conditions and a high incidence of disease (Molina 2006).

Despite the dominance of literature examining the effects of U.S. policy and influence on Mexico, the border region is a space that has been constructed through economic, political, and social processes on *both* sides of the border (Hernández 2010; Nevins 2002). Thus, because so much land was forcibly taken from Mexico, as the boundary was

drawn after an invasion, it has always represented a source of conflict and ambiguity for both countries (Nevins 2002). Early border studies emphasized the interconnected transnational nature of the border and its residents, birthing the *hybridity* trope. However, more recent literature has illuminated the conflict and ambiguity that is intrinsic to the local border culture.

Early scholarship touted a hybrid borderland culture and applied the borderlands as a metaphor for understanding transnationalism and identity (Anzaldúa 1987; Calderón and Saldívar 1991; García Canclini 1990; Gómez-Peña 1988; Hicks 1991; Kearney 1991; Martínez 1994; Rosaldo 1993; Saldívar 1997; Vélez-Ibáñez 1996). Borderland scholars such as Anzaldúa (1987), Kearney (1991), Martínez (1994), Rosaldo (1993), and Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) in particular expound the close cultural and transnational ties found among people on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. Some descriptions are quite dramatic, for example Anzaldúa's oft cited hybridity trope, which asserts the border represents "...una herida abierta [open wound] where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (1987:25). This statement perfectly illustrates the hybridity trope by using a visceral metaphor that alludes to a corporeal experience.

Subsequent scholarship has challenged the blended culture metaphor, for example Grimson and Vila (2002:69) critique the hybridity trope:

They obscure the social and cultural conflict that often characterizes political frontiers, independent of the physical separation that borders can create through ethnically homogeneous groups like the Mexicans on the U.S.–Mexico border. Nullifying conflict as a central dimension of border life impedes visualizing the asymmetric relations between sectors, groups, and states, and the growing dynamics of exclusion.

Two more prolific borderland scholars in the latter group, Pablo Vila and Josiah Heyman, have ably illustrated their work with solid ethnographic data (Heyman 1995, 1998, 2000, 2001 & 2002; Vila 2000 & 2005).

Despite a shift in focus to the conflict present among border populations, proximity in space has an undeniable effect on identity.

Proximity to the border predisposes Mexican-Americans as a group to be bilingual and bicultural, and to maintain substantial links with their ancestral homeland (Gutiérrez 1995; Martínez 1994). More specifically Pablo Vila (2000:233) describes the connection between identity and space in this region:

In the particular setting of the border...the presence of the “other side” has to be taken into account to “locate” the self, at least in space...In other words, the processes of construction of the self and construction of the border are, in most cases, highly intertwined. In this regard, the border, as well as its cultures, is a “setting”...This setting, however, is not an institutional one but a regional one, a local culture.

Connections and divisions created by social space are a direct result of the reproduction and reinforcement of boundaries. Governmental entities

(the state) invent distinctions between citizens and “aliens” through discursive manifestations related to the perceived necessity to maintain territorial purity (Nevins 2002:162). Space then is a crucial factor in the racialization<sup>13</sup> of minorities in the United States.

U.S. policy and practice have often been at odds on the issue of immigration. While it has historically acted to create a division between American citizens and Mexicans, it simultaneously allows a porous border to feed its need for cheap immigrant labor. El Paso, TX and Juarez, MX are a classic example of the latter. Until the Guadalupe Hidalgo treaty in 1848 El Paso, TX and Juarez, MX were one city. The treaty created an imaginary line between the two cities, but it did not divide the deeply intertwined economic and social relationships (Vila 2000). These two cities act as a metaphor for the historical interconnectedness of the United States and Mexico, which are inextricably linked economically and politically. However, these bonds run deeper and are more personal for residents of El Paso and Juarez.

The physical nearness of Mexico has undeniable effects on identity when living in El Paso, as proximity between “us” and “them” blurs boundaries. Traveling through the different neighborhoods of El Paso, TX one begins to understand the feeling of not quite being in the United States. Signs advertise their wares in Spanish, most everyone around you “looks Mexican”, you can hear Spanish music coming from parties,

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<sup>13</sup> Racialization is defined by Omi and Winant (1986) as a discursive practice extending racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.

and people all around are communicating in Spanish or my native tongue “Spanglish” or Chicanese. These characteristics are unique to the social space of the Mexico-U.S. border.

Familial ties, cultural similarities, language, and friendships transcend boundaries and borders. I myself have family that resides in Juarez, went to school with kids from Juarez, played fútbol in Juarez, hired workers from Juarez, eaten at restaurants whose proprietors are from Juarez, and spent plenty of my “formative” years enjoying lax drinking-age laws of Mexico. A reciprocal relationship can be deduced for the inhabitants of Juarez, many of whom rely on El Paso residents for their economic well-being. It should also be noted that a large immigrant population from southern Mexico and Central America has migrated to Juarez in search of jobs at one of the plentiful maquiladoras<sup>14</sup> that operate on the border. These are very real connections that people experience on a daily basis. Living there so long one takes for granted the interconnectedness of the region and leaving the region for other parts of the country is like exiting a cultural bubble.

Two study participants are naturalized citizens (one is from the west central region of Mexico and the other from a city closer to El Paso) but every participant still has relatives in Mexico. Several participants are second generation American citizens as their parents were born and

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<sup>14</sup> A maquiladora is the Mexican term for a low-wage, often foreign-owned, factory built along the border in a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) where goods are assembled and exported out of Mexico.

raised in Mexico. Though they all have relatives in Mexico, their relationships vary widely:

I do have relatives in Mexico. I don't necessarily have family.  
**-Ricardo**

...I do have a lot of cousins, because now my aunts have passed away. But, I do have a lot of cousins out there. **-Abel**

I keep in contact with them [family in California] but not the ones in Mexico. I've still got my grandparents that live down there, they come out here once in a while and visit... **-Charlie**

Ricardo, a third generation citizen, acknowledges that he has "relatives" in Mexico, but because of social and spatial distance he draws a line (boundary) between "relatives" and "family." Abel is a first generation citizen and still has many cousins who live in Mexico, but he informed me he no longer visited or had contact with his relatives in Mexico after his aunts passed away. Charlie, who was born in Mexico, has cut ties with his Mexican relatives. The only exception is his grandparents, who he interacts with only when they come to visit the United States.

Close cultural and familial ties do not mean that conflict or ambiguities do not exist; on the contrary, these close ties create friction just like in real families. The divisions and conflicts that exist are unique to the region, because of its unique history. Class, citizenship, gender, sexuality and religion are only a few relevant categories that breed conflict (Vila 2000 & 2005). Statistics paint the economic and educational challenges the region faces.

## Borderland Statistics

A look at newer statistics from the 2010 U.S. national census highlights the unique demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the El Paso region. I specifically focus on El Paso County, TX for the purposes of this thesis and all participants are agents working in this sector. Moreover, all participants with the exception of one are from the region. El Paso is unique compared to other large border cities such as San Diego because it actually sits on the border with its Mexican counterpart. The two cities are separated by only a few dozen meters of empty land that acts as a buffer between Mexico and the Rio Grande River (Figure 2).



Figure 2. A nighttime photo of El Paso and Juarez taken from space. From: [http://heartofcampus.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/nasa-juarez\\_el\\_paso.jpg](http://heartofcampus.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/nasa-juarez_el_paso.jpg)



Like most borderland statistics these statistics are flawed as the census has historically underestimated the population of the region due to the high proportion of undocumented immigrant residents, who often do not participate for fear of government reprisal (Woodrow-Lafield 1995).

The overall population of the region is numbered at 800,647; however, this does not take into consideration the tens of thousands of refugees and migrants that have fled Juarez and the surrounding areas because of a drug related violence in Mexico (Martinez 2010; Rice 2011; U.S. 2010 Census). Of the 800,647 counted citizens, 82.2% are Hispanic and 76.6% are of Mexican origin; in contrast, in San Diego County 28.8% of the population is Hispanic, with 24.9% claiming Mexican origin (U.S. Census 2010 American Community Survey). In El Paso County 25.8% of the population speaks English only at home; 74.2% speak a language other than English, predominantly Spanish (U.S. Census 2010 American Community Survey). Of the total population 26.6% are foreign born and of those that are foreign born 57.5% are not naturalized citizens (this statistic is almost certainly an underestimation) (U.S. Census 2010 American Community Survey).

The border region has historically been an economically depressed region (Barrera 1979; Martínez 1994; Vélez-Ibáñez 1996). This fact has changed little today. The median household income in El Paso County is \$36,015 versus \$66,715 in San Diego County and \$50,046 for the United States (U.S. Census 2010 American Community Survey). In El Paso

County 20.7% of households live under the government stated poverty line whereas the national rate is at 11.3% (U.S. Census 2010 American Community Survey).

Following class related characteristics, lower income equates to lower educational attainment rates (Bourdieu 1984; Ortner 1998 & 2003). The percentage of El Pasoans who finish a bachelor's degree is 13%, while the national average is 17.7% (U.S. Census 2010 American Community Survey). High poverty rates in concert with lower educational attainment rates culminate in poor employment choices for most residents. As of March 2012, the El Paso city unemployment rate was holding steady at 9.6% compared to 8.2% nationally (El Paso City Office of Economic Development; Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The lack of well-paying jobs in El Paso is one of the major reasons the Border Patrol is seen as such a positive and lucrative option for many residents. Seven of the top regional employers are call centers (strategically located to employ bilingual low-wage laborers) and the second largest private employer is Wal-Mart (notorious for low wages and poor benefits) (El Paso Office of Economic Development). A push to increase the number of Border Patrol agents made good-paying government jobs available to a population in need of stable, good-paying occupations. This is where the story begins for many of the Mexican-American BP agents.

After the attacks on September 11, 2001, there was a move for greater security in America, particularly on the border, which was represented as porous and weakly guarded (Hernández 2010). In 2003, the U.S. Border Patrol was transferred over to the newly formed Department of Homeland Security and President George W. Bush mandated an increase of agents, bringing the total to 18,319 by the end of 2008 (Hernández 2010). As a result the U.S. Border Patrol is now over 52% Hispanic (Pinkerton 2008). Therefore, the agency engaged in a recruitment surge, providing a good opportunity for border residents, as the job requires no college degree and limited work experience.<sup>15</sup>

The agency has increased its efforts to recruit Hispanic agents because it is more cost effective (personal communication with Border Patrol supervisor). Recruits fluent in Spanish are no longer required to take Spanish in the academy, making agents ready for the field a full 30 days earlier than their English only coworkers. Not only do Hispanic agents save the government millions of dollars on training, but the state also gains a force of Hispanic agents that actively enforce the illegality of people of their own ethnicity.

There is a general sense among conservatives that the rising Hispanic and immigration population represents a threat to White hegemony (Hernández 2010). For example, the discourse of nationalism

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<sup>15</sup> For Border Patrol Basic Qualifications:  
[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/careers/customs\\_careers/border\\_careers/application\\_process/basic\\_requirements\\_for\\_bp.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/careers/customs_careers/border_careers/application_process/basic_requirements_for_bp.xml).

and xenophobia is present all over the internet and airwaves, with whites raising alarm of what has been coined “the browning of America” (Rivera 2009; Rodriguez 2002). Right-wing conservatives have used the threat of immigration and rise of Latino/a populations in the U.S. to pass draconian laws in several states in the country, giving police officers the responsibilities of a BP agent. Some laws have gone as far as to ban Chicano Studies in southern Arizona, asserting that such classes are a vehicle for radical anti-white and anti-government discourse. Their overall goal is to exploit an image of racial instability and a weakening of “American” values and life ways.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s (1986) work posits that during periods of racial instability governments work to return equilibrium to the social system. These reactions take many forms as we can discern from the history of Civil Rights movement, but the end result is often the state’s concession to minority demands, although these concessions are watered down versions of the demands of the group in question (Omi and Winant 1986). The battle to maintain equilibrium can be seen today as the government moves (albeit incrementally) to “solve” perceived problems such as immigration.

By actively recruiting more Latino/a agents, the state is able to construct new social and economic boundaries between Mexican-Americans and Mexican migrants. More importantly the government and their big business contributors use BP agents to maintain control of

migrants' labor. In this way the United States is able to maintain the status quo while simultaneously creating a rift between immigrants and their most vocal proponents, Mexican-Americans. As Hernández (2010) asserts, all BP agents embody a site of political disenfranchisement, economic inequity, and social suspicion with the United States, which creates a real fear among migrants of BP agents. Pitting individuals of similar backgrounds and histories against each other is not a novel strategy.

European whites used mulattoes to insulate themselves from blacks in colonial Cuba (Martinez-Alier 1974). Mulattoes were allowed greater degrees of social and economic freedom, creating a class disconnect between themselves and the lowest on the social ladder—blacks. In this way the white superordinates were able to buffer themselves from backlash posed by black subordinates. Martinez-Alier states that:

the possibility and the existence of racial mixture provided a safety valve for the system [of subordination] by creating an intermediate group, the mulattos, whose allegiance to the blacks' cause was often minimal. It was those blacks that were frequently the most rebellious; whereas among those that pursued fugitive slaves, for instance, one could find many mulattos. (1974:39)

This historic analogy is appropriately applied to the immigration issue in modern day America and the class boundary that may become more pronounced to Border Patrol agents on the border.

Through the cooption of Mexican-Americans the U.S. government is able to create such a buffer, offering not only economic and social

mobility (e.g. the possibility of being middle-class or symbolically white), but also the ability to wield power. Only this time the divide is not primarily linked to skin-color or race, but to citizenship.

## Methodology

This study utilized ethnographic methods including participant observation at locations outside of the work environment (with the exception of Tanya) and twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews. Data collection methods and protocols were approved by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Institutional Review Board.<sup>16</sup>

I initially intended to use quota sampling<sup>17</sup> to recruit my participants, but rejected that method due to constraints in the field. Chief among them was that I could not convince enough agents to participate. Concomitantly, Border Patrol management rejected several requests for access to agents in the field for a ride-along. Agents were very apprehensive about speaking with me as they assumed that because I was from academia I would be adversarial and challenge them on every issue. Basically they feared the “bleeding heart liberal” that would not listen and understand their experiences. Therefore, I changed my sampling method to a snowball sample and utilized key participants within the Border Patrol (Bernard 2006).

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<sup>16</sup> Protocol Title: Gatekeepers of Emotion: Mexican-American Border Patrol Agents Negotiating Emotional Labor and Identity Protocol #: 1005-3455

<sup>17</sup> Quota sampling involves deciding how many subgroups there are within a population of interest, in this case male and female (Schensul et al. 1999: 124-25).

With the help of two key participants, both current Border Patrol agents whom I have known for many years, I was able to recruit three individuals who then helped me recruit the remainder of my participants. I was able to recruit and interview a total of seven agents. I also drew upon contextual information gained from informal discussions with several Border Patrol agents that I have known for many years, including family members and longtime friends. In-depth interviews comprise the bulk of data, because narratives are essential for understanding how agents perform identity and how my participants feel about their duties. My interviews followed a “flexible format” and I used a topic guide (See APPENDIX A) to direct the interaction (Bernard 2006; Lofland et al. 2006). After initial interviews I met with five participants for follow-up interviews (See APPENDIX B). The interview topics covered basic demographics, life-history, work, and questions directed at eliciting emotional data. According to Abu-Lughod (1986:34), sentiments can symbolize values and the expression of these sentiments by individuals contributes to representations of the self, representations that are tied to morality, which in turn is ultimately tied to politics [ideology] in the broadest sense. Therefore, by analyzing narratives I could get a sense of their identities, feelings, and the tacit ideologies that frame their duties.

In order to gain a level of background knowledge and develop rapport I met casually with my participants for our participant-observation sessions. Participant-observation is experiencing the

conditions and interactions that are commonplace for participants and exploring how they negotiate these experiences. These meetings served as “unstructured interviews” where I encouraged my participants to open up and express themselves in their own terms (Bernard 2006). I would have liked to spend more time with each agent, but accommodating their ever-changing schedules, commitments to family, fatigue after long shifts, and an overall hesitation to have me lingering about, equated to spending less time with them than I would have liked. Unfortunately, the current drug related conflict in Mexico stifled my ability to engage in participant-observation during the workday because the Border Patrol was unwilling to take on the “liability.” It is my personal feeling, based on the current state of government secrecy, that Border Patrol management was unwilling to have its agents engage in research that could expose any doubts regarding their duties and the mission of the Border Patrol.

In order to mitigate a lack of time observing my participants in the field I watched the first season of National Geographic’s show *Border Wars*. The show follows Border Patrol agents working along the Mexico-U.S. border as well as Customs agents working the ports of entry (POE). I have confirmed with my participants and other agents I know the relevancy and accuracy of the show and they all assured me that it is a “truthful” depiction of their experiences in the field. The show offered me a window into the daily experiences of agents in the field and the dangers



they encounter. I must note that the show is officially sanctioned by the Department of Homeland Security; therefore, it is safe to assume that the agents filmed performed their roles accordingly and within the display rules of the Border Patrol and it is likely the public will never see what ends up on the cutting-room floor.

The interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed by a third party company (GMR Transcription) after an approved Transcriber's Confidentiality Agreement was signed.<sup>18</sup> Data was coded using the principles of grounded theory: a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development (Charmaz 2005:507). Grounded theory is appropriate for my research because by coding the data I was able to infer identity performance, expose occurrences of emotional labor, and explore tacit links to symbolic boundaries. The data was coded using ATLAS.ti 6.2 and grouped into digital files as emergent themes—related to identity performance, emotional labor, feeling rules, and instances of surface- or deep-acting—became apparent.

### The Participants

As the statistics have illustrated, the El Paso border region is significantly poorer and less educated than the national average. With

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.gmrtranscription.com/Confidential.aspx>

this said, the participants of this study are representative in some ways and not in others. All participants in this study came from working-class to lower middle-class income homes. Contrary to border statistics three participants have graduated with a bachelor's or graduate degree, while two others have some college experience. Three enlisted in the military soon after graduating from high school, which is often the only viable option for upward mobility or educational attainment. Even for those with college degrees the Border Patrol is an attractive economic opportunity, given the paucity of comparable salaried careers. The Border Patrol provides the perfect opportunity for upward mobility for an underpaid and undereducated populace.

My sample consists of seven Border Patrol officers: two women and five men. Two are naturalized citizens (born in Mexico) while the others are first to fourth generation U.S. citizens. They range in age from 27 to 39 at the time of their involvement in my study. Six are from the border region and the seventh was born in Mexico and raised in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood in southern California (Hispanics represent the largest ethnic group in the region at 40.57%) (U.S. Census 2010 American Community Survey). Participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity. In order to protect their identities my descriptions must remain vague as these agents could potentially experience sanction for their honest opinions.

I include a brief physical description of each agent as I feel it is important to help the reader visualize the way in which agents perform their roles as border guards. Physical presence is an important aspect of interactions with potentially dangerous individuals. The more intimidating an agent can make his/her presence felt, the more likely he/she is to reduce the chances of actual physical or violent confrontation, ensuring everyone goes home safely at the end of the day. This has particular relevance for the women of the study, who are at a physical disadvantage in relation to the perceptions that favor masculine qualities over the perceived weaknesses of femininity.

Abel is in his early thirties and I have known him since I was a youth. We grew up together and attended the same school for a time. We lost touch after I left for a private high school and had spoken maybe twice since I contacted Abel about my project. Because of our previous relationship he was open and candid with me about his experiences in the Border Patrol. Despite our previous familiarity I believe that Abel's participation was warranted, because as I have expressed in Chapter 1, I am not attempting to generalize the experience of all Mexican-American BP agents, but instead to collect and analyze narratives in order to develop a framework in which to understand identity performance and feelings. In this case our previous relationship meant he was more comfortable speaking honestly and frankly.

He is approximately 5'9" with an athletic build, a moderate brown complexion, and a military style haircut. He has been married for several years and has young children. Abel is a first generation American, as both of his parents were born in Mexico. His father gained his citizenship early on, but his mother did not earn her citizenship until later in life. He was raised in a working-class neighborhood (middle-class according to his estimation, but not according to standards outside of the border region; something I will touch on in Chapter 3). Abel joined the military a year after finishing high school and in service to his country he proudly served more than one tour in Iraq and is still a member of the National Guard.

He joined the Border Patrol after returning from his military service with the blessing and favor of his family. Becoming a federal agent provided Abel with the financial security to care for his family and provided him an occupation where he could apply his military training. Abel works in a more remote station within the El Paso sector where most field work occurs in remote desert and mountain regions. The border fence does not provide coverage for a large portion of this part of the border and agents in this area must often work without the benefit of back-up nearby. Both interviews and participant-observation occurred at his home.

At 6', Felipe is tall for the border region and is likely taller than most migrants he encounters. He has an athletic build, light brown skin,

and closely cropped hair. He is in his late twenties and was born in a small working-class community in southern New Mexico. Both of his parents were born in Mexico and emigrated after their marriage, making him a first generation citizen. His family has a history of working in the Bracero Program in the 1950s and 1960s when they could not make ends meet in Mexico. Felipe still has family that lives in Mexico. He earned an undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice. His intelligence is evident as he is very articulate and was able to speak critically of his time with the Border Patrol. He is married and has young children.

Felipe, although hesitant at first, was very willing to work with me and I was able to spend the most time with him. I spent time with him and his family on his days off and conducted both interviews at his home. His willingness to open up was refreshing and a reflection of his experience as a college graduate, as he understood the importance of academic research. He also wanted to give his perspective on his job and to shed light on misconceptions about the Border Patrol and its agents. Felipe has known for most of his life that he wanted to go into law enforcement as he admits he was enamored by the flashing lights and gadgets at officers' disposal. He joined the Border Patrol, after a short stint with a local police department, in order to have a potential stepping stone into other federal agencies, and to secure financial stability for his growing family.

He lives in a new middle-class neighborhood and works in a more urban station than most of my other participants. This means he spends most of his time “sitting on an X”, or he sits in his vehicle on the south side of the border fence and watches for any signs of movement or attempts to cross the border within his given section. This strategy was first employed in the 1990s by then Chief Border Patrol Agent Silvestre Reyes of the El Paso Sector, who is now an established congressman from the same district.

Ricardo is in his mid-thirties, married (although was temporarily separated at the time of our contact), and has young children. He is of average height (approximately 5’9”), of moderate build, and has a light brown skin tone. Ricardo has an amiable temperament and is quite gregarious. He was born and raised in El Paso by his parents and is a third generation American on his maternal side. They both worked in a professional capacity allowing for a comfortable lifestyle. In his youth he lived in a middle-class neighborhood. He excelled in school and earned an academic scholarship to a public university.

He returned to El Paso without finishing school in order to help his mother who was struggling to make ends meet. Ricardo joined the Border Patrol after several years of working as a manager for a retail store. It occurred on a whim after his wife saw a recruiting billboard for the Border Patrol. Ricardo took the test and the rest is history. Although he never thought to join, he does like the economic benefits he has

acquired, and the duties of his job. He works in a station just outside of El Paso in a more rural farming community that is flush with undocumented migrants.

Rosa is in her late twenties, petite, with shoulder length hair, and a light brown complexion. Rosa was shy and hesitant to say much the first time we met, but opened up after we developed rapport. Rosa was born and raised south of the border until her teens when she moved to another southwestern state. She returned to the border region after graduating from high school and attended a local college for a short time. Her parents still live in Mexico and Rosa visits them as often as she can, although it has grown more dangerous over the past few years.

Rosa joined the Border Patrol almost by accident. Originally she believed that she was taking the test for U.S. Customs, but quite to her surprise she was offered an opportunity at the Border Patrol. Her mother was somewhat hesitant for her to join because of the dangers associated with the job, but it didn't deter her. She works in a station located in a rural community.

Tanya is 5'8", lanky, but strong, with hair she keeps back in a tight ponytail. She is tanned from countless hours in the sun and has a confident demeanor. Born and raised in the region she is a fourth generation American citizen and was raised in a community outside of El Paso city, which has a large migrant community. Although she is certain

she has relatives in Mexico, she has no contact with them. Both of her parents were professionals and had good jobs when she was a child.

She is in her thirties and is college educated. The Border Patrol is a second career for her. She joined because she wanted a new challenge and had friends who were BP agents. For both of my interviews with Tanya we met in her office at a BP station. Given the context of the interviews and Tanya's professional manner, it is my opinion that Tanya dispensed most of her answers strictly along "company" lines. Despite this she was candid about her feelings and experiences as a female agent.

Charlie is about 5'10" with a heavy athletic build, a light brown complexion, and keeps his hair high and tight. He is in his mid-thirties, married and has several children. He was born in Mexico and moved to the United States as a young child, then moved back to Mexico for a short time, and finally settled in the southwest. Both of his parents were born and raised in Mexico and he still has family there. He no longer remains in contact with his Mexican relatives.

He grew up in southern California in predominantly Mexican neighborhoods. After graduating from high school he joined the Marines, where he served for many years. When he returned to the States from his last tour, he applied for the Border Patrol after seeing a recruitment advertisement and after two years of waiting was offered a slot in the academy. For anybody who has met a U.S. Marine the attitude and



demeanor are unmistakable; it is a quiet but strong presence that exudes a palpable confidence. Charlie was friendly, respectful, and answered all of my questions with a grim determination and a “yes sir.” I was able to develop a good rapport with him and spent some time with him on the shooting range for our second interview, where he taught me the proper way to handle and shoot a handgun.

Josue was the oldest of my participants in his late thirties; he has been married twice and has young children. He is a first generation American citizen, born and raised along the border in the Valley of Texas, which is on the easternmost portion of the Mexico-U.S. border. He joined the military after high school and with the G.I. Bill was able to get an undergraduate degree. He worked with children after graduating for several years before deciding to join the Border Patrol. Josue joined because he was ready to move on from his first career; his decision was also influenced by family members and friends that were in the Border Patrol.

Josue is approximately 6’ with a solid athletic build, light skin, and short hair. He is soft spoken and was willing to give me time because of the importance he places on education. Unfortunately our final interview occurred in a café inside a hospital where a family member was in serious condition. Josue was fatigued and was in a distressed emotional state, but it was his decision to meet with me at that time, as I was leaving the field site the following week it was the only time he had

available. In my analysis I take into consideration Josue's strained emotional and physical state.

All of my participants joined the Border Patrol for various reasons and under different contexts, but the one unifying theme is the economic benefits and stability offered by working for the Border Patrol. Much to my surprise they faced little to no resistance from family or friends (other than some teasing) when considering joining the Border Patrol. This was surprising to me as I have knowledge of some of my friends experiencing some stress from family members about their careers in the Border Patrol. All seven participants uniformly agreed that their families supported their decision and in fact encouraged them, because of the economic security provided by a government job. Only two objections by parents were noted as two agents' parents worried about the inherent danger of law enforcement professions.

The increasing numbers of Mexican-American onto the Border Patrol's rolls will, and has, changed the dynamics within the organization. Moreover, many of these new agents come from a place familiar with the presence of migrants, whether it is in passing, or through direct transnational or familial connections. The nature of the border affects the construction and performance of identity. Furthermore the economic and educational statistics of the border region infer a strong relationship between the increase in Latino/a agents and economic mobility. This mobility creates greater rifts than inherently

present between the participants of this study and migrants, reflecting symbolic boundaries that are reproduced and reinforced by the duties of the Border Patrol.

## CHAPTER 3

### BOUNDARIES AND IDENTITY

...you know, the people who call you a race traitor...they don't seem to get that. How different their life would be if they were on the other side, but they're not, so they can say whatever they want, which is fine, it's kind of ignored by them. It used to bug me at the beginning. I'd be like, what do you mean? What are you talking about? Now it's, well if I don't do it, somebody else will, and it's completely just 95% to 99% of the time it's just a job. It pays really well...It's a very good paying job with a chance to do something right, and give something back. **-Ricardo**

And, I guess I would do the same thing. You know what I mean? It's just you see it so often, it's like, God damn, dude, maybe not everybody's a dirt bag, you know what I'm saying? Maybe some people are legitimate. **-Abel**

Boundaries vary historically and contextually. Social and symbolic boundaries are inherent to the ways in which groups of people and individuals construct difference (Wray 2006) and through perceived difference we construct our own identities (Hall 1996). Border Patrol agents are no different in this regard, with the exception that they are tasked with enforcing national, economic, and political boundaries that reproduce and reinforce said boundaries. These boundaries are part of the way they construct and perform their identities.

I assert that the participants of this study perform identity in relation to the migrant "other" within historically situated social and symbolic boundaries. Furthermore, identities are fluid and in constant flux because they are situated contextually in histories, cultures,

languages, classes, localities, communities, and politics (Espiritu 2003:12). Interactions between BP agents and migrants often occur out of view of the public and within an overall decidedly anti-immigrant (anti-Mexican) climate that shapes the way the self can be and is performed at the time the interviews took place.

According to Victor Turner (1986) the self is presented through the performance of roles. Roles are performed during interactions with other actors. These interactions are constrained and informed by boundaries, in the form of display rules. Everyday life consists of myriad with interactions that are rule-bound that guide how a performance should unfold (Goffman 1959; Schechner 1988). These “rules” are reflective of boundaries, which define perceived differences between groups and individuals. By analyzing the performances of border agents I can construct the self and since the self is constructed in relation to the “other”, I can also deduce the boundaries that influence how the migrant “other” is characterized.

Boundaries are important to group cohesion and to defining one’s own identity; they are used to delineate the in-group and hence, create an out-group. Furthermore, the “other” is constructed into social hierarchies and these hierarchies are used to justify domination, injustice, and human suffering (Wray 2006:8). As stated in Chapter 1, two boundaries are relevant to this thesis: social and symbolic. Social boundaries are tangible objectified forms of social difference that

manifest in unequal access to and distribution of resources and social opportunities (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Symbolic boundaries are mental constructs of perceived difference we use to differentiate individuals and seem natural and self-evident (Wray 2006). Both boundaries should be viewed as equally real; social boundaries exist at the intersubjective level whereas symbolic boundaries manifest themselves as the groups with whom we identify (Lamont and Molnár 2002:168-69).

Gender, citizenship, occupation, class, and race are pregnant with symbolic boundaries that intersect at identity performance. All these social categories are discerned through essentialized characterizations. In other words, we as humans rely on categories or stereotypes to interpret the world around us. Hence, symbolic boundaries are often tacit, naturalized stereotypes that are internalized and reproduced in ideology and in public discourse (Wray 2006:8). This brings us to the concept of representation.

#### Representation: The Migrant “Other”

The discourse of race shapes identities and interactions through representation. One of the most significant ways we construct the borderlands and immigration is through academic and popular *discourse* (e.g. news, television, radio, internet, etc.)—a term that embodies not only expression by words, but also their associated social practices

(Nevins 2002:162). Ideologies are expressed and generally reproduced in the social practices of their members—but more importantly are acquired, confirmed, changed, and perpetuated through discourse (Van Dijk 2006). For example, race in America is a socio-historic construction and it is used as a sense-making ideology that informs our interactions and perceptions of one another (Omi and Winant 1986). Border Patrol agents are no exception as they rely on constructed representations of the migrant “other.”

The media in the United States has consistently represented Mexican immigration using alarmist imagery, contributing to the racialization of the Mexican/migrant “other” as criminal, undocumented, alien, drug smuggler, as commoditized labor, and as a representation of poverty (Chavez 2001; Gomberg-Muñoz 2011; Hernández 2010; Keogan 2002; Maldonado 2009; Molina 2010; Nevins 2002). Two of the most salient characterizations of migrants are that of the criminal and/or social parasite that emigrates to drain social systems, regardless of the fact that statistics show the majority of migrants are law abiding citizens and pay more in taxes than they utilize in social programs (ACLU 2008; Chomsky 2007; PPIC 2008).<sup>19</sup> Another prevalent “positive” stereotype propounded by the political “left” is that of the poor-migrant coming to make a better life for his family (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011; Maldonado

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<sup>19</sup> ACLU, From: <https://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/immigration-myths-and-facts>; Public Policy Institute of California, “Just the Facts: Immigrants and Crime.” From: [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF\\_ImmigrantsCrimeJTF.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF_ImmigrantsCrimeJTF.pdf).

2009). Both negative and “positive” characterizations intersect at the socio-historical construction of “Mexican” identity in the United States (De Genova 2005). These representations are reproduced by official policy and strategies, and in the narratives of border agents.

Felipe explains how the litigation process has been used selectively, under the guise of national security, to serve as a strategy for the criminalization of migrants:

So with the pressures of border violence and terrorism they [Border Patrol Administration] kind of saw that as a vulnerable point as far as for homeland security you know. If we don't deter or keep people from trying and trying over and over again how long is it before terrorism is gonna take advantage of it you know...so they started enforcing 100% prosecution...the border is basically broken down into zones...so...if people are caught within this zone and this zone prosecutes them for a criminal statute known as illegal entry...Another thing they introduced was actually deporting people with several recidivist hits...that's what kind of changed also now we were actually catching people taking them to jail and if they had a lot of history with us we would deport them...now that they are deported and we catch them it's another criminal statute that we enforce known as entry after deportation, basically which is pre-penalized...Get the word back south that we're going to stick you in jail and if you have a history with us you are going to be deported and you come back after being deported you gonna be in jail longer.

Felipe's narrative illustrates the process by which migrants are criminalized. Selectively enforcing and prosecuting migrants reproduces and reinforces the racialization and negative representation of Mexican migrants. By inflating the number of “criminal” migrants the system is reinforced, justifying enforcement as a measure to keep out “criminal” migrants. Furthermore, the concept of the criminal migrant is solidified



in the minds of BP agents, influencing how they perform identity and how they interact with migrants.

Charlie, an eleven year veteran of the military, reproduces the stereotype of the criminal immigrant:

...once you take them back to the station and you fingerprint them, half of them have a big rap sheet, like 90 percent of the people that you arrest have a rap sheet.

Charlie's claim jumps from 50% to an approximation of 90% of the people he arrests have a criminal record, while in actuality the rate is significantly lower<sup>20</sup>. The criminalization of migrants creates a morality-superiority relationship between agents (the force of good) versus the illegal criminal (or the force of evil). This sentiment is echoed by other agents, although once pressed on the subject they accede that many migrants are non-violent and not criminals. By constantly reinforcing this construction of the criminal migrant it becomes a part of the agency's culture, seeping into popular discourse. But by creating this boundary agents are able to not only justify their job, but also feel good about fighting crime, and perform their roles with the knowledge they are in the right.

On the other hand, Tanya describes the constituency of typical migrant arrestees more accurately and follows the "positive" characterization of migrants:

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<sup>20</sup> According to statistics from the DHS Office of Immigration Statistics, of the 282,666 Mexican "aliens" removed, 96,965 were "criminals" at total of 34%. Of these criminals 31.3% were removed for non-violent traffic or immigration offenses and another 16.5% for "Other" crimes. From: [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/enforcement\\_ar\\_2009.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/enforcement_ar_2009.pdf).

Our statistics show that most of the people that do cross illegally...are coming here to seek a better life, to work. They're non-violent individuals...so statistics show that most people are non-criminals, coming to look for work and are non-violent.

Even though many agents recognize that most people they arrest are not criminals, the stereotype is so pervasive that it becomes tacit naturalized knowledge. The media perpetuates the stereotype of criminal that the state reinforces through immigration laws and selective enforcement strategies.

Historically, the Border Patrol was established to *manage* human migration across the nation's borders and primarily to police the corridor of international labor migration (Hernández 2010:4). Therefore, a minimum level of undocumented migrants is allowed to keep the economy running. Informally a Border Patrol supervisor explained to me the unsaid enforcement policy of the agency. They are tasked with *selectively* enforcing immigration law. They are discouraged from approaching or apprehending groups of migrants who are clearly on their way to work in the fields. This implies that agents are obligated to allow some migrants to remain in the country as long as they fulfill their roles as low-wage laborers, a role that is still associated with Mexicans in the United States.

The location of Mexican migrants as a laboring class has a long history in the United States. Consequently, the notion that hard work is attributable to "Mexican culture" naturalizes Mexican immigrants' subordination and reduces their work performances to a "putative

cultural inclination for socially degraded, backbreaking work” (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011:83). These stereotypes are not the sole propriety of Mexican migrants, but get conferred on to all Latino/as, including Mexican-Americans. Characterizing Mexicans as working-class has repercussions for the ethnic group as a whole.

Yen Le Espiritu (2003:210) asserts immigrant lives are shaped not only by the social location of their group within the United States but also by the position of their home country within the global racial order. It is fair to assume that this is extended to Mexican-Americans who have historically experienced *differential inclusion* in this country, a process whereby a group of people is deemed integral to the nation, but integral only precisely because of their designated subordinate standing (Espiritu 2003:211). This process creates boundaries *within* a nation that are bolstered by political and cultural mechanisms designed to restrict membership in a national community. As Mexican-Americans are discursively produced as foreign (i.e. not true Americans) they are marked as linguistically, culturally, and racially “outside” the national polity (Espiritu 2003:211). An explicit understanding of this position is evident in Abel’s narrative below.

Abel, who has experienced racism firsthand, explains the way Hispanics are represented in the United States. He explains that the public [whites] can see that he is keeping out the “bad” Mexicans:

I don’t know how to explain it, but for whatever reason [we]... Hispanics, we’re perceived as we’re criminal and this and that, and

I guess in a sense, they're [public] seeing, "you're keeping them out, keeping those people out." And...pues [well] people who don't pay taxes, ride the system, they're keeping them out, too, so I guess in a sense they're okay with what we do...

Through his identity as a Border Patrol agent, Abel can utilize the concept of the criminal migrant and create a space between Mexican-American agents and the Mexican "other." Hence, his position as a border enforcer symbolically "Americanizes" Mexican-American BP agents, but simultaneously reinforces the racialization of Mexican migrants as criminal and freeloaders. This symbolic Americanization reinforces agents' identification with their roles as border guards.

Charlie presents a dualistic characterization of Mexican migrants, which falls within established boundaries, when asked about his feelings on Mexican migrants moving to El Paso to escape the drug violence in Mexico:

As long as they're not gonna be contributing to the flow of weapons and drugs and money and all that. There's some that actually come to work and other ones they don't, they're just criminals. If they're gonna come to work that's fine, but if not, they need to go back.

In this dualistic representation, Mexican migrants are either criminals or good hard working migrants just looking for a better life and even though it is his job to keep them out, he allows that the hard-working ones can stay. This naturalizes these stereotypes and denies variability in the Mexican population—they are either criminals or laborers (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). Once again these boundaries solidify the agents I interviewed identification with their jobs.

## Creating Division One Word at a Time: Boundary Terms

Boundary terms, one-word characterizations, have been used as tools in the racialization of Mexican migrants. Migrants are labeled: “alien”, “illegal”, “mule”, “body,” or “bodies”. These terms serve the same objective, to continue to objectify and deny migrants humanity. The power of words to define and characterize is readily evident in our everyday speech; for example, referring to a woman as a “lady” indexes a set of characteristics much different from those associated with a “broad”, “babe”, “spinster” or “mistress”, etc. The same goes for Mexican migrants. If the Border Patrol were to change its official language and the way it references migrants (from “alien” to “migrant”) there would be a corresponding shift in the way migrants are perceived and thus treated.

Among the agents I interviewed “body” or “bodies” is the most frequently used term to refer to Mexican migrants. “Body” is a way of extracting the volition and personhood from another human being. It is a term that refers to only the corporeal presence and ignores every other aspect of humanity. Some examples:

Recently we've had some *bodies* get into the canal... **-Felipe**

...we're running after and the camera operator suddenly spotted some *bodies* coming across... **-Tanya**

...I apprehended it was like seven or eight *bodies*... **-Josue**

... that's pretty much all there is...just fucking *bodies*, just running dude. **-Abel**

Other terms like “alien” and “mule” further dehumanize migrants by depicting a non-human animal representation. The term “mule” refers to the sterile offspring of a horse and a donkey used primarily as a pack animal, but in the Border Patrol it is used to describe drug smugglers who carry drugs on their backs across the border. We are all familiar with the term “alien” which replaced “wetback” in 1956 because the then chief of enforcement of the Border Patrol believed that the new characterization would change the psychology of public perception; in his estimation, the term “wetback” had engendered a sympathetic public attitude (Hernández 2010).

It is common to hear these boundary terms in agents’ narratives, as they are part of the BP’s culture. For example:

He encounters the group and he's doing it like its regular *aliens* and it ends up being 11 *mules* packing just under 500 pounds of marijuana. **-Ricardo**

The first time I encounter an *illegal alien*. **-Rosa**

But I can actually say I threw the rope and that was the rope that the *alien* took a hand of and we yanked him out... **-Felipe**

Most *undocumented aliens* are not going to cross during the day. **-Josue**

They apprehended a group of five *illegals*... **-Charlie**

Referring to migrants using these labels negates messy morality issues, denies migrants humanity and volition, and reinforces and reproduces stereotypes. Pursuing a “body”, “illegal”, “alien”, or “mule”, as opposed to a human being, essentially creates distance between BP agents and

migrants and turns migrants into a non-human object to be pursued and arrested. Boundaries are not only expressed in language, but also in practice. I will now explore how agents perform identity and how boundaries are reflected in these performances.

### Class and Citizenship

Reading economic and educational attainment statistics leads us to posit that many of the Hispanic agents that have recently joined the Border Patrol come from households with lower-than-average household incomes and lower educational attainment rates than their white counterparts. Historically racialized as lower or working class, Latino/as are also tied to an outsider identity as far as true citizenship in the U.S. is concerned. This is because being “American” infers a white middle-class identity (Ortner 1998 & 2003).

Ortner (2003:52) suggests that stress and the drawing of new boundaries are typical results of transitioning from a lower economic status to a higher one:

This often means that boundaries must be drawn, literally and figuratively...Rising up is not only a matter of gaining positive goods...but also drawing negative lines between one's own group and those below it. Such drawing of lines is quite irrational...But the irrationality and emotionality can be understood in part in relation to the anxieties of upward mobility itself: the fact that such mobility is economically tenuous, at least at the beginning; the fact that it carries ambivalent feelings about leaving kin, culture, and pieces of the self behind; the fact that the uprisen self may feel out of place in the higher-class surroundings; and more.

Most of my participants were raised in what most Americans would consider to be lower or working-class households and have now moved up economically and socially within the border region. Thus, upward mobility not only creates distance between agents and migrants, but between agents and working-class Mexican-Americans.

It is common for people to refer to themselves as middle class, because middle class is a socially neutral category (Martin 2010). For instance, most of the agents I have interacted with expressed that they were raised in a middle class home, yet in the same narrative they would describe going to shop at Goodwill or relying on food stamps to make ends meet. But class is on a continuum and has a different definition on the border. The performance of class varies regionally and historically (Bourdieu 1984; Ortner 1998 & 2003). What is considered middle-class for a white Anglo-Saxon (WASP) from New York is not the same for a Latino/a on the border. Hence, class on the border is variable and highly predicated on the distancing of one's self from the high level of abject poverty found on the border, particularly south of the border.

Vila (2000) ties the notion of upward mobility on the border to symbolic "Americanization":

In El Paso, as in other areas of the country, the discourse of race and ethnicity is pervasive...here it combines with the discourse of nationality in a volatile mixture that, for many people, marks almost anything stigmatized as Mexican. Poverty is named in Spanish in El Paso—and in El Paso, Spanish signifies Mexican. (2000:83)



My own experiences confirm these assertions, as I have often heard or even used this trope as a way to describe someone who has economically improved their situation. For example, “You have a good paying job now. So you think you’re white now?” This example illustrates the salience of class boundaries between Mexican-Americans of varying economic standing and between Mexican-Americans and impoverished Mexicans.

Given that class mobility is a significant factor for joining the Border Patrol, it is still difficult to divine specific narratives of performing class while on the job. However, I argue that the job itself is a class performance, because agents’ identities are rooted in a middle-class occupation coupled with the requirement of U.S. citizenship. Understood in these terms, the disparity between agents and the migrants they arrest is unmistakable.

In other words in accepting this job, the agents I interviewed develop social and symbolic boundaries involving class, race, and ethnicity to rise above the “poverty” trope just as other border residents do (Vila 2005). According to Heyman (2002), Latino/a agents he interviewed used citizenship as a social boundary between themselves and Mexican migrants. The connections between class and citizenship are apparent in the availability of resources in each country. The representation that paints migrants as poor is reinforced by American capitalist discourse. According to Ortnier (2003:26), because hegemonic American culture takes both the ideology of mobility and the ideology of

individualism seriously, explanations for non-mobility not only focus on the failure of individuals (because of some inherent fault), but also shift the domain of discourse to arenas that are taken to be “locked into” individuals—gender, race, and ethnic origin. Historically minorities are represented as having some flaw in their cultures that prevents them from being successful.

Ricardo, who was raised in a lower middle-class home in El Paso, uses food, education, and opportunity as a metaphor for class differences between Mexico and the U.S.:

...whatever you want, you can go buy. You want a steak, go to a restaurant. You want chicken, go to that one. You want a new shirt, go buy one. You want to change jobs, go change jobs. You can't do that in Mexico. You can change jobs, but it don't mean it will pay you anything, but for the most part, we have free education through high school. Most of the people that I have arrested you ask them if they went to school, and they answer that they went to like third grade, or maybe the 6th grade. Every once in a while you get somebody who went to college...

He draws class boundaries between Americans and migrants, indexing access to food, jobs, material goods, and education, constructing a space for his identity—a middle-class American identity.

People of Mexican descent constantly mix classification systems in order to make sense of themselves and ‘others’ and they tend to use nationality to detach themselves from Mexican nationals (Vila 2000:85). For instance, when asked if they have ever been characterized as a “sell-out” or “race traitor” Ricardo, Tanya, and Abel’s responses support Vila’s assertion:

...how can you arrest your own people?...they're not my people. I was born and raised here. I've never been to a small town in Oaxaca. I've never lived there. I never met anybody from there. It's not me, so those aren't my people. **-Ricardo**

You know what, I'm not selling anybody out, because my people are U.S. citizens and I'm protecting my country, so how can I be selling out, when I'm not from Mexico. **-Tanya**

I'm an American...When the day is over bro. I'm an American...I fight for this country...I bleed red, white and blue. And, I don't think I'm selling out anybody... **-Abel**

These narratives implicate citizenship, space, nationalism, and social relationships to draw boundaries. Ricardo uses the state of Oaxaca (located in southern Mexico) as a representation of Mexico. Many of the poorest migrants that come from Mexico migrate from the south, from places such as Oaxaca and Chiapas. The implication is that he is spatially and economically detached from the migrants he encounters. Tanya cites social space, nationalistic sentiment, and citizenship as divisions between herself and migrants. Abel indirectly refers to his service in the military and states nationalistic sentiment to illustrate why he is not a "sell-out." At first glance these narratives are self-evident, but they illustrate the salience of boundaries related to class and spatial distance rooted in discourses/ideologies of citizenship and nationalism.

My findings, in-line with those of Heyman (2002), indicated that the financial benefits of the job are one of the most important factors in deciding to become a Border Patrol agent. Referring back to the opening quote of the chapter, Ricardo acknowledges the financial benefits of his job and also believes that he is able to "give something back." This

includes protecting America from terrorists, catching drug smugglers, controlling criminal migration, and demonstrating his nationalistic sentiments. Abel cites familial support because of the pay, and the security of holding a government job as reasons/factors that influenced his decision to join the BP:

When I first joined, pretty much, everybody was encouraging me. My mom being the biggest motivator. She said, 'Do it. It's a good paying job. It's a government job.'...Thankfully, I have a job, a well paying job at that. I'm able to put food on the table, give my kids and family the luxuries they want, so yeah, it's tedious, but you know what, I'm gonna do it.

It is important to Abel to be able to provide his family with the "luxuries" they want, which is a common theme of the proverbial "American Dream." This is an important idea, because it is out of reach of most Americans, border residents in particular. The ability to provide for one's family is a major driving force for my participants' decision to become a BP agent.

### Internal Divisions

The agents I interviewed cited citizenship and class boundaries to distance themselves from Mexican migrants, but they also drew race/ethnicity boundaries between themselves and Anglo agents (Vila 2000). Three narratives from Abel, Felipe, and Josue help us to understand how supposed racial boundaries influence everyday life at work:

As far as your Hispanic and non-Hispanic agents, there is kind of a dividing line, but it's a natural line that you would see anywhere else you know. As a person you want to be comfortable so you feel the most comfortable around the people like you, almost like...you know you feel your values are the best, because you grew up in them, you feel comfortable with them, so when your use[d to] someone similar to you, you automatically attach yourself or associate yourself with that group, and as far as a lot of the Anglo agents that joined the agency, most of them are from the northern border, almost stuck on the southwest border in order to get back north, so they kind of hang around together because they can interact with each other a lot better. **-Felipe**

I guess in a sense, not that it's written, bro, but it's like, I guess you kind of have to watch out what you do around the white guys, you know what I'm saying? Because, they have a tendency to, and not all of them, but it just seems the majority of them, are like big ass kissers to the suits and all that stuff. I mean, it's all a big brotherhood. We all get along and all that, but I guess in the way we do things...like I said before, that the white guys tend to get a little bit more loud and obnoxious with the undocumented aliens and what not. **-Abel**

I know that there's been times when I actually think that an agent of a different race sometimes acts more professional in the way they treat illegal immigrants. I have encountered some Hispanic agents where sometimes I feel they're not treating people or giving people the respect that they deserve. **-Josue**

Abel's narrative describes having to essentially be more careful, or guard his performances, when he is with white agents. In his estimation this is because they are in tight with the "suits", which I interpret as a reference to middle-management. He also notes that the "white guys" tend to treat the migrants they arrest with less respect than do the Latino/a agents. On the other hand, Josue gives a dissenting opinion based on his experiences. He feels that it is the Latino/a agents that are more likely to treat migrants poorly, but he does still construct difference based on race. Felipe understands these "racial" divisions as a function of space.

Most of the white agents are from the north and are unfamiliar with life in the Southwest and flock to other northerners for comfort. These narratives illustrate that there are divisions within the Border Patrol based on perceived racial division.

Boundaries are reflected in the narratives of the participants of this study. Social and symbolic boundaries are imagined and tangible borders and barriers that help us to understand the “other” and in turn our own identities. In the narratives I analyzed boundaries that reinforce divisions between middle-class BP agents and poor criminal migrants, supporting Pablo Vila’s (2000 & 2005) assertion that border residents define identity in relation to Mexicans south of the border. These boundaries are more pronounced for the BP agents in my study as they are maintained through boundary terms and in daily practice through the enforcement of immigration laws. Enforcement of these same laws reinforces and reproduces the racialization of Mexicans (citizen and noncitizen alike) in the United States. Additionally, the Border Patrol has internal divisions—divisions rooted in perceived “racial” differences between agents.

## CHAPTER 4

### EMOTIONS AND IDENTITY

Once you go over there, you just gotta—it's a different...mindset because you can't let them [migrants] see you, well not vulnerable, but the way you are because they're gonna try to figure it out. Just like you're trying to figure them out, they're gonna try to figure you out, so you gotta have a poker face pretty much. **-Charlie**

Emotions are an important aspect of identity and one of the most important ways we convey identity is through language (affect) (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Besnier 1990; Ferber 1998; Hochschild 1983; Leavitt 1996; Stryker 2004; Wharton 2009). While emotions are subjectively felt and interpreted: “socialized human beings are the ones feeling them in specific social contexts; this means that emotions are socially and symbolically produced” (Leavitt 1996:531-32). Therefore, it is in within social interaction that the participants of this study manage their emotions and perform their identities. The emotions and memories experienced during these interactions are conveyed through the narratives. In this chapter I examine the role of emotional labor in identity performance, instances of surface- and deep-acting, hypervigilance, emotive dissonance in relation to blurring boundaries, and positive emotional labor.

Emotion management refers to how people actively shape and direct their feelings with the recognition that social structures and institutions impose constraints on our efforts (Hochschild 1983). The

expression of emotions are constrained by what are known as feeling rules or the societal norms that dictate the appropriate type and amount of feeling that we should experience in a particular situation (Hoschild 1983; Wharton 2009). However for the purposes of this thesis I will use the term display rules, which refers to what emotions ought to be publicly expressed according to each occupational ideology (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Hochschild 1989; Rafaeli and Sutton 1989) as it is a more appropriate description of the rules that constrain how agents *display* identity on the job within the constraints of their training and daily experience. The display rules of the Border Patrol are rooted in a masculine law enforcement ideology and underscore the occupational culture.

Like ideology, emotional management is not a neutral exercise and we have all experienced instances when our emotions were not in line with those required of us at work. During these experiences of *dissonance* we engage in *emotional labor*. Emotional labor implies the regulation of both feelings and expressions for organizational goals (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Grandey 2000; Hoschild 1979 & 1983). Emotional dissonance occurs when an internal state of tension arises and an individual must display emotions that are discrepant from his/her true feelings (Grandey 2000:97). Additionally, conflicting requirements of one's societal and employment contexts may require the transgression of one's moral values to fulfill the requirements of a job



(Syed 2008). This is relevant to the topic of this thesis because the decisions BP agents are faced with on a daily basis are not merely occupational, but moral.

Emotional labor can be experienced both positively and negatively. The effects of emotional labor are moderated by identification with one's role; hence the stronger the identification with a role, the fewer the negative effects on well-being are felt and the stronger the positive effects (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993:89). This is important because the effects of stress have been linked to mental and physical issues; furthermore, negative ramifications for job performance and home life are associated with high levels of stress (Gilmartin 2002; Hochschild 1983; Morris and Feldman 1996; Neidig et al. 1992; Olson and Surrette 2004; Schaubroeck and Jones 2000). In short, the more the participants of this study identify with their roles as border guards, the better they can mitigate or circumvent the effects of stress. Given the benefits of identifying with one's occupational role it is reasonable to assume that over time agents will identify more with their roles, or drink the proverbial "Kool-Aid."

Emotion regulation theory is a good psychological correlate to the anthropological theory of emotional management (Grandey 2000).

Emotion regulation theory is an

input-output model, [in which] individuals receive stimulation from the situation and respond with emotions...The situation acts as a cue to...the individual's emotional response tendency (physiological, behavioral, cognitive) provid[ing] information to that

individual and the others in the social environment. (Grandey 2000:98)

Emotional regulation postulates two strategies of emotion management, antecedent- and response-focused regulation, which correlate to deep- and surface-acting.<sup>21</sup>

Deep-acting involves transforming one's emotions, marshaling appropriate emotions and suppressing inappropriate ones, in order to bring our emotions in line with emotional norms and display rules (Gottschalk 2003:358). On the other hand, "[s]urface-acting entails acting and *impression* [his emphasis] management—displaying emotional 'face' and demeanor appropriate to the feeling rules of the particular context in which we find ourselves" (Gottschalk 2003:358). These two processes/strategies are often employed in tandem and are not mutually exclusive.

### Emotional Labor and Identity Performance

Border Patrol agents face difficult situations every day and must perform their duties while interacting with individuals who may be near death, evading capture, threatening the safety of agents or other migrants, or even traveling with small children. These situations only paint a portion of the daily situations they may encounter.

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<sup>21</sup> The terms will be used interchangeably: antecedent-focused regulation = deep-acting and response-focused regulation = surface-acting.

Every situation requires quick thinking and the performance of a suitable identity. Many of these reactions are trained reactions and tight emotional control is required for safety reasons. To accomplish this Border Patrol controls all aspects of agent selection, training, supervision, and rituals. The Border Patrol controls emotional displays through an occupational culture and through norms regulating emotional expression (Martin 1999:114). Agents are trained to display a persona specific to the Border Patrol, but one closely in-line with other law enforcement personnel.

Law enforcement officers are expected to display no emotion or to display emotions in-line with the masculine ideal of law enforcement ideology (Hochschild 1983; Martin 1999; Martin and Jurik 1996; Pierce 1995; Sutton 1991; Wharton 1996). A suitable identity at work is not necessarily appropriate in the context of the home or when interacting with family members. For this reason the agents attempt to keep the two identities mutually exclusive.

For an example we'll refer back to Josue's theater metaphor, which illustrates how he engages in emotional labor to perform a role at work:

I mean you are an agent. When you are arresting someone, you are an agent. You are not the civilian person you are when you are at home. You put the front stage on the back stage.

Josue constructs himself as an agent, a role tied to his duties, while he makes it clear he does not perform when he is "back stage" or the "real" Josue, the person he is when he is "off stage." Following this same line of

reasoning Felipe's narrative echoes the need for a boundary between a home and work identity:

...a lot of people will tell you in law enforcement...when they put on that uniform, it's like putting on a costume...in a theater. You're putting on the uniform and you're putting on the role of the enforcer, the sheep herder...criticism is directed towards that badge, that uniform, and it's unfortunate because we do put on that uniform, but you always gotta remember that you are a human; you are a person once you take the uniform off...

Felipe makes reference to an acting metaphor referring to putting on a costume. You "put on" the role of an "enforcer" or interestingly enough a "shepherd." The reference to a shepherd gives us insight to the way law enforcement officers perceive the public or those they are charged with controlling. Sheep are dumb, skittish, and easily herded.

Nonetheless, being a border enforcer is a role played-out once the uniform goes on (surface-acting), but also requires a change in perception and attitude (deep-acting). When he is wearing the badge and the uniform he becomes something other than "human", implying a sort of social distance between himself and the public or most often migrants. Felipe points out the importance of remembering that "you are a person" once you take off the uniform. This return to humanity is recognition of returning to a default role that can be recognized by other humans as such.

Both Josue's and Felipe's narratives illustrate the performance of emotional labor and the intricate connection between surface-acting and deep-acting. The uniform and the badge represent response-focused

(surface) regulation, as it allows for a physical and visual way of manipulating their identities and thus influences the way people react to, and interact with, them. The antecedent-focused (deep) regulation is evidenced by their recognition of the expectation of a different identity performance when they are wearing the badge and uniform. Therefore, the uniform and badge are the “surface” of the performance, while the embodiment of this face is the deep-acting or actually becoming the badge and uniform.

#### Response-focused Regulation or Surface-acting

Surface-acting is an essential part of a being a Border Patrol agent as it represents the public face of the agency. The dark green uniform and standard issue side-arm in tandem with the unaffected demeanor of authority is meant to convey one message: control.

During response-focused regulation the person has a tendency toward an emotional response, but manipulates how he or she shows that emotional response by “directly influencing physiological, experiential, or behavioral responding” (Gross 1998:285). These emotional manipulations include displaying more emotion than they feel, such as anger or aggression, or to suppressing true feelings, such as fear or empathy (Grandey 2000). The projection of control is expressed through manipulating power differentials during interaction through behavior and appearance.

Interactions between Mexican migrants and Border Patrol agents represent an unequal power relation. Status and power are inherent to all social interactions and these interactions produce varying emotions from all actors (Kemper 1990). As Kemper (1990:211) states: "...power [is] the ability to realize one's will even over the opposition of others...We may say in general that power is a major mode of human social behavior, one that is frequently manifested in relations between individuals." A confrontation between a border enforcer and boundary breaker is an interaction where power differentials are magnified because of the power invested in the border enforcer by the state. The relation is made more unequal due to "undocumented" migrant's subordinate political status.

In addition, power differentials between the United States and Mexico confer onto their citizens, by virtue of citizenship. Or in other words, the life of an American citizen is worth more than that of a Mexican citizen by virtue of their place of birth. Consequently, interactions between Mexican migrants and the Border Patrol are a direct application of that power. The performance of power can be justified because agents are arresting "criminals" who are not worthy of respect. This also reflects Heyman's (2000: 644) findings: "only some actors are appropriately equivalent to officers in being complex and volitional, that is, people in a full sense...but when immigrants manifest equal personhood, most officers find it both practically frustrating and morally inappropriate." When migrants do not conform to their expected roles,

agents have the potential to engage in more force than might be necessary.

BP agents must establish control and exude power over migrants during interactions in the field in order to control the situation and minimize the possibility of resistance. For this reason, migrants often consciously conform to officers' expectations and behave deferentially in an effort to obtain better treatment (Heyman 2000:646). However, if migrants express volition, agents have the power to rectify perceived insubordination (Heyman 2000). BP agents must exude control and confidence to establish their authority when interacting with migrants, as perceived weakness can lead to violent encounters. The following examples demonstrate what it takes to perform a suitable border guard identity:

...if you actually see them cross, if they know that they're doing wrong, then you get a little bit more, how can I put it, man, use your big boy voice, in a sense, bro. You know what I mean...you get all assertive... **-Abel**

...in order to effectively do your job, I mean, you need not be timid. You'll have guys who are timid at home, they put on that uniform, and it just helps them come out... **-Felipe**

You just have to be strong when it comes to situations. So, that particular situation, yeah you have to be strong. It is just the way we do things... **-Josue**

...it's a different...mindset because you can't let them see you, well not vulnerable, but the way you are because they're gonna try to figure it out...they're gonna try to figure you out, so you gotta have a poker face... **-Charlie**

Abel, a veteran, describes a situation of encountering an undocumented migrant and projecting a “big-boy” voice, while simultaneously becoming more assertive. The performance of the two outward actions gives migrants the impression that Abel holds authority that must be respected and maintains the hierarchical status quo. Felipe notes that agents who are timid at home must change their persona at work and perform a role opposite their nature. This performance requires an outward change in character; in other words, timid agents must *act* tough. Josue echoes this sentiment using the keyword “strong,” or another word for assertive, noting that it is the way things are done at the Border Patrol. Charlie states agents must present a “poker face” in order to keep his emotions invisible to the migrants he encounters. Charlie’s poker face implies he is concealing his true feelings from migrants so he convinces migrants (whom in his estimation are trying to uncover his vulnerabilities). They all illustrate the role surface-acting plays in performing a proper BP role, assertive and an emotional blank slate.

The role agents play depends on with whom they are interacting. For instance, a group of hungry and dehydrated migrants will not warrant the same performance that a group of dangerous smugglers will. Felipe, who is stationed in a more urban environment, explains his approach to engaging a threatening individual(s):

You may meet someone who looks super scary to you. Naturally, they’re intimidating, they’re bigger than you, they’re more



aggressive than you, they're unpredictable...and here you are having to get him to do something that he doesn't want to do. You do have to put on an act...I'm bigger, tougher, and regardless of how bad you are, you are going to be taken down by me and my partners. So you do have to put on that act...

Felipe's narrative is an excellent example of expressing "appropriate" assertiveness in the face of a potentially dangerous situation. He states that you have to "put on an act" and if he can "out intimidate" a dangerous smuggler he can potentially avoid a violent confrontation. This performance is two-fold, drawing upon the projected appearance and demeanor (surface-acting), but at the same time he must in some part *believe* he is dangerous (deep-acting). This is important because his audience, in this case a potentially dangerous individual, can discern or sense a genuine performance from a ruse.

On the other hand, agents sometimes have to tone down a performance if the situation warrants. Josue, who is a devote Christian, uses respect as a metaphor for power and laments that some of his fellow "Hispanic" agents do not give enough respect to immigrants they arrest:

I have encountered some Hispanic agents where sometimes I feel they're not treating people or giving people the respect that they deserve. And I feel like they don't know how to draw a line between actually doing your job and respecting people or doing them at the same time.

In his narrative is an implied level of surface-acting, as these disrespectful agents are likely using their role performance to abuse their power. Here power and boundaries intersect. Mexican migrants are not equal to or the same as agents, and therefore, have less power and

deserve less respect. This is not true for all agents of course as my informants expressed that they treat “non-criminal” migrants with respect and dignity.

When some participants feel that a situation is getting out of hand or they feel anger and frustration rising, they may engage in response-focused regulation in conjunction with antecedent-focused regulation in order to maintain an outward appearance of control. Felipe explains how he handles such situations:

...if you're getting to the point where it's just gonna be too much, you've gotta get away from the source of the stress, the source of whatever is making you angry. If you can afford to get away from it, let your partner step in for a little bit...just staying with it yourself, taking a few deep breaths, and remembering that you're gonna come out of this all right. You're gonna be fine, it's gonna be over, and tomorrow the sun's going to come up again. To me, personally, just getting away from the situation for a little bit; you know, hey man, step in real quick. Walk out, take in a deep breath, maybe taking a drink of water, going to the restroom, talking to somebody about something else just for a little bit, and then coming back into it and finishing it up. If you can't do that, then just take in a deep breath, realize you know what, this is my job, I gotta perform it, and tomorrow will be a new day.

By stepping away from the situation and taking deep breaths, Felipe is able to manipulate his environment and bodily responses to an increasingly stressful situation. In this way he is able to calm down. It is important to note that Felipe practices response-focused strategies in conjunction with antecedent-focused strategies by recalling that he has a job to perform and that tomorrow will be a new day, which helps him gain control of his emotions and performance.

Like most jobs, surface-acting also takes place among agents and their coworkers as Tanya's narrative illustrates:

I usually don't try to get angry, so it's really hard to say, when did I get angry? I guess, I get angry if I see that somebody's not giving 100 percent. Just because when I come in to work, I try to do my job to the best of my ability and then I see an agent or supervisor that I know is capable of getting more and is just apathetic. That angers me. I mean, it angers me inside, I don't know if I convey that outwardly...

Tanya uses a different approach to controlling her emotions. Where Felipe physically removes himself from a situation and calms himself through deep breaths. Tanya essentially swallows her anger and maintains her professional "face," because she feels that is the appropriate way to respond. She doesn't specify if this anger is re-appropriated at a later time or becomes a weight upon her.

#### Antecedent-focused Regulation or Deep-acting

Two of the most common forms of antecedent regulation, attentional deployment and cognitive change, involve agents managing emotions by changing their *focus* or their *appraisal* of a given situation (Grandey 2000). Attentional deployment is accomplished by drawing upon personal history or events that call up the emotions that are needed in the given situation; this is also known as method acting (Grandey 2000). The three following narratives illustrate how attentional deployment strategies can be used to mitigate stress:

I don't think I focus on one event. I think I draw just from experience. A lot of times, when I'm feeling down and out, or just

like frustrated on a certain situation, I just think back to, I played college basketball, and I think about all the stuff that I went through, the two-a-days and the screaming and the yelling and nonstop butt-chewings. And I figured, hey, I survived that; I can pretty much get through anything. **-Tanya**

... I got put in a lot of situations in the military, and kind of the same thing with the BP in handling people and dealing with people, I guess in a sense, helps me cope and deal... **-Abel**

...if I get that rush, all I think is like, if I'm going to die today, I'm going to die today, and that's it. If something's going to happen today, it's going to happen today. **-Rosa**

Tanya's narrative shows how she draws upon her experience. By connecting with a different time in her life she can draw upon it to manage her emotions in the present. Abel, like Tanya, draws upon his previous experiences (training) to "cope and deal" during interactions with others. Rosa's narrative on the other hand is more striking. When she is called in to a dangerous situation she draws upon emotions to mentally accept her death. In this way she allows for fate or faith to give her the strength she needs to perform a suitable role for herself and her fellow agents.

Cognitive change occurs when one perceives the situation so that the emotional impact is lessened (Grandey 2000). For example, Arlie Hochschild (1983) described flight attendants who were trained to cognitively reappraise passengers as children so that they would not become angry with passengers' potentially infantile behaviors. The difference between attentional deployment and cognitive change is that the former focuses upon changing personal thoughts and the latter to

changing perceptions of the external situation (Grandey 2000). In the following two examples Ricardo and Tanya both explain how they re-interpret situations to mitigate their emotions:

...a journeyman agent of mine told me, "If you encounter a group and they break up on you and take off running, they're just doing what they're doing. That's their job in this game. Their game is to come in and, if they see us, take off running. Our job in this game is to find them and catch them. So it's a cat and mouse game. So when they break up on you and take off running, don't get mad. They're just doing their job." And the same token, if they're not listening or something, then that's their game. That's their job.  
**-Ricardo**

Operations aren't always going to be successful, but at the end of the day, if I can look at myself, and say, hey, I gave it my best shot, then I believe I'm successful, and that's all I can do. There's just so much that goes on, on a daily basis that you can't get down on yourself if things go bad. Even though its national security, you got to just realize, hey, I put my people in the best position possible and we did the best that we could, and we can just learn from what happened, and then hopefully get better... **-Tanya**

By changing his perception of a possibly aggravating situation and thinking of it as a game—where it is his job to be the pursuer—Ricardo is able to mitigate his anger and make his job more enjoyable. He also cognitively constructs migrants as his opponents here to do their job, which is to avoid him. In this way he is able to suppress emotions tied to an increased level of stress, mitigating a potentially inappropriate emotional response, and enabling him to play the role of the controlled hunter. Ricardo's narrative is also a good example of the boundaries agents employ to distance themselves emotionally from migrants. By constructing migrants as opponents in a game or as prey BP agents can construct an adversarial relationship and mitigate conflicting feelings.

Tanya reassesses her situation in regard to scale of the problem and how she can affect it. She knows she cannot stop every crime or criminal, but as long as she does her best she does not let the scope of the problems she faces weigh her down. This leads us to the most salient form of emotional labor that my participants engage in, hypervigilance.

### Hypervigilance: Always on Guard

The potential for uncertainty. Just never knowing...it's kind of boring here [El Paso sector] because there's not a whole lot going on, but that could change in the blink of an eye. **-Ricardo**

As I have established my participants must perform proper identities to cope with conflict and uncertainty. As Ricardo's quote expresses, the day may be passing by slowly, but agents must always be on their guard—as their situation may change in the “blink of an eye.” Agents appropriate a *hypervigilant* state to deal with the uncertainty that comes with working in the field.

The law enforcement ideology of the Border Patrol is historically rooted. During its development it has reframed its mission from controlling unsanctioned labor migration to preventing cross-border criminal activities, such as prostitution and drug trafficking (Hernández 2010:13). This shift occurred to meet the nation's shift to an increased concern with crime control coupled with the subsequent move to privatize the prison system (Hernández 2010). Along with this shift has

come an increasing emphasis on hypervigilance corresponding to the militarization of our nation's law enforcement.

Hypervigilance is a form of emotional labor that incorporates surface- and deep-acting strategies that agents exploit to cope with the uncertainty, stress, and real present danger. Perceiving the world in this manner necessarily employs symbolic boundaries, e.g. good people/bad people and non-threatening/threatening. It is also important to note that these symbolic boundaries are analogous to other identity-informing variables. For example, good people/bad people correlates to American citizen/undocumented migrant.

Like other law enforcement agencies the Border Patrol trains its agents to always be on guard against potential threats and to be suspicious of everyone. However, this constant suspicion can lead eventually to deep-rooted cynicism (Gilmartin 2002). Agents themselves express that they must assume everyone has a criminal record. Abel told me a story of being "burned" by a migrant he felt sorry for after hearing his sad tale when he was a new agent. When he ran his prints at the station, Abel found the man had a warrant out for attempted murder. From that point on he promised not to let himself be taken for a fool ever again. Felipe echoes Abel's sentiment, explaining why you must operate with a high level of suspicion:

You're surrounded by lying so much, and you're surrounded by so many situations where the person initially starts off swearing up and down that they're telling the truth. And then, there's a breaking point in your interview or in your case that basically

proved this person was lying to you the whole time. On a personal level, it builds, you kind of punish yourself. Like, how could I be so foolish to actually trust and buy into it? So then, you build a guard up, so next time...I'm not gonna let this happen. So you have that guard, you build a wall...you carry it home, you carry it into your personal life. So I do agree with that; it does happen.

Felipe illustrates how his experiences have validated and reinforced his performance of hypervigilance. The building of an internal wall directly affects the performance of his role as a border enforcer. This boundary increases his and other agents' chances of surviving every day in the field. Furthermore, the inherent emotional distance bolsters the masculine aspects of a law enforcement role. This internal boundary guards him from physical harm, and also from mental stress and injury, by reinforcing the representation of migrants as dangerous criminals. At the same time it reinforces the distance between him and migrants, and the Border Patrol's representation of migrants as criminals. The emotional "wall" has the potential to bleed into his home life as it is internalized and it also influences every future encounter he has with migrants.

According to Gilmartin (2002), who was a veteran police officer before getting his PhD in Behavioral Science, performing identity with such a high level of vigilance is both mentally and physically draining and stressful. For example:

Just not knowing what they have when you encounter a group. Because at night you can't see everything. You can't see their hands; you can't see what they're hiding...I think that's the only stressful part, the initial approach to a group or a person, and that could be every time you approach somebody. To me that's



stressful. Actually, they think I'm paranoid at work. Because when I take my bag, I carry about nine magazines for the M4, and they're full, and I've still got like another thousand rounds. **-Charlie**

The mindset is...you gotta think safety...we live somewhere where, and in a time, and personally in a job where not only do I gotta look for the enemy south of me, but I got I gotta look at the enemy that's north of me. Law enforcement constantly has that target on you. I mean, so you gotta be constantly looking around you, so the mindset isn't like when I'm at home where I can afford just relax a little bit. **-Felipe**

It just makes you operate at a higher level of urgency. Because the threat is constantly there...the threat has always been there, but it just seems that lately it's coming closer and closer to home... basically, just a higher level of urgency, and awareness, and I always tell my agents to make sure that they wear their body armor... **-Tanya**

Any law enforcement officer will tell you that it is their goal every day to make it home safely. All three examples show the “mindset” that agents must approach their fieldwork with to accomplish this goal, with high levels of suspicion and urgency. They accomplish this by staying aware, assuming potential danger from all encounters, and being prepared for any eventuality. The stress of always being wary is a constant pressure that influences how agents interact with migrants.

Hypervigilance reinforces pre-existing “us” versus “them” symbolic boundaries between migrants and my participants. However, despite these boundaries, my participants are not immune to emotional dissonance or feeling empathy for the migrants they arrest, because not all migrants or their experiences are the same. Boundaries are not immutable and as often as there is conflict, there is also a level of ambiguity.

## Blurring Boundaries and Emotive Dissonance

Agents embody power in their uniforms and in the way they perform identity. However, power can be a site of ambiguity for Mexican-American as well, as illustrated by the historic racialization of Mexicans (and Mexican-Americans) in the United States. Ambiguity can be particularly salient when agents are aware of the marginalization people of Mexican ancestry have faced in the United States or who have experienced racism first hand. For instance, Abel has a dark complexion and has experienced being profiled based on appearance. On two separate occasions he has had his citizenship challenged before becoming a BP agent.

Symbolic and social boundaries can be rigid or flexible, static or fluid, stable or unstable, permeable or impermeable, weak or strong and these qualities fluctuate at different historical moments and in different contexts (Wray 2006:14). Transnational ties, proximity to the border and a life's worth of interacting with migrants causes my participants to experience a blurring of boundaries as evidenced by expressions of empathy and a deep understanding of the plight of many of these migrants. This is because they are closer to them literally and figuratively.

Everyone experiences life subjectively; even so, we may feel constrained by the boundaries reinforced and reproduced by the groups and institutions with which we identify. However, we have the ability to

choose which boundaries we accept and act upon. For example, a Catholic active in his/her church, can choose not to believe that homosexuality is a sin; they then can act on this belief and actively undermine a symbolic boundary propounded by the Roman Catholic Church. Does this mean they are any less Catholic? Maybe in the eyes of the church, but individual subjectivities allow for a *blurring* of boundaries, without comprising an individual's self-identification. In other words, we choose what boundaries are important to us and which ones aren't. This principle is the same for BP agents. They can choose, often without directly reflecting on the notion of a boundary, what they believe and how it will influence their identity performance.

Some of their required duties can induce emotional dissonance—displaying emotions discrepant from those felt. Breaking families apart, sending migrant children back to Mexico, and coming across near dead or dead migrants are just a few of the conflicts agents face. Experiences such as these are rooted in the ambiguity of the agent's own experiences, transnational and cultural ties, and basic human decency. During instances of ambiguity agents engage in emotional labor to maintain their role performances.

Ricardo expresses empathy and conflicted feelings about arresting and deporting children, unfortunately a not too infrequent occurrence:

You know what, I feel bad for kids, like the little kids, under 5 or 8, not so much for arresting them, but I guess it would be because arresting them because you're keeping them in a crappy place. They're going back to the city on the south side, they all look like

Juárez you know, they're all third-world countries, so they're just little rat holes, and you don't want to do that to a child, and then you see them, and as law enforcement, you want a child to leave with a positive attitude toward you, but with these kids, you can't.

Expressing regret for having to deport children, he knows he is responsible for sending them back to a dangerous and desperate place. Despite his internal regret and conflict he must suppress his feelings and remain in character, showing no readable emotion. This sort of experience is not forgotten and Ricardo must "detach" himself from his feelings of empathy:

It's not my child. But still, when you sit there and you think about it, it really pisses you off. Because one, you're detaching yourself from it. So that bothers you.

By detaching himself Ricardo is reinforcing a boundary not only between himself and those he is conflicted about deporting, but he is also creating an emotional boundary he can draw upon in future interactions.

Discovering the bodies of dead migrants can be challenging for agents like Abel, who despite or maybe in light of experiencing the horrors of war first hand, finds it difficult to discover migrants' corpses. This is magnified because Abel, whose parents both migrated from Mexico, can feel empathy for those that die trying to cross the border:

The most difficult would probably be, I guess dealing with the bodies...The dead bodies...That kind of, I don't know if you've ever seen a dead body... but that's kind of one of the most difficult things to deal with for one because, I don't know, it's a dead... that's someone's son or someone's daughter or someone's mother or someone's, you know what I'm saying? That in its self is... hard to deal with. Fuck...this guy tried to make this long journey, this long trek just to make a better life, and they're just passing away in the middle of it...

He feels empathy because he has transnational, historical, and tangible connections to Mexico and its people. Boundaries are breached when agents can relate to the desperation of migrants, especially when they see them as human beings—sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, etc. And despite the myriad social and symbolic boundaries that divide my participants from the migrants they arrest, a *blurring* of the boundaries occurs, based on the characteristics that sustain a hybridized border culture. The strength of transnational connections varies from agent to agent, but they are connections nonetheless.

Feelings of empathy must be controlled while interacting with migrants they are arresting and in front of their peers, lest they appear weak or be tempted to give over to their feelings of ambiguity making their duties more difficult. Performing an emotionally aloof identity serves two purposes: it projects the proper identity to fellow agents and potentially dangerous migrants; and it reinforces internal emotional boundaries that suppress unpleasant feelings. Regardless, empathic feelings exist and can take many forms, but they often manifest when agents encounter families and children:

...we're humans too; [we] empathize with some of the people. It's part of the job. You have to empathize with them [migrants]. Not all of them...we do have some that are really bad criminals...you see a family group that has traveled across the world...traveled three or four days, to try to seek a better life. It's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking just to see that lengths these people will go through to try to get away from their country...whether it's poverty or violence... **-Tanya**

...most difficult I would have to say... [is] having to arrest people who you see have no other option...when you catch the person who is trying for the first time, who doesn't mean harm...I'll guarantee you right now if I was in Mexico if I was poor if I had mouths to feed and I didn't have a job I would try crossing illegally...So I understand where these people are coming from...I mean it's very difficult it's hard to swallow. Situations where you stop the vehicle and maybe it's a family and dad out of the whole family is the only one that's illegal and everyone else is fine and that's difficult. Especially when you have the kids crying, it's very difficult. **-Felipe**

According to Tanya, empathy is a part of their job. She emphasizes that Border Patrol agents are “humans too” and when she encounters migrants in dire situations she finds it “heartbreaking.” She implies the two most common representations of Mexican migrants, criminal or good worker, to illustrate those for whom agents can harbor empathetic feelings. She cannot show compassion to “criminals”, but can to those who are seeking a better life in the United States. Felipe reaffirms this point. The hardest part of the job is breaking apart families. Felipe confirms that he would do the same thing if he found himself in a similar situation. He says “it’s hard to swallow,” but this is precisely the emotional labor agents must perform to avoid emotive dissonance; swallowing feelings of anger, compassion, sadness, and frustration. They must build an emotional boundary that can keep sadness and guilt from overwhelming them. It is during these same sad situations that agents can experience positive emotions.

Not all emotional labor is negative as it can also be identity affirming (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993). Some of the interactions my participants encounter end positively for both parties, such as finding

children abandoned in the desert, saving a group on the verge of heat exposure, or arresting drug smugglers. During experiences such as these, agents are able to play a positive role and as a result they have identity affirming experiences:

...nothing feels better then when someone tells you or thanks you for what you did...it's compounded when you're commonly seen as the bad guy, so when someone changes and realizes that hey these guys aren't so bad after all you know, it's the greatest feeling ever one of the greatest feelings I've had. And I've had the opportunity [to cover] an area where I work to save several people out of the canal, I've had the opportunity to save people that are running from danger in Juarez...so at that point we change our roles from okay now we are going from an arresting Border Patrol agent to be rescuing Border Patrol agent...When you save a human life and at the same time you did your job by enforcing and by securing our border...So you know what I mean it's like icing on the cake.

**-Felipe**

I'm just trying to stop the flow of criminals, and try to save whoever is out there. **-Charlie**

Felipe refers to changing the way he performs his role, from that of an “arresting” Border Patrol agent to a “rescuing” agent. His identity is affirmed by receiving a positive response from someone he has rescued. Charlie is more concise, stating he is there to stop criminals, but to also save migrants who are in trouble. When agents are able to transform their identity to border enforcer to life saver, they no longer represent a site of oppression, but saviors who will give migrants a chance to fight another day. These are the experiences they can hold on to and feel like they have accomplished something positive and worthwhile.

Border Patrol agents are expected to perform their roles as border enforcers following display rules that elevate masculine characteristics

over the perceived weaknesses of femininity. Subsumed in these performances are agents' feelings of empathy, made more salient and profound by connections inherent to border populations. Emotional labor mitigates the conflicts and ambiguity agents experience and helps them to perform suitable identities when confronting migrants or smugglers, but it also a source of stress. Stress is further compounded by the fact that agents necessarily engage in hypervigilance to make it home safely at the end of their shift. Agents experience high levels of stress, because emotional labor can lead to emotive dissonance. However, it is during experiences that seem the most heart wrenching that agents are able to save a life and have a positive identity affirming experience.



## CHAPTER 5

### HEALTH, STRESS, SUICIDE, AND COPING

Where your day builds, stress builds upon stress and keeps going. You get out of work, come home, and the first thing you do is step on your kid's toy and then it pisses you off because it's not supposed to be there. And then you're going overboard and you're going to take it out on your kid...I know for me it's when I get home and I'm snapping at my kids, I know, "You need to calm down. It's not their fault you had a bad day."...I was separated for a year. And a lot of guys, unfortunately, I work with are divorced and stuff. So it's just one of those things...But the best thing for me is to just leave work at work and leave home at home. **-Ricardo**

The participants of this study experience high stress levels related to hypervigilance and emotional management and must find ways to cope with and relieve tension. Ricardo's narrative above recalls some of the themes I discussed in chapters 3 and 4. When he comes home from work his work role bleeds into his home role and he must change his behavior to reflect his new situation. He must cognitively change (deep-acting) his perception of the situation and how he reacts (surface-acting) to his children. Days like these are when Ricardo must engage in emotional management to perform a proper home role. Unfortunately, too often it is not enough and agents like Ricardo experience separations, divorce, mental and physical health issues, and sometimes suicide at higher rates than the general population. This can be linked to a shift in perception of others and the world, because agents identify with their work identity more over time. In this chapter I will explore the stresses agents experience, its repercussions, the high rate of suicide within the Border

Patrol, and how agents cope with stress within a masculine occupational culture.

### Stress and its Repercussions

The constant anger and the physical upheaval...[stress]...causes, combined with years of shift-work-induced sleep deprivation, poor diet, and a sedentary lifestyle, can lead the now veteran officer to face physical changes in addition to emotional issues. (Gilmartin 2002: 4-5)

As we have seen in Chapter 4, agents can experience emotive dissonance when arresting and deporting migrants they deem have tried to enter for legitimate economic reasons. This emotive dissonance coupled with the frequency in which they engage in hypervigilance and emotional labor compounds their chances of health issues. Furthermore, they, like most of us must also deal with “normal” work stress—such as problems with coworkers, dissatisfaction with management, long hours, frequent shift changes, and dissatisfaction with working in cumbersome bureaucracy. In addition, more often than for most individuals in middle class jobs, agents sacrifice time with their families because of frequently changing schedules and mandatory overtime.

The stress linked to emotional labor is difficult to quantify in ethnography, as stress is experienced subjectively; nonetheless, instances of stress and its consequences are present in the agents’ narratives. The frequent and consistent performance of emotional labor by BP agents can result in high levels of stress (Grandey 2000;

Hochschild 1983). Stress has been linked to higher rates of physical and psychological health issues that can translate into negative repercussions at work and home (Gilmartin 2002; Gross 1998; Hochschild 1983; Morris and Feldman 1996; Mohandie and Hatcher 1999; Pennebaker 1990; Schaubroeck and Jones 2000). Stress is a common experience for all agents, but can be worse for female agents.

Both Tanya and Rosa have had to endure stress related to their gender because they are subject to greater scrutiny and doubt than their male counterparts:

When I first joined, it wasn't a pleasant experience a lot of times. Regardless, even now, as a female you just, because there's not so many of us, that we're always kind of under a microscope, if you will. The way that I feel when I came in, is that I have to a) prove myself, okay, that I can do the job like every other agent. But, then I also felt like if I'm gonna get respect from my fellow agents, then I just had to work that much harder to show that I was a good agent. **-Tanya**

And:

**Rosa:** I really think you have to prove yourself...

**Aaron:** ...what do you mean by prove yourself?

**Rosa:** I guess gaining respect from everybody...I'm going to Arizona...and I felt like people treated me differently...

**Aaron:** Is it because [working in] Arizona [is]...more dangerous?

**Rosa:** Yes...And everybody thinks the girls are not worth anything.

Being a female in a male dominated organization has been a difficult process for both Tanya and Rosa as law enforcement has been historically linked to men and masculinity (Martin 1999). Both women

noted that they really had to try hard to prove themselves. Tanya felt she was under a “microscope” and had to try just that much harder to gain the respect offered to male recruits. Rosa goes as far as to say that “everybody”, meaning her male coworkers, thinks that “girls are not worth anything.” She has had to volunteer to put herself in harm’s way to be treated on par to her male coworkers. In order to succeed, both women had to conform to a masculine ideal that may or may not have come easily, but emotional labor was necessary to perform roles that proved they were worthy to be agents to their male counterparts. The stress of not fitting-in and potentially experiencing emotive dissonance because of having to perform a role they are not comfortable with is something all female agents contend with.

A less tangible stress factor, but a very real and present one that all agents are subject to, is the weight of being publicly scrutinized—or having to perform one’s duty with the knowledge that they may be scrutinized by a potential jury of millions. A heightened awareness of border issues, mainly due to America’s obsession with immigration and homeland security, has resulted in elevated local and national scrutiny of the Border Patrol. Additionally, the media typically reports from an anti-police perspective (Gilmartin 2002). Given this assertion, recent episodes of violence, corruption, and a spike in agent suicides have cast a negative pall on the agency and its agents (Archibold 2008; Martínez-Cabrera 2011; Sherman and Torres 2010; Weber 2010). Increased scrutiny adds

pressure on agents to not only perform before a critical media, but it also makes every split-second decision a potential for disaster.

Even though law enforcement agencies may decry the way they are treated in the media, it is a necessity. All power must be checked lest it be allowed to operate with impunity. Moreover, the Border Patrol is tasked with managing a migrant population that is highly susceptible to abuse because of their relatively powerless economic, social, and political position. Regardless of the moral validity of the way agents are portrayed in the media, intense public scrutiny is a significant source of stress for agents.

Felipe works within the El Paso city limits where a teenager from Juarez was recently killed by a fellow agent in a well-publicized rock-throwing incident. He describes the pressures of being a Border Patrol agent, emphasizing that much of the stress is not necessarily tied to the “daily grind”:

...a lot of the stress isn't necessarily the daily grind. It's mental stress where you're...faced with the split decision that's gonna be dissected by attorneys, jurors, and media for weeks...Monday [morning] quarterbacking, it's to the extreme with law enforcement...to me...is what's the most stressful about law enforcement...I've opened myself to all this criticism, all this... negative feedback...

His narrative illustrates the scrutiny he and his fellow agents experience and the real and tangible negativity that can be directed at them as the result of one poor decision. BP agents are performing roles under a microscope and before a critical audience. As history has proven this

level of scrutiny is warranted, but it is a difficult experience at the individual level and the pressure can affect agents in real ways. In other words, the stress is palpable.

According to Felipe, the stress is “mental” and colors every critical decision agents make in the field, decisions such as what amount of force is appropriate in a given situation? Split-decisions in the field are made all the more difficult when you consider agents are operating at a hyper-emotional level and the display rules of the agency elevate potential violence above feelings of compassion. For example, Felipe described a situation where a fellow agent experienced extreme stress after using deadly force in an encounter with an undocumented migrant.<sup>22</sup>

I've experienced where agents have had to shoot and kill somebody. And granted it's a justified shooting as far as we are concerned, as far as law enforcement is concerned but imagine the family of the victim, imagine the agent, or the family of the agent who has to be there with them...it's not easy. It's shooting and killing somebody, it's something that is done in your defense, but it's not something that you do because obviously you feel good about it...I've seen it firsthand where the agent is torn apart...I would hate that because of the career choice I made my family has to struggle. That's kind of hard that's kind of depressing...

The agent in question not only has to cope with the guilt of killing someone, but (s)he also can imagine the pain one has inflicted on others, causing him/her to second-guess their decision. Not only does the situation affect the agent and their well-being, but that of their family as

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<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately I do not know the context surrounding this specific encounter and it is likely that Felipe could not say because of legal concerns.

well, who must bear the brunt of the agent's emotional issues and being thrust into the public eye. Furthermore, a seed of doubt has been planted and it will affect the agent anytime (s)he is put into a dangerous situation, potentially endangering themselves and their coworkers or migrants. A situation such as this can become a negative feedback loop. Undoubtedly, emotional labor can be strategically implemented to mitigate this stress that can help the agent perform his/her roles at work and at home, but it can *only* mask true feelings. And masking feelings does not mean they won't "leak out" in other ways.

Ricardo describes several occasions where stress has physically affected agents he knows:

I do know guys that it [stress] is affecting. Like one guy, he was being investigated because of something he did. Which he did, but it was to the point where they were offering him termination and he was trying to fight that. And him, he ended up losing 50 pounds just because of stress and not eating. And it's mostly not so much while working...one guy was getting sued civilly for civil rights violations. And it was the same thing.

The two situations illustrated in Ricardo's narrative are examples of internal and external stress. The first agent was the subject of an internal investigation and was fighting for his career. The stress was so palpable it had severe physiological effects on his body, not to mention what we don't know—how it affected his psyche. The second example highlights the potential for external stress. The agent in question faces a civil lawsuit for a civil rights violation, which is a possibility for any agent. Justly or unjustly agents can be accused and sued for a myriad of

real or perceived wrongs that can potentially ruin a career and/or financial stability. Even when agents are going through difficult emotional situations they must still go to work and perform their roles. Ideally, they perform as if nothing is wrong, putting on a show for their coworkers, but stress can change an individual's perceptions and inhibitions, potentially leading to abuse of migrants or lapses in judgment which can have consequences for all involved.

So what is at the root of the emotional stress agents experience? As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the "masculine" nature of the law enforcement field inhibits the expression of emotions considered to be feminine. Agents will hold in "feminine" emotions to refrain from displaying perceived weakness (Martin 1999). When asking agents about expressing their true emotions at work they responded negatively:

I have shared tidbits of...this and that, but coming from such a macho-type line of work, you almost kind of learn not to because you don't want to open yourself up to the jokes and this and that... you tend to kind of just keep those feelings more for your wife, your parents, or someone that knows you more as my son, my cousin, or whatever... **-Felipe**

I think when there is a sad situation; nobody likes to talk about it...I noticed that guys are not that easy to let other people see their feelings. **-Rosa**

...for the most part, I find myself; I just talk to my wife...I don't really talk too much of my personal life, or my personal feelings with my friends. **-Josue**

Show no emotions, even if they're out there crying their eyes out... **-Charlie**

I don't want to seem like I'm a pussy or anything. **-Abel**



Felipe, fearing ridicule, does not reveal his true feelings to his coworkers, understanding that he works in a “macho” line of work and his perceived weakness could be held against him by his fellow agents. Rosa specifically references sad situations and how difficult it is for her fellow agents to discuss sorrow or let down their masculine facade. Josue keeps his feelings to himself at work, but is able to speak to his wife about his personal feelings. The performance of an emotionless man at work is consistent with what Josue said about having a “front stage” and “back stage.” Abel’s crude remark shows he fears that showing emotion or looking for help at work would make him seem more like a “pussy”, a derogatory way to imply being feminine. He instead feels keeping his emotions to himself is the masculine and acceptable way to perform his role. Thus, the masculine ideals and display rules inherent to being a BP agent are crucial factor in the way agents cope with stress, mainly alone.

Most study participants stated that they did have a close friend or a family member that they could speak openly with, but it was typically someone outside of work from whom they could depend upon for privacy. Yet, after years of suppressing emotions and having no outlet, agents can experience emotional and physical burnout. Research supports the prediction that emotional labor will lead to burnout (Grandey 2000). Several other studies have evaluated the relationship of emotional labor with burnout in employees; results relate emotional dissonance to emotional exhaustion (Abraham 1998; Grandey 2000; Gross and

Levenson 1997; Morris and Feldman 1997). For Border Patrol agents the primary stressors are the long work days and associated frequent shift changes. Depending on the agent's station, shift rotations occur as frequently as every month. Given that the Border Patrol is a 24/7 operation, my participants change from working a regular day shift, to a midnight shift the following month, and then switch again to a swing shift. Border Patrol agents always work mandatory overtime.

Tanya and Charlie make the connection between the long hours and burnout:

Yeah, absolutely. I've worked sometimes a double shift. It's long hours, sometimes under very stressful conditions. Sure, I think everybody that's ever worked anywhere, I would say, has experience[d] some burnout at one time or another... **-Tanya**

You know, you'll feel burned out just mentally...because of the... work flow... **-Charlie**

Both agents single-out long work hours and the overall stressful working conditions as the primary reasons for experiencing burnout. Frequent shift changes make spending time with their families difficult and can impede an agent's ability to maintain outside relationships. These are the relationships that can keep people grounded and can act as a support system in times of need. Hence, emotional labor, coupled with the stressful working conditions of the Border Patrol are exhausting and can create distance/boundaries within the relationships that agents most cherish.

Suicide: “It’s a sign of weakness to seek...help”

The lack of a good emotional support system at home in concert with the “masculine” culture of the Border Patrol can be disastrous for agents. Tanya’s statement, “It’s a sign of weakness to seek...help” illustrates a display rule among BP agents, one that constrains agents from seeking help if they are in need of emotional or mental support because they fear the real or imagined stigma of being weak. Consequently, identity performance within the Border Patrol has a fatal flaw, a flaw rooted in imagined masculine ideals.

In essence agents employ emotional labor to maintain a tough guy/girl image, and many shun help even when they are in dire need. As a result law enforcement officers commit suicide at a higher rate than the general population (Gilmartin 2002; Mohandie and Hatcher 1999; Weber 2010). National statistics show that the suicide rate among the general public is 11.3 suicide deaths per 100,000; among the Border Patrol the rate increased in 2009 to 23.9 deaths per 100,000.<sup>23</sup>

A close friend and BP supervisor, knowledgeable in suicide awareness and prevention, explained to me that the higher rates of suicide can also be attributed to access to firearms. This logic assumes that because law enforcement agents have access to deadlier means of

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<sup>23</sup> The national rate is according to the National Institute of Mental Health, from: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-in-the-us-statistics-and-prevention/index.shtml>. Border Patrol statistics come from National Border Patrol Council, a labor union representing over 17,000 agents, from: [http://www.nbpc.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=334&Itemid=1](http://www.nbpc.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=334&Itemid=1). It is important to note that some Border Patrol union representatives express doubt regarding the number of suicides reported by the Border Patrol, believing a higher number is being suppressed.

committing suicide, they then have a lower failure rate. Regardless, a rate more than double that of the national level is still troubling, considering the vetting process agents must pass before being offered a position. This information was echoed by Felipe:

...within the agency within law enforcement, there is a high amount of suicides that occur. We're very accessible to weapons, we work a job where we are very sleep deprived, we work a job that keeps us away from social interactions with others family, friends. So it's a combination of things that I can see would lead someone that has mental health oriented mental health problems and then eventually doing something to take their life. But within our agency because of that reason because of other reasons another one of which being divorce, the divorce rate within the United States is like 50-50, 50%. Law enforcement [is] something like 80% or 90%, border patrol is something like 90 or 95%.

He mentions many of the difficulties associated with the job that can physically and mentally wear down on an individual, but a critical factor is the high rate of divorce. This is something I have heard mentioned by several different BP agents, although there are no definitive numbers available. The long work hours and changing schedule is a likely significant factor in the high levels of divorce. Notwithstanding, divorce is an extremely stressful event and would add significantly to the emotional load of any agent. Ricardo connects the high levels of divorce to the increase in suicides:

Right now we have this marriage enrichment program going on for agents because we've had an increase of suicides. So now it's kind of reactionary, but better late than never.

According to Gilmartin (2002:10), higher suicide rates for law enforcement are alarming when you consider that it is general practice in

most law-enforcement agencies to conduct pre-employment psychological evaluations of potential officers, in order to rule out pre-existence of psychological abnormalities. Border Patrol agents are subject to similar psychiatric evaluations; additionally they must pass a lie detector exam and endure months of extensive training before becoming agents. Recently there has been an increase in suicide awareness, but the focus on prevention and awareness is unfortunately only a result of an increase of suicides. Since 2008 fifteen agents have taken their own lives (Weber 2010).<sup>24</sup>

Not a single participant of this study has been untouched by the suicide of a fellow agent. They either know of or knew someone personally who committed suicide:

**Rosa:** ...we lost two of them, and it's very sad. Up to this point, I think I can understand why they did it...and they were very good friends of mine, so...And we had a suicidal training, and they showed the video where they showed pictures of them, and I started crying. I left out of the training. I needed a moment to calm down and go back to what I needed to do.

**Aaron:** ...how do you deal with it emotionally?

**Rosa:** I just sort of remember the last time I talked to them, and the last time I'd see them...saw them and it just...I just cried. I just cry...I tried to hide it, like, I'm not crying, I'm not crying, but still, you can't hold the tears or feel sorry.

And:

Yeah, and you know when you were asking about some of the worse days at work and I can't believe I didn't think of this, was at my old station...we had two suicides in six weeks, so that hits home. One was an agent, and then the other was a supervisor, and

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<sup>24</sup> These are the most recent numbers available during a search 6/15/2012.

I had just seen that supervisor the day before...it makes you feel angry. It makes you feel sad... **-Tanya**

Rosa had to hide her emotional distress, even after losing two friends from her sector; she still felt she had to perform surface-acting in order to control her outward appearance to maintain her “masculine” face. She felt crying in front of her fellow male agents would diminish the way they perceived her after she has worked hard to gain their respect. Her experience illustrates the salience of the masculine display rules of the BP and how they hamper normal emotional reactions. The constraints of masculine roles are not individually experienced, but affect the entire group or institution’s dynamic and relationships, creating a culture where it is not advisable to express grief. Tanya’s narrative illustrates this point, as morale in her station dropped precipitously after the loss of two agents to suicide. The cycle can continue without an emotional outlet for agents to express sadness, frustration, and anger. The people that committed suicide were people she knew and worked with on a daily basis, which must have had a significant impact on Tanya’s role in her station. She later informed me that supervisors are now being trained to recognize the signs of suicide, but of course this is a reactionary measure. The Border Patrol offers counseling services and chaplains, but because of the masculine culture of the agency none of my participants stated that they had utilized them.

Tanya and Rosa’s experience illustrates that suicide affects all levels of the Border Patrol’s hierarchy from the field agents to

supervisors. Suicide affects morale and makes for a hostile work environment, making it difficult for all employees to operate “normally.” Acute emotional stress such as dealing with grief can affect how agents interact with other agents, but more importantly with migrants. Emotions run high; and without positive outlet agents find themselves relying more heavily on emotional labor to get through the day.

Charlie lost a close friend and coworker and he describes the emotional impact it had on him and how he coped on his own:

...one of my classmates, she actually killed herself. She shot herself and I was her...leader. And I used to talk to her all the time...next thing you know, she shot herself on my birthday...two years ago...[I] was just screwed up for two, three months. I couldn't—I didn't even want to go to work, you know so, because she's not the first one that had killed herself ...she was bi-sexual, but she was cool as hell and nobody wanted [to] hang out with her and stuff like...she's not the first one to die like that...It's just hard to deal with, with that stuff...I didn't go out drinking or none of that, I just, pretty much, I just go and jump on the treadmill and try to get a different mindset, because even my wife didn't know. She was just like what's wrong, but I'm [like] nothing. So, because you try to keep certain things away from them, so they won't know.

Charlie had difficulty coping with the suicide of a friend and coworker.

From his own words we know he was experiencing deep emotional distress, to the point he was “screwed up” for two to three months. Yet, instead of seeking out help, he engaged in both surface and deep acting in order to perform his duties at work and to operate at home. Charlie had to hide his emotional distress and act as he believes a man should at work and with his family, stoically and without complaint. He tried through running (response-focused management) and mentally trying to

change his state of mind (antecedent-focused). In other words, he tried to escape his emotional pain alone.

By keeping his feelings to himself and never showing weakness, even though he was in pain, Charlie personifies the masculine ideal of a proper agent and “man”. He says that he has kept the information secret, even from his wife, to protect his family; by keeping that secret, he creates an emotional boundary between himself and his family. For what reasons, we can only speculate, but by keeping these feelings locked away creates distance, leading to stress and mistrust within a relationship. From examples like Charlie’s we can suppose reasons why law enforcement officers endure higher rates of divorce than the rest of the population, because they are emotionally closed to their partners.

Managing emotions at home—that is, performing an identity by hiding pain and stress from family members—creates an emotional boundary between agents and their families. The combined stresses of being an agent, a public figure under scrutiny and constantly on the alert for danger, illustrates why agents experience higher levels of stress than civilians. They must find other methods of coping with this stress on a daily basis other than physical exertion.

#### Laughing at the Severed Head: Managing Emotions and Humor

A common theme among most agents I have had contact with, including the agents I interviewed for this study, was a good sense of humor, albeit



a dark one. It just so happens that humor is an excellent way of moderating stress (Martin 1999; Pogrebin and Poole 1995). In the context of this thesis it can also be considered a form of emotional labor, because agents utilize it to perform suitable roles. Humor serves a myriad of purposes other than moderating stress: it is a strategic tool used for testing other group members, it promotes social solidarity, and moreover humor maybe directed at “out-group” members (Pogrebin and Poole 1995:184).

We always...yes, we always make fun of people, even for the little mistakes. **-Rosa**

Pogrebin and Pool (1995) describe it as the “laughter of inclusion” that affirms social boundaries and moral superiority. But more importantly, humor is a method of coping, normalizing tragic situations, and reinforcing group cohesion (Pogrebin and Poole 1995). The ability to normalize the otherwise abnormal experiences agents deal with is an important strategy. Joking about tragic events offers agents an emotional outlet without appearing weak; furthermore, it enables agents to collectively empathize with each other's feelings, reinforcing in-group bonds.

The following narratives note the prevalence and reasons for humor at work:

Yeah, law enforcement is known for what we call black humor. We'll take a traumatizing situation like a death or something horrible, and find something in it because if we sat there seriously and took it seriously, it would just eat us up...then just being such

male dominance you can only imagine the type of jokes that are said. **-Felipe**

But your level of normalcy changes and you laugh at some things that you probably shouldn't laugh at. But I think that's more of a coping mechanism. So you just kind of, "Well, whatever." You laugh about it and joke. **-Ricardo**

Once you go through a situation. Afterwards you talk about it, analyze it. Sometimes we think it was funny the way we handled certain things or we laugh about it. I mean that is probably a way we deal with humor. **-Josue**

I think when any situation that calls for it. I'm not a big, big person on joking around or whatever, but I think if the mood maybe is a little bit tense on whatever the case may be, maybe try to find some humor in it, or just every day, if we're out there in the back, processing for long hours, try to find humor in that as well. **-Tanya**

Agents witness the worst of humanity as well as heart breaking scenes more often than is normal<sup>25</sup> or healthy for any human being. Felipe recognizes that because of the frequency with which they are put in these situations they must develop a coping mechanism. If Felipe were to ruminate on these events he would be emotionally "eaten up." Humor helps make light of tragic events, making them easier to cope with, which in turn, makes it easier for agents to perform their roles. Ricardo, echoing Felipe's words, asserts that "your level of normalcy changes" denoting a great rift in what the general public experiences on a daily basis in relation to what the typical agent experiences. Ricardo's quote brings us back to the point that agents are tasked with enforcing gross inequality and witness human misery as a matter of course. Tanya and

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<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately this all depends on where you live. Normal for a child in Afghanistan is hardly what would be considered acceptable in America.

Josue are a little more reserved in their assessments on the use of humor at work, which could be related to the fact that they are the two more senior agents for whom the Border Patrol was a second career. Yet they acknowledge that humor is important in many contexts for keeping morale up.

Law enforcement display rules allow for humor in situations that would not be acceptable among the general public (Martin 1999). I attended a party where several of the attendees were Border Patrol agents.<sup>26</sup> I witnessed black humor first-hand when they joked about a body (dismembered) that was discovered after being hit by a train, a normally, at least in my estimation, gruesome scene. They were tasked of with tracking down body parts. They joked and laughed about the appearance of the head when it was located. As I winced, they laughed and assured me that you have to “get used” to that sort of thing. Black humor allows the participants a conduit to perform acceptable emotions within the display rules of the Border Patrol. It is important to point out that in this context at least, none of the agents were on the job, yet they still felt it necessary to engage in the same type of behavior.

Humor can have a dark-side as well. As it can be used to distance oneself from a situation, it can also be used to distance oneself from other groups of people through *laughter of exclusion*. Laughter of

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<sup>26</sup> Of the four agents, only one was a participant of this ethnography.

exclusion comes at the expense of the “other”, reinforcing existing boundaries and moral worth. Consider the following example<sup>27</sup>:

They joke about everything, especially like when people [migrants] run. They run from you and they [agents] just throw them in the mesquite to stop them. You know you’re right behind them and you just push them in the mesquite and you go and talk about it...

If you are unfamiliar with mesquite bushes they are covered in thick, tough thorns that can reach 3-4 inches in length. On several occasions I’ve had mesquite thorns go through the soles of sturdy hiking boots. In short, they hurt and the wounds, if untreated, can easily become infected. For an agent, the actions described will likely be viewed as a part of the job. In fact it is something to laugh about, but in reality it is a form of excessive force. Joking about excessive force normalizes its presence, allowing it to exist and become more openly accepted, at least tacitly among field agents.

A certain level of force, excessive or not, eventually becomes part of the occupational ideology, justified because the migrants are not submitting to the authority of the agent. As Heyman (2000) found when migrants manifest equal personhood, most officers find it both practically frustrating and morally inappropriate. Hence, excessive force becomes justified, and it becomes the migrant’s own fault. In other words, if he/she (migrant) had chosen to obey me (agent) then none of this would have happened.

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<sup>27</sup> I decided to keep the identity of the participant anonymous, even beyond the general anonymity offered to participants of the study, because of the sensitive nature of the topic.

Thus, black humor serves multiple purposes. It helps agents to cope with different traumatic or tragic situations, to express emotion in an appropriate manner, and it creates bonds between agents. But conversely it creates distance, or reinforces boundaries, between agents and migrants allowing space for “acceptable” excessive force, and a legally and morally inappropriate role performance.

As the narratives have illustrated, Border Patrol agents experience high levels of both physical and mental threat at work. BP agents must also perform their masculine roles consistently and consequently they internalize their emotional distress/pain. For these reasons BP agents are more susceptible to physical and mental health issues than the “average” middle-class occupation, culminating in a higher frequency of suicide than found among the general public. Agents mitigate these stresses through emotional labor, physical activity, and by engaging in black humor. Black humor gives agents an emotional outlet, it reinforces group cohesion, and it reinforces the boundaries between the “other”—or migrants.

## CHAPTER 6

### FROM MACRO TO MICRO: REPRODUCTION OF OPPRESSION IN ROLE PERFORMANCE

It is impossible to disentangle the goals and gains of capitalism from the enforcement and exploitation of migrants in America. Keeping migrants in a limbo of fear and uncertainty makes them vulnerable to exploitation, serving the baseline tenant of *laissez faire* capitalism—unchecked profits, low wages, low overhead, and unlimited growth. The Border Patrol's enforcement strategies are directly controlled by a pro-business federal government and by enforcing militarized immigration laws the BP controls the migrant labor pool (Hernández 2010). The exploitation of migrant labor is no longer the sole propriety of agribusiness, as small businesses and homeowners can all *benefit* from migrant labor. Furthermore, by keeping food prices low for consumers, Americans are more likely to turn a blind eye to the exploitation forced upon migrants who are the producers of our bounty.

The discourse of exploitation is the discourse of division, reinforcing the boundaries that maintain a hierarchical division between Americans and the rest of the world. Exploitation is sold as the cost of doing business, part of the natural hierarchy of world citizens, and essential to maintaining the American way of life. The duties of the agents I interviewed directly impact migrant exploitation and now more

and more their incarceration. Between 1985 and 2000, the percentage of non-citizens in federal prison increased from 15 to 29 percent, demonstrating the increasing importance of the criminal system in U.S. immigration control (Hernández 2010)<sup>28</sup>. The current enforcement strategy will increase the number of “criminal” migrants in the eyes of the public and continue lining the pockets of private prison groups who are benefiting from incarcerating migrants (CBS Los Angeles 2012; Sullivan 2010). According to Hernández (2010:232), the increasing number of undocumented immigrants joining African Americans in jails and prisons across the country is evidence of the link between “race” and inequity in the United States. By virtue of their duties the Mexican-American BP agents I interviewed are directly connected to the oppression of migrants. What will their increasing numbers mean for the agency and its culture?

A Hispanic majority in the Border Patrol is a novel situation for a federal law enforcement agency and many agents working in the El Paso sector are from El Paso and the surrounding areas. Fortunately for migrants, the BP agents involved with this thesis are not emotionless automatons. They experience empathy and intimately understand the economic needs that drive most of the migrants to try to cross into the United States without proper documentation. My research has shown that for the agents of this study feelings of empathy and understanding

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<sup>28</sup> 68% of the 55,000 foreign born individuals in prison were Mexican in 2011 (Perasso 2011).

are rooted in the deep ties border residents have with the “other side.” Whether they are transnational, familial, cultural, linguistic, economic, or social, these bonds are more tangible the closer you are to the border because of proximity in geographic and social space.

Study participants most frequently interact with Mexican migrants. For the most part, these interactions are routine and supposed “criminals” are apprehended, resulting in agents feeling they are contributing something worthwhile to their communities. However, situations arise that can elicit feelings of ambiguity and conflict. Most frequently conflicting emotions are felt when agents encounter migrants in dire situations, children, corpses, or when agents are required to separate families. Conflicting emotions are evident when Tanya arrested a woman that reminded her of her mother, when Abel finds dead migrants in the desert, when Ricardo must deport children back to “rat holes” in Mexico, or when Abel had to arrest a father in front of his children when a family had the unfortunate luck to get a flat tire near Abel’s area of responsibility. Conversely, agents often find themselves and their peers in dangerous situations coming face-to-face with a group of individuals intent on causing them harm, which reinforces masculine enforcer roles. But it is not all doom and gloom as agents often encounter migrants in trouble that they can save from impending harm or death, playing the role of the saving agent. Agents’ emotions or lack thereof are reflected in their role performances.



The role performances of the Mexican-American BP agents I interviewed are guided and informed by masculine display rules that pervade the BP's occupational culture. These rules are boundaries shaped by law enforcement ideology, public discourse(s), the setting, their own experiences, and the experiences of peers. Their roles as border guards require emotional labor and they perform roles suitable for each situation. Through surface- and deep-acting, they suppress or enhance feelings that conform to masculine ideals. But at other times they have to suppress feelings that may betray this ideal because of conflicting feelings of empathy. Performing masculine roles is related to hypervigilance or the need to view the world and others from a threat-based perspective, manifesting in an outward appearance and behavior, which asserts confidence and control during interactions with migrants (Gilmartin 2002). The reality of the field reinforces the need for hypervigilance as agents are under threat from increasingly violent narcotics traffickers. Regardless of the circumstances, BP agents engage in emotional labor in order to perform suitable roles for the situation, roles that conform to tacit and explicit boundaries.

On the border, American citizenship is constructed in relation to the Mexican "other" and this identity is closely tied to a white middle-class identity (Ortner 1998 & 2003) and is the most explicit divide between agents and migrants (Vila 2000 & 2005). By enforcing this divide, BP agents actively participate in the racialization of Mexican

migrants. The Border Patrol's discourse and enforcement strategies construct an essentialized migrant, and consequently, migrants fall into one of two categories: a) the poor, hard-working Mexican coming to either leech off American social welfare programs and to occupy a low wage job; versus b) the Mexican criminal who comes to sully America and her citizens (Heyman 2000, 2001, & 2002). These representations are reproduced in popular discourse and thus reinforce the essentialized constructions of migrants. In this way migrants are racialized in the United States by the enforcement of immigration laws.

For Mexican migrants, racialization occurs at a deeper level of experience, or what Nicholas De Genova (2005:8) describes as "illegality"—"the spatialized social condition that is linked to the way migrants are racialized as *illegal aliens* and thus Mexican in relation to Americans." According to Hernández (2010:10), Border Patrol agents "literally embody...[a] site of political disenfranchisement, economic inequity, and social suspicion with the United States." Border Patrol strategies drive migrants to cross the border in the most dangerous and treacherous regions of the American southwest leading to high numbers of migrant fatalities<sup>29</sup>. They often turn to *coyotes* to smuggle them across the border safely, but are often abandoned, sexually assaulted, and left to die. The migrant experience is thus one of survival followed by

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<sup>29</sup> In 2010, 252 migrants died trying to cross the border in Arizona. From: <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2010/1216/Border-deaths-for-illegal-immigrants-hit-record-high-in-Arizona-sector>.

oppression if they do make it successfully into the U.S. BP agents are aware of the great lengths migrants will go through to make it to the U.S. and they know when they arrest migrants it means that they are being relegated to time in prison, a life of abject poverty, hunger, exploitation or a violent death. These outcomes are all the more salient when BP agents must arrest children or families. The BP agents I interviewed are at least tacitly aware of the negative experiences migrants face when being deported and must find ways to cope with guilt and any moral conflict that may arise.

BP agents may or may not dwell on the repercussions of their actions, but they know the end results for those they arrest. This conflict is why emotional labor is so important to performing proper roles. First they must outwardly show no signs of empathy or remorse, lest fellow agents or potentially dangerous migrants consider them weak. But more importantly, they must convince themselves that what they are doing is morally right. Therefore, a legal rationalization is the most pervasive reason given to justify their duties—because a migrant broke the law they must be returned to Mexico or placed in jail. Even if the consequences are unjust and against agents' morality, they must develop a moral crutch, something to hold on to, keeping the conflicts and sadness they feel from consuming their everyday lives.

The Border Patrol will continue to be a growing factor in Mexico-U.S. relations, and the number of Hispanic agents will likely increase;

therefore, it is important to understand what the change in dynamics will mean for the agency, its agents, and the migrants with whom they interact. Mexican-American BP agents bring a different set of values and emotional rules to the agency than do non-Hispanic agents, forged from generations of differential inclusion in the United States. This means that they will have an increasing role in how the Border Patrol is managed and what strategies they employ. One hopes that the bonds shared by agents from the border region and migrants will lead to greater mutual respect; and decreasing instances of death, excessive force, and acts of dehumanization.

However, as Hoschild's (1983) work with female airline attendants alluded to, after years of performing certain roles it is natural for one to start identifying with the role. In other words, performance changes one's worldview. The "front-stage" begins to blur with the "back-stage," and it gets more difficult to separate the two. Consider the performance of hypervigilance by agents while on duty; it builds cynicism and mistrust, and eventually individuals conform to the role they most often perform and eventually, where once there was emotional dissonance, now there is tacit acceptance, or even fervent belief. If agents were to hold on to reservations about their work, it would slowly eat at them mentally and emotionally. And maybe it does for some, as evidenced by the high number of suicides found among law enforcement officers (Weber 2010). Another indication of emotional conflict and stress are the divorce rates,

which are purportedly extremely high for Border Patrol agents. In this case, emotional labor can slowly stop becoming labor and become part of one's identity. Consequently, the long hours and frequent shift changes, coupled with the weight of emotional labor, may shift the burden of role performance to the home environment rather than the work environment.

Despite potential mental and health drawbacks, all of the agents I interviewed enjoy their job and are proud of their service to their country. BP agents believe that their service keeps America safe from terrorists and drugs, while mitigating the potential pitfalls of un-regulated migration, even when they understand they can only make a dent in the flow of drugs and migrants. Furthermore, not all experiences at work revolve around negative emotions, as agents enjoy playing the role of the rescuer, since it is an identity-affirming experience; however, their true motivation is the pursuit of the American Dream. It is unattainable for most people and growing more so every day, but it is a dream that has always been elusive for minorities. Growing up in the border region with few opportunities to advance economically, the proposition of making a good living with excellent benefits is too good to pass up. Mexican-American BP agents can provide a quality of life for their families that they themselves did not experience. Consequently, the job is not about subordinating migrants, it is about paying the bills and providing a good life for your family. Even so the unintended consequences of performing

a border guard role is reflected in the kind and quantity of emotional labor the participants of this study experience.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Introduction:

I just want to reiterate that anything said here during our interview is confidential and no one will have access to it but me. I will keep this information only for a few years and then it will be destroyed. If anything is printed or used in a publication it will be anonymous. The questions I am going to ask you are open ended meaning there is no right or wrong answer, I simply interested in your experiences and views. The beginning of the interview will cover some basic background information about you and your family, then I'll we'll move to questions about your work as a Border Patrol agent. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions you don't have to answer them and we can move on. If you have any questions for me during the interview please feel free to ask. Is there anything you would like to ask me before we begin?

#### **Part I. Background Information**

How old are you?

Are you married?

Do you have any children?

Where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Tell me about where you grew up? What was it like?

Where are your parents from?

How did they end up living where you were raised?

What did your parents do for a living?

Tell me about family life growing up.

Where did you go to High School?

What did you do after you graduated?

How did you feel about what you were doing before you joined the Border Patrol?

Were you ever in the military?

For how long? Did you serve abroad? How were you recruited?

Tell me how the military has influenced how you do your job.

How is the military different from the Border Patrol?

When did you join?

How long have you been an agent?

How did you become interested in the Border Patrol?

Did anyone encourage you to join? Anybody discourage you?

Describe what basic training was like for you.

What are the strategies do you learn for interacting with immigrants?

American citizens? Other agents?

Tell me about your first weeks on the job.

Can you tell me if you feel you've changed in any way since those first weeks?

What stations have you worked at?

Have you witnessed any major changes in the agency since you've been an agent?

Changes in policies toward undocumented immigrants?



Can you describe any significant way your life changed since you became a Border Patrol Agent?

Tell me about your work relationships with other agents?

Does it differ with males or females? Does it differ with agents from another race?

Do you speak Spanish to other agents of Mexican ancestry? With non-Hispanic agents?

Tell me about a typical interaction with an undocumented immigrant.

How does it differ when you deal with criminals?

How has the recent violence in Mexico affected how you do your job?

Has it changed the way you approach undocumented immigrants?

This is a question another Mexican American Border Patrol Agent told me I should ask, how do you respond to someone who tells you you're selling out your own people?

How does it make you feel? Why?

Have you lost contact with friends or noticed that your relationship has changed since you became a Border Patrol Agent?

Why do you think that is?

How do you feel the American public perceives what you do?

Have you ever had an experience where you feel someone questioned your "Americanness"?

How did that make you feel?

Tell me how your life changed since you became an agent.

Do you feel your personality has changed?

Tell me about the most memorable experience you've had as a Border Patrol Agent.

Do you ever feel guilty? Proud? Sad? Angry?

Can you tell me what you like most about your job.

Is there an experience that best describes your answer? How did it make you feel?

Can you tell me what you like least about your job.

Can you tell me about an experience that best describes your answer?  
How did it make you feel?

Tell me about the most difficult situation you have encountered at work.

How did it make you feel? Does an incident like this go home with you?

Tell me about a time you felt bad for arresting someone.

How did you feel? Why do you think that is?

Tell me about a time you felt fulfilled or happy at work.

Tell me about a time you felt depressed or saddened because of an event at work.

How did it make you feel? How do they train you to deal with witnessing a traumatic event?

Tell me about what the most stressful part of your job is.

Tell me about a time you felt angry on the job.

How did you deal with it?

Do you ever feel anxiety at work?

Does it ever carry over home?

Has this stress ever had a physical effect on you? Making you ill?

How has working as a Border Patrol Agent affected your relationships at home? With friends? Family?

How do you deal with or cope with stress?

Do you find yourself drinking more?

Do you ever have trouble sleeping because of traumatic events?

Are you or have you ever taken anti-depressants while working for the Border Patrol?

Is it common within the station?

How does the agency cope with emotional issues?

Do they offer any counseling services?

Tell me how have you think you have changed since you first joined the Border Patrol.

Emotionally? Outlook on life? Perception of immigrants?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW #2

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Introduction:

Thanks again for taking the time to meet with me. I appreciate your candor and experiences. Our first interview together focused more on the basics of your life and how you feel about your work. This second interview will be more in-depth and the questions may be tougher to answer. So don't hesitate to take a minute or two to formulate your answers. Remember that this is an open-ended interview and you are welcome to answer however you feel comfortable. There is no right or wrong answers. You are welcome to not answer any questions you may feel uncomfortable with and you can ask me anything you like. And again, this interview is confidential and anonymous. Are you ready to start? Do I have your permission to record this interview?

This question is out of curiosity since I know most people have an opinion on the matter. What are your feelings regarding the Mexican nationals that have come to live in El Paso due to the drug violence in Mexico?

What are the qualities and expectations of a successful agent?

How do you feel you measure up to them?

Why do you think this is?

Now that you have become an agent, do you perceive (interact with) citizens differently?

I have read and heard from other agents that you learn to distrust people that are not in law enforcement, because you learn to assume that most

people lie to you. First, do you feel this way? And if so do you regret your loss of trust for non-law enforcement individuals?

Are there common assumptions or stereotypes within the culture of the Border Patrol regarding undocumented immigrants?

Do you agree? Why do you think this is?

Have you ever put yourself in the shoes of a person that you are arresting? Why or why not? How does this make you feel?

Can you recall a situation that may have changed your perception of immigrants?

Do you treat male suspects differently from female suspects? Why?

Are there any unspoken rules that exist within the culture of the Border Patrol culture, which guide or restrict how you perform your job? E.g. it's commonly known among police officers that you always have other's back, or the Code of Silence.

Do you believe that your personal values and morals are in line with those you find within the culture of the Border Patrol? Why or why not?

Do you feel your Border Patrol agent identity is the same as your personal identity?

How does it differ? Why do you think this is?

How do you mentally prepare for work? What kind of mindset do you assume to go to work?

How do the different work shifts affect your overall attitude? How about different details? E.g. working a check point or in sitting on an X.

Do you ever feel you have to mask your true emotions and feelings at work? Or do you ever have to fake emotions at work? Can you give me an example? Why do you think you do this?

Do you ever feel like you have to "put on an act" to deal with people you encounter at work?

Superiors? Agents of the opposite gender? Suspects? Do you try to actually try to internalize these emotions?

Do you ever focus on one event or one feeling to motivate or prepare for stressful situations?

Do you have any techniques that you use to keep composed or calm in an aggravating or dangerous situation?

On the flipside how do you keep alert when you're doing something tedious or boring?

In what situations do you use humor at work? How does this help you deal with stress or cope with tragedy?

Have you ever encountered or found a dead body? How did it make you feel?

How do you deal with the death of a co-worker? How did it make you feel?

How do you feel about the shooting that took place last year near the bridge downtown?

Do you ever share your true feelings with fellow agents? In what context? Why or why not?

I'm sure you've heard about the agent who was fired from the Deming office, for presumably speaking his mind to fellow co-workers, who is now suing on the basis that his First Amendment Rights were violated. Allegedly, "Gonzales remarked that he believed that legalization of drugs would be the most effective way to end the violence. He also related to the other agent that, as a former dual U.S.-Mexican citizen, he understood the economic factors that drive migrants to cross the border without documentation to seek work." How do you feel about the agency terminating him? Do you feel this is fair? Why or why not?

Does this incident reflect on the culture of the Border Patrol? Do you feel you have to be inline 100% with the views held by the agency?

Do you ever feel burnt-out at the end of a shift? Why? How do you deal with burnout?

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# ***Curriculum Vitae***

## **Aaron W. Hockman**

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### **Education**

New Mexico State University: BA Anthropology, 2003

University of Nevada Las Vegas: Cultural Anthropology MA student

- 01/2008 to present
- 40 credit hours completed
- Graduation date 08/2012

### **Relevant Skills**

- Archaeological Site Inventories
- Archaeological Test Excavations
- Archaeological Data Recovery Excavations
- Regulatory National Register of Historic Places State, Forest, and BLM Forms and Class I Inventories
- Collections Management
- Data Management
- Enforced state and federal rules and regulations on a multi-million dollar oil/gas exploration project on protected wildlife habitat
- Experience as lead Archaeological/Environmental Monitor
- Determined eligibility of cultural resources and environmentally sensitive areas
- Supervised groups of three to twenty individuals
- Responsible for implementing efficient strategies for completing

- budgeted projects on time
- Maintained detailed daily progress logs
- Completed state mandated Cultural Resource Management forms for Texas, New Mexico, and Nevada including site narratives
- Processing field samples for testing
- Flotation
- Experienced in artifact analysis and accessioning
- GIS mapping

## **Professional Experience**

### ***Geo-Marine, Inc.***

***Tampa, FL***

*Project Archaeologist*

*09/15/2011 to present*

- Supervise cultural resources investigations throughout the Southeast
- Pedestrian survey, background research, evaluation and testing of archaeological sites, data recovery, and monitoring
- Write technical reports for federal and commercial clients

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic, Belle-Glade, Seminole  
*Counties:* Highlands and Polk, FL; Copiah and Rankin, MS

### ***HARC-Poinciana Terrace Group Home***

***Clearwater, FL***

*Direct Care Service*

*06/28/2011 to 09/01/2011*

- Provide assistance to group home members in becoming more self-sufficient and functioning members of society
- Medication Certified
- CPR, AED, and First Aid Certified
- Professional Crisis Management (PCM) Practitioner 2
- Behavioral Assistance Certified

### ***Geo-Marine, Inc.***

***El Paso, TX***

*09/2010 to 01/20/2011*

*Archaeological Tech*

- Excavated three rooms at the recently discovered Sacramento River Pueblo at the southern edge of the Lincoln National Forest
- Worked on a mitigation of three burned-rock midden sites with

associated pit house village located within El Paso Canyon in the southern foothills of the Sacramento Mountains, NM

- Collected samples for scientific testing and flotation processing
- Pedestrian survey, including artifact identification and site determination

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Paleo-Indian, Mogollon, Puebloan, Archaic

*Counties:* Otero, NM

***University of Nevada, Las Vegas***

***Las Vegas, NV***

*08/2008 to 12/2010*

*Graduate/Teaching Assistant*

- Co-taught Anthropology 101 class for three semesters
- Compiled and graded tests and class assignments
- Involved in different research projects for two professors compiling relevant literature reviews
- In-depth interviewing
- Qualitative Data Analysis
- Transcription
- Microfiche
- GIS mapping

***NewFields Environmental, Inc.***

***Las Vegas, NV***

*04/2010*

*Crew Member*

- Exploratory testing project at Duck Creek wetland located in Henderson, NV
- GIS map creation for report

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Paiute

*Counties:* Clark County, NV

***Geo-Marine, Inc.***

***El Paso, TX***

*6/22/2009 to 8/25/2009*

*Crew Chief*

- Managed TRU survey at the foothills of the Sacramento Mountains in Range 14
- Pueblo mitigation for the Army Corp of Engineers at the Columbus Pueblo (Mimbres) near the U.S./Mexico border
- Excavated one full room

- Collected field samples for scientific testing
- Site mapping
- GIS map creation for reports

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic, Mogollon, Mimbres-Mogollon, and historic settlements.

*Counties:* Otero, NM and Luna, NM.

**Geo-Marine, Inc.**

**El Paso, TX**

6/20/2008 to 8/15/2008

*Crew Chief*

- Managed TRU survey on Ft. Bliss Army Base in El Paso, TX.
- Supervised a crew of eight to ten archaeological techs on a 10,181 acre survey
- Completed New Mexico and Texas CRM forms
- Site identification and eligibility determination
- GIS map creation for reports
- Artifact identification, flotation processing, and artifact accessioning

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Mogollon, and historic ranch sites.

*Counties:* El Paso, TX and Otero, NM.

**NewFields Environmental Inc.,**

**Las Vegas, NV**

1/21/2008 to 6/10/2008

*Crew Member*

- Mitigation project for the Bureau of Reclamation excavating three rock shelters near Henderson, NV
- Worked in the lab and was responsible for artifact analysis and accessioning
- Field mapping and GIS map creation

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic, Paiute, Virgin Anasazi, and historic

*Counties:* Clark, NV

**TRC Inc.**

**El Paso, TX**

10/26/2007 to 1/17/2008

*Crew Chief*

- Managed mitigation project consisting of 16 prehistoric sites on Ft. Bliss Military Installation in El Paso, TX

- Excavated multiple hearths and opened several units on a small pit house village
- Responsible for field methodology including placement of units, operating transit station, excavation paper work, and recommending eligibility of sites to the NM SHPO.

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic and Mogollon  
*Counties:* El Paso, TX.

**Blanton & Associates, Inc.**

**Austin, TX**

*2/1/2007 to 10/25/2007*

*Crew Chief/Crew Member, Archaeological and Environmental Monitor*

- Temporary Lead Environmental/Archaeological Monitor for large section of Laguna Madre/BND Seismic Project
- Managed over 20 monitors placing them with several seismic crews on Federal and State protected wildlife refuges (Lower Rio Grande Wildlife Area & Laguna Atascosa)
- Collected daily hours and work logs
- Worked on all phases of wind farm projects in West Texas
- Responsibilities include pedestrian survey, shovel testing, trenching, site recording, and artifact analysis
- GIS maps creation
- Wetland delineation
- Aerial delineations of ecological zones.

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic, Coahuiltecan, Plains, Historic brick production sites and shipwrecks.

*Counties:* Bexar, Brazos, Cameron, Howard, and Travis, TX.

**Geo-Marine, Inc.**

**El Paso, TX**

*7/8/2005 to 1/30/2007*

*Crew Chief/Crew Member*

- Managed TRU survey with crew of 4 to 8 techs during pedestrian survey and site recording
- Identified and analyzed cultural resources materials
- Excavated several rooms at Pueblo Madera Quemado (LA 91220) on Ft. Bliss Military Installation
- Completed excavation forms, excavated a variety of room features, removed intact roof beam samples, and sketched pueblo room maps
- Responsibilities included survey, recording, shovel testing, mapping (Trimble hardware), in-field artifact analysis, and writing site narratives

- Flotation and processed samples,
- GIS map creation for reports
- Artifact accessioning

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Mogollon, Mogollon Pueblo, and historic ranch sites.

*Counties:* El Paso, Hudspeth, Starr, and Bexar, TX. Otero and Dona Ana, NM.

***Blanton & Associates, Inc.***

***Lakeway, TX***

*8/20/06 to 10/27/06*

*Crew Chief*

- Managed crew of 3 during shovel testing phase of a BND/Laguna Madre Seismic project along the South coast of Texas
- Completed shovel testing forms
- Artifact and site identification

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic, Coahuiltecan, Historic brick production sites and shipwrecks.

*Counties:* Cameron, TX.

***Westland Resources, Inc.***

***Tucson, AZ***

*6/30/2005 to 7/6/2005*

*Crew Member*

- Surveyed and recorded prehistoric and historic cultural sites in Navajo County, AZ.

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic, Apache, and historic ranch sites.

*Counties:* Navajo, AZ.

***Ecosystems Management, Inc.***

***Albuquerque, NM***

*8/1/2004 to 6/28/2005*

*Crew Chief/Crew Member*

- Archaeological tech on a 20,000+ acre survey on White Sands Missile Range, NM
- Located and identified Pueblo sites
- Managed crew of four and planned survey methodology in the Lincoln National Forest
- Archaeological tech on survey in the Gallina Mountains in northern New Mexico
- Responsibilities included survey, site recording, shovel testing,

mapping, and in-field artifact analysis.

*Cultural resources encountered:* Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Mogollon, Mogollon Pueblo, Gallina Pueblo, historic logging sites, and historic cold war era sites.

*Counties:* Dona Ana, Otero and Sandoval, NM.

***Human Systems Research***

***Las Cruces, NM***

*2/15/2004-7/30/2004*

*Crew Chief/Crew Member*

- Coordinated crew and planned survey methodology
- Responsibilities included compiling and composing technical documents related to survey contracts, assisted in report writing, survey, recording, sketch mapping, shovel testing, and in-field artifact analysis

*Cultural resources encountered:* Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Mogollon, Mogollon (Mimbres), Anasazi, historic Spanish ranching, historic logging sites, CCC work sites, and historic cold war era sites.

*Counties:* Dona Ana, Grant, Otero, and Sierra, NM.

***USDA, Lincoln National Forest***

***Alamogordo, NM***

*5/13/2002 to 8/10/2002*

*Archaeological Technician GS 4*

- Pedestrian survey
- Surveyed and recorded sites
- Responsibilities included writing LA forms and Lincoln National Forest Archaeological site forms, sketch mapping, plotting sites on topo maps, and site rehabilitation
- Map based navigation

*Cultural Resources Encountered:* Archaic, Mogollon, CCC work sites, and historic logging sites.

*Counties:* Chaves, Eddy, Lincoln, and Otero, NM.

**Key Projects**

**2010-2011**

**Sacramento River Pueblo Data Recovery Project in Otero County,**

**New Mexico – Geo-Marine Project 11013.01.020** – November 2010 to January 2011.

**Three Site Mitigation in Training Area 14 in Otero County, New Mexico – Geo-Marine Project 11013.00.021-** Data recovery at three archaeological sites in the Sacramento Mountains aside El Paso Canyon (LA 37157, 123504 and LA 163975). This included the excavation of multiple burned rock ring midden features and a Mesilla Phase pithouse and associated activity area.

**2009**

**Data Recovery Project at Columbus Pueblo (LA 85774), A Southern Mimbres Occupation in Luna County, New Mexico**

**2008**

**Mitigation of 16 sites on MA 6 Fort Bliss, El Paso County, TX**

**2006-2007**

**Laguna Madre/BND Seismic Survey , Cameron County, Texas-** Environmental/Archaeological Monitor and Crew Chief

**2005**

**White Sands Missile Range Survey, EMI, Dona Ana and Otero Counties, New Mexico** - Survey of over 27,000 acres east of the White Sands Military Post. I was involved in the recording of 206 cultural resource sites and 1,838 isolated occurrences. The sites included prehistoric artifact scatters to residential complexes associated with the El Paso phase or Early to Late Pueblo Periods, historic sites, WWII sites, and Cold War era sites.

**Cuba Class III Inventory Project, EMI, Sandoval County, New Mexico** –Ecosystem Management, Inc. – Survey of over 300 Acres in Sandoval County just southeast of Cuba, New Mexico in the Hondo Project area. Identified over 15 cultural resource sites and recorded six of these and



12 isolated occurrences. The sites included Archaic Period lithic artifact scatters, Gallina Phase residential complexes with multiple room blocks and towers, and Pueblo IV Period residential sites.

## **Teaching Experience**

University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV): Spring 2009-Spring 2010

- Anthropology 101 (Dr. Jiemin Bao)
  - Guest lectured six class periods
  - Show videos once a week and led discussion
  - Created quiz and test questions
  - Graded exams
  - Managed grades
- Anthropology 101 (Dr. Liam Frink)
  - Guest lectured
  - Graded exams
- Anthropology 420 Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion
  - Showed videos
  - Graded exams

## **Academic Experience**

*Graduate Assistant*

- Dr. Jiemin Bao—Committee Chair and Advisor
  - Researched variety of topics relevant to Dr. Bao's work
    - Wrote summaries of research
  - Microfilm research
  - Edited journal articles
  - Searched for relevant books for proposed anthropology classes
  - Managed 101 classes
- Dr. Liam Frink
  - Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) research
  - Literature review
  - GIS map production

*Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Program, NMSU, Las Cruces, New Mexico 8/1/2002-12/12/2003*

### *McNair Scholar*

- Conducted research on how the Camino Real affected assimilation of Eastern Puebloan peoples during the Spanish Conquest
- Wrote and published senior thesis (May 2004). Mentor Dr. Edward Staski.

### *Minority Biomedical Research Support Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (MBRS-RISE)*

8/1/2000-7/31/2001

- Conducted research on the effects of water stress on the essential oil content of *Nepetia cataria*
- Experiment methodology and implementation
- Managed a greenhouse, helped graduate students with their projects, and also maintained outdoor irrigation systems. Mentor Dr. Rolston St. Hilaire.

### **Professional and Academic Organizations**

- American Anthropologist Association (AAA)
- Southwestern Anthropologist Association (SWAA)
- Florida Anthropological Society

### **Conference's & Publications**

- Presenting at 2009 Southwestern Anthropological Association Conference (SWAA) in Las Vegas—Panel: Identity Formation I: Multiple Belongings and Regulations
  - “White Skin, Brown Blood: Living In-between”
- Hockman, Aaron and Edward Staski. 2003. “El Camino Real: Effects on Eastern Puebloan Assimilation During the Spanish Conquest.” *Ronald E. McNair Journal*.
- Orally presented research at National McNair Conference at PENN State 2003.
- Presented posters at several conferences including *Botany 2000*, Albuquerque, NM.

## **Awards**

- GPSA Spring 2010 Grant
  - \$700
  - Declined because my project had not started
- GPSA Summer 2010 Grant
  - \$500
- Patricia A. Rocchio Memorial Scholarship 2010
  - \$1300

## **Relevant Skills and Accomplishments**

- 1 Certified through ESRI in Basics of ArcGIS 9.2
- 2 Experienced with a variety of Trimble and Garmin products
- 3 Bilingual (Spanish/English)
- 4 Dean's list, Crimson Scholar, McNair Scholar, and MBRS-RISE Scholar
- 5 Teaching
- 6 Class preparation
- 7 Interviewing
- 8 Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis
- 9 Project Management