

NorCal vs. SoCal: Culture Communication

A Senior Project Presented to
The Faculty of the Communication Studies Department
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor Arts
By
Jillian J. Smith

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Theory	3
Narrative and Literature Review	3
Research Overview and Rationale	8
Methodology	8
Analyzing Data	11
California History	11
California English	17
California in the Media	21
Cal Poly Students' Perceptions: What They Reveal	23
Conclusion	28
Works Cited	
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form	
Appendix B: Survey Questions	
Appendix C: Survey Results	

Nor Cal vs. So Cal: Culture as Communication

Introduction

California is a unique intersection, where diverse cultures collide and burst into colorful displays of identity. California is comprised of different regions populated with long-time and new citizens of many ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds. From sun-tanned movie stars to cow-milking farm owners, Silicon Valley computer nerds to Birkenstock-wearing tree huggers, many call California “home.”

As a California native, I am proud to call this beautiful state my home. I am even more proud of my roots as a “NorCal” resident from the eastern region of the San Francisco Bay Area and the City of Lafayette, to be exact. In my eyes, no other city can compare with my hometown. It became clear to me during my first few days as a freshman undergraduate student at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo that everyone else believed the same about their own hometown! With few immediate ways to express our individuality, many of us used our hometown to present and confirm our image of who we believed we were. We quickly divided ourselves into teams of “NorCal” students or “SoCal” students. We generally identified ourselves as being from Northern California when we hailed from any city or town north of San Luis Obispo, Kern or San Bernardino counties and “SoCal” if we claimed residence in any city or town to the south of, and including those counties. Race, gender, religious affiliation, high school GPA, and appearance were less important, it seemed, when it came to initiating relationships and finding similarities. We were fiercely defensive about our own identities, and critical of others. Furthermore, we had a set of stereotypical beliefs about others based on those origins. Negative aspects of our own identities were pointed out to us, and we became aware they existed. Weren’t we all from California? Who knew that there were so many perceived differences between Northern Californians and Southern Californians?

Theory

This report contains preliminary findings on the perceived and real cultures of northern and southern California. There are distinct cultural differences between Northern and Southern California. These differences contribute to how people living in these regions define themselves and others as Californians. These differences are communicated in interpersonal interactions, through media content, by institutions and within infrastructure. With this essay, I investigate and come to a fuller understanding of why California regions have distinct cultures, how these cultures communicate and what they communicate about, stereotypes and media representations of each region, and Cal Poly students' perceptions of these cultures. I also examine peoples' willingness to engage in inter-regional communication and relationships. I explore these differences through presenting and analyzing historical documents, scholarly journals on California English, past and current media, and the survey results of NorCal vs. SoCal: Culture as Communication, a qualitative and quantitative survey completed by over one hundred Cal Poly students.

Narrative and Literature Review

Culture and communication are one and the same. Culture is created and maintained through communication, while, inversely, communication is influenced by culture. Culture shapes our communication, but without communication there is no culture. According to Martin and Nakayama, "we communicate our identity to others, and we learn who we are through communication" (162). Our identity is based on how we see ourselves in relation to others and how others perceive us in relation to themselves. We try to guide the impression we make on others, but it is impossible for us to control others' perceptions completely. Identities form as we encounter identity conflicts and crises. People are compelled to maintain their identity, but

forced to rethink their beliefs, values, or norms upon encountering new and different ways of seeing or doing things.

A perfect example would be the first day of college. One is surrounded by thousands of new people from all different backgrounds in an entirely new place. Queue identity crisis. For likely the first time in many of these students' lives, their identity is not as closely matched to the others around them. Although many Cal Poly students fit into an upper middle-class white demographic, diversity is maintained through regional identification.

It was, as I drove up to the parking lot on move-in day for the dorms, that the Northern California versus Southern California distinction was made. Along with everyone's freshly applied Cal Poly car sticker, one could easily determine another's home town or region by looking at their car. If the large Nor*Cal or So*Cal stickers didn't give it away, there were stickers for Lake Tahoe or Mammoth, Giants or Dodgers, or a license plate holder displaying the city where the car was purchased. If you hadn't figured out every one's regional identity upon leaving the parking lot, you would soon find that every person's name and hometown were clearly listed on the door of their room. Besides a name and college major, one's hometown was the only other way for them to identify themselves. These displays communicated not just regional provenance, but, basically, a sense of who they were, how they behaved, and what they liked to do.

Regional identity, I argue, became a way of identifying one's self, or distinguishing oneself, from others in either positive or negative ways. If someone was from your home area, you could instantly identify with them. However, if someone was from an area different from yours, you tended to focus on your differences rather than on your similarities.

A sense of unfamiliarity leads students to rely on stereotypes to process this mass inflow of new acquaintances and cultures. Stereotypes are cognitive structures that represent widely held beliefs about a group of people. Stereotypes can allow people to make more informed decisions about people they do not know, but they also may lead to inaccurate opinions about others. According to Carroll, “if stereotypes are hardy, it is not because they contain a grain of truth but rather because they express and reflect the culture of those who espouse them” (4). In other words, stereotypes are a reflection of one’s own culture, rather than a truthful interpretation of another. These incorrect perceptions can have negative effects, including scapegoating, preventing identification, distress, and impaired performance of the stereotyped individual (Nelson 195).

Students chose to initiate or inhibit interpersonal interactions and communication based on the regional stereotypes they created or quickly learned from others. Intercultural communication scholars Martin and Nakayama explain how mistaken identities can create communication problems:

Sometimes we assume knowledge about another person’s identity, based on his or her membership in a particular cultural group. When we do so, we are ignoring the individual aspect. Taking a dialectical perspective can help us recognize and balance both the individual and the cultural aspects of another’s identity. This perspective can guide the ways that we communicate with that person (inconceivably with others). (209)

This is exactly the problem incoming freshman face: because we have little knowledge about the individual, we assign them an identity based on their cultural, in this case regional, group. The identity we assign others likely guides our communication with them.

According to my survey of Cal Poly students, students' perception of differences and difficulty relating to others was more prevalent than expected. When asked, "In general, do you believe that there are more similarities, or differences between Northern Californians and Southern Californians?" 41% of respondents felt there were more differences than similarities. I found this notable, considering Californians are relatively similar in culture when compared to people from the South, Midwest, or New England. When students were asked if they perceive that others judge them based on their home area, 55% responded yes. Over a quarter of students felt that it was harder to relate to students who weren't from their home area and an eighth reported they had initiated or failed to initiate a relationship based on a student's home area. Education on regional cultures within California would show students that regional similarity outnumbers regional differences.

According to cognitive consistency theory, the perception of greater similarity in attitude promotes social attraction (Byrne, London and Reeves 259). Studies have also found that perceived attitude similarity significantly increases one's initial attraction to communicate with another (Gutkin, Gridley and Wendt 153). Incoming students tend to recognize regional differences, hence attitude dissimilarity, between themselves and others in order to distinguish themselves and create an identity. If students' perceive dissimilarity, they are not initially attracted to communicating with one another. Greater understanding of California's regional similarities will likely promote intercultural communication among Cal Poly students.

It is important that we promote intercultural communication at Cal Poly because communication can constitute to learning about others' identities, and ultimately to creating our own identity. People need to learn about and experience the beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, and behavior of others in order to better understand themselves. Intercultural communication fosters relational learning; what we learn from a particular relationship generalizes to other contexts (Martin & Nakayama 383). Relationships thus present the opportunity to learn about others and how they do things, acquire knowledge about the world, break stereotypes, and acquire new skills. Self-development is important from a personal stand point; however, what is most important to Cal Poly is to prepare its students for success in the working world. For Cal Poly to fully prepare its students for life after college, the university needs to take steps to promote intercultural communication amongst its students.

According to a link posted on the Cal Poly website, the number one thing employers look for in new college graduates is the ability to work well in teams--especially with people different from themselves. If students fail to initiate communication based on perceived differences, they will not receive these benefits. It is important, then, that Cal Poly understand the importance of discussing, understanding, and ultimately accepting regional and cultural differences in order to enable more effective communication among its student population, and to best prepare them for life in the working world.

Providing students with information on the different regional cultures of California can potentially enable them to learn about the true identities and cultures of their fellow students rather than rely on stereotypes. Showcasing regional similarities as well as differences can encourage intercultural communication and all the benefits that come with it.

Research Overview and Rationale

Cal Poly strives to create a welcoming and accepting community for people of all different ethnicities, sexual orientations, and socio-economic statuses; however, there is not enough education or campus awareness concerning the acceptance and embrace of regional differences. There is, then, a need to study these regional differences in order to better understand how these differences are extended and perceived by others. This knowledge can be used to help people--especially the diverse Cal Poly campus body--better comprehend the actions, beliefs, and values of people from different regions of California. This knowledge will facilitate greater understanding of others and, subsequently, greater understanding of one's own identity and regional culture. This will hopefully encourage people of different regions to interact with one another and in turn make judgments based on the person's personality, rather than their regional identity.

Methodology

I used a variety of methods to better grasp the current climate on regional differences and their effect on social relationships. I conducted research on the Internet to study the history, language, demographics, and media representations of California. Since there is not a large amount of research on the topic, a portion of this research was derived from several non-academic online sources. There are few surveys or scientific findings on this topic. However, there are hundreds of blogs, message boards, and *YouTube* videos that are excellent sources of unbridled personal beliefs on the Northern California and Southern California cultures.

I began my research studying the history of California and how historical events shaped California culture. By tracking California back to the time of missions and gold rush, I was able to begin to piece together the origins of a California mentality that lives on in the culture today.

Immigration patterns, politics, and infrastructure also played a role in shaping California's culture through history.

I also explored the media's role in creating an image of the California lifestyle. Gold Rush propaganda, old Hollywood movies, surf music, California tourism commercials, and modern representations of California in the news and media were all taken into account when it came to creating a California identity.

Regional and state demographics gave me a quantitative look at California's racial, ethnic, political, and religious make up. A look at the lexicon and dialect of "California English" gave me insight on the regional language differences in California. The "California Grown" survey, a questionnaire filled out by 500 consumers in five California cities, will also serve as quantitative data concerning Californian's true beliefs and behaviors regarding stereotypical Californian activities. As I will show, this data both proves and disproves a number of commonly held California stereotypes.

Additionally, I briefly studied the Cal Poly Week of Welcome (WOW) and Cal Poly University Learning Objectives (ULO) sites in order to familiarize myself with Cal Poly and WOW goals pertaining to diversity and cultural learning. Resources from the WOW site, including PowerPoints and new student info, provided me with further basic information on incoming freshmen and a channel for implementation of my research.

The Week of Welcome program includes messaging on diversity and accepting differences amongst new students. Cal Poly, in fact, has created learning objectives pertaining to diversity to include diversity as a part of the educational experience. Cal Poly's statement of diversity reads:

For students preparing to embark upon work and life in the 21st century, a critical element of a well-rounded education is the ability to understand and to function effectively in a diverse and increasingly interdependent global society (. . .) it is in the compelling interest of Cal Poly, the state, and the nation to provide our students with an education that is rich with a diversity of ideas, perspectives, and experiences (“University Learning Objectives”).

My research and findings on differences and perceptions between students of different regional areas would be an excellent contribution and expansion to the WOW presentation. This information could also be useful to the university when it comes to developing programs to foster diversity education on campus.

The majority of my research focuses on the results of the “Norcal vs. Social: Culture as Communication” survey I conducted concerning students’ views towards different regional areas within California. Questions weighed students’ perceptions of their home regional area, the regional areas of others, and whether or not these perceptions affect their relationships. The responses I gathered from the survey provided information on regional identities and attitudes specific to Cal Poly and address whether these attitudes and stereotypes influenced students to be prejudiced when forming relationships. Qualitative research on California’ history, portrayal in the media, demographics, and language, in concordance with the quantitative data from the survey provided me a strong base of information on the stereotypical and true regional cultures within California. I hope to pass these findings on to Cal Poly in order to stimulate conversation regarding the regional diversity of Cal Poly students.

Analyzing Data

California History. Californians have always done things differently. The state's physical isolation, due to the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the east, and its southern deserts, caused early Native Americans to form cultures different than natives in other parts of the United States ("The First Peoples" 1). With no means of transportation to reach California and the Native's initial lack of resources to trade, the early Californian's made little contact with the outside world besides Mexico. It was not until 1821, when Mexico acquired and formed ranchos and missions throughout California to raise livestock, that Californians had something to attract outside traders. By 1825, ships from the east coast and Britain regularly came to CA to trade, bringing with them new ideas, resources, and, sadly, diseases. Between 1820 and 1846, the Native American population declined from 80,000 to only a few thousand due to diseases acquired from non-natives, abuse at ranchos and missions, and later a lack of income due to the dismantling of missions. The state's physical isolation was brought to an end with the establishment of the California trail in 1844. However it was not until the discovery of gold a few years later that it became heavily traveled.

The California Gold Rush, another key aspect of California's history, prompted thousands of immigrants to flock to California via the California trail and by sea; 80,000 alone in 1849. Immigrants from China, Hawaii, Mexico, and Chile were first to arrive followed by U.S. immigrants who arrived by boat six to seven months later ("The Discovery of Gold"). California was unique in population when compared to other states at the time. Besides New York, California was the only state with a diverse population comprised of immigrants from Europe, Asia, South America, and North America. Immense diversity amongst Californians early on made it thus necessary for early settlers to learn to cooperate with each other in order to survive in the unpredictable Wild West.

California's beginnings as a state with no government or infrastructure gave new settlers the opportunity to create an identity all their own. Unlike the settlement of the east coast, many migrated to California as independents rather than in groups. Other migrations, usually religion-based, settled with the goal to recreate life elsewhere. California settlers came with the motivation to get rich, then return back home to their families (Franzius). For the first time, the settlers were free from their families, rules, religions, and societal expectations. The lack of an established set of ideas forced settlers to be more open to change and new ways of seeing things. Californians continue to be the first to do many things. This "pioneering spirit", it can be argued, lives on through California's liberal politics, economic fads, technological innovations, and influential show business.

The official port of entry was San Francisco. Many tons of goods poured in through San Francisco ports in order to feed, cloth, and provide services to the thousands of gold miners and local burgeoning population. The population of San Francisco soared from about 200 in 1846 to 36,000 in 1852, then to 308,000 in 1860 (U.S. Census Bureau). Sacramento also became a large trading center and popular place for new settlers to take root based on its proximity to the American River and Gold Country. Sacramento and San Francisco are considered more historic cities than southern California cities based on their greater historic significance and early modernization. The age of the cities, then, may contribute to people's views that Northern Californians are more sophisticated and "old money" than the less sophisticated, "new money" Southern Californians.

California became the 31st state admitted to the United States on September 9, 1850. The creation of California's statehood shapes its unique culture. The California Constitution closely resembled the original U.S. constitution, but for three significant differences. The California

Constitution encouraged statewide education and established the University of California; slavery was outlawed, and women were given the right to own and control their own property (“Constitution of the State...”). California continues to value education, which is likely why California has the eighth largest economy in the world and houses fifty-three Fortune 500 companies’ headquarters (“Fortune”).

Another key piece of California history relates to the fact that hundreds of thousands of US citizens came West upon completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Railroad company owners decided to build a route through the northern states, rather than the southern states, based on the outcome of the civil war. This likely resulted in more northern influence than southern and may have contributed to the state’s liberal attitudes. It is also possible that, based on proximity, more people from the north settled in northern California and more people from the south settled in southern California; another possible cause of conservative leanings in areas of southern California. The extension of the transcontinental rail line to Los Angeles caused the population to sky rocket from 11,000 people in 1880, 100,000 people in 1900 (U.S. Census Bureau).

Southern California was a nice, comfortable place to live based on its warm climate, and became especially attractive to tourists who wanted to see the environmental beauty of California. In order to preserve its environmental beauty, California became one of the birthplaces of the conservation movement, led by John Muir and his Sierra Club in 1892. Californians continue to be very environmentally and eco conscious. The state is one of the leaders in the green movement and has lead the way in passing “green” initiatives. California was also the first state to regulate vehicle exhaust and air quality standards (“Key Events”).

In the early 1900's, Californians became leaders of the progressive movement as they attempted to mend corrupt local governments across the state. The state supported labor unions, granted women the right to vote, increased taxes, gave state aid to handicapped, and became the first state to enact an old-age pension law ("The Legacy..."). The state added further regulations after WWII including state-provided unemployment compensation, a 48 hour work week maximum for women, an apprentice law, and workplace safety rules ("Safety Timeline"). San Francisco was the main stage for the California labor movement and Los Angeles reluctantly followed suit. Although the state as a whole had liberal leanings, the San Francisco bay area usually leaned more left than parts of southern California. These historical foundations, I argue, are still very much a part of current perception and identity claims.

The 1930's saw the beginning of show business and growth of industry in Los Angeles. The diversity of climates in California enabled directors to shoot movie scenes that took place in the city, snow, desert, beach, and forest without having to travel far from the studio. During WWII, Los Angeles became a center of production of war materials, ammunition, and aircraft. An influx of immigrants from the South and Midwest paired with a boom in war production turned Los Angeles into a highly profitable area ("California and the Second..."). Real estate development replaced agriculture and oil as the leading industry in southern California (Starr 11 – 13). As the city of Los Angeles expanded to the east and towards the oceans, the city continued to build freeways to accommodate the growing population. The closure of the local street car system, in addition to the expansive freeway and bus systems, were and continue to be the likely cause of the city's pollution (Starr 124). Los Angeles continues to be a highly populated and profitable area: as of 2009, the greater Los Angeles area was estimated to have a population 17.8 million people and had the third largest metropolitan economy in the world

(U.S. Census Bureau). Los Angeles' large population defines the city's infrastructure, how and how often people interact with one another, what people talk about, and what activities people do.

The 1960's and 1970's were characterized by the counterculture movement headquartered in San Francisco. This, too, is an important element to understand California's cultures. The San Francisco Bay Area became a hot spot for hippies looking to create social change, embrace freedoms, explore passions, and be one with nature. The hippie movement was likely an outcome of the large student population from University of California, Stanford, and San Francisco campuses. During this time, California also saw the beginning of surf culture centered on southern California beaches. These easy living, "free-spirited" lifestyles were likely influenced by the comfortable climate and aesthetic beauty that hippies were looking to embrace. The hippie and surf movements also influenced the language of Northern Californians and Southern Californians, respectively, as referenced later in this report. As San Francisco became ever more liberal and known for its left-wing views, the city attracted a large lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual population.

Los Angeles went through an economic shift in the 1980's and 1990's as automobile and aerospace factories shut down or moved location. The entertainment business and agriculture continued to thrive and create new jobs; however the majority of these jobs provided low wages and were filled by easily exploitable immigrants (Lopez 1). Los Angeles has also changed from being the home of primarily white, American-born Protestants, to the home of mainly Latinos and immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau). The large Latino population has a major influence on Los Angeles culture. Aspects unique to Latino cultures are injected into Los Angeles culture via

music, language, fashion, art, and dance. Northern California has a smaller population of Latinos, therefore, the Northern California culture shows fewer Latino influences.

Northern California and Southern California's distinct histories play major roles in shaping their cultures. As the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles area grew into metropolitan areas separate from one another, each area formed a defining culture based on the area's differing populations and the context they found themselves in. Northern California's early ethnic diversity and settlers of northern origin likely resulted in more open-minded individuals interested in creating change. The region's reputation, specifically the Bay Area, as a left-wing, radical haven was enumerated with the arrival of the hippies and the resulting history-making anti-war movements. Based on historical events, people may be apt to judge Northern Californians as liberal, political, radical, hippies, tree huggers, earthy, or left-wing nuts. Individuals who identify as more conservative may avoid communication with Northern Californians, especially people from the Bay Area, based on this perception.

As home to more southern settlers, a large Latino and general population, beach culture, and the entertainment business, people from Southern California are likely more conservative, experience more Latino influences, enjoy ocean activities, and have some interest in the entertainment industry. Southern Californians are, thus, commonly perceived as beach bums or fake, materialistic, Hollywood wannabes. Individuals may hesitate to communicate with Southern Californians because they perceive them to have different values (money, looks), and feel looked down upon by Southern Californians. Beach bums may not be viewed as negatively, but people may neglect to communicate with them based on perceived lack of common interests (beach bums are only interested in surfing, the ocean, and so on). Each region's history paints a picture of the identity and culture of that area which may initiate, or inhibit communication.

California English. Another way to learn about a regional culture is by studying its language.

I formed a greater understanding of regional cultures within California by studying how people from different regions speak, and what they speak about. English speakers from the United States and Canada first came to California during the Gold Rush. Initially, there was no distinct speech pattern associated with California because it was a relatively new state. However, linguists began to notice defining characteristics of “California English” at the beginning of the twentieth century as well as a linguistic boundary between the northern and southern parts of the state (Bucholtz et. al 325).

California English has a specific phonological pattern or accent that distinguishes it from other dialects among English-speakers. A UC Berkeley study found that certain vowel pronunciations are specific to Californians, also known as vowel shifts (Eckert). Vowel shifts refer to the place in one’s mouth (front, back, top, bottom etcetera) where a vowel is pronounced. According to Eckert, the following vowel shifts appear in Californian’s speech.

In the speech of white people in California, as in many parts of the west, the vowels of *hock* and *hawk*, *cot* and *caught*, are pronounced the same—so *awesome* rhymes with *possum*. Also notable is the movement of the vowels in *boot* and *boat* (called back vowels because they are pronounced in the back of the mouth). These vowels all have a tendency to move forward in the mouth, so that the vowel in *dude* or *spoon* (as in *gag mewith a...*) sounds a little like the word *you*, or the vowel in *pure* or *cute*. Also, *boat* and *loan* often sound like *bewt* and *lewn*—or *eeeeuw*. Finally, the vowel in *but* and *cut* is also moving forward so that these words sound more like *bet* and *ket*.

The California vowel shift is still in the early stages but will continue to become more differentiated as an identifiable accent as time goes on. Therefore, as time goes on, California English will be distinguishable from other dialects, and, perhaps, dialects within the state will become more distinct. In the future, one may be able to immediately identify where a person is from in California based on their dialect.

Additionally, California's diverse ethnic populations each add a specific influence to California English. Spanish was the predominant language prior to the gold rush, and has been spoken continuously in California for the past 250 years (Bucholtz, et. al, 2007). The Spanish language has influenced California linguistics due to its continual usage and the large Latino population, the majority of which is bilingual, in California. Chicano English, a dialect of California English, is specific to Mexican-Americans. The prevalence of the Spanish language has led to the creation of the pseudo language "Spanglish" and has introduced a number of Spanish words to our vocabulary. For example, it would not be odd for Californians to incorporate words such as "adios", "hola", "amigo/a", "burrito", or "fiesta" into everyday conversation. Many people choose to learn Spanish as a second language in order to make communication easier with those who speak only Spanish.

Another dominant ethnic group is California's large black population, especially in intercity Los Angeles and Oakland. Black culture and language have also influenced California English by injecting it with grammar and terms associated with Ebonics and west coast gangster rap styles (Bucholtz et. al, 2007). San Francisco Bay Area based Hyphy music, which is almost exclusively performed by black artists, has popularized terms and phrases such as *thizz*, *scraper*, *ghost ride the whip*, *go dumb*, *stunner shades*, *sideshows*, and *yadidamean* amongst Northern California rap fans. Another group within California with a specific dialect are rural white

Californians, who immigrated from the Midwest, known as “Okies.” Okies have a midland dialect that is associated with different parts of California’s central valley (“Voices” 3). The Central Valley is, politically, more conservative and not as wealthy as coastal areas. Therefore, Okies are sometimes perceived as white trash or hicks by others based on their accent.

Differences in dialectics and more importantly lexicon are the most apparent distinctions between Northern California and Southern California linguistics. Both regions have words that are more commonly spoken and sometimes exclusively spoken in that region. Lexical and dialectical differences are likely due to the subculture of that region based on the regional history, demographics, and environment. In a 2007 study performed by professors at the University of California Santa Barbara, students were asked to “draw a boundary around each part of California where you believe people speak differently, and label the area”. Researchers found that certain labels were more commonly associated with specific regional areas within California. Participants applied the dialectical terms “English”, “standard”, and “normal” to northern California the greatest percentage of the time.

Despite participants’ perception of northern California’s “normal” dialect, 47.4 percent of all the slang and other lexical labels participants wrote was the term *hella*, a term that hails from Northern California (Bucholtz et al.). Researchers found that *hella* represents a major division of the north and south, especially to southern Californians. Southern Californians were also more likely to criticize users of “hella” with comments including, “hella is not a real word”, or “hella is probably the worst word ever” (Bucholtz et al.). The terms *Spanish*, *Spanglish*, and *broken* occurred most often in the San Diego region. The researchers noted that the term Spanish was more often applied to Southern California than the term English, even though English is the majority language. Slang labels that appeared most in the Los Angeles region were *like*, *grip*,

and *chill*. Terms most noted in San Diego were *dude*, and *bro/bra*. It is likely that participants associated the terms *chill*, *dude*, and *bro/bra* with southern California based on the region's prominent surf culture and laid back lifestyle. The association of the term *like* to Los Angeles is likely based on the popular perception that Los Angeles is home to "valley girls", made famous by a Frank and Moon Unit Zappa song and Nicholas Cage movie of the same name.

One of the most observable differences between California regional linguistics is how Californians talk about driving from place to place. Southern California's large population and lack of public transportation make it increasingly difficult to get from one place to the next, especially on the freeways. When talking about distances, one will usually say how long it takes to get there rather than how many miles must be traveled, presumably with the consideration that traffic is a better predictor of time than mileage. Inversely, Northern Californians talk about distances in miles because traffic is rarely an issue when it comes to driving on the freeways from one place to the next. When referring to freeways, Southern Californians say, "Take the 405 to the 5", placing the article "the" before the freeway name. Northern Californians omit the article and would instead say, "Take 24 to 680". It is also more common for southern Californians to refer to freeways by name rather than number. For example, the 405 is often called the San Diego freeway and Highway 1 is called "the PCH" or Pacific Coast Highway.

Differences in dialect and lexicon define the communication styles of regional areas. One of the best ways to learn about one's identity is to study how they talk and what they talk about. Therefore, in order to better understand a regional culture, it is important to examine their dialect and lexicon. This information can provide insight regarding what someone likes to do or talk about, what they value, and their ethnic background. The vowel shift and lexicon distinctive

to “California English” legitimize linguistic differences among California regions, however, many false perceptions of Californians and regional differences are reinforced by media outlets.

California in the Media. A fuller understanding of all this emerges when we take a look at media representations. The “golden state” is portrayed in the media as a laid-back paradise where dreams come true. There are many stereotypes about California and the people who live here, both true and false, that are reinforced by the media. California has always been a popular destination and hence the setting or subject of many movies, songs, television shows, advertisements, and news reports. As early as the Gold Rush, California was portrayed as the promised land by newspapers. Articles and headlines told of “inexhaustible mines” and men finding “stacks of yellow metal” (Image 3.1). Stories of endless riches were found to be empty claims upon the settlers’ arrival; however that did not prevent hundreds of thousands of people from taking life-threatening journeys to California. The “California Dream” was thus born. To this day, California continues to be portrayed in the media as a place of fame and fortune.

The California Travel and Tourism Commission’s “Visit California” campaign is a perfect stereotypical representation of California. Television advertisements showcase, and in one case mock, California stereotypes. The people in the video, most of which are celebrities, engage in stereotypical California activities like driving around in a convertible, walking around in a bikini, or spending the day at a winery. These videos also reinforce stereotypes of what different regions in California are like, and how the people that live in those regions act. For example, people from southern California all surf, hang out in their swimsuits, have bonfires on the beach, drive convertibles, or are celebrities. Northern Californians all snowboard in Tahoe, own a winery, love camping and kayaking, and go on bike rides across the Golden Gate Bridge.

Depictions of California in music and film further reinforce these stereotypes.

California's surf culture became popularized as surf rock band The Beach Boys grew in popularity. Feel good songs about "Surfin' Safaris," "California Girls," and "Good Vibrations" shaped perceptions of Southern California as presenting a laid-back atmosphere full of beautiful girls and long days of surfing. Films such as "The Endless Summer" and "Big Wednesday" also created the idyllic scenes of Southern California life on the beach.

More recent depictions of southern California culture in the media are popular MTV shows Laguna Beach and The Hills. Both shows are reality-based and center on the lives of teenagers and young adults in Orange County and the Los Angeles Hills. Laguna Beach shows real, perfectly coifed teens engaging in everyday activities in beautiful Laguna Beach: lounging by the pools of their multi-million dollar houses, shopping at expensive stores, having bonfires on the beach, and driving their BMW convertibles down the Pacific Coast Highway. The O.C., a scripted show about a family in Newport Beach, created a similar picture of Orange County as a wealthy enclave populated by beautiful people who appear to have perfect lives. The Hills is a spin-off reality show of Laguna Beach and features four young women living in Los Angeles. The opening credits show Los Angeles with clear blue skies, palm trees that sparkle, shots of the Hollywood sign, and close shots of the girls laughing at a fabulous Los Angeles club; all the meanwhile looking like movie stars. These shows portray Los Angeles, and nearby Orange County, as glamorous, yet also superficial, appearance obsessed, extravagant, and ignorant of the outside world.

Another perception of people from Los Angeles is the "valley girl" stereotype. Valley girls, or girls from the San Fernando Valley, are portrayed in the media as "airheads" who incessantly use the word "like" and speak in "uptalk", in other words, all sentences have a rising

intonation. *Valspeak* was popularized in the movies “Clueless” and “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure”. The entertainment industry’s home in Los Angeles forces the area into the media spotlight which makes it vulnerable to stereotypes.

Northern California by comparison, manages to avoid the frequent media portrayal in movies and television shows, yet San Francisco remains newsworthy for its liberal-minded politics and current and past radicalism. As discussed in the history portion on the report, San Francisco was a magnet of the counterculture movement in the mid twentieth century that was characterized by a number of protests, riots, and rallies for everything from civil rights, rights of workers, and gay rights. San Francisco was also home to the Beat Generation and a gathering place for hippies. San Francisco was also home of the “Summer of Love”, a large scale protest that took place in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. UC Berkeley has remained prominent in the press for draft-card burnings, the national guard’s occupation of the city in response to student civil disobedience, and, recently, for a number of protesters living in a tree in order to prevent campus from cutting it down to add athletic facilities. The term “San Francisco Values” is commonly used by conservative commentators in the media such as Bill O’Reilly and Newt Gingrich. The term is used pejoratively to refer to cultural values associated with San Francisco such as gay pride, the anti-war movement, secular values, pro-choice politics, and marijuana decriminalization.

Cal Poly Students’ Perceptions: What They Reveal. An extensive investigation of historical, linguistic, and popular trend differences between Northern and Southern California provided me with scientific differences between each area. I chose to supplement this information by asking of Cal Poly students their perceptions of different regional areas and how this affects their communication patterns. Based on my experience as an incoming freshman and

personal sense of regional superiority, I knew students would have interesting ideas and opinions to contribute. The survey NorCal v. SoCal: Culture as Communication garnered 116 responses during the three weeks it was available for students to take. Of the respondents, 51% identified themselves as northern Californians and 47% identified themselves as southern Californians. This distribution is representative of the Cal Poly student population which has a higher population of students from northern California than southern California (The Office). The remaining 2% identified as out-of-state or out of country residents.

Responses to the question “What are five words (beliefs, ideas, places, people, things, etc.) you would associate with Northern California?” included everything from *cultured* and *beautiful* to *smug* and *ignorant*. Many responses made reference to cities in Northern California such as San Francisco, Sacramento, San Jose or aspects of the environment like *trees*, *lakes*, *snow*, *trees that change color*, *redwoods*, *mountains*, *cold*, and *fog*. References made regarding attitude included *chill*, *cultured*, *liberal*, *open-minded*, *non-judgmental*, *open*, *friendly*, *ignorant*, and *bitter*. Other words associated with the culture of the San Francisco Bay Area included *hella*, *hyphy*, *hippies*, *marijuana*, *thizz*, and the names of sports teams. Overall, most responses were positive and made some reference to nature or Northern California slang.

When asked the same question about Southern California, responses tended to focus on the warm weather and the beach or ocean. Not as many responses made reference to specific cities, likely because of Los Angeles’ urban sprawl and less distinguishable city borders. Similar to Northern California, a lot of respondents noted that Southern California was *laid back*, *relaxed*, and *chill*. Other responses, unlike those associated with northern California were *fun*, *exciting*, *attractive*, *rich*, and *well dressed*. However, a fair number of responses were negative including the words *snobs*, *superficial*, *stuck up*, *arrogant*, *prissy*, *materialistic*, and *fake*.

Twenty-seven percent of the responses contained one of the aforementioned words. It seemed people had more negative things to say about Southern California than Northern California. This suggests that, in general, Los Angeles has more negative aspects than Northern California, or, that Northern California people feel a greater need than Southern Californians to put the other region down. A number of Southern Californian respondents felt that Northern Californians were more abrasive and competitive when it came to proving which region is better. When asked if there was a region the respondent perceived negatively, one replied, “Northern California because the students here brought an animosity that I did not know existed between ‘NorCal and SoCal’.” Respondents included *bitter*, *prideful*, and *smug* as some of the five things they associated with Northern California. There were no instances of these words when asked about southern California. This suggests that northern Californians need to validate, rather than feel confident in, their so-called superiority. A lack of confidence may be due to the popularity and luxurious representation of Los Angeles in the media: a huge number of associations made with Southern California related to Hollywood, plastic surgery, fame, blonde, rich, and celebrities. Both areas have their benefits, but Southern California’s fame, fortune, beaches, and celebrity appeal makes it, at times, irresistible – maybe even to Northern Californians. The need for superiority meshed with negative perceptions of Southern Californians could keep people from initially interacting with them and engaging in conversation.

Despite supposed tensions between Northern Californians and Southern Californians, the most negatively perceived areas in California were the Central Valley and Inland areas. Comments that accompanied the answer included disliking the weather, the conservative, close-minded nature of residents, ugly landscape, career-limiting, and that there was nothing to do there. This may be due to the differences in political identification from the coast (San Francisco

and Los Angeles are generally more liberal) to more inland areas (Sacramento, Fresno, and Riverside tend to be more conservative). There are also economic differences: coastal California is more industry based while inland areas tend to be more agriculture based. The negative response to inland areas based on clear environmental, political, and economic differences poses the question: why is there greater animosity between Northern and Southern Californians when there are in fact more perceived differences between coastal regions and inland regions? As mentioned, this could be caused by a need for superiority and lingering jealousy between two equally amazing places to live.

The second less assuming cause: sports teams. Surprisingly, a number of respondents mentioned disliking Northern Californians because they “think they are superior in every way” and tend to be more aggressive about their sports, especially Giants fans. Numerous responses regarding sports teams and fans suggest that sports teams play a crucial role in creating and driving intrastate rivalry. Thirty-five responses mentioned a specific sports team or their fans when discussing certain regions. If they were talking about their favorite team or fellow fans they would say it with pride, “DODGERS!!!” but if it was an opposing team’s fans, they were not so kind. For example, a fourth-year student from San Luis Obispo (Southern California) stated, “Norcal fans (of the Giants, for example) tend to be more aggressive about their sports affiliations than say Dodgers fans. There is definitely a negative connotation with Giants fans if you aren't a Giants fan (i.e. a large sense of egoism and exclusion)”. A first year from Vacaville (Northern California) had similar feelings, “[The region I judge more negatively than others is] SoCal because being from NorCal all my fav sports teams have their rivals in LA so I strongly dislike those teams and their fans.” A recent example of a regional rivalry that became personal was the brutal beating of Giants fan Bryan Stow at Dodger Stadium earlier this year (Jackson 1).

Following the attack, ESPN message boards went ablaze with biting comments between fans attacking Stow for “bringing [the attack] on himself” and making racist comments about Dodgers fans (Honolulu). Not only did the beating enrage Giants fans, but it flamed animosity and revealed hidden tensions between Northern Californians and Southern Californians.

Respondents also tended to perceive Los Angeles negatively: they complained about awful traffic, congestion, and lack of cleanliness. The cities of Oakland and Compton got equally bad wraps for being dangerous and “ghetto” – perceptions presumably influenced by media representations and news stories concerning these cities and their crime rates. By contrast, respondents tended to bash on Orange County for being stuck up, too conservative, and sheltered. These perceptions are likely due to constructed images of Orange County in the television shows Laguna Beach and The O.C., as well as Southern California’s historically conservative leanings.

When asked “How significant is your home town in shaping your identity?” 82% of respondents felt it was significant or very significant. This shows that students are aware of their regional identity and feel that their hometown or regional upbringing has significantly contributed to their identity. However, when asked how important it was for them to move back or “settle down” in their hometown, the majority were “neutral” followed by “somewhat important”. These responses suggest that people are not opposed to living elsewhere and experiencing different regional cultures. This also implies that the rivalry is a façade and that people are not as adamantly attached to their home area as they put on.

Despite the negative feedback received by all regions, almost everyone had something good to say about their hometown, from Bakersfield to Beverly Hills. When they had to turn the tables and say something negative about their hometown, most Southern Californians admitted

they hated the traffic while most Northern Californians said they wish they were closer to a warm beach. A few respondents reacted with open minds, free of judgment. They neglected to compliment or criticize either region and instead acknowledged their inability to make generalizations about an entire regional population. Encouraging students to be open to different cultures and avoid relying on stereotypes will help them break down the barriers between themselves and others, and will foster better, more effective, and caring communication.

Conclusion

From the research I have gathered, I can indeed conclude that there are distinct regional cultures and communication styles within California. Northern Californians and Southern Californians have historical differences, linguistic variations, and specific representations in the media. Despite these differences, Californians remain united by their pioneering spirit, relatively liberal politics, enjoyment of the environment, and overall love of their state and hometown, regardless of where they call home. When it comes to deciding which region in California reigns “most awesome”, there is animosity between Northern and Southern Californians. Both regions feel their home area is better, and for good reasons. Southern California has an amazing climate, endless entertainment, a glamour factor, and warm beaches. Northern California has a rich history, beautiful landscapes, diverse population, tight knit communities, and values that reflect a love of culture and knowledge. Members of both regions acknowledged their regional flaws as well as the assets of other regions. Interestingly enough, Northern and Southern Californians who lived in coastal areas, including the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego, seemed to hold similar values when it came to politics, environmental beauty, diversity, and family.

Rather than a North versus South dynamic, a coastal vs. inland divide seems more apparent. This is likely due to political differences (inland regions tend to be more conservative), economic (agricultural rather than industry based), and environmental (open land, less scenic, no beaches). An analysis of regional cultures comparing inland regions, such as the central valley and inland empire, to coastal regions, including San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and San Diego, would be an interesting topic for future studies. Another topic to delve further into is why Californians feel that the number of regional differences within California exceeded regional similarities. I am assuming this is because many of the respondents have not experienced cultures of regional areas outside of California. However, it would still be interesting to hear people's opinions, as they would likely further our understanding of such matters.

After five months of research, one-on-one interviews, endless discussions, and reading through hundreds of written survey responses, I have come to appreciate the incredible diversity in opinions, activities, values, beliefs, likes, and dislikes of the many regional populations within California. As a Northern Californian who adores her hometown and came to Cal Poly with negative opinions of a number of areas outside of the Bay, I felt I had a lot to learn about the people and places throughout the state. Having been to Southern California, specifically Orange County, numerous times throughout my childhood, I felt that I had Southern California "figured out." There were lots of freeways, strip malls, urban sprawl, and the people there valued appearance over everything else. When it came to the Central Valley, I had been there once for a basketball tournament and had no desire to go back. Since I have been at Cal Poly, I have met amazing people from all parts of the state. My roommate and best friend is a San Diego native, my three best friends from the dorms are from inland Orange County and Los Angeles, and my

boyfriend of over a year is from the Central Valley. They may be from areas different than mine, but once I got to know them on a personal level, it was clear to me that we had a lot in common and that regional stereotypes did not, and should not, seem to matter. Through these friendships, I have both learned and experienced firsthand why each of these people love the place they call home. For starters, San Diego has beautiful beaches with endless outdoor activities, Orange County has amazing shopping and beautiful weather, Los Angeles has endless entertainment so you're never bored, and the Valley has a peaceful, hometown feel to it complete with country music and weekends at the ranch. Rather than focusing on our differences, or on who is better than who, we should strive to look for the beauty in all areas of this beautiful state we call home. Stereotypes will always be there. However, if we travel and get to know the people from different regions, we will find that many stereotypes are untrue, or that, when it comes to relationships, they do not and should not matter. I love California, the people here, and the regional diversity that makes the state so unique. Although I plan on returning home to the Bay Area after graduation, I would be honored to call any city in California my home.

Works Cited

- Bucholtz, Mary, Nancy Bermudez, Victor Fung, Lisa Edwards, and Rosalva Vargas. "Hella Nor Cal or Totally So Cal?: The Perceptual Dialectology of California." Journal of English Linguistics. 35.4 (2007): 325–52.
- Byrne, Donn, Oliver London, and Keith Reeves. "The Effects of Physical Attractiveness, Sex, and Attitude Similarity on Interpersonal Attraction." Journal of Personality. 36.2 (1968): 259–71.
- “Cal Poly Statement of Diversity”. *Diversity - University Learning Objectives*. California Polytechnic State University. 2011. Web.
<<http://ulo.calpoly.edu/facultyandstaff/diversity.html#dloob>>.
- “California and the Second World War.” California Military History. The California State Military Museum.
- California Voter and Party Profile. Sept. 2010. Public Policy Institute of California.
- “Constitution of the State of California 1849.” California Secretary of State. California State Archives, 2001. Web. <<http://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/1849/full-text.htm>>.
- Jackson, Tony. “Dodgers, Giants Condemn Beating.” ESPN Conversations. 3 Apr. 2011.
- Eckert, Penelope, and Norma Mendoza-Denton. “Do You Speak American?” Public Broadcasting Service. National Endowment for the Humanities, 2005. Web.
<<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/californian/#add>>
- “Fortune 500 2011: California Companies.” Fortune on CnnMoney.com. 23 May 2011. Cable News Network. 2011.

Franzius, Andrea. "California Gold -- Migrating to California: Overland, around the Horn, and via Panama." *The Digital Scriptorium, Special Collections Library*. Duke University.

2007. Web. <<http://www.duke.edu/~agf2/history391/migration.html>>.

Gutkin, Terry B., Gregory C. Gridley, and Jeanette M. Wendt. "The Effect of Initial Attraction and Attitude Similarity-Dissimilarity on Interpersonal Attraction." *Cornell Journal of Social Relations*. 11.2 (1976): 153–160.

Hall, Edward T. *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Books, 1981.

Honolulu_pd_sargent. "Re: Giants, Dodgers Condemn Beating." *ESPN*. ESPN Internet Ventures, 4 Apr. 2011. Web. <<http://myespn.go.com/s/conversations/show/story/6287428>>.

Image 3.1. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Yale University.

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/three/63_01.htm>.

Jackson, Tony. "Conversations: Giants, Dodgers Condemn Beating." *ESPN*. ESPN Internet Ventures, 3 Apr. 2011. Web.

<<http://myespn.go.com/s/conversations/show/story/6287428>>.

"Key Events in the History of Air Quality in California." *Air Resources Board*. California Environmental Protection Agency. 13 Jan 2011. Web.

<<http://www.arb.ca.gov/html/brochure/history.htm>>.

Lopez, Elias S., and Alicia Bugarin. "The Manufacturing Sector and Job Training in California." *California Research Bureau*. Apr 2004. California State Library.

Martin, Judith N., and Thomas K. Nakayama. *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010.

Nelson, Todd D., ed. "The Unbearable Accuracy of Stereotypes in Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination." *Psychology Press*. 2009. 195–222.

Peter D. Hart Research Associates. "How should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy?" The Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Dec. 28 2006.

"Safety Timeline." *Occupational Health and Safety*. 1 Jan. 2007. Web.

<<http://ohsonline.com/articles/2007/01/01/safety-timeline.aspx>>.

"San Francisco County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." *State and County QuickFacts*.

U.S. Census Bureau, Nov. 2010. Web.

<<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/06075.html>>.

Starr, Kevin. Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963. Oxford University Press, 2009.

"The Legacy of Progressivism." *LearnCalifornia.org*. California Secretary of State. Web.

"The Discovery of Gold." *California History Collection*. The Library of Congress, 1998. Web.

<<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/cbhtml/cbgold.html>>.

"The First Peoples of California." *California History Collection*. The Library of Congress, 1998.

Web. <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/cbhtml/cbpeople.html>>.

The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis. *Fact Book*. Publication. California Polytechnic State University, Fall 2010. Web.

<http://www.ipa.calpoly.edu/publications_reports/factbook/fbfall10.pdf>.

Van Maanen, John. Tales of the Field. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Visit California - Misconceptions. Prod. California Travel and Tourism Commission. *YouTube*.

Visit California, 8 Oct. 2010. Web. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExuuFNFdd0k>>.

Visit California – Find Yourself Here. Prod. California Travel and Tourism Commission.

YouTube. Visit California, 12 Jan. 2008. Web. <<http://youtu.be/Md69zCJKD1c>>.

Visit California – Do you feel Lucky? Prod. California Travel and Tourism Commission.

YouTube. Visit California, 2 Mar. 2006. Web. < <http://youtu.be/l01KuG0VU5U>>.

“Voices from the Dust Bowl.” All Things Considered (NPR). 28 July 2000: 9 pages. Web.

<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3187034>>.

“Week of Welcome Program Participant Learning Outcomes.” *Week of Welcome Program*.

California Polytechnic State University. 2010. Web.

<studentlife.calpoly.edu/orientation/.../WOWparticipantLearningOutcomes.pdf>.

Wollan, Mali. “Farmers Lead a Bid to Create 2 Californias.” Visalia Journal. Mar 2009: 1 page.