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Strength-Based Interaction Rituals: The Impact of Sweatlodges and Danza Mexica on  
Mexican American Well-being

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Sociology

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Master of Arts in Sociology

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This study draws from twenty-six in-depth interviews to explore how Indigenous ceremonies shape the well-being of working-class Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. Through a combined strength-based and interaction ritual chains analysis, these interviews of non-participants, moderate- and high-level participants reveal how participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica exposes Mexican Americans to social and cultural strength-factors. These strengths include collective indigenous identities, social support systems, and micro rituals (instruments, songs, and incense) that help generate collective effervescence and enhance wellbeing. Previous research has found various health benefits associated with ethnic identity, social support, and forms of individual and collective healing resulting from participation in sweatlodges. Contributions in this study include: (1) micro rituals – traditional singing, drumming, and incense – utilized in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica, act as strength-factors that contribute to collective effervescence and well-being; and (2) the length of high emotional energy resulting from participation in sweatlodges and Danza may last a few days to a month based on the symbolism derived from rituals. This study adds to the literature on effectiveness of coping strategies for Mexican health, by identifying how Indigenous ceremonies act as strength-resources for coping with adversity.

## Introduction

Oh my gosh, absolutely amazing! I can't even describe how I felt. I just remember feeling almost like I was soaring. You know like a bird kind of just flows through air gliding, that's the way I felt. It felt like that's the way I was walking through life, soaring through life, at that moment immediately after, and for several days after.<sup>1</sup> – Karla

Karla, age 38, is a single mother and moderate-level participant who expressed how she felt immediately after participating in a sweatlodge ceremony. She interprets her emotional energy as feelings of “soaring...like a bird flows through air gliding,” which signifies an enhanced state of subjective well-being (SWB). Emotional energy (EE) refers to a kind of energy, fueled by emotions, that derive from participation in rituals (Collins 2005). Karla is one of many Mexican Americans from Los Angeles (LA) who participate in Indigenous ceremonies for reasons related to ethnic revitalization through reconnection to Indigenous culture, but also for purposes of healing and wellbeing. This study examines how participation in Indigenous ceremonies shapes the SWB of working-class Mexican Americans in LA. I combine the Strength-based approach<sup>2</sup> with Interaction Ritual Chains theory (Collins 2005), to analyze: how social and cultural strength-factors within sweatlodge and Mexica dance (also known as Danza Azteca/Mexica or just Danza) ceremonies enhance collective effervescence among ritual participants (see appendix for description of sweatlodges and Danza Mexica); and how collective effervescence is expressed as coping, strength, and healing as a form of well-being for participants. Collective effervescence refers to a process of intense shared experience, a condition of heightened mutual awareness and emotional stimulation derived from participation in rituals (Collins 2005). Research examining the effectiveness of coping strategies for Mexican American health, often excludes Indigenous cultural practices, which might contribute to an incomplete understanding. Although only a small, unknown, percentage of Mexican Americans participate in traditional indigenous ceremonies, it is relevant to examine the experiences of those who do participate, and how it shapes their SWB, to further understand the effectiveness of coping strategies and strength resources that exist within these communities. It is also relevant to examine the factors that discourage people from participating, to understand the inconsistency in coping strategies among Mexican Americans.

Borrowing from positive psychology and the sociology of well-being literature, I put forth the following definition to measure respondents' accounts of SWB resulting from participation in Indigenous ceremonies. SWB refers to how people experience and evaluate their life satisfaction favorably, the meaning and quality of their lives, their purpose, and their potential for growth – which can be based on feelings and experience of moods and emotions of happiness or sadness (Veenhoven 1984; Gaia 2005; Diener and Lucas 1999; Vitero 2004; Diener and Chan 2011). In Mexican American barrios in LA, at-risk, working-class, Latina/o youth may potentially be absorbed into risky behaviors such as drug use, gang involvement, and the criminal justice system which can contribute to additional accumulated stressors that affect their well-being (Pearlin 1989). Studies show community support groups can be a resource to assist at-risk youth in addressing social problems (Nettles 1991; Godina 2003). For example, faith-based organizations in LA can assist working-class Chicanos in gang exit by drawing on embodied forms of

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Karla, on August, 14, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>2</sup> The Strength-based approach, also known as Strength-based theory, is a social work theory and philosophy that views individuals and communities as resourceful and resilient in times of adversity. It focuses on identifying and enhancing peoples' resilient strengths and self-determination rather than focusing on their deficits.

masculinity such as ‘the family man’ and the ‘man of God’ (Flores 2016). Similarly, I propose Indigenous-based groups and organizations can provide Mexican Americans with access to strength-resources that are instrumental for coping with adversity and to enhance well-being.

### **Developing a ‘Strength-Resource’ Perspective of Indigenous Interaction Ritual Ceremonies**

In this section I develop a ‘strength-resource’ perspective of Indigenous ceremonies, by combining the Strength-based theory (often used in community resilience studies) with Collins’ (2005) IRC theory. In developing this perspective, I argue participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica exposes Mexican Americans to social and cultural ‘strength-factors’ – including Indigenous identities, social support systems, and micro rituals (traditional singing, drumming, and incense) – that generate collective effervescence and high EE as a form of Well-being.

#### *Interaction Ritual Chains Theory: Indigenous Healing Rituals, Sweatlodges, and Danza Mexica*

In IRC theory, Collins (2005), emphasizes Interaction Rituals (IRs) are constructed from a combination of ingredients, these include (1) group assembly, (2) barrier to outsiders, (3) mutual focus of attention, and (4) shared mood. This combination of ingredients also determines successful IRs that contribute to collective effervescence among the ritual group, and ‘successful ritual outcomes’ – including (a) group solidarity, (b) individual emotional energy, (c) symbols of social relationship, and (d) standards of morality (Collins 2005). Not all interaction rituals are successful. Successful IRs can transform negative emotions of sadness into positive emotions of happiness (Collins 2005). I place importance on ‘emotional energy’ (EE) as a type of energy stemming from long-lasting emotions that result from successful interaction rituals, to analyze how participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica contributes to ‘high’ EE, and how high EE is associated with participants’ SWB. In this study, ‘low’ EE is equated with emotions of ‘sadness’ – such as depression, disappointment, shame, alienation, marginality, weakness, fear, distrust, lack of initiative and other negative feelings toward self – which signify a ‘decrease’ in SWB. And ‘high’ EE is equated with emotions of ‘happiness’ – such as pride, trust, joy, exhilaration, elation, effervescence, vitality, enthusiasm, confidence, emotional strength, solidarity, high level of initiative, and other positive feelings toward self – which signify an ‘increase’ in SWB (Bericat 2014; Collins 2005). Within the combination of ingredients that construct the IR, the “mutual focus of attention and the shared mood, reinforce each other; as the ritual participants become...more aware of what each other is doing and feeling...they experience their shared emotion more intensely” (Collins 2005:48).

Collective effervescence is an outcome of successful interaction rituals (IRs), and thus a key component that can improve participants’ well-being because it is associated with positive emotions that help combat adversity. For instance, Durkheim (1965) describes ‘collective effervescence’ among religious ritual participants as follows, “when they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation...the initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance” (247). Here Durkheim describes collective effervescence as a sense of reaching an extraordinary degree of exaltation, or of being carried away by overwhelming emotions. Collins (2005) emphasizes ‘collective effervescence’ is associated with emotions of happiness, that results from successful IRs. Based on this perspective, I propose ‘collective effervescence’ derived from

participation in successful Indigenous ceremonies can also be a form of coping, strength, and healing that enhances the SWB of ritual participants. Indigenous healing rituals.

Pan-Indigenous spirituality has emerged throughout the past century through migration and diaspora, in which Indigenous practices and ceremonies have been widely adopted and utilized by groups as effective healing rituals and as symbols of shared collective identity and belonging in the world (Kirmayer, Simpson, Cargo 2003; DeLugan 2010). Traditional institutions “such as sweatlodges, fasts, powwows, the Sun Dance, and rituals of various kinds have been brought into the service of personal and collective healing and solidarity building” (Nagel 1996:6). The process of indigenous peoples reconnecting to, or recovering, their indigenous traditions and ceremonial practices is a form of ethnic renewal and collective healing (Kirmayer et al. 2003; Nagel 1996). Spirituality is a vital part of Latina/o identity which involves connection with cultural values, tradition, family, and indigenous healing practices that incorporate spiritual elements and ceremonial beliefs that combat emotional and physical illnesses (Harwood 1987; Godina 2003; Torres-Rivera, Wilbur, Phan, Maddux and Roberts-Wilbur 2004; Trunk 2000). Indigenous communities encourage the use of traditional medicine and healing mechanisms that bring balance, detoxify and purify the body, and clear the mind (Schiff and Moore 2006; Livingston 2010).

### *Sweatlodges/Tamazcals*

For thousands of years sweatlodges have been used by Native American and Indigenous tribes throughout the western hemisphere for various purposes (Lopatin 1960; Berger 1998; Lake-Thom 1991). Sweatlodges are a place where participants can address certain personal problems or needs by talking to Creator, the spirits, and each other in search of solutions (Lake-Thom 1991). The experience of sweatlodges has been described as a collective purification ceremony, sense of community, continuity with tradition, and a spiritual tool for dealing with stressors (Lake-Thom 1991; Livingston 2010). Studies examining the health benefits of sweatlodges have found participants reported increased levels of social support, physical wellbeing, and enhanced sense of connection to the mineral, animal, and human world (Gossage, Barton, Foster, Etsitty, Lone Tree, Leonard, May 2003), and decreased levels in violent behaviors, and incarceration recidivism among participants (Amnesty International 1992). Additional studies have found sweatlodge participants were more similar in spiritual and emotional dimensions after the ritual (Schiff and Moore 2006); sense of spirituality and strengthened relationships increased among group members from participating in a sweatlodge (Schiff and Pelech 2007). Other studies have found participation in group therapy within a sauna revealed participants reported greater relaxation, stress relief, catharsis, and a sense of accomplishment (Colmant and Merta 2000; Colmant, Eason, Winterowd, Jacobs, Cashel 2005), more revitalized, and less physically exhausted up to two-hours post-sweat (Colmant 2006). Another study relied on interviews to analyze non-Native American participants' accounts of transpersonal experiences within the sweatlodge, and found various accounts relating to 17 categories of transpersonal experiences including visions, feelings of connectedness, sympathetic resonance with earth, past-life experience, extreme joy and peace (Hibbard 2007).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This study relied on semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of thirty non-native participants of three different Native American sweatlodges, each lodge was based on different Native traditions. Ten participants were selected from each of three different sweatlodges from the regions of Montana (a Cree-based traditional lodge), Texas (Earth tribe, an eclectic, non-traditional lodge), and Arizona (Deer tribe, a Diné-based traditional lodge) (for a full list of transpersonal experiences reported in this study, see Hibbard 2007).

Most previous studies examining the beneficial effects of sweatlodge ceremonies have been measured quantitatively using survey questionnaires and scales and have focused on one single sweatlodge location or single group (Gossage et al. 2003; Amnesty International 1992; Schiff and Moore 2006; Schiff and Pelech 2007), do not emphasize cultural factors that may contribute to well-being or even the motives for participation, and have not included Mexican Americans in their analysis. Survey questionnaires may limit participant respondents from fully expressing the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual impact of the sweatlodge ceremony. Also, studies that combine group therapy and sweat therapy using a sauna as a proxy for examining the effectiveness of the sweatlodge (Colmant and Merta 2000; Colmant et al. 2005; Colmant 2006), however, limits the effectiveness of the cultural context of traditional sweatlodge ceremonies, ignoring micro rituals such as traditional Indigenous songs, instruments, incense, and language (Indigenous epistemologies) – as factors that may potentially contribute to collective effervescence. This study adds to the literature on effectiveness of sweatlodges on Mexican American health, by considering cultural factors that contribute to SWB.

### *Danza Mexica (Aztec dance)*

The practice of Danza Mexica as a Nahua cultural phenomenon is an evolving tradition from central Mexico, that since the 1600s has spread across centuries and cultures “as it connects with a search for cultural roots and power” (Myers 2014). Nahua ritual dance has historically survived since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, from Concheros (Nahua ritual dance infused with Catholic tradition and symbolism) to Danza Mexica (Rostas 1991; Garner 2009; Myers 2014). The ritual dance embodies circular movements that resemble life cycles, stories, and encoded history (Vento 1994; González Torres 1996). Danza group members usually make their own *traje* (regalia), learn about Indigenous history, culture, language, and social justice. In this study, Danza is analyzed as a prayer, to understand the meaning that participants give it, and the strengths and healing that it provides. Danza and Nahuatl language derive from Nahua traditions, and often symbolize ‘Indigenous roots’ more broadly for many Chicana/os, and sometimes for individuals who belong to different indigenous (non-Nahua) groups (Rostas 1991; Garner 2009; Myers 2014). Danza is often performed in political demonstrations and marches in defense for Chicano/Indigenous and immigrant rights (De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2013), as well as in Native American powwows and multicultural events throughout the U.S. (Vento 1994; Garner 2009).

Danza practitioners utilize traditional instruments and incense as part of micro rituals incorporated into the dance. Danzantes beat on a long wooden drum called a *huehuatl*, blow conch shells, wear *ayoyotes* (instrument made of seed pods tied onto a piece of buckskin that wraps around the ankles), use hand rattles called *sonajas*, and burn incense (*copal* or sage) that can produce an aroma-therapeutic healing effect (Vento 1994; Godina 2003; Myers 2014). These ceremonial objects manifest the four elements fire, earth, water, and air that are “integral to indigenous culture...invoking an interrelated cosmology” (Godina 2003:147). Danza Mexica has a transformative power that can enhance practitioners sense of strength, purpose, and personal renewal from the ‘energy’ that is released through the dance (Garner 2009; Myers 2014).

### *Strength-Based Theory: Indigenous identity and social support as social and cultural strengths*

The Strength-based approach, also known as Strength-based theory, is a social work theory and philosophy that views individuals and communities as resourceful and resilient in times of adversity. It focuses on identifying and enhancing peoples’ resilient strengths and self-



determination rather than focusing on their deficits. The strength-based perspective emphasizes groups' personal, cultural, and environmental capabilities and strengths that make the groups/communities resilient in times of adversity (Guo and Tsui 2010). The strengths perspective focuses on the body's restorative and resistant capabilities to resist disease (Ornstein and Sobel 1987; Saleebey 1996) and stressful life events. Culture plays a significant role in the concept of coping (Eckenrode 1991). Strengths of Native American youth such as "personal attributes, supportive relationships, and indigenous culture were found to be significant mechanisms of strength and resilience" (McMahon, Kenyon and Carter 2013:694). Cultural strength resources are utilized by individuals, families, and communities as protective factors to cope with stress related issues (Delgado 1998), such as familial conflict, economic hardship, and living in high risk neighborhoods. The strength-based approach is used as a lens to identify the social and cultural strengths that exist within Indigenous ceremonies analyzed in this study. Below I include how ethnic identity and social support are 'strength-factors' that can shape well-being.

### Indigenous identity as a strength-factor

During the Civil Rights Era of the 1960's and 1970's, some Mexican Americans inspired by the Chicano movement, embraced a Mexican identity that emphasized Indigenous roots (Rodriguez 1998). Being Indigenous "is the conscious experience of Native descent and lived culture historically situated in the Americas; of a historical memory related to awareness of a Native group membership; and of an ethos that recognizes exploitation and discrimination, past, present and future" (Gómez-Quíñones 2012:68-69). Indigenous "Chicana/o activists, informed by trans-border interactions, cultural practices, and long oral traditions challenged hegemonic constraints of Indigeneity constructed by Mexican and U.S. assimilationist projects; demonstrating varying types of Indigeneity that advocates Chicana/o self-determined Indigenous identity to a broader transnational Pan-Indigenous community" (Serrano Najera 2015:3). Reconnection to Indigeneity as part of the Chicana/o movement, led to the emergence of various Indigenous-based groups in Mexican communities throughout the Southwest and other parts of the U.S. (Barnes and Talamantez 2006; Hernández-Ávila 2005; Myers 2014).

Indigeneity is "reconstitution of identity by Chicana/os towards reversing the effects of colonialism on their communities, rationales, and philosophical perspectives, as well as standing in solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas in an ethics of decolonization" (Serrano Najera 2015:20-21). Some Mexican Americans rely on community advocacy groups from the Chicano movement to access information about indigenous culture (Griswold Del Castillo 1990; Godina 2003). Strengthening ethnic and "cultural identity, community integration and political empowerment can contribute to improving mental health in aboriginal peoples" (Kirmayer et al. 2003:15). Ethnic identity is a beneficial strength-factor in positively shaping mental health and well-being through enhanced coping ability, self-esteem, and optimism (French and Chavez 2010; Jackson, Wolven, and Aguilera 2013). Ethnic identity may enhance resiliency by reducing ethnicity-related stressors such as perceived discrimination and negative stereotypes (French and Chavez 2010). A study found Mexican families who shared collective indigenous identities, values, beliefs, and traditions reported increased levels of individual well-being (Jackson et al. 2013).<sup>4</sup> Limited information exists on how Indigenous identity shapes U.S. Latina/o well-being

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<sup>4</sup> With a focus on resilience, this in-depth qualitative study examined how twenty-four Multiethnic Mexican Americans experience stressors in their social environments related to their mixed identity, and the resilience strength factors they incorporate to cope with these stressors. Resilient strength-factors reported by respondents

within the context of Indigenous ceremonies. In this study, I analyze how ethnic identity is associated with respondents' connection to Indigenous culture and perceived Indigenous heritage, and how that connection contributes to SWB.

Indigenous ceremonies expose Mexican Americans to traditional images of indigenous identities and counter-narratives of colonialism, that are instrumental in deconstructing internalized stereotypes and stigmas of Latina/os and indigenous peoples (Rostas 2002) depicted throughout U.S. Media – such as the Mexican drug dealer and the illegal immigrant (Aguirre 2004), the savage and drunken Indian (Fenelon 2008). The media often portrays indigenous peoples as primitive, inferior people, which stigmatizes them and creates a negative ideology of indigeneity in society (Gonzales Casanova 1965; Fenelon 2008). This racial hierarchy ideology was introduced to Mexicans by the Spaniards who created racial categories in order of power “to maintain their privileged positions in colonial New Spain during the 1600s, placing ‘negro’ and ‘Indigenous’ at the bottom of the racial hierarchy (Simms 2008). This ideology has been reinforced throughout the 20th century by the Mestizaje project that started in Mexico, which aims to acculturate Indigenous Mexicans to accept a mixed-blood nationalist identity (Spanish-Indian) and to shed their Indigenous identity, language, and culture (de la Garza, 2010; Gutiérrez 1998; De la Cadena 2006; Ontiveros 2010). Mestizaje acknowledges indigenous roots, but tends to keep indigenous culture in the past and not address contemporary indigenous nations in Mexico. Mestizaje has the capability to transform aspects of Mexican race and ethnicity into a mixed-race mestizo ideology, and it is reinforced by the states institutions and the media, and consumed by the Mexican people as cultural reality of who they are (Chong 2008; Hipolito-Delgado 2014). Mestizo identity has also reinforced indigenous cultural roots of modern Mexican identity.

Danza Mexica “can claim a powerful space for reconstructing and reconfiguring the meaning of history and its relationship to ethnic identity” (Myers 2014:174). Danza Mexica connects Chicana/os to the north (U.S.) and the south (Mexico), and influences them to shed a state-imposed identity of Mestizaje and to adopt imagined, binational, collective Indigenous identities (Garner 2009; Rostas 1991; Gonzales Torres 1996; Myers 2014; Serrano Najera 2015). Ceremonial roles carried out by participants in sweatlodges and Danza assist in reshaping Mexican Americans to perceive themselves through an indigenous lens, as warriors, spiritual leaders, teachers, healers, dancers, and caretakers of the land (Rostas 2002). Sweatlodges and Danza provide a space where Indigenous “identities are created in stories, language, and narrative that have tremendous power to create community” (Weaver 1997:40).

### Social support as a strength-factor

Borrowing from Thoits (1995), social support is a “social fund from which people may draw when handling stressors...social support refers to the functions performed for the individual by significant others, such as family members, friends, and coworkers...which can provide instrumental, informational, and/or emotional assistance” (64). Social support is a form of strength and resiliency, an important basis for self-definition and identity formation, which provides individuals with supportive networks and culture-based resources to seek when needed (Delgado 1998). Social support is instrumental in coping with health issues associated with social and institutional discrimination (Freeman 1990; Leung, LaChapelle, Scinta, and Olvera 2014). Social

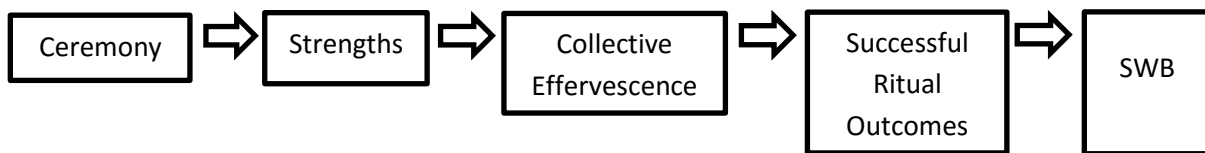
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in this study include social support systems, interpersonal and internal protective processes to moderate stressors associated with interethnic discrimination (Jackson et al. 2013).

support from family, friends, and religious institutions has also been shown to help when dealing with social and economic challenges (Leung et al. 2014; Delgado 1998). Latino natural support systems include “family and extended family, friends, spiritual leaders, healers, local community organizations and groups, community leaders, and religious institutions” (Delgado 1998:11). Limited information exists on how social support shapes U.S. Latina/o well-being within the context of Indigenous ceremonies. Collective participation in indigenous ceremonies can help strengthen social ties among people of different Indigenous groups, build community (DeLugan 2010) and enhance one’s sense of belonging through social support systems that emphasize cultural strengths, values, and solidarity. Danza Mexica within the Chicano community is a sign that “grants the certainty of ‘belonging’ to an ancestral lineage...to a race that becomes the Chicano-Aztec” (De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2013:229). I analyze Indigenous identity and social support as strength-factors within Indigenous ceremonies, to examine how they contribute to Mexican American SWB.

### Theoretical Synthesis: Strength-Based Interaction Ritual Chains Perspective (SIRC)

In this project, I introduce the Strength-based Interaction Ritual Chains (SIRC) perspective by combining the Strength-based approach with IRC theory, in order to help illuminate community well-being within Indigenous ceremonies. I am bringing these two theories together to analyze how participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica enhance the well-being of Mexican Americans. The strength-based approach is used as a lens to identify the social and cultural strengths that exist within Indigenous ceremonies analyzed in this study. I use IRC theory to evaluate the success of sweatlodges and Danza Mexica in increasing strength-based factors of participants. Specifically, SIRC is used to analyze: how social and cultural strength-factors within sweatlodges and Danza Mexica contributes to a state of collective effervescence; and how collective effervescence is interpreted by participants as coping, strength-building, and healing as a form of well-being. The SIRC perspective views Indigenous ceremonies as a resilient strength-resource that can be instrumental for Mexican Americans to combat symptoms associated with adversity that negatively affect their well-being. SIRC is based on the notion that SWB is enhanced through participation in successful IRs that transform negative emotions into positive emotions (Collins 2005). I propose participation in sweatlodges and Danza exposes Mexican Americans to ‘strength-factors’ including collective indigenous identities, social support systems, and micro rituals – traditional singing and drumming, and incense – that contribute to collective effervescence as a form of well-being. The embodied rituals that I examine involve the senses, sensory, and physical exertion. These strength-factors may be a function of the healing and empowerment process that occurs from participating in Indigenous ceremonies, and may also contribute to Mexican Americans’ continued participation in these IRs. As emotion transformers, sweatlodges and Danza, as IRs, can act as a strength-resource for Mexican Americans to combat adversity through forms of coping, strength-building, and healing. The diagram below illustrates the relationship between Indigenous ceremonies and SWB.



## Methodology: data and variable measures

This qualitative study consists of 26 in-depth interviews with adult, working-class Mexican Americans ages 18-59. The Interview Guide included a semi-structured questionnaire (with 83 core questions and 35 follow-up questions) addressing themes on: family and upbringing, ethnic and cultural identity, cultural practices, cultural exploration, intra group and intergroup relations, views on society, resilience and coping, and SWB. I focused on these themes to gather information on how indigenous community resources impact Latina/o identity formation, coping, and SWB. In-depth interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder in public places of their choosing, including coffee shops, public libraries, restaurants, and city parks. The average length of the interviews varied between 60 to 150 mins. Interviews were fully transcribed for analysis.

Nineteen interviews were conducted with participants, and seven with non-participants. Non-participants were selected through participant recommendations of friends, to examine why Indigenous ceremonies may not appeal to them and their well-being outcomes. Non-participants were demographically similar to participants, and some were close to participating in indigenous ceremonies but expressed factors that held them from attending. The sample consists of 12 women and 14 men that were selected based on three categories, non-participants (n=7), moderate-level participants (n=9), and high-level participants (n=10). Level of participation scales for sweatlodges are as follows: moderate-level practitioners participate in 1 to 2 sweatlodges per year or within the last year; high-level practitioners participate in 3 or more sweatlodges a year or within the last year. Level of participation scales for Danza Mexica are as follows: moderate-level practitioners participate in 2 dance practices monthly, and/or attend 1 ceremony every two months; high-level practitioners participate in 1 or more dance practices weekly, and/or attend 2 ceremonies monthly. Of the total 19 participants, fifteen have/ still participate in sweatlodges, ten have/still participate in Danza Mexica, and 6 have/still participate in both sweatlodge and Danza.

Table 1 – Participant selection (n=26)

<b>Level of Participation</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High-Level	5	5	10	38%
Moderate-Level	5	4	9	35%
Non-Participants	2	5	7	27%
<b>Total</b>	12	14	26	100%

This study focuses on working-class Mexican Americans because, as part of the lower end of the social stratification scale, low-income ethnic communities are more likely to be affected by adverse conditions and structural violence than higher class Mexican Americans (Menjívar and Abrego 2012), which contribute to stressful life conditions that can lead to more mental health problems for this population (Pearlin 1989; Aneshensel 1992; Brown 2003; Patler and Laster Pirtle 2017). Racial stratification produces stressors that lead to psychological and emotional distress as low EE, which can lead to mental health problems among ethnic minorities (Brown 2003; Williams et al. 2013). Psychological distress is associated with low socioeconomic status, stress, and physical health problems (Vega and Rumbaut 1991), and access to and the use of material and

social resources were found to be key factors in “maintaining socioeconomic differentials in mortality” (Phelan et al. 2004:280). I have fifteen years of experience working with Indigenous-based communities throughout California, and relied on snowball sampling (Coleman 1958) to recruit participants from Indigenous-based clubs/organizations<sup>5</sup> including Danza groups, sweatlodge circles, and drum circles in Los Angeles. These are often communities of practice where there is education of Indigenous history, culture, and social justice issues affecting communities of color, as well as solidarity, and preparation prior to and beyond the ceremonial experience. Participation in sweatlodges and Danza is common among Latino/a Indigenous-based groups in LA, but not all. These groups consist of self-identified Indigenous Latina/os, Afro-Latina/os, and Native Americans, but may also include biracial, multiracial, and non-Latina/o individuals. Chicana/o is a political identity that, for some, is also connected to indigeneity. This study reveals that not only Mexican Americans who identify as Chicana/o participate in Indigenous ceremonies. Respondents identified with Indigenous-based identities<sup>6</sup>, not primarily as Chicana/o.

### Measuring Subjective Well-being

SWB was measured through specific questions that asked participants what they felt at different points in time – during, immediately after, and a week later – from participation in sweatlodges and/or Danza Mexica. Open coding was used throughout each paragraph for all interviews during data analysis, to identify if and how respondents associated Indigenous identity, social support, singing and drumming, and incense with positive emotions, coping, and strength-building. Additionally, participants were asked to explain the reasons for their continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza, to identify whether continued participation was based on expectations for coping, strength-building, and healing as forms of well-being.

### **Strength-Based Interaction Ritual Chains (SIRC): Sweatlodges and Danza Mexica as Strength-Resources that Enhance Mexican American Subjective Well-being**

To understand how participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica enhances the SWB of Mexican Americans, it is necessary to identify social and cultural strength-factors that exist within these ceremonies. Strength-factors can have both direct and indirect influences on well-being, especially for individuals who are on the path of exploring or reconnecting to their indigenous roots. This path is sometimes referred to as walking the Red Road, which consists of individuals trying to learn and practice their cultural traditions, but also to serve as role models for others by teaching traditional knowledge and fulfilling responsibilities within their communities (Thompson, Cameron, and Fuller-Thomson 2013).

In the following sections I first layout the experiences of Mexican Americans during and immediately after their participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica, and the length of the effects a week later. The second section includes factors that contribute to Mexican Americans’

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<sup>5</sup> Some of these Indigenous-based groups and organizations include the Mexica Movement, Idle No More, Danza Cuauhtémoc, Harmony Keepers Warrior Society, Mujeres de Maiz, American Indian Movement, and many more.

<sup>6</sup> Indigenous identities that respondents identified with include: Xicana/o, Indigenous Chicana/o, Native, Native American, American Indian. Some respondents identified with more specific Indigenous identities based on regions in Mexico where their family is from, such as Mexica, Aztec/Azteca, Mayan, Huichol, Cora, Purépecha etc.

continued participation in these ceremonies as IRC. The third section briefly includes factors that discourage non-participants from participating in Indigenous ceremonies.

### **Experiences in Sweatlodges and Danza, During, Immediately After, and a Week Later**

To analyze respondents' experiences in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica, I focused on how Indigenous identity, social support systems, and micro rituals – including traditional singing, drumming, and incense – act as strength-factors that contribute to successful IRs and collective effervescence as a form of well-being.

#### **Participant experiences during sweatlodge and Danza Mexica**

To gather information on participants' experiences during ceremony, respondents were asked the following question: How do you feel during participation in sweatlodges and/or Danza Mexica, what is your experience like? Depending on the tradition(s) and person(s) who runs the sweatlodge, some allow participants to exit the lodge between rounds, to get a drink of water, and others encourage participants to stay in the lodge for the entire four rounds of the ceremony<sup>7</sup>. Several participants reported difficulty in their experiences during the beginning rounds of sweatlodges, because of the hot vapor that circulates from the pouring of water on pre-heated volcanic rocks placed in a center pit in the lodge. Olivia, a 39-year-old high-level Mexica dancer, expressed the difficulty that participants may experience in the lodge, she exemplified,

It could be overwhelming a lot of times. It's the heat, the singing, a lot of stuff can be going on at the same time. It could be challenging if you're not well prepared, and if you're new. At times, depending on how long the sweat is, you're thinking 'am I gonna make it'. But that's part of the journey you have to surpass... in the sense that you are here and there's an intention set for this sweatlodge. For some of us it's pushing the envelope, getting to that next phase and say 'I can do this, I'm still here'. You'll have like twenty something grandfather [heated] rocks, and it is very intense heat. Physically, it can take a toll on you if you're not prepared. Also, mentally, if you're going in there and not understanding what you're doing, it could take you to this place where you're in some kind of trouble.<sup>8</sup>

Olivia's account addressed some of the challenges that participants may experience in sweatlodge, and how for some people, it is about challenging themselves to surpass their limits and to meet their intentions for participating in sweatlodge. But what strength-factors assist participants in challenging themselves to surpass their limits? Miguel, a 24-year-old recent college graduate and high-level sweatlodge participant, highlighted how singing and drumming in the sweatlodge helps him focus and self-reflect, he recounted,

While in there, it's hot, breathing in all this hot steam, just a lot of time to reflect on what's going on with yourself. You'll begin to think about what or where you are now, what you need, what you don't need. It's like the singing and the drumming helps to focus more than just thinking to yourself any other time...where there [are] random distractions that are not

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<sup>7</sup> This information is based on my personal experiences as an active participant in six different sweatlodges/Temazcals in California, facilitated by individuals from different Indigenous tribes/nations.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Olivia, on August 28, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

at a constant beat like singing and drumming. Thinking to yourself in this way is not the same as any other time, it's something you have to experience.<sup>9</sup>

Miguel's account showed how sweatlodges can provide a space for people to self-reflect and evaluate their life satisfaction, and how singing and drumming can help participants maintain focus by minimizing outside distractions. Olivia's remarks further emphasized how traditional singing and drumming gives her strength to stay grounded in the lodge. Olivia said,

It's powerful because you're sitting here in your physical state trying to not faint [from the heat], trying not to give up. A lot of things are going through your mind and a lot of times the songs make you stronger. It all kind of combines, you're there in a physical state trying to stay positive, praying for different intentions, and the songs help a lot to sort of balance, and to not give up while you're in there. It's kind of like a motivation for me to keep on going. It's a very good feeling when you're singing in there, you're singing with your heart for all good intentions.<sup>10</sup>

Olivia's account exemplified how singing traditional songs can bring forth positive emotions such as strength, motivation, and balance to stay focused and keep on going in the lodge. But how do micro-rituals impact participants during Danza Mexica? Laura, a 27-year-old moderate-level Mexica dancer, mentioned how drumming gives her strength during Danza. Laura proclaimed,

Very tiring, sometimes it (Danza) goes for a really long time...At first it was hard because you're learning, but then once you get into it, it's fun. It makes me happy to see young people or kids doing it, and we're all celebrating and getting into our community. The drum helps you, you just kind of go with it. If you ever have done it (Dance) without the drums, it's a major difference. It's just not the same, you don't feel those vibrations from the drum.<sup>11</sup>

Laura's account demonstrated how practicing Danza can be challenging because one needs to develop stamina and learn dance steps, but the vibrations from the drumming gives her strength to continue and stay focused. This suggest there may be a certain connection to the *huehuetl* drum that enhances practitioners' EE in Danza. Olivia, Miguel, and Laura all illustrated how singing and drumming can act as strengths that create a mutual focus of attention that helps participants stay focused and grounded, by bringing forth feelings of vitality, enthusiasm, confidence, and emotional strength to overcome certain challenges during sweatlodges and Danza. By helping participants overcome challenges during ceremony, these micro rituals can ultimately contribute to successful ritual outcomes. This supports my argument that micro rituals – singing and drumming – act as strength-factors that participants are exposed to within Indigenous ceremonies, that can contribute to collective effervescence as a form of well-being.

#### Indigenous cultural practices as perceived connection to Indigenous heritage

To analyze how these micro rituals act as strengths, and how Indigenous identity is further developed through participation in sweatlodges and Mexica dance, participants were asked the following question: Do you feel a connection to Indigenous culture during participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica? Within these ceremonies, micro rituals such as traditional singing

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Miguel, on August 10, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Olivia, on August 28, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Laura, on August 27, 2016, at a public library in Los Angeles, CA.

and drumming, and incense help connect Mexican Americans to Indigenous culture. I argue this perceived connection to Indigenous culture and the meaning Mexican Americans give to it, based on their perceived Indigenous heritage, is one of the ways these micro rituals enhance high EE and give them strength. Eduardo, an 18-year-old moderate-level *danzante*, expressed how during *Danza* he feels an emotional connection to the drum, and to the past. Eduardo playfully reenacted,

When I would do *Danza* I would feel a connection to the drum, I would feel like boom-boom-boom! like my heart would race, I feel joy, like a strong energy going to my body. When I was a kid and I would hear the drums, I would be like 'wow, that's very beautiful' Sometimes I feel like I get these emotions [in *Danza*], or like images and thoughts like if I was a person from the past or like if I've done this before, or things like that.<sup>12</sup>

Eduardo's account demonstrated how the *huehuetl* drumming during *Danza* brings him joy and enhances high EE, but it also brings him thoughts and images of past lives and familiarity with the ritual dance as part of his Indigenous heritage. This is similar to Hibbard (2007) who found that sweatlodge practitioners reported having images of being in other lives while in the sweatlodge, but in this case, Eduardo reported these types of imagery within *Danza*. Fidel, a 59-year-old high-level sweatlodge participant, confirmed how traditional songs enhance his connection to Indigenous culture and his ancestors in sweatlodge. Fidel said, "it's the songs and the experience that you're having in there that is the connection; it's what our ancestors left for us to help us find our way, that's what I was taught".<sup>13</sup> Fidel's account exemplified how traditional songs and the experience within the lodge, can enhance some participants' sense of connection to Indigenous culture and their ancestors. These accounts reveal how Indigenous identity can act as an indirect and direct strength-factor that shapes how Mexican Americans negotiate their experiences within sweatlodges and *Danza*, based on their perceived connection, and the meaning they give, to Indigenous heritage. It is their perceptions of this ancestral connection through these practices that can enhance high EE as positive emotions that contribute to wellbeing.

The practice and smell of *copal* incense<sup>14</sup> can also be viewed by some Mexican Americans as a connection to Indigeneity because it has been used throughout Mesoamerica since pre-colonial times. Julie, a moderate-level Mexica dancer, articulated how the practice of *Danza* and *copal* incense enhances cultural pride, and it is also a form of resistance. Julie recalled,

I think cognitively I'm aware [of my Indigenous culture], physically smelling the *copal* incense. It's almost a feeling of something that is relatively not alive, but we're bringing it back to life and it is [like] striving for your traditions. When you do it, it's like a form of resistance, it's like you gotta keep it alive. Even psychologically we've been thinking about bringing back the Indigenous, the healing, and it all makes so much sense...it's around you and it makes you feel good, and makes you feel like you're doing something purposeful.<sup>15</sup>

Julie's remarks exemplified how the practice of *copal* incense and *Danza* can enhance participants' sense of cultural pride and connection to Indigenous culture, and how, for some, it is viewed as a

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Eduardo, on July 22, 2016, in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Fidel, on July 13, 2016, at his workplace in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>14</sup> Copal refers to tree sap resin from the copal tree. For centuries, copal has been used for several purposes including purification in religious ceremonies, and as treatment for various illnesses (Gigliarelli, Giulia, Judith X. Becerra, Massimo Curini and Maria C. Marcotullio 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Julie, on August 24, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.



form of resistance by striving to keep their traditions alive. This supports studies that state how preserving cultural traditions and healing are a focus of contemporary Indigenous movements, to combat adversity stemming from a long history of colonialism and cultural exclusion (Kirmayer et al. 2003; Mora, Zermeño, Rodriguez, and Almeida 2017). Julie's remarks also support Vasquez and Wetzel (2009) who state how Mexican Americans emphasize symbolic boundaries as a strategy of resistance to institutional racism, by invoking "roots, values, and cultural toolkit to describe their traditions and to account for their racial groups' social worth" (1569). Indigenous identities and worldviews can also be developed through Danza. For instance, Olivia recounted,

When I'm there [in Danza], we feel a connection to the elements, to the ancestors, to mother earth, to the wind, to the water, the fire, to the people who are dancing. You feel a connection to everything, to the animals, everything...Not only to our tribe, [but] to every tribe. That's something so universal that you might be dancing here and five-hundred miles someone else is dancing somewhere else in another tribe...so it's a connection. I feel connection not to a culture, but to elements, earth, and people at the time.<sup>16</sup>

To Olivia, connection to Indigenous culture means understanding the relationship with and having a connection to the elements and all life within the universe. These are worldviews shared by some Native/Indigenous peoples that can also be further developed through participation in Indigenous ceremonies, because practitioners usually learn the meaning and purpose of the interaction rituals and micro rituals they partake in. For instance, *Mitakuye Oyasín* is a Lakota precatory punctuation that translates as "all my relations, and includes all life forms, including human beings, animals, plants, earth beings, and spiritual beings that can be seen or imagined (Weaver 1997; De la Cadena 2010). When Mexican Americans participate in indigenous ceremonies they are stepping into a space where this form of circular (interconnected) thinking is encouraged and manifested as part of Indigenous identity and culture.

This section demonstrated how participation in sweatlodges and Danza exposes Mexican Americans to micro rituals such as traditional singing, drumming, and incense that enhance their sense of connection to Indigenous culture and their ancestors, as well as enhance cultural pride and sense of belonging. These feelings are also equated with moods and emotions of happiness as high EE, which can contribute to collective effervescence as a form of well-being. Traditional singing, drumming, and *copal* incense as micro rituals can create a mutual focus of attention and the shared mood within sweatlodges and Danza, which allows participants to "experience their shared emotion more intensely" (Collins 2005:48).

#### Strengthening social ties through collective participation in Indigenous ceremonies

To further analyze how social ties are strengthened and how social support is manifested within Indigenous ceremonies, participants were asked the following question: Do you feel a connection to other ritual participants during and after your participation in sweatlodge and/or Danza Mexica? Collective participation in indigenous ceremonies can help strengthen social ties, build community (DeLugan 2010) and enhance one's sense of belonging through social support systems that emphasize cultural strengths, values, and solidarity. Indigenous social support

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Olivia, on August 28, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

systems may include groups of like-minded individuals that share cultural values and are an important basis for self-definition and identity formation (Weaver 1997; Delgado 1998).

*Vulnerability and openness within sweatlodges and Danza Mexica*

Social support is a form of resiliency, that can assist individuals in dealing with adversity, including challenges posed by social and institutional discrimination (Delgado 1998; Leung et al. 2014). Ceremonial spaces allow for individuals to express themselves with less judgement from others, as a form of group therapy. Jimmy, age 21 and moderate-level sweatlodge participant said,

You make many different connections [in sweatlodge]; you relate in many ways [to others]. You are allowing yourself to be vulnerable in this space, and to be open in that way really helps you embrace one another. I guess you definitely feel it more in the moment, but when you come out of the ceremony you still feel the strong connection to the people around you. If you don't stay connected to these people, you lose a cultural connection. It all depends on your engagement to these people, to the community and individuals. A week later, I still feel the connection with people I attended these ceremonies with.<sup>17</sup>

Jimmy's remarks demonstrated how sweatlodges can provide a space of vulnerability where participants can openly express their concerns, worries, emotions, to release negative EE as a form of coping and group therapy. This can help strengthen social ties and expand Indigenous social networks with other ritual group members through social support systems. Danza groups can also provide social support and a space where participants can be vulnerable and open to conversations about personal and historical traumas. Jackie, a 30-year-old high-level Mexica dancer, stated,

It was really hard for me to share from a survivor's point of view in Latino queer spaces and Raza communities, because no one wanted to talk about rape, or date rape. I feel like Danza has a lot of intelligent people, and people were already having those conversations, so I gravitated and stuck with Danza because those conversations were there and they could talk about those things without it scaring people. I was following good histories.<sup>18</sup>

Jackie voiced how she felt comfortable talking about her experience as a survivor of sexual assault among her Danza group, and she mentions how the group was already having those conversations. Danza groups that focus on teaching Indigenous history and culture often incorporate the story of colonialism of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, which includes cultural genocide (Short 2010) and rape of land resources and Indigenous women by Europeans colonizers (Galeano 1997). Both Jimmy's and Jackie's accounts illustrated how sweatlodges and Danza groups can provide a space where participants can be vulnerable, even among complete strangers, which can help them release negative emotions, reduce stress, and strengthen ties among ritual groups members.

Peoples' vulnerability and openness in sweatlodges allows for other ritual group members to relate to similar struggles. Miguel recounted,

I remember [the sweat leader] asked if anybody had something to say, or request to speak, and then other [group members] will bring up something that isn't really talked about, and that just creates the right opportunity or right time to speak about it. You hear that a lot, and then everyone else's struggles you can identify with or not. You get a sense that you're

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Jimmy, on June 27, 2016, in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Jackie, on July 31, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

not the only one dealing with [certain] problems. I remember nothing but compassion. You make a lot of new connections. Usually it's not always the same people showing up, sometimes people come in from out of state or across the country.<sup>19</sup>

Similar to Miguel, Karla recalled, “not knowing who was speaking at the time because it's pitch black [in the sweatlodge], I came out of there feeling so connected to everybody whether I knew what their story was, what question they asked, or what story they shared”.<sup>20</sup> Miguel's and Karla's accounts showed how sweatlodges can sometimes provide a space where Mexican Americans can identify their personal problems or concerns with others, allowing them to receive compassion, and insights from group members of how to cope with what they are going through. Sweatlodges are a place where participants can address certain personal problems or needs by talking to Creator/God, to the spirits, and each other in search of solutions (Lake-Thom 1991). This can contribute to strengthened relationships with others based on what they share in the lodge or because they may be dealing with similar circumstances.

These accounts demonstrated how social relations can be strengthened within sweatlodge ceremonies. Participants may experience an increased sense of cultural connectivity with individuals who relate to them on different occasions and experiences. The darkness in sweatlodges create spaces that allow Mexican Americans to be vulnerable and to open-up to others about personal problems and concerns as a form coping. This supports studies that found levels of social support (Gossage et al. 2003; Schiff and Moore 2006) and strengthened relationships increased among group members from participating in sweatlodges (Schiff and Pelech 2007).

#### *Shared intense cultural experiences strengthen relationships*

Shared intense cultural experiences can help strengthen social relationships. For instance, those who fulfill their goals of participation in the sweatlodge, whether it is withstanding only one round or all four rounds, may feel a shared sense of accomplishment with other ritual group members. For instance, Mario stated,

It was real hot, dark and sweaty my first time [in sweatlodge]. The second time it felt a lot easier to stay in there and you could tell everyone was just happy to be there. Yea, [after the sweat] we felt like we had just done a battle or something, because everyone is fighting the urge to run out of the sweatlodge [because of the heat]. And when we all finally make it and greet each other outside, it's like a greeting of victory, we made it.<sup>21</sup>

Mario's account elucidated how social ties can develop from shared experiences such as surviving an intense ceremonial process. Collectively overcoming these challenges can enhance participants' sense of accomplishment and exhilaration as high EE that contributes to collective effervescence.

Collective participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica provides symbols of shared relationships, establishing a sense of cultural and emotional connectivity among the ritual group. For instance, Jessie expressed a sense of group coherence within his Danza group, and stated how the ancient dances are structured in a way as to redirect negative energies. Jessie recalled,

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Miguel, on August 10, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Karla, on August 14, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mario, on July 24, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

It felt like as a group we could do anything, because we all channeled the energy in one direction, that the dance was a microcosm of many things. That's what the Aztec dance symbolized; it wasn't just a dance. Some people saw it as entertainment, but it was so much more. It was also a way to train our hearts and our minds, so that if we work as a group we can do beautiful things if we're all moving in complementary directions. These are people that you develop relationships with, so we would just get together for whatever reason. It became greater than just a ceremony, where our families would get intermixed somehow. We'd end up going to the kid's birthday party or celebrating our birthdates or whatever.<sup>22</sup>

Jessie's account emphasized how Danza Mexica is movement of energies, where synchronized movements among group participants can channel negative or positive energy to certain directions within the ceremonial space. Through a sociological perspective, this shows how some Danza practitioners may view their participation in the ritual dance as a significant role, fulfilling a purpose in life, by helping to heal their communities through the cancellation (movement) of negative energy with positive energy, which can bring forth positive feelings toward self. This section showed how successful IRs "grow to differing levels of intensity, and result in the ritual outcomes of solidarity, symbolism, and individual emotional energy" (Collins 2005:47). Social support systems are a strength that contribute to collective effervescence within sweatlodges and Danza Mexica, which can enhance forms of well-being among ritual participants.

Positive health benefits as an outcome of participating in Indigenous ceremonies: Participant experiences immediately after participating in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica

This section highlights the positive health benefits as an outcome of participating in Indigenous ceremonies. To analyze the experiences of participants immediately after participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica, I focus on the social and cultural factors that contribute to successful IRs and collective effervescence. I also include the length of the emotional effects of the ritual outcome, as reported by participants. Analyzing the length of long-lasting EE post-ritual, can provide insight on the effectiveness of and how long these rituals help participants moderate negative emotions associated with adversity. Ritual participants were asked to express what their experiences were like immediately after sweatlodge. Some stated feeling slightly physically drained and relieved from the heat, but most participants also expressed their high EE as feelings of being reborn, cleansed, and detoxified. Ruben, a 29-year-old high-level sweatlodge participant, emphasized how most participants reported feeling immediately after sweatlodge. Ruben recounted,

It's like a metaphor, like a snake shedding its skin. If you're [in] there, you know that hot vapor is dissolving your current skin, it's destroying who you think you are. And when you're out, it's like you just shed that skin, and you're purified because you've put yourself through a physical trial. That's why they call it a purification ceremony. You could interpret it like the metaphor of a snake shedding its skin, or dissolving of ego. Like if ego was a mask that you wear over your face, then the sweat lodge melts that away and you see who you really are under the mask. There's different ways of seeing it, but it's all the same.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Jessie, on July 25, 2016, in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ruben, on June 19, 2016, in Los Angeles, CA.

The metaphor of a snake shedding its skin, or the dissolving of ego, was expressed in different ways by sweatlodge participants. For instance, Jimmy expressed feelings of renewal and stress-relief immediately after sweatlodge. Jimmy recalled,

I'd say immediately after [the sweat], [I felt] mostly renewed and relieved, very light as if I don't have all the weight of all the stress and everything that has gone up until that moment. You know, cleansed in a way. I believe it depends on the person and the amount of energy they put into the ceremony. For myself, there's been moments were for months I'm still thinking back to that moment [in sweatlodge], and it makes me feel empowered to continue a path where I'm trying to live in a good way. I think it's the energy in that ceremony, that you put into it and the energy that everybody around you is putting into it. It builds you up as an individual because you get a sense of community.<sup>24</sup>

Jimmy's account demonstrated how sweatlodges can be effective coping mechanisms for some Mexican Americans, by enhancing high EE that helps relieve stress. Jimmy's remarks also revealed how symbolism derived from interaction rituals can determine long-term EE for months after participation in sweatlodges. It is possible long-term EE can be instrumental in moderating systemic everyday stressors faced by Mexican Americans, by triggering positive thoughts and emotions that help empower individuals. Echoing Jimmy's remarks is Lucia, who recounted feeling light, reborn, and grateful immediately after participation in a Temazcal. Lucia said,

The Temazcal is the womb of mother Earth. When you come out of there, you are like being born again, and I felt that, like I just sort of floated out of there. The first thing I did was look up at the moon and expressed my gratitude. And the second thing I did was hug my sisters after we all came out. It was this feeling of light, of physically feeling lighter than my own body, and emotionally grateful for what we had just experienced. Usually, we then share food and be around each other for a couple of hours after ceremony. So, that connection is still strong. I feel like with the people that I hadn't known before the ceremony, whenever I do come across these people again, there is that recognition of closeness, [because] we've shared this experience together. Like with many ceremonies, the [sweat] ceremony is a way of igniting feelings and emotions from your being. And so, a week later you continue with some of those emotions that ignited during the ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

The accounts of Ruben, Jimmy, Lucia exemplified how sweatlodges and Danza can act as a strength-resource for some Mexican Americans, for purposes of healing and well-being. Successful IRs can contribute to emotions of happiness as high EE that contributes to collective effervescence and well-being. Immediately after participation in sweatlodge, Jimmy expressed his EE as feelings of reduced stress, elation, and vitality, and Lucia expressed her EE as feeling reborn, lighter than her own body, floating, and gratefulness. This supports studies that describe the experience of sweatlodges as a purification ceremony...and a spiritual tool for dealing with stressors (Lake-Thom 1991; Livingston 2010). The feelings that both Jimmy and Lucia reported are all equated with emotions of happiness that can enhance well-being (Triandis 2000; Gaia 2005; Bericat 2014; Collins 2005). Lucia's account also showed how after sweatlodge, ritual participants usually share a feast together, which can help strengthen social ties among them.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Jimmy, on June 27, 2016, in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Lucia, on July 13, 2016, in Los Angeles, CA.

Symbolism derived from successful IRs can determine long-term EE. In Danza ceremonies, symbolism can determine long-term EE even for spectators. For instance, Rodrigo, a 33-year-old non-dancer, voiced his experience as a spectator at a Danza ceremony. Rodrigo said,

Just being there [at the Danza ceremony] I escape from reality. I escape from the world that I'm in, and focus on their dancing and focus on the music of the drums, on the conch, everything is just so beautiful. After the dance, I feel very energized with positive energy. They dance for a purpose and that's what makes me feel good, feel re-energized positively. [A week later] there's still some kind of impact, because they dance for a purpose and that purpose you need to keep inside of you. It's like when you go to church and you feel good, and the next day you feel good. It's something you have to keep inside.<sup>26</sup>

Danza Mexica has a transformative power that can enhance practitioners sense of strength, purpose, and personal renewal from the 'energy' that is released through the dance (Garner 2009; Myers 2014). Rodrigo's account revealed how symbolism derived from Danza ceremonies can also enhance high EE and determine long-term emotions even for spectators. This shows how Danza ceremonies can also be a strength-resource that can enhance the well-being of Mexican American spectators. Marcos, a 35-year-old mailman and moderate-level danzante, further demonstrated how symbolism can determine long-term EE post-ritual. Marcos stated,

Even sometimes when I'm working [as a mailman], there are households that burn sage, and if they have their window open and I'm walking by it's like my head turns right away. Or if I hear something that sounds like a drum, it's like my ears go up. It's like a calling and I'm looking for it, like where is it. Or the smell, like where is that coming from, it draws me. It definitely draws me, the copal and sage, for sure. I live next to a high school and they have a band and they practice in the evening, and I can hear the drum, and from a distance the echoing of the drum reminds me so much of the Huehuetl.<sup>27</sup>

Marcos' account demonstrated how the smell of *copal*, sage, and the sound of a drums beating while he delivers mail, can trigger thoughts and emotions previously experienced in Danza. Micro rituals such as incense and drums can act as shared symbolism for some Mexican Americans, that emotionally bring them back to Danza and contribute to long-term EE post interaction ritual. EE "manifests itself both physically and psychologically, but its underlying basis is not as physical energy per se" (Collins 2005:118). Symbolism derived from successful IRs can have a cognitive component that can determine long-term EE (Collins 2005). The cognitive "side of this is that symbols, particularized memories as well as generalized ideas or emblems, have emotional energy attached to them" (Collins 2005:119). As Jimmy's, Lucia's, Rodrigo's and Marcos' accounts demonstrated, symbolism can be very effective in taking people back to that moment in sweatlodge or Danza, and can sometimes trigger thoughts and emotions previously experienced in ceremony. Danza Mexica is an embodiment of symbols incorporated "in a living experience, creating 'emotional transmutations', and above all granting a sense of being in the world" (De la Torres and Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2013:231). After participation in sweatlodges or Danza, certain "symbols come to mind, or appear in the external environment, and spark off propensities (positive or negative) for social action" (Collins 2005:119). It is possible this kind of symbolism contributes

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Rodrigo, on August 12, 2016, at a public park in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Marcos, on August 26, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

to Mexican Americans' continued participation in these ceremonies, because symbols may spark previously experienced thoughts and emotions that are instrumental for coping with adversity.

### **SIRC: Factors that Contribute to Continued Participation in Sweatlodges and Danza Mexica**

This section includes some of the pull-factors that contribute to Mexican Americans' continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica. Micro rituals such as singing, drumming, and incense can act as shared symbolism that can pull some Mexican Americans back to ceremony at the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual levels. These shared cultural symbols act as pulling factors because they trigger thoughts and EE that individuals experienced in previous sweatlodge and/or Danza Mexica ceremonies. Interviews in this study reveal Mexican Americans continue to participate in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica to maintain emotional balance, for social support, and to further expand their knowledge of Indigenous culture, and ethnic politics.

Maintaining emotional balance through continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica

Continued participation for many respondents was interpreted as instrumental for maintaining a balance of EE in their lives. For example, Fidel explained his reason for continued participation in sweatlodge is like a tune-up. He stated,

What you take out of the ceremony, you try and apply it in your life. So, you need to stay conscious. That's why you go [to the sweatlodge], you go to ground yourself, and it is sort of like to tune-up. And then after you come out, you're slowly going to start going out-of-tune, but that feeling that you had in there, that harmony, that balance, that grounding, you try and apply it in your life. Your life is a ceremony, and when it's time to go back in [the sweatlodge], it's because you're out-of-tune. Tune-up again, ground yourself.<sup>28</sup>

Resonating with Fidel's remarks is Olivia, who stated the sweatlodge helps recharge her energy like a battery, but also makes her sensitive for the next couple of days. She proclaimed,

You're full of energy [after sweatlodge]. It's like you re-energize, like you charge your battery...Not only do you come out with a lot of energy, but you also have to take in mind that you're gonna be in a place for the next week where you are gonna have this sensitivity around certain places. Wherever you step, it's like having this transcend sensibility. It's a good feeling, it's like you're vibrating full of energy. It's usually a week, where you're gonna be sensitive for the next few days...you will see the signs, spiritually, you'll get more animals coming around you. A lot of different things will manifest itself.<sup>29</sup>

Both Fidel's and Olivia's accounts demonstrated how high EE derived from successful IRs helps them maintain emotional balance in their lives as a form of well-being. For Fidel, continued participation in sweatlodge is like a tune-up, and for Olivia it is like re-charging her battery. These accounts showed how continued participation in sweatlodges can act as a strength-resource for Mexican Americans to stay grounded and balanced in their lives. Fidel's and Olivia's remarks

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Fidel, on July 13, 2016, at his workplace in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Olivia, on August 28, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

demonstrated how continued participation in sweatlodges are a way of continually coping with everyday stressors that contribute to low EE, like a drained battery.

For some Mexican Americans, continued participation in Danza is also a form of maintaining emotional balance in their lives. The recharge of high EE from successful IRs is instrumental for some participants to cope with adversity. For Xochitl, stress-relief and staying grounded are the reasons for her continued participation in Danza. Xochitl explained, “for me, it (Mexica dance) has always been a stress reliever and it also helps to ground me, and it reminds me why I'm going to school, to help better my community and to give back. It's something I've always enjoyed, one of our traditional arts I've always connected with”.<sup>30</sup> Xochitl's remarks demonstrated how continued participation in Danza is not only a stress reliever, but also a motivating strength-factor for some Mexican Americas to stay grounded and focused in their educational attainment and to better their communities.

These accounts demonstrated how continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica is instrumental for some Mexican Americans to stay grounded and maintain emotional balance in their lives. IRs are emotion transformers that help transform negative emotions into positive ones (Collins 2005). Continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica can act as a strength-resource for Mexican Americans to seek when in need of healing and strength-building. These ceremonies can help some individuals continually cope with adversity when needed, and is one of the reasons why individuals continue to participate. These accounts demonstrated how continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica shapes well-being.

#### *Strengthened relationships through continued participation in sweatlodges*

Mexican Americans also continue to participate in sweatlodges and Danza because of the social support systems that exist within these ceremonial spaces. Ritual group members can help stimulate participants high EE by enhancing their sense of belonging through social support and community-building. Social support can also be a pulling-factor for continued participation. Anthony expressed an appreciation for the darkness in the lodge as a space to self-reflect. He said,

It's those few moments where you get to be in complete darkness [in sweatlodge] and appreciate the darkness in a loving way...to appreciate that self-reflection that comes out of there. But also, the community, the [extended] family that we've been very blessed to have, who have been very supportive and loving, always just super generous. They become a chosen family, they do become an extension of another family. We're raising family together in those spaces, and that's something we all value. It's really great to be able to see all these kids sort of singing along, knowing the songs, it's like next level.<sup>31</sup>

Anthony's account showed how some Mexican Americans can experience a sense of community through continued participation with a chosen sweatlodge group, where other ritual group members can act as an extended family. Anthony voiced how some participants bring their family members to sweatlodges, where families can sometimes intermix and strengthen social ties. Anthony's remarks also showed how for some, these ceremonial spaces become part of participants' children's upbringing and socialization.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Xochitl, on August 18, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Anthony, on August 26, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.



Continued participation in Danza can also be based on the groups activism in helping its own community members. For instance, Julie emphasized, “I feel I’m doing something important and making a difference [through Danza]. I like everything else, but my initial drive is politics and reaching out to the community and educating the community, and letting them know what’s happening in the world. Because everybody is caught up in their daily [lives] and we forget what’s happening [around us]”.<sup>32</sup> Julie’s account exemplified how some Mexican Americans continue to participate in Danza Mexica as a form of social activism, to educate their communities about social and environmental issues that affect their well-being. This supports De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga (2013) who state Danza is often performed in political demonstrations and marches in defense for Chicano/Indigenous and immigrant rights. The concept of struggle can be viewed as a tool of social activism (Mora, Zermeño, Rodriguez, and Almeida 2017). From struggles of identity and cultural exclusion can emerge transformative power, such as actors engaging in resistance and de-colonial strategies to change those conditions (Menjívar and Abrego 2012; Smith 1999).

This section demonstrated how continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza, as SIRC, is instrumental for maintaining emotional balance as a form of well-being. Respondents accounts showed how maintaining emotional balance, social support, furthering one’s knowledge of Indigenous culture, and ethnic politics are pulling-factors that contribute to continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza. Continued participation is a way of continually seeking high EE from successful IRs that contributes collective effervescence (Collins 2005) and well-being.

### **Factors that Discourage Non-Participants from Participation in Indigenous Ceremonies**

There are several factors that can discourage Mexican Americans from participating in these ceremonies. One reason is due to cultural exclusion and unfamiliarity from not being exposed to or taught about Indigenous Mexican culture during upbringing or in school (Godina 2003). Some non-participants stated they did not feel comfortable participating in Indigenous ceremonies because they did not learn about Indigenous culture during their upbringing and did not feel a connection to it. Boundary policing by others is another factor that can discourage people from identifying as Indigenous and participating in Indigenous ceremonies. Some non-participants have been told by others they are not Indigenous, and that it is disrespectful to ‘actual’ Indigenous peoples to identify as such. I asked a few danzantes why they have not yet participated in sweatlodges at the time of the interviews, and some of them said it was a sense of unpreparedness, or even fear of the intense heat. These may be reasons that have discouraged them and other non-participants from participating in sweatlodges. Most of them said it was other sweatlodge participants, and non-participants, that warned them about the potential risks of the sweat, and of the importance of preparing oneself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually prior to entering the lodge. Furthermore, some Mexican Americans may be discouraged from participating in Indigenous practices because of stigmatization and marginalization of Indigenous people and cultures. Stigmatization and marginalization may be a reason why some people are discouraged from learning and practicing Indigenous culture, because it may seem unattractive.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Julie, on August 24, 2016, at a coffee shop in Los Angeles, CA.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrated how participation in sweatlodges and Danza, as IRs, enhances the SWB of working-class Mexican Americans. These interviews demonstrated how Indigenous ceremonies are a strength-resource for Mexican Americans, that can be instrumental for coping with adversity. Participation in these ceremonies exposes Mexican Americans to social and cultural factors that help increase participants' high EE, and contribute to collective effervescence as a form of well-being. Through participation in sweatlodges and Danza, Mexican Americans: 1) develop a greater sense of cultural pride and self-confidence related to their ethnic identity; 2) gain access to social support systems that help establish a sense of belonging and cultural competence; and 3) engage in rituals that contribute to collective effervescence and well-being.

Sweatlodges provide a space for people to self-reflect and evaluate their life satisfaction. Singing and drumming can act as strengths that create a mutual focus of attention that helps participants stay focused and grounded, by bringing forth feelings of vitality, enthusiasm, confidence, and emotional strength to overcome certain challenges during sweatlodges and Danza. Traditional singing and drumming ultimately contribute to successful IRs because they help participants overcome challenges during ceremony. Singing and drumming act as strength-factors within Indigenous ceremonies, that contribute to collective effervescence and well-being.

Participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica, and the micro rituals incorporated in these ceremonies, such as traditional singing, drumming, and incense, enhance Mexican Americans' sense of connection to Indigenous culture and their ancestors, as well as cultural pride, and sense of belonging. These feelings are equated with moods and emotions of happiness as high EE, that can contribute to collective effervescence and well-being. Some Mexican Americans also view the practice of Danza as a form of resistance and pride because it is a way of striving to keep their traditions alive despite colonization and cultural exclusion. The practice and smell of *copal* incense can also be viewed by some Mexican Americans as a connection to Indigeneity because it has been used throughout Mesoamerica since pre-colonial times. These interviews showed how traditional singing, drumming, and incense can create a mutual focus of attention and the shared mood within IRs, and allow participants to "experience their shared emotion more intensely" (Collins 2005:48).

This perceived connection to Indigenous culture and the meaning Mexican Americans give to it, based on their perceived Indigenous heritage, is one of the ways these micro rituals enhance high EE and give them strength. Indigenous identity can act as an indirect and direct strength-factor that shapes how Mexican Americans negotiate their experiences within sweatlodges and Danza, based on their perceived connection, and the meaning they give, to Indigenous heritage. It is their perceptions of this ancestral connection through these practices that can enhance high EE as positive emotions that enhance participants' wellbeing during ceremony.

Collective participation in indigenous ceremonies can help strengthen ties among the ritual group, and positively impact one's sense of belonging through social support systems that emphasize cultural strengths, values, and solidarity. Sweatlodges and Danza groups can provide a space of vulnerability, even among complete strangers, where participants can openly express their issues, worries, and concerns as a form of coping. This supports Lake-Thom (1991) who states sweatlodges are a place where participants can address certain personal problems or needs by talking to Creator/God, to the spirits, and each other in search of solutions. Sweatlodge participants may experience an increased sense of cultural connectivity with individuals who relate to them on

different occasions and experiences. This supports studies that found levels of social support (Gossage et al. 2003; Schiff and Moore 2006) and strengthened relationships increased among the ritual group members from participating in sweatlodges (Schiff and Pelech 2007).

Shared intense cultural experiences such as sweatlodges can help strengthen social ties, and enhance participants' sense of accomplishment and exhilaration, feelings that are equated with emotions of happiness as high EE that contributes to collective effervescence and well-being. These findings are in line with studies that examined group therapy within a sauna and revealed participants reported greater relaxation, stress relief, and a sense of accomplishment (Colmant and Merta 2000; Colmant et al. 2005). Collective participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica provides symbols of shared relationships, establishing a sense of cultural and emotional connectivity among the ritual group. Some danzantes may view their participation in Mexica dance as a significant role, fulfilling a purpose in life, by helping to heal their communities through the cancellation (movement) of negative energy with positive energy, which can bring forth positive feelings toward self as SWB. Successful IRs "grow to differing levels of intensity, and result in the ritual outcomes of solidarity, symbolism, and individual emotional energy" (Collins 2005:47).

Respondents' experiences immediately after participating in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica demonstrated how these interaction rituals can act as a strength-resource for some Mexican Americans to cope with adversity. Immediately after participation in sweatlodge, many participants expressed their high EE as feelings of reduced stress, elation, vitality, feeling reborn, cleansed, detoxified, lighter than their own body, and gratefulness. These feelings are all equated with emotions of happiness that can enhance well-being (Triandis 2000; Gaia 2005; Bericat 2014; Collins 2005). This supports studies that describe the experience of sweatlodges as a purification ceremony...and a spiritual tool for dealing with stressors (Lake-Thom 1991; Livingston 2010). EE "manifests itself both physically and psychologically, but its underlying basis is not as physical energy per se" (Collins 2005:118). For instance, micro rituals such as traditional singing and drumming, and incense can act as shared symbolism that can contribute to long-term EE post interaction rituals. Symbolism from IRs can determine long-term EE for weeks or even months after participation in ceremony. This suggests long-term EE can be instrumental in moderating everyday systemic stressors faced by Mexican Americans, by triggering positive thoughts and emotions that empower individuals during times of adversity. Symbolism from Danza ceremonies can enhance high EE and determine long-term emotions for both danzantes and for spectators. This reveals Danza, as a strength-resource, can also enhance the SWB of spectators (non-dancers).

Interviews revealed that Mexican Americans continue to participate in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica to maintain emotional balance in their lives, for social support, and to further expand their knowledge of Indigenous history, culture, and ethnic politics. Symbolism derived from successful IRs can have a cognitive component that can determine long-term EE (Collins 2005). Micro rituals such as singing, drumming, and incense can act as shared symbolism that can pull some Mexican Americans back to ceremony, because they can trigger thoughts and EE that individuals experienced in previous sweatlodge and/or Danza Mexica ceremonies. The cognitive "side of this is that symbols, particularized memories, and generalized ideas have EE attached to them" (Collins 2005:119). After participation in sweatlodges or Danza, certain "symbols come to mind, or appear in the external environment, and spark off propensities (positive or negative) for social action" (Collins 2005:119). In many Indigenous traditions, spirituality/religion and culture as symbolism are closely connected, and all aspects of life take on spiritual meaning (Harrison,

Wilson, Pine, Chan, and Buriel 1990; Michaelsen, 1983). Symbolism from successful IRs can contribute to continued participation in these ceremonies because it can spark previously experienced thoughts and emotions that are instrumental for coping with adversity.

A contribution of my model is consideration of the grievances and accumulated stressors, as low EE, that individuals bring to the IRs prior to participation. Studies show systemic stressors are a natural function of the various systems of stratification that exist in society – such as those based on race/ethnicity, social and economic class, gender, and age – that embody unequal access to resources and contribute to stressful life conditions and their emotional consequences often experienced by ordinary people (Pearlin 1989; Aneshensel 1992). Over the life course, stressors “typically surface as groups or constellations of stressors...that blend events with more durable strain” (Pearlin 1989:254). In addition, centuries of colonialism, cultural oppression and marginalization, have led to grief and high levels of mental health issues found in Indigenous communities (Weaver 1997; Kirmayer et al. 2003). Recovering Indigenous traditions and healing is a central focus of contemporary Indigenous movements (Kirmayer et al. 2003).

Continued participation in sweatlodges and Danza Mexica demonstrated how these interaction rituals can shape well-being over time. For many participants, continued participation in sweatlodge and Danza is like a tune-up, or like a re-charge of energy. Continued participation in Danza was also reported by some respondents as a motivating strength-factor that keeps them focused in their educational attainment, and as a form of activism to educate their communities about social and environmental issues that affect their well-being. This supports De la Torre and Gutiérrez Zúñiga (2013) who state Mexica dance is often performed in political demonstrations and marches in defense for Chicano/Indigenous and immigrant rights. Continued participation in these Indigenous ceremonies, as SIRC, is a way of continually seeking high EE that derives from successful IRs that lead to collective effervescence and well-being. Respondents in this study also reported having participated in other Indigenous ceremonies including healing/drum circles, ceremonial runs, equinox and winter solstice ceremonies, and peyote ceremonies – for purposes of healing, strength- and community-building, and continuity with tradition. Future research should examine how participation in these ceremonies impacts Mexican Americans’ health, to understand effective coping mechanisms that exist within Mexican communities in California.

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## **Appendix 1 – setting**

*Sweatlodge/Tamazcal*- have been used by Native American and Indigenous tribes throughout the western hemisphere for various purposes (Lopatin 1960; Lake-Thom 1991). Sweatlodges are also known as sweat baths or purification ceremonies. The forms, styles, and shapes of sweatlodges vary throughout different Native/Indigenous cultures (Lopatin 1960; Berger 1998). For instance, a Tamazcal is an ancient Mesoamerican type of sweatlodge, usually built from wood and earth as a permanent structure, used for religious and purification purposes (Lopatin 1960). A typical structure used by Pan-Indigenous groups in L.A. is the *Inipi*, a Lakota style sweatlodge which has become popular among Pan-Indigenous groups and even among non-Indians (Hibbard 2007). The *Inipi* structure often consists of a dozen or more “bent willow poles tied together to form a rough dome shape, and over these willows are placed skins or tarps such that the interior can be made completely dark...an opening to the West or East faces the fire pit” (Livingston 2010:617). Volcanic stones are pre-heated in an outside fire pit, and brought inside and placed in a center pit inside the lodge where water is then poured over them to create steam. Participants in the lodge sit in a circle around the center pit, where traditional rituals are performed along with song, prayer, and the use natural herbs and tree zap as incense for fragrance and purification (Lopatin 1960).

*Mexica Danza* – in Danza, every step, sequence, and movement has a significant meaning and purpose (which can vary across different groups), and it is “expressed through dance, song, and the drum, and the symbols of the four directions and the circle are central to the ritual” (Garner). Mexica dance groups often incorporate a military-like hierarchy among group members (Garner 2009; Myers 2014). Practitioners not only view traditional dance as having a spiritual impact, but these “rituals are considered necessary not just to maintain balance and harmony in the world but for the continuation of life itself” (Garner 2009:433-434). Mexica ritual dances resemble life cycles, stories, natural forces, and movements of the moon, and planets around the sun (González Torres 1996; Garner 2009). In Danza Mexica, there are various dances which have different meanings and purposes, such as, for example, the dance to honor the four directions, the dance of the deer, Sun, mother Earth, moon, etc. Members of these traditional dance groups are exposed to traditional ceremonies, values, philosophies, and histories that have been passed down for generations since the 1600s, from Concheros to Danza Mexica (Garner 2009).