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"Dancing On The Corpse's Ashes": Analyzing The Emotional Use Of Music And Genre By At The Drive In And How It Communicates Border Identity

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“DANCING ON THE CORPSE’S ASHES”: ANALYZING THE EMOTIONAL USE OF
MUSIC AND GENRE BY AT THE DRIVE IN AND HOW IT COMMUNICATES
BORDER IDENTITY

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MUSIC AND GENRE BY AT THE DRIVE IN AND HOW IT COMMUNICATES
BORDER IDENTITY.

By

CRYSTAL A. ROBERT-SEGURA

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Music has the ability to communicate various facets through the use of lyrics, dissonance and melody. At the Drive In, an emo, post-hardcore band from El Paso, TX won worldwide fame with their last album, *Relationship of Command* (2000). The band was active from 1993-2001. Throughout their time as a band they were able to communicate their life experiences, as well as the varied cultures that make-up the band,

The band was able to communicate through their music, identity. The band was from the U.S.-Mexico border. The U.S.-Mexico border extends nearly 2,000 miles from San Diego, CA to Brownsville, TX. El Paso, TX, now the sixth largest city in Texas is located on this border located directly across from Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. Currently, El Paso has a population of 649,121, however together the two cities have a combined population of 2 million.

This study seeks to analyze the lyrics and interviews produced by the band when they were most active between the years of 1993-2001. The analysis was conducted by identifying the word usage, borrowed words from the Spanish language that is used in Mexico that were used in a purposeful manner by the band to convey to their audience, negative connotation, as well as bring to light certain leftist political movements. Also identified were the references to location and certain persons and events that are found in both lyrics and interviews as the band sought to communicate these events and experiences to their audience.

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PREFACE

The topic of music has always been of utmost interest to me. I have worked in the music business for years while I completed my Bachelor's degree. I was a talent buyer for local venues, which fostered my interest in music, its roots and its history. I was interested in all forms of music, and as I watched various live music groups perform the music they felt most passionate about. The musical acts I met and enjoyed came from various states in the U.S. and some from countries from around the world. They varied in levels of fame, some packing the house with fans, others whose reputation would grow throughout the years. What I enjoyed most about the ten years I spent working in music venues was the story behind each band's music. Every group I met communicated experiences about their hometown through their music. They toured, not only to gain attention for their music, but also to share the histories and culture from where they were from and to learn about the histories and cultures of the places they visited. I was once told, coincidentally, by a member of At the Drive In, that I had the best and worst job in the world for two reasons, "you go home to the same bed, and you go home to the same bed". He referred to the fact that I could experience the life of a band on tour, and still go home at the end of the night, but while I got to experience a location through the eyes of another, I would still go home to the same bed.

I had always been interested in the history of El Paso, and the Asian, French, Native American, and Mexican cultures that produced the modern-day culture in which I was raised. I was always happy to work with local bands and wondered what tales they had to tell about our hometown through their music. I was hired by the El Paso Times to write a column about local music in which I wrote about bands on both sides of the

border and where I was able to study some of the local blues musicians who made careers in Juárez and El Paso. I would always come back to the career of At the Drive In, and their ability to reach so many people and communicate so much about El Paso. Without fail, there was always at least one musical act per week that would ask me about events and people that ATDI referenced in their music. I also met many people from different parts of the country who decided to move to El Paso because of ATDI's music.

Due to these experiences, I decided early on while studying for my Master's degree to pursue the study of how music communicates local identity. I chose ATDI because I believed they were able to communicate to the largest number of people. I am very interested in border culture and how two cultures can co-exist despite a political and geographical border. I would like continue my studies of music, history and its relation to location in the future, and feel this study has been a valuable stepping stone in doing so.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the singing minstrels of medieval times to the slave songs on the underground railroad, music has been used to communicate messages depicting histories from events and time that were specific to their location. Kun (2005) contends “All musical listening is a form of confrontation, of encounter, of the meeting of the worlds and meanings, when identity is made self-aware and is, therefore menaced through its interrogation,” (p.13).

Stephen H. Chaffee, (1985) explains that “music is surely the most widely enjoyed form of human communication”, (p.413). Chaffee continues, “Of the ancient ‘muses’, it alone cries that very word into our time. It (music) transcends social boundaries-national, linguistic, temporal-that otherwise tend to block communication.” While Chaffee contends that music is beneficial in overcoming physical geographic and linguistic boundaries, Chaffee also believes that the opposite may be true, such is that music will also create social entities-subcultures, folk traditions, generation gaps, and other such “boundaries” that may set people apart.

“Listening to music,” Chaffee states, “is the most universal mass communication behavior, requiring neither literacy nor advanced electronic media”, (p.413) These factors, Chaffee concludes, are the reason for music’s popularity among youth culture. Music like most forms of communication may be segmented into various factions, in regards to music these divisions are known as genres. Chaffee (1985) states that music becomes part of a mainstream culture only after it has appeared as an incarnation of counterculture. “What appears to happen”, Chaffee states, “is that successive cohorts of

young people approach their entry into society by adopting novel forms of music that set them apart from the very mainstream” (p.416). Chaffee uses the example of music genres such as jazz, big band, blues, boogie-woogie, rock n’ roll and punk as musical styles that were once seen as rebellious until they were adopted by popular culture.

Presently, there are many studies that have been conducted in order to understand the significance between music and identity. Of the studies exploring both music and identity, there are some who have delved deeper into the question of identity to include cultural identity, specifically Latino culture. Avant-Mier’s “Latinos in the Garage: A Genealogical Examination of the Latino/a Presence and Influence in Garage (and Rock and Pop Music)” published in 2008, is an example of such work, while Pineda’s “Will They See Me Coming Do They Know I’m Running? Los Lobos and the Performance of *Meztizaje* Identity through Journey,” published in 2009 discusses Chicano/a identity, *meztizaje* and identity as well as discussing the journey made by Mexican immigrants to the United States. Research in the influence of Latino culture upon music has continued, including Josh Kun’s introduction in his publication, “Audiotopia, Music, Race and America,” in which he uses the example of Los Tigres del Norte and their song, “Mis Dos Patrias” as an example. (These studies will be revisited later within this document.) The documents offer a proper literature background into the study of culture and identity, however there are very many specific factors, a couple being the emotional nature of music and genre that should also be considered when discussing music and identity. The genres found in these previous studies have utilized various genres to include that of Tex-Mex, garage, rock and pop, and the blues-rock and traditional sounds of Los Lobos. However, there also exists a gap in the literature in regards to modern music, this absence

is not just limited in particular to modern music, but also that of genre. While we are able to study music and genres of the past, as well as music genres whose influence leans towards the more culturally traditional, there is not a great deal of study that investigates modern music, specifically modern music that is influenced by a variety of cultures, as well as the place in which it finds its roots.

The genre(s) to be examined in this study is popularly known as “emo” (which mainly consider short for emotional) and post hardcore. As genres, emo and post-hardcore are recent advents to music since the nineties, known for their emotional and aggressive nature. Emo and post hardcore as genres are fairly new and changing genre(s) that may be considered particular to the Southwest. One of the emo and post hardcore genres most popular defining artists was originally located in El Paso, Texas. As emo and post hardcore are still considered new genres, at this time there has not been a great deal of study into the field. Finally, the emotional nature of music also helps to illustrate local identity. The band in question not only uses genre to define themselves but also is made unique by its use of the emotional lyrics and wailing vocals that seek to illustrate the events and history of the border. Throughout this study I will examine the artifacts produced by emo, post hardcore artist, At the Drive In, that I propose may have resulted in the communication of (Latino) culture and local identity specific to the U.S-Mexico border.

The band, At the Drive-In, was founded in 1993 by guitarist Jim Ward and vocalist Cedric Bixler-Zavala. They played their first live show on October 15, 1994 at the Loretto High School Fair in El Paso, Texas. Soon after, At the Drive-In released *Hell Paso*, an EP issued in 1994. It was the release of the 7-inch EP, the band’s first studio

recorded album that allowed the band to tour across Texas for the first time. After the band released its second EP *¡Alfaro Vive, Carajo!* In June 1995, they set out on their second tour, in a 1981 Ford Econoline purchased by guitarist, Omar Rodriguez-Lopez' father that helped them tour for nearly a month and a half across the United States. Due in great deal to their successive and rigorous touring, At the Drive-In, developed a large underground following as their popularity grew by word of mouth. In July 1996, ATDI recorded *Acrobatic Tenement* at this time the band's lineup was solidified, after cycling through several drummers Tony Hajjar became the band's final drummer. Paul Hinojos played bass and with Omar Rodríguez-López transitioned from bass to guitar. The ethnicity of the band's lineup helps to explain the influence behind the band's music. Co-founder, Jim Ward, rhythm guitar and backup vocals, was born in El Paso, Texas. Ward's pride in his hometown has been evident in every one of his music projects. Co-founder, Cedric Bixler-Zavala, frontman and occasional guitarist for the band was also the band's lyricist. Bixler-Zavala was originally born in Redwood City, California; throughout his musical career Bixler-Zavala has written references to his culture, surroundings and present situation(s) that will be explored further in this study. Omar Rodriguez-Lopez, began his role in the band as a bassist, but with the addition of Paul Hinojos he quickly switched over to guitar. Rodríguez-López was born in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, and the influence of his birthplace continues to affect his music to this day. Paul Hinojos, final bassist for the band, was born in Los Angeles, California. Tony Hajjar, final drummer for the band was born in Beirut, Lebanon, it is Hajjar's influence that is evident in ATDI's style and noted Lebanese Chaabi influence. ATDI was most well-known for its final album, *Relationship of Command* (2000). *Relationship of*

Command was the third and final album by the band and was released in September 2000, this album propelled them to mainstream success, however shortly after its release the band went on an indefinite break. Each member of the band would branch off starting their own musical projects and many times joining each other in these projects to continue collaborating.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1) How do the events and culture of a location influence the medium of music?

- a. How does ATDI use the emotional nature of their music to express border identity through music? How does the music of ATDI illustrate the relationship between place and space?

RQ2) What does the music of ATDI communicate about border identity?

RQ3) How does the music of ATDI illustrate the relationship between place and space?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Miell McDonald, and Hargreaves (2005) believe “music is a powerful means of communication. It provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions, and meanings even though their spoken languages may be mutually incomprehensible. It can also provide a vital lifeline to human interaction for those whose special needs make other means of communication difficult. Music can exert powerful physical effects, can produce deep and profound emotions within us, and can be used to generate infinitely subtle variations of expressiveness by skilled composers and performers,” (p. 11). Music also has the ability to communicate various facets through the use of lyrics, dissonance and melody. There are a number of ways that music can be deconstructed and studied. The first analysis focuses on the genre in which ATDI belongs, emo and post-hardcore.

Post-Hardcore and Emo Genres

Music writer, Jim DeRogatis (1999), explained that regardless of those that some may refer to the music genre in question as post-hardcore and post-punk, “you might as well call it the name that nobody likes; Emo.” The author loosely defines emo as being short for “emotional” music and describes the argued term as a style of music that has been popularly considered, punk rock. The argument made is that emo music is more melodic, introspective and depressing than hardcore, characteristics that make this genre different than others due to the fact that it also taps into that primal energy and anger.

One of the bands credited for spearheading the emo genre is At the Drive In. ATDI was a post-hardcore band from El Paso, Texas, who was primarily active between the years of 1993 to 2001. The term post-hardcore attempts to explain the music genre that evolved from hardcore punk, which was itself an offshoot of the punk-rock movement. Post-hardcore is the movement in music that followed shortly after the rise in the hardcore music genre of the early nineties. While post-hardcore was similar in music style to that of the hardcore punk music, post-hardcore was emotional and aggressive, yet still introspective and intelligent in nature. The five-piece act was known for their highly energetic stage presence that was reminiscent of the 1980's hardcore scene. ATDI may have been most known for was their surrealistic lyrics, unconventional guitar melodies and irregular changes in timing and rhythm.

ATDI was heavily influenced by a number of sources. The first being hardcore bands, Drive Like Jehu, Fugazi and Nation of Ulysses. Hardcore was a subgenre of punk rock that is considered faster, thicker and heavier than punk rock. To clarify we will consider Azerrad (2001) who states "Music is the first art form to register discontent," (p 9). To elaborate this notion presented by Azerrad, the example of underground rock will be utilized. Music protests not only in sound, but also the way in which it is recorded, marketed and distributed, just as music communities and artists that are considered underground rock are those bands and start-up labels that protest against major labels. In this example, Azerrad contends that the music business exists as a manifestation of cultural power recognized by American youth. The author believed that this rebellion was not just an example of youth rebelling against big business but should be also considered a metaphor for rebelling against the system in general. Azerrad claims that

one of the first times rock rebellion is recognized is in the umbrella term of underground rock, also known as American indie rock. American indie rock isn't a "circumscribed musical style; it was the punk ethos of DIY, or do-it-yourself" (Azerrad 2001). As underground rock begins to take the recording, marketing and distribution into the hands of small agencies and the artists themselves, they identify themselves a political power, particularly in regards to American youth.

Hardcore, as a dominant subgenre in underground music is a style, and lifestyle in music that presents itself as both political in message as well as action, throughout the utilization of the punk rock and DIY ethos. "(Hardcore) boiled over in rage on several fronts: police harassment, materialism, alcohol abuse, the stultifying effects of consumer culture, and self-lacerating angst", (Azerrad 2001, p. 33). It was this genre that would later spawn several different genres such as melodic hardcore, metalcore, post-hardcore, thrash metal and emo. ATDI was also said to have been influenced by the local hardcore scene from which the band first formed and developed their sound. Due to the ethnic diversity of the band, ATDI's sound was also heavily influenced by ethnic musical styles such as Latin Salsa and Lebanese Chaabi. Just as they are found in other cultures, Lipsitz (1997) claims that "amalgamated cultures formed by a fusion of African identities with European, American and Asian circumstances that mean that "it is not culture which binds the people who are partially African origin now scattered throughout the world but an identity of passions" (p.33).

Just as significant as the divide between Delta Blues and Chicago Blues, it may be argued that location plays a distinct role in the post hardcore or emo, giving ATDI it's unique sound. It is the element of place and space that belonging to the same sub genre,

emo, may exhibit similar differences. The genre(s) in which many music experts have ventured to classify ATDI are both post-hardcore and emo. Post hardcore and emo, as well as variations of the genre(s) were found in three different regions in the United States at their inception in the mid to late nineties. One of the first regions as well as the region explored and referenced in this research is that of Texas and the Southwest. The second most prevalent region where this genre was found was in the found in the Midwest, where a band called Bright Eyes, lead by Conor Obest was founded. Bright Eyes is known primarily for its sorrowful introspective lyrics and vocals, as well as indie style acoustic guitars that were slower, less electric and pronounced, yet all the while still incorporated the distorted music style that was particular to hardcore. The third major region for the emo and hardcore genre was found in Florida where emo and post hardcore act Hot Water Music was located. Hot Water Music and bands such as Planes Mistaken for Stars that originated in the Florida scene were harsher in guitar sound and vocals. This offshoot of these genres was aggressive, yet introspective and melodic in sharp comparison to that of the bands of the same genre found in the Midwest. While ATDI, Bright Eyes and Hot Water Music all belong to the same sub genre of music, one can predict that the differences in the three audio and visual recordings of their music will produce varying results in the listener/observer. Throughout this study I wish to conclude that examination of lyrics and music provided and produced by ATDI would show that the message found in both their music and lyrics pertains to the specific locale, region (both geographical and political) that shaped their music.

Emotional nature of music

Miell, MacDonald and Hargreaves (2005) propose that “people in contemporary society use music as a resource such as in managing situation-specific emotional states or moods: we use music in order to achieve certain psychological states in different everyday situations” (p 11). The music of ATDI reached a great deal of young people due to the fact that the band embarked on an extensive touring schedule for many years. Furthermore, ATDI fans were a like-minded youthful population who became attracted to the music style due to shared experiences. Wells and Hakanen (1991) believe that the music genre known as rock were embraced by certain listeners because its sound and words are similar to the intensity and turbulence experienced by those same listeners. The authors state that music reflects the extreme emotional experiences that are dealt with through the daily lives of the listener enabling this form of communication to be part of their daily reality.

When further analyzing the emotional nature of music, specifically “emo” music it behooves one to consider Hothschild (1983) who analyzed the complex nature of the emotion, love, and the differing ways that females and males deal with that specific emotion. Hothschild states that in order for one to experience the full impact, the listening audience would have to perform three social acts in order to completely experience the music. These three actions that must be given attention to are attending to the music, and codifying and managing the music as well. Lipsitz (1997) believes that “cultural production plays a vital role in nurturing and sustaining self-activity on the part of the aggrieved peoples”. Lipsitz continues, assuming that “culture enables people to rehearse identities, stances, and social relations not yet permissible in politics. But it also

serves as a concrete social site, a place where social relations are constructed and enacted as well as envisioned. Popular culture does not just reflect reality, it helps constitute it”.

(p.137)

Local Identity and Place

Bennett (2004) states that music becomes part of a creative process whereby members of particular local scenes construct shared narratives of everyday life. He has hypothesized that participants in the world of Chicago blues consume culture as a kind of focused activity in which shared meanings are collectively imagined and diffused within a specific spatial context.

To illustrate, one may wish to refer back to the example than that of blues music, blues music is one of the genres that develop a unique sound based on location, within the umbrella genre of the Blues, there is Delta blues and Chicago blues. In the southern states, particularly the Mississippi Delta, there existed an acoustic blues sound that leaned towards an acoustic style one that would be incomplete without the manned manipulation of a slide guitar. “The Delta region with its black majority, its long held, deeply felt segregationist attitudes and its desolate, strange and almost frightening action landscape caused the creation of the most poignant and moving blues possible” (Herzhaft, et al. p. 52-53). Popular artists belonging to this genre of music were Robert Johnson, Blind Willie Johnson and Blind Willie McTell, to name a few. While these music genres were considered generally similar in sound, the stylistic changes in both song and instrumentation would differentiate the two from each other.

As the genre of blues migrated throughout the United States there were various factors that localized it to a certain geographic region. Herzhaft, Harris, Debord, Haussler & Mikofsky (1997) have recognized that in the northern states, such as Illinois and Michigan, blues music and musicians leaned towards an electric sound, incorporating the wailing guitar riffs of Memphis Slim, Muddy Waters, Elmore James and others. This style of music is most often referred to as “Chicago Blues”.

While most Blues music consisted of a similar content, the differences in this popular modern music of the nineties could be identified by geographic region due to their lyrical and contextual rhetoric. When studied as a form of communication, blues music may be considered an example of a similar music genre one that may encompass various facets of communication transferrable to the listener, so is the paramount history and resulting attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of modern day music. When using the example of the Blues music genre one may also venture to conclude that (music) has a specific identity due to its geographic location, a fairly new music genre that is similar to Blues music that may fall under this assumption is the emo post hardcore music genre.

Bennett (2004) bases his argument on a study previously conducted by the music scholar, Norm Cohen. He refers to Cohen’s analysis of the relationship between music and locality through his consideration of the local as a space for multiple expressions of musical life, characterized by a series of coexisting local scenes. Cohen contends that while certain scenes may conflict musically, visually or both each corresponds in different ways with the local sensibilities of the city and state.

Bennett (2004) takes into consideration the study conducted by Bud Shank in order to support his claim in regards to music and local identity. In this study, Shank demonstrated the variable as a factor through his examination of the cowboy song and punk rock, music that has different historical and cultural associations with the local scene in Austin, yet are linked through their offering of parallel yet conflicting discourses on Texan identity and local political attitudes.

One should also acknowledge Kruse's (1993) study as beneficial in defining the variable of local identity operationally. Kruse argues that there are occasions where it is not possible to circulate from one local scene to another. Some localities such as Iowa City, Iowa and Columbia, Missouri are more receptive to indie pop while other scenes are more receptive to hardcore. This discrepancy between the tastes of music is largely due in part with the particularities and histories of each scene. While ATDI may be considered one of the founders of the emo and post-hardcore subgenre of music, they are not the only musicians who perform under this subgenre. Emo and post-hardcore in the nineties was also found in the Midwest, as well as other areas of the U.S. It can be presumed that in light of the study conducted by Kruse that similar results will be found in the differences in identity due to the location of their origin.

Lipsitz (1994) states that "in our time, social and cultural crises often come to us in the form of struggles over place and displacement, over transformations in our relationships to both physical places and discursive spaces. The relationship between popular music and place offers a way of starting to understand the social world that we are losing- and a key to the one that is being built. Anxieties aired through popular music

illumine important aspects of the cultural and political conflicts that lie ahead for us all.”
(p.3)

There were several events that occurred throughout the years that shaped the music and messages of ATDI. Due to ATDI's home on the border there exists a great deal of politically fueled messages that can be found in the surreal lyrics written by lead singer, Cedric Bixler-Zavala. The emotive nature in Bixler-Zavala's vocal inflection, whispers and wails to the audience, delivered the political and emotional nature of the music. As stated previously, ATDI's extensive touring schedule allowed the maximum amount of audiences from different parts of the United States and Europe near the end of their career. Lipsitz (1997) states “because music travels it augments our appreciation of place. Demonstrates and dramatizes contrasts between places by calling attention to how people from different places create culture in different ways.” He continues with the notion that whether “intentionally and unintentionally, musicians use lyrics, musical forms, and specific styles of performance that evoke attachment to or alienation from particular places” (p.4). Finally, “recordings by artists from different cultures continue to be attractive to and entertain those of different cultures and geographic regions”, however Lipsitz suggests that these transactions transform-but do not erase attachments to place (p. 4).

Lipsitz (1997) remarks regarding the questions posed by critics inquiring about cultural practices, could also be called political. Throughout his study Lipsitz questions whether music has an impact upon political and economic power. In answer to the question the author asserts that the critics missed a valuable point between everyday life and politics, claiming “that these same critics failed to see the significance of how

popular culture creates it's own micro-politics of organization, location, identity, and affiliation" (p 152).

Music and Border Culture

Pineda (2009) explained that the border as a place that "represents a space where engagements between cultures are negotiated", (p. 188). The existence of a physical border is constant as there will always be limitations in territory between states and countries. However, the relationships and culture that exists on the border is constantly changing as events and popular culture change. On the border there exists a codependent relationship where each side of the border has inevitably been influenced by the other. The border in question deals with the El Paso and Ciudad Juárez border, where El Paso is located in the United States and Ciudad Juárez is located in the country of Mexico. Pineda (2009) describes this relationship as a "fluid" space where influences are intertwined. Pineda uses Los Lobos as an example of the performance of Chicano/a identity, also using the journey of a Mexican immigrant, in order to illustrate journey while making a political comment.

Vila (2005) contends that it is "local culture that makes identity locally accountable is constantly being shaped and reshaped by symbolic struggles whose goal it is to close meaning in a particular way," (p 237). Vila explains that the border is a hotbed for work conducted on the processes of identity construction. The different identities on the border have the ability to control each other with the way that each individual or group experience the border, and the way that they perform in everyday life.

Examples of Latino/a influence both near the U.S. Mexico border and throughout

the U.S. have been recognized in Avant-Mier's (2010) examination of the Latino/a influence on an early form of rock and roll known as garage rock. Avant-Mier has analyzed various rock and roll acts identifying the influence of the Latino/a culture on the music produced in the garage rock and roll genre. Many of the musicians studied were also part of the Latino/a culture, Avant-Mier refers to Richie Valens, and his legacy in consideration of the Latino influence on rock and roll. In regards to Valens' influence on rock and roll, the author notes music journalist's, Lester Bangs', statement inferring that Valens' three-chord mariachi squawkup has continued to be recycled in the rock and roll community although as Bang's describes "more primitively" played with each incarnation.

Avant-Mier (2010) believes that the "development rock and roll music as well (as its cultural aesthetic) has been a result of intercultural exchange between the United States and U.S. Latino/as (and Latin America) as much as between blacks and white in the United States", (p. 570). Even those groups whose members were not of the Latin American descent, Avant-Mier also considers Latino/a influence on black saxophonist, Chuck Higgins whose "Pachuco Hop" was a reference to the pachuco, which Avant-Mier describes as being part of the 1920s subculture. Higgins recorded his saxophone instrumental while in East Los Angeles.

These examples describe the instances in which music has illustrated both instances of border and cultural identity. These cases have proven beneficial to the study of music as a form of communication that enables the audience to share in an experience that is particular to the artist. The afore-mentioned examples range in genre from popular garage rock to the eclectic sounds of Los Lobos melding traditional forms of music with

garage rock, blues and rock and roll. As music genres emerge there remains the need for ongoing research into the communicative function of music and its reflection on border identity. At the end of the century, post-hardcore emerged as a genre that encompasses a rebellious political identity with varying reflections upon local identity and culture. As a fairly new genre in regards to music, there has not been sufficient research examining the impact of post-hardcore on both cultural and local identity.

Despite their short run as a musical group, ATDI was able to achieve world-round success. Through extensive touring and their hard-won fame through rigorous touring they were able to find a place in music as one of the most influential rock bands in various music publications. Other bands born in El Paso as well as the U.S-Mexico border would, and have had a longer career as a group than ATDI, however these bands were not able to reach as many audiences as ATDI had in their time together. Of the three albums released by ATDI the last album produced by the band was able to reach the Billboard 200 in the U.S. and was also on one of *Spin Magazine's* 100 Greatest Albums from 1985-2005. The band also gained mainstream success due in part to their appearance on late night shows such as "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" and the "Late Show with David Letterman".

Border Identity

Identity is shaped and formed through a variety of experiences, the location where we are from as well as the people we encounter in our day to day lives. ATDI was shaped by their surroundings, historical events and the people in their lives, their lives on the border. To illustrate one may refer to the examination of Anzaldua's *Borderlands'*

which has been examined in a multitude of fashions, Hammad believes that Anzaldua's *Borderlands* "emphasized a consciousness that emerges from an awareness of multiple subjectivity not only contributes to the development of a new paradigm for the theorizing differences, but also addresses aspects of identity formation for which theories of subjectivity alone", (p.303). Identity can be readily performed through a variety of creative means, identity may be spoken, or expressed, in poetry, literature, visual art and the live performance of a play or skit. This study will analyze how music also helps the artist express and claim their identity through lyrics.

Border identity may present itself through performance, Holling and Calafell (2007) claim that Gomez-Pena's performance in "Border Brujo"(1990) have offered a way to explore the ways that the performances stage identities. These identities that operate from an urban-based perspective and the other from a border-based perspective, advances commentaries about the cultural shaping of Chicana/o identity, although ATDI did not readily express their affiliation with the Chicano culture, the analysis of language wishes to conclude that the band's identity could lend itself to the Chicana/o identity that is found on the border.

In conclusion, the definition of border identity is probably best described by Gloria Anzaldua, whose book, *Borderlands*, is the best source for the examination of border identity. To paraphrase Anzaldua states "Produce accounts of who they are, as conscious political agents, that is, constitutes themselves, politically... Subjects are contradictory, "in process", fragmented, produced. But human beings and social movements also strive to produce some coherence and continuity, and through this, exercise some control over feelings, conditions and destinies", (69).

The emotional and aggressive nature of ATDI seems to correspond with the theory presented by Anzaldua in regard to identity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

ATDI produced three full-length albums during their career. Those three albums would be the only studio albums the band would release before their breakup. The band also released five EPs, one compilation album, and three singles. This body of work, with the exception of the compilation that was released after the band's breakup and the six singles and three music videos that were also found on the three studio albums, are the main resources from which this analysis will be drawn. The lyrics and music will be first studied as material culture, material culture explained by Prown (1982) as an artifact that is designed to be communicative and representational, artifacts, Prown believed that dealt with beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions that are specific to a particular community or society at a given time. The lyrics found in these songs will be treated as material culture one that may lead to the communication of place and culture. The lyrics will be examined and categorized for their representation of culture, through the use of Spanish words and phrases specific to the predominant Mexican-American, Latin-American culture that existed on the border, as well as references to political and cultural events. The first album was released in 1996, entitled *Acrobatic Tenement*. Two years later in 1998, ATDI released *In/Casino/Out* and the final studio album *Relationship of Command* was released in 2000.

The first album, "Acrobatc Tenement", is considered the debut album for ATDI. This album was released by Fearless records and contained eleven tracks. It is suggested that the track entitled "Embroglio" was written for a friend of the band named Julio Venegas who committed suicide in 1996, at the time the album and the songs were

written. The second album released and to be examined is entitled *In/Casino/Out*".

"*In/Casino/Out*" was offered in 1998. ATDI's sophomore effort was recorded as a live studio album in order to capture the highly energetic shows and stage presence that had been quickly gaining the band popularity while they toured. *In/Casino/Out* featured eleven tracks as well. This album also featured a song written for the band's friends and Bixler-Zavala's girlfriend who passed away in an automobile accident. The track entitled "Napoleon Solo" was written for two former band mates of lead singer Bixler-Zavala, Laura Beard and Sarah Reiser. Finally the last artifact to be examined is the studio album that gained ATDI the largest amount of attention. *Relationship of Command* was considered the sleekest and most well produced and polished of the three albums released by the band. This album won the band the most accolades. *Relationship of Command* was considered one of the top 100 albums of all time and also ranked among the top fifty albums of the decade.

The lyrics and content of these albums is readily available on the internet as well as in hard copy. The lyrical content and music has been gathered in order to analyze and identify the political, emotional and local identity factors found in the music through the understanding of the music and lyrics. Lipsitz (1997) contends that even if the political figures and powers do not understand the lyrics, the audience and listeners are able to understand the lyrics and decipher the message.

Zagoria (2009) contends that language is one of the most important markers of identity, Zagoria's study, "Performing (G)local identities: Codeswitching in African songs produce in Perth, Australia" finds that the use of more than one language or code, especially by bi/multilingual language users, is one way of signaling multiple identities.

Zagoria (2009) believes that these identities are expressed through code switching in music lyrics, code switching as described by the author is the juxtaposition of at least two linguistic codes during one communicative event. In the study conducted by Zagoria, the event in question is described as a communicative event the public performance of a number of songs. In the case of ATDI, the code switching is demonstrated through the written lyrics found in the body of work mentioned earlier, as opposed to the performed code switching that took place during the songs themselves as well as between songs being performed. Although as Zagoria explains code switching usually occurs between bi/multilinguals but can also be witnessed between monolinguals.

The use of borrowed words from other languages is also known by the linguistic term, calque. The term calque, described by the Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics is a French term for a new word modeled in another language. These words may use the word and its literal meaning, or the borrowed word may also be used loosely as based on a foreign concept. The lyrics will be analyzed for the band's use of Spanish calques in the lyrics as well as the explanation of their usage in the lyrics as described in interviews.

It does not take much to enjoy any medium of art. Visual and performance art need only to be viewed, music may be listened to and absorbed by just one of the senses. Enjoyment does not require that one understand the medium immediately, simply that the medium of art is experienced. In order to analyze and understand music in attempt to receive its intended message we must look at it from a variety of angles. It should be listened to, and absorbed. The emotions that arise from music are the intended first response, to like or dislike upon the first impression. If the listener develops a strong

taste for the music they may be inclined to read the lyrics, learn about the artist through interviews and possibly attend live performance.

The internet has allowed listeners from all over the world to become resident “experts” on a band without ever experiencing the band’s live shows first hand. The internet has also allowed access to the band’s albums and lyrics to be readily available to all with a few key word searches on any search engine. Avid fans of an artist usually have a tendency to thoroughly analyze an artist and their music. In order to analyze the music of ATDI, I chose to use the same measures as an avid fan of the band would. I have listened to the music, which is what first sparked an interest in the band that led to the desire to analyze the band further. To analyze the band’s music, I first read the band’s lyrics. The lyrics analyzed were three studio albums *Acrobatic Tenement* (1996), *In/Casino/Out* (1998), and *Relationship of Command* (2000).

These albums were chosen as they were the only albums that the band produced in their short time together. In addition to the three albums there were two EPs that were also available for analysis. Those two EPs are *El Gran Orgo* (1997) and *Vaya* (1999), in total there are 45 songs that were analyzed and studied.

After the lyrics were collected they were analyzed for different characteristics that would prove pertinent to the study. The first characteristic searched for in the lyrics was the use of Spanish language words and phrases, or “calques” in the lyrics. These words were the most obvious in the lyrics and found in almost every album and EP. After these words and phrases were found, the second characteristic searched for in the lyrics were references to place. The references to place could be anything from a street name, a

geographic location, to the name of a place known to those who live in the location where the band was originally from. The band's lyrics were also analyzed for references to people and events. These events could have been personal events or references to events that occurred in the general area. The lyrics have been coded and will be included. Calques will be designated by bold text. References to people and local events will be designated by italics and references to place, both geographic and place names will be designated by underlined text.

The textual analysis of the band and its music was the best way to analyze the band's message and the diffusion of their culture. The band dissolved in 2001, therefore an ethnographic approach to analyzing the band was unavailable. Because of this the last form of analysis was through written and spoken text. There were four interviews and two music reviews that were studied in addition to the analysis of lyrics. These interviews are "Geeks Bearing Gifts" an interview and article written by Richard Cromelin for *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 2000, "The Wild Bunch, Punk agitators release the most intense rock record of the year" by Jeff Minton for *Spin Magazine*, October 2000, At the Drive In interview for SNO//SK8//SND, Meanbeat-At the Drive In for Mean Magazine by Ian Ghent, Shawna Kenney and Jeff Gros (date unknown) titled "At the Drive In" interview for Western Breed by Brooks Harlan on November 17, 1998, interview by Sexual Ryan for buddyhead.com on May 24, 1998 and finally an interview with online magazine *Line and Ink* in August 2000. The articles used in the analysis also included "What drives At the Drive In" in Rolling Stone posted on December 4, 2000 and finally and most recently "The Best Little Music City in Texas" by Andi Teran in *Vanity Fair*, March 26, 2009. This final interview hopes to satisfy the influence of El Paso on

music by taking a quick snapshot of bands that have spent time in El Paso, Texas. Teran (2009) interviews Jim Ward, guitarist for ATDI collecting his opinion on why El Paso is the “music city” that it has become since ATDI’s breakup.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The textual analysis has been divided into two specific areas. The first area will be the description of the evidence found in the lyrics. The lyrics will be divided into three subdivisions that include calques, or borrowed words or phrases, references to place, and finally references to people and events.

The second area of the textual analysis is the portion that deals with interviews conducted at the height of ATDI's popularity in 2000, and one interview conducted in 2009 that interviews Jim Ward, guitarist for the band.

Lyrical Analysis

Language

The first and most evident characteristic searched for in the lyrics of ATDI was the use of borrowed words, or calques. As stated in the previous pages, the use of Spanish words in their lyrics may allow the artist to be part of two cultures simultaneously. The use of English is standard, but the use of Spanish language proclaims the group's pride in being from a border town rich in the Mexican-American culture. Use of these words is purposeful and wishes to call attention, or communicate the influence of two cultures and their languages. The use of Spanish words was found throughout the forty-five-song body of work. The first of these borrowed words from the Spanish language was found in "Red Planet" from the EP "Hell Paso".

Mr. A&R “dinero” thug is the first example of the borrowed Spanish word. The context used can be presumed as negative and it is closely followed by the lyrics, “cash crops in the entertainment section”. The word “dinero” is the Spanish word for money followed directly by the use of the word “thug” may imply that the lyricist was making a reference to a drug dealer. “Cash crops in the entertainment section” is a line that further validates the assumption that the Spanish word is used to point out a person of ill repute.

“Alfaro vive, carajo!” is the EP title to the band’s second EP released in 1995. The phrase is taken from leftist movement in Ecuador to refer to Eloy Alfaro, a clandestine leader of a left-wing movement in Ecuador. The phrase, roughly translated, means Alfaro lives! Damn it! The group was named the Eloy Alfaro Popular Armed Forces a group that formed in 1982. Although the band claimed not to have any definite political ties, there are many definite ties to left-wing movements and political attachments both on the U.S.-Mexico border, in Mexico and Latin America. The lyricist and band made pointed references to their implied political beliefs and would do so using language variations. The use of this phrase in mainstream media brought further attention to the band’s incongruence with other groups of this genre and attention to the political sphere.

El Gran Orgo is the EP title for ATDI’s third EP. “El gran”, means the grand, or the large, but the word orgo does not have any specific meaning in the English or Spanish language, but it also loosely translates to the word ogre. There are many times when the band chose to use words and phrases that related to the Mexican-American culture, but have no real meaning. The band is known for its surreal lyrics, and invented words.

The fourth use of Spanish language borrowed words is the phrase “hasta la victoria siempre” the phrase is found in the song “A Devil Among the Tailors” in the first album “In/Casino/Out” released in 1998. This phrase is taken from Che Guevara, an Argentine Marxist revolutionist, at this time there were a great many young people in El Paso who were interested in the Zapatista movement, of which Che Guevara was a great hero. The quote was found in a farewell letter from Che Guevara to Fidel Castro and became the slogan for the Cuban revolution. After his execution in 1967, Guevara became an icon for leftist revolutionary movements.

Shortly following the use of this phrase in “A Devil Among Tailors” the lyricist uses the term “manana hay misa para los sordos”, which roughly translated means tomorrow there will be mass for the deaf. The use of this Spanish phrase, and its meaning wishes to bring attention to those who would turn a blind eye, or deaf ear on political movements occurring globally.

Vaya is the fourth EP released in 1999. “Vaya” means ‘go’ in English, but could also reflect surprise in both exhilaration and disgust.

"Rascuache" is the first song on the *Vaya* EP is an adjective in Spanish that may mean, tacky or garish, or poor, wretched, ridiculous, also coarse and vulgar. The lyrics are incongruent with the title of the song. However, when in regard to art “rascuache” also spelled “rasquache” is a Spanish term that is usually used by the Chicano movements. The term rascuache is a deeply complex word that has been topics of entire essays and articles. Rascuache is usually spelled rasquache, although it has been modified according to description and circumstance. David Spener (2010) believes that

“rasquachismo refers to the celebration of the sensibility of los de abajo (the underdogs), whose resourcefulness and ingenuity permit them to overcome adversity by stitching together the tools needed to survive from whatever materials they have at hand,” (p.9).

The last example of Spanish borrowed words was *federales* found in “Invalid Litter Dept.” this song was on the band’s final studio album, *Relationship of Command* released in 2000. The word *federales* is the Spanish word for federal officers of Mexico, specifically Juárez, Mexico. The band’s use of this word in their lyrics exemplify two different things in its usage. First, that the band is familiar with the occupations and titles for government officials in Juárez, Mexico, and also that the band has a significant grasp on the Spanish language, one they want to make clear to their audience. The song will be later analyzed through interviews and references to events.

The use of the Spanish language in these lyrics is intentional and wishes to communicate both culture, political identity and affiliation (even when unintentional) and at times a certain amount of negative connotation.

References to Place

“Hell Paso” is the title of EP released in 1994, this is the EP that first brought attention to ATDI as they toured extensively throughout the U.S. This is the band’s first EP, and in early interviews the band may be perceived to have a bad taste in their mouth for their hometown. This would explain the play on words, the “hell” in El Paso. When the band wrote the album they were still teenagers, full of angst and disgust at their hometown. However in later interviews they learned to embrace the area in which they were raised. Their hometown would later be mentioned in every interview and reference to the band whether in performance or album review or interview.

“Embroglio” is a song off the Acrobatic Tenement album. The band names specific street names like Mesa Street exit. This reference to the street also refers to a specific event that happened on the street and the exit from I-10 highway.

Juárez, Mexico is mentioned specifically by name in the song “Embroglio”. Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico is located on the other side of the U.S-Mexico border from El Paso. The full lyric is “in Juárez, Mexico where they buried my friend”. Because of their proximity the borders bleed together and citizens of El Paso may still have a great deal of family on the other side of the border and wish to be buried closer to her family.

There were a great deal of vague references to a location that spans more than thousands of miles. The U.S. Mexico border extends from San Diego, California to Brownsville, Texas. The border follows along the Rio Grande, also known as the Rio Bravo del Norte. One of the main border crossings is located at El Paso, Texas crossing into Juárez. In the “Blue Tag” song found in “Acrobatic Tenement” the lyric “burning on the border” is repeated. The band internalized many of their experiences while living on the border and would admit in interviews later that there was a great deal of turmoil that they experienced while living on the border.

“Porfirio Diaz” is another song name that is also the name of a former president of Mexico. It is also the name of a street and highway exit in El Paso that was named after the ex-president. The area where the street is located is the area around the city’s university. This area has always been popular with artists and musicians. The area is known as Sunset Heights and it is where the band spent a great deal of time.

The references to place in the lyrics would draw the attention of music critics and audiences alike. This coupled with the introduction the band gave at the beginning of every show announcing themselves as from El Paso, Texas, exemplifies the band's wish to communicate the place where they are from.

References to People and Events

"Schaffino" is the song title found on the album, *Acrobatic Tenement* released in 1996. The song is named after one of the friends of the band who also played a part in El Paso's music scene. The lyrics describe a less than favorable situation that may or may not depict the real-life person in the song.

The next three songs are included in their entirety in this text as they describe a particular event that occurred before the song was written.

The first song listed is "Embroglio" this song is *Acrobatic Tenement* found on the band's first studio album,. This song was written for a friend of the band who committed suicide in 1996. The following lyrics depict a scene where their friend, Julio Venegas who it is assumed jumped off an overpass near the Porfirio Diaz street and Mesa Street exit located in downtown El Paso. The lyrics depict someone who is stranded on the exit. The lyricist expresses envy over still being stuck on the intersection, while his friend had passed him by. Embroglio is defined as someone who is embroiled in confusion, which they believe their friend was at the time he took his life. The lyrics follow and make a reference to a specific location in El Paso, while the description of blood on the median alludes to the situation that occurred on the intersection.

"Embroglio"

he's stranded on the Mesa Street exit

yes there's blood on the median

The following song is about two girls the band knew while living in El Paso, Texas. Cedric Bixler-Zavala, the band's lyricist dated one of the girls who passed away in a car accident, he was also played drums in a band with the two girls named Fall on Deaf Ears. The second section of this analysis contains a few interview questions that address the inspiration behind the following lyrics directly.

"Napolean Solo"

march 23rd hushed the wind, the music died

if you can't get the best of us now

it's because this is forever

seventeen, embalmed and caskets

Perhaps one of the most highly referenced songs by ATDI is "Invalid Litter Dept." These lyrics set the scene for one of the most horrific events occurring on the border today. The criminal trend that continues throughout the ongoing drug war is what is known as the femicide. At present there have been nearly 400 reported murders of women, but residents of the border region believe that the number is closer to 4,000. Although it does not relate directly to this study, the band has exhibited their sensitivity towards violence against women in the song "Speechless" found on the El Gran Orgo EP. Other than the murders on the border the lyrics describe a scene familiar to anyone who lives in the El Paso area. The smokestacks referenced belong to the ASARCO refining smelter located in El Paso, Texas, yet visible on the other side of the border.

"Invalid Litter Dept."

The song entitled "Invalid Litter Dept." showed various instances of references to place as it referred both directly (through the use of video, that showed images of El Paso, as well as Ciudad Juárez. The imagery in the video portrayed the pink crosses that were seen around the El Paso and Juárez border where they were used to commemorate the loss of hundreds of women who have gone missing from maquiladores-sweatshops that produce items for import. Due to the loss of these women, and the area that has been dubbed by investigative journalist, Diana Washington Valdez, as the "killing fields" the band repeated the line "dancing on corpses' ashes" to communicate the death(s) of the women whose mass graves were found in Juárez.

The following lyrics in the song also made reference to the now defunct smoke stacks of the Asarco refinery, located in El Paso that are visible on both sides of the border "and they made sure the obituaries showed pictures of smoke stacks".

The same song also used a borrowed word, a calque, to express a negative connotation to the Juárez lawmen who many journalists, and researchers believe may be turning a blind eye to the loss of life, the federales performed their customs quite well".

Interviews

The interviewers in the interviews shown above read the lyrics of the songs by the band and read previous interviews to find out the truth behind the songs.

Location

El Paso, Texas is not the first place in the world people think about when one regards places that have provided great inspiration. Avant Mier (56) notes that many musicians, such as Buddy Holly, who before he became famous crossed over into Juárez, Mexico from El Paso, Texas to watch guitar “legend”, Long John Hunter, play, which is where the artist may have developed his trademark, Tex-Mex sound. Holly came from Lubbock, Texas, as such, El Paso is not even the first place in Texas from which many musicians hail. In the interviews the band is asked directly where their influence comes from. The band answers candidly and attempts to explain the stories behind their lyrics. Sometimes the references made in the lyrics are blatant and do not require an explanation, but there were also times when some of the lyrics required more elaboration on behalf of the songwriters and musicians in the band. Through the interviews gathered it may be determined that El Paso played a great part in the music that ATDI created. It may be Ward who states it best in the 2000 interview for *Spin Magazine*.

“We were raised in El Paso, and only people from border towns understand what that means,” Ward says. “It’s the dichotomy of a Third World country and a First World country living together, breathing together, separated only by a bridge.”—*Spin Magazine* (October 2000)

Many music writers have often referred the lyrics of ATDI to as surrealistic. The lyrics written by the band’s lyricist Bixler-Zavala have even been ranked in the top ten listing of the most insane lyrics on some websites, http://rateyourmusic.com/list/nigh/top_ten_most_batshit_insane_lines_in_songs.

In the textual analysis of the lyrics there were many references to the border. Bixler-Zavala wrote many lyrics in regards to both the geographical region as well as the specific city that exists on the other side of the border from the band's hometown of El Paso, Texas. Bixler-Zavala states that growing up on a border town affected his lyrics due to the amount of injustice that took place on the border. The "crazy stuff" Bixler-Zavala states he has seen on the border. In an interview conducted by Richard Cromelin in the *Los Angeles Times*, Bixler-Zavala states, "I think that really translates in our writing and the way we play too." 'That' refers to El Paso, specifically the border where Bixler-Zavala states he saw a great deal of injustice. Furthermore, Bixler-Zavala acknowledges the bridge of communication that occurs when people listen to the lyrics and invites listeners and those who attend the band's live shows to ask about the meaning behind the lyrics.

Spanish Language words

Through the sometimes-cryptic lyrics ATDI was able to communicate various messages through their music. The use of borrowed words in Spanish were one of the ways that the band attempted to share the culture they experienced when in El Paso, Texas. These borrowed words were found throughout the forty-five songs collected for lyrical analysis. The borrowed words varied from the Spanish word "dinero", for money to the word "carajo", which could translate to a few different Spanish curse words.

In an interview with online magazine *Line and Ink*, the interviewer asks both Omar and Cedric about their Spanish word usage. The question posed by *Line and Ink* is

in bold print. Omar Rodríguez-López' and Cedric Bixler-Zavala' answers are labeled with an O and C respectively.

On the albums you use more English words in the titles, but on the EP's the titles are more Spanish, like *Vaya* and *El Gran Orgo*. Do you all do that intentionally?

C: Um, it's kind of been a conscious effort. Totally.

C: That's our roots showing through. Yeah, it was definitely a conscious effort.

The roots that Bixler-Zavala refers to in his answer is the cultural diversity that exists in El Paso, Texas due to the city's proximity to the border. In an interview conducted in December of 1999, Bixler-Zavala explains the atmosphere that predominated the live shows that he attended and performed.

What are the kids at shows like in El Paso? Is there a lot of cultural diversity?

Totally. El Paso is predominantly Mexican. There are a lot of Mexicans, and a lot of black kids too that are coming out now.

Although the band has stated in these interviews that El Paso, Texas was a favorable place from which to draw inspiration in earlier interviews the band was not always so positive. The first EP the band released seemed to exemplify the band's disdain for their hometown. This EP was released in 1994 before the band began touring heavily. At the time of its release the many of the band members were barely out of high school. They entitled the first EP , an obvious play on words depicting the name of their

hometown in a less than favorable light. In an early interview with underground online magazine Buddyhead, the band is asked to describe their hometown. In this interview segment, R signifies the interviewer for Buddyhead, known by the name of Sexual Ryan. Sexual Ryan interviewed Tony Hajjar and Omar Rodríguez-López on May 24, 1999.

R: Is it weird being in a band that started from almost nowhere that now has a pretty decent sized following?

O: We've been touring pretty much un-noticed since the beginning of 1995 so we've played plenty of shows where there were no people, ten people, twenty people.

The previous question deals with the decision made on the choice of the band. As mentioned earlier, the band toured extensively which allowed for the message behind their music and lyrics to be received by a wide variety of people.

In a later interview in "What drives At The Drive In," published in *Rolling Stone* December 2000, ATDI is asked about the home town where they are from. Throughout this interview they describe both the geographic location of El Paso, as well as the reason behind their hard and sometimes aggressive sound. The band is famous for never allowing their audience to slam dance at their shows, yet have also admitted that it is one of the ways they would express themselves while alone. The following statement made in the interview describes that the release of energy the members of the band once expressed in private, they were later able to express on the stage, communicating to their audience the feelings of isolation meanwhile, also expressing identity.

"Being a little alienated in El Paso, you only had one way to release your energy, and that was to go to a show and slam dance and be a fool," he

says. "Either that, or listen to your music and let it out in your room.

People and Events

How has El Paso affected your music?

There are a lot of things going on here that affect the way that you think. There is a lot of gang culture here. There are age-old gangs in different parts of the city. There are always gangs, whether it's punk rock gangs or cholo gangs with low riders and all that kinda stuff. That keeps you on you toes sometimes."

Avant Mier (2010) addresses El Paso's role in the pachuco movement with its use of clothes, music and language that would lead to the Mexican-American culture ATDI describes that drove low rider cars, spoke in calo, (Spanish slang) and listened to pachuco style music. The "cholo" gangs referenced by ATDI are what became of the pachuco gangs as the culture evolved.

"When you go into Juárez there are these pink crosses on telephone poles that go all the way down the strip deep into the heart of Juárez and it signifies the amount of women that have died within the past couple of years. That has had a big impact on the way we write music. I guess you might call that political or whatever, but it's kinda fucked up over there."

"Invalid Litter Dept." was the name of the song that the band wrote for what they witnessed happening in Juárez during what is known as the Juárez-based femicide. In December of 2003, NPR reported that over the past ten years (approximately from 1993-2003) as many as one hundred and forty women had been the victim of sexual homicides, their bodies disposed of in ditches or vacant lots. The band would also produce a video

that showed images of the El Paso-Juárez border, showing the maquiladores where the women were kidnapped outside of, as well as the pink crosses that memorialized the women who had gone missing. Although the band never fully admitted to take a political stance on the issue, their efforts to communicate the situation through song, sight and words was in itself a political stance on the issue.

The following excerpt from the same interview helps to emphasize the previous statement. In the interview, the band references the racial discrimination that occurred while they came of age in El Paso, when students who had darker skin than the others at Bowie High School (one of the high schools in the city located nearest the U.S.-Mexico border, not far from international bridge, the Bridge of the Americas) were harassed more than their lighter-skinned peers.

“The culture definitely affects us, the heat and the shit that goes on over the border. Things like that influence us to write music that is not necessarily of a political nature, but has some sort of message of “fight back.”

One of the songs that is looked at less critically, yet a song that helps explain how the band chose to communicate through their music to express their sorrow about two lost peers in musical comradery. Unlike the song, “Embroglio” that merely references the suicide the entirety of the song, “Napoleon Solo” describes the experience the band went through when their friends were lost in a car accident. The song’s lyrics read, “seventeen, embalmed and caskets,” to directly refer to their friends who passed.

**You've had a few friends die - you documented their life in the song
"Napoleon Solo" - how has that experience changed you?**

I went picked up the phone and Jim tells me that Sarah and Laura got in a really bad car accident. It was three girls driving at the same time, and the one girl at the wheel had fallen asleep- she was OK, but Sarah and Laura didn't make it. They died at the age of 17."

In the song entitled "Speechless", the band depicts a scene where a female character is being abused by her significant other. Although it does not seek to empower women, there is no course in the lyrics where the female character takes revenge, but once again it is in these lyrics where the band wishes to communicate through their music and lyrics that the issue should be brought to the foreground. "Napoleon Solo" was not only written in tribute, but also sought to honor the strong female personalities they encountered throughout their lives.

"In our hometown, it was a big deal to do the things they did. A lot of people would just dis on them or like them 'cause they were girls and just check out their bodies and stupid shit like that. They opened up a lot of minds and now there are some bands in El Paso with girls playing in them. It's a lot cooler now. I think they definitely paved the way for them, and we celebrate their lives with that song."

Several of ATDI's early songs referenced both people and incidents that occurred during the time that the band and songwriters. References to these events can be found in the lyrics. Due to the cryptic nature of the photos and references to real-life places and

events the band is frequently asked about their inspiration behind their lyrics. Meaning can be inferred from the lyrics, but ultimately the description offered by these interviews is specific. The following interview excerpt is taken from an interview with Line and Ink where Cedric Bixler-Zavala is being asked about the inspiration behind "Napoleon Solo".

Music Emissions provided the last interview that examined in this text.

"There was a gang at one time that was hired to kidnap maquilladoras," Bixler recalls. "They called themselves called the Rebels--I don't know what they were "rebellling" against. It's just an embarrassment to everyone there that these things could happen. To most people, this is El Paso: Richard Ramirez, the "Train Track Killer"... No wonder no one wants to play there. That has a lot to do with why we play the way we do.

The last and final piece of analysis was gathered from the same interview. This is included, not only for it's reference to El Paso, as a place, but to satisfy the question that asks what ATDI seeks to accomplish with their music. The band wishes to change perceptions about the area in which they were from, where experiences and the historical political nature of the area were formed.

"Maybe we can dispel the myth, the negative history. Maybe we can show people that something good could come out of such a desolate place."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Through the identification, definition and selection of borrowed words from the Spanish language in the lyrics of ATDI one may conclude that the Mexican-American culture in which the band was raised greatly influenced their patterns of speech and thought. The use of Spanish language was a deliberate choice selected by the lyricist to embed culture in their music. The band readily admits in previous interviews that the location where they were raised greatly influenced their music. Bixler-Zavala the band's lyricist drew from the band's experiences living in a border culture incorporating the history, past events and culture of their location therefore sharing these experiences with their audiences. Their use in the lyrics and the references and explanations the band made about their usage and history was the band's attempt to communicate to their vast audiences their experiences concerning culture and the events taking place in the place where they lived at the time the albums were produced.

Furthermore, the use of calques, or words borrowed from the Spanish language was intentionally placed to refer to the cultural dualism that exists on the U.S.-Mexico border. The words slip easily from the tongues of border natives and are also found in the lyrics. The use of the word *federales* is spit out with negative connotation, and a description is implied through the explanation found in the lyrics that followed. Listeners can derive from "performed their custodial customs quite well". As stated previously the use of this word intends to exemplify two different things in its usage. First, that the band is familiar with the occupations and titles for government officials in Juárez,

Mexico, and also that the band has a significant grasp on the Spanish language, one they want to make clear to their audience. The song will be later analyzed through interviews and references to events.

The message communicated to the ears of the listeners throughout the music and lyrics, and interviews communicates one of the struggles that are witnessed and faced by a group of young men coming of age and experiencing the angst that comes along with the loss of life coupled with the experience of dealing with the tragic events occurring over the border due to the tragic events occurring in Juárez, Mexico. In 1994, when the band released their first album, their first studio produced piece of work, “Hell Paso” related to the band’s first initial audience, the young fans and peers they found in their hometown of El Paso. At the time the band experienced a great deal of angst that they shared with their original audience. This play on words was greatly understood by the audience of their peers who believed that the city of El Paso should be more open to live music and supportive of their culture. Although in later years certain band members would claim California as their home, there is no denying that when the band first began they identified themselves as El Pasoans, the use of dual language helping them express their border identity. The band had deep personal ties to the events and people who they encountered in El Paso, Texas. These people affected them so greatly their presence was visible in more than one song. Considering the fact that many of the lyrics are considered surrealistic and difficult to understand, the fact that so many sought answers after reading these lyrics speaks to how much the band was able to communicate their experience through their lyrics.

The interview analysis is perhaps the most telling facet in the argument for At the Drive In's communication message. The examples of culture, events and place are referred to in the interview questions posed by the various interviewers from their respective magazines and fanzines. The questions asked by the interviewers from all over the U.S. say more about the communication of culture, politics and events than the answers of the musicians themselves. The communication of border culture leads to the identification and expression of the two nations that exist on the border. When interviewed by various news outlets throughout the U.S. the band explained that their influence was multi-faceted, due in part to their ethnicity as well as being raised on the border, names like "Hell Paso" were the first indication of the band's identification as a border band, even if they were non-traditional in their music, appearance and views. (it may be argued that though ATDI's political views were leftist, and at times revolutionary, views that historically correspond with events that occurred on the border. This notion would be a great addition to future study, although not applicable to the present study.

There are many limitations to this study, ATDI could be interviewed, members of the audience could be polled, and live concerts could have been analyzed. However, recent events such as the growing number of people killed in Juárez, the band's break-up and feelings for each other could greatly affect the responses received. The interviews, although dated, reflect what the band was experiencing at the time. The band was in the middle of their first tour, since then they have had long careers, various bands and have received Grammy awards for their work. It would be difficult for these experiences not to affect any opinions they may have had about the past at this time.

There were a great deal of live performances that were caught on video, some of these are available through the internet, found on youtube.com. These clips may have also been analyzed as the band would display the different flags that represent their ethnicity. These articles could be studied as well for the bands seemingly violent and energetic displays as they performed live. However, delving into this research would lead into the study of performance and to include that layer into the study, although beneficial, would not be feasible in regard to time.

The band, as a whole, had deeply rooted political beliefs that they dispelled in interviews, however, their leftist ideals were very apparent throughout their lyrics, their opposition to slam dancing and moshing despite their own aggressive behavior onstage. There were video clips that are still available where the band's frontman, Bixler-Zavala stopped a live performance and reused to play unless the slam dancing ceased in the audience. These instances could have readily been applied to this study, however that portion of the study would fall under political communication and once again the addition of this layer was not applicable given time constraints.

ATDI and its music offered a unique insight into border culture. It is one of the first bands of its kind to be studied in such a manner and is a notable part of music history, which is also a great part of border history and El Paso history. ATDI's message was and continues to be received by many who learn more about the music, border and band at every turn of the record (CD).

APPENDIX A

Music Lyrics

Coded Lyrics

Spanish language words- bold

References to Place-underline

References to Person/Event-Italics

“Red Planet”

I don't mind all these blatant stares
Cuz my words are like all you
People, meaningless
Spineless like the mime, imitates
The shrine, the shrine of college
Cretin bags, yeah come pick me a winner
Mr. A&R **dinero** thug

Used to be that fun was our
Main objective, but Mr. old school
Will tell the new fuel, they're
Igniting in the wrong direction
Cash crop clubs in the entertainment
Section

Do you know the red planet?
Do you know yourself?
Do do do company policy
Do do do all rights reserved
Do do do funds are pending
Do do do you're a sales figure

I don't mind if you take me there
In fact I want to see the stars
We'll take the plunge in a fabric boat
And we'll sink together, just sign my
Destiny and I will seal it forever

Emptiness is a mule
There's a place I call home,
and It's there anymore

Once upon a crime, with the radio on I was trampled underfoot
By the prince far guard broadcasting
To your living room two miles from Bangladesh
I will walk your rope without that safety net this member is dismembered
But who still remembers that we're all pretenders

Watch your step because the mule is an empty
Because the mule is free

Fifth time on the mission
Her volcano erupted so respect equal's embarrassment testosterone coward
I'm ashamed to be a pig amongst the pork
That fights the war against the wounded
And disabled the life I've encountered

Take the time don't you hold your breath
Cuz as the years pass by we turn blue
You can't be absolute within the obsolete
So don't whisper and murmur like a fool
Pick a card from the shuffling base
But all your kings and queens are gone
So how the hell do you expect to swim in all your filthy cesspool of psalms

Motel coffin deposit, down and out on 6th St. a la Japan

"Schaffino"

this time I'm gonna take the collection baby
and with the money in my hand
I'm gonna purchase all the details
scrub you clean with my soap opera chirping
walking on tip-toed pickpocket fever
racing up the scales of your thermometer
turnbuckle tourniquet clotting the moonshine
Clothes lined seizures singing happy valentines
I found feathers in the hit and run nest
omerttas not a prayer on your rosary beads

when she knocked me over
I looked inside the hearse
sprouting chauvinistic swine
and written were the words
poking butter with this knife
allergic to this concubine
racing by in a '56 Chevy
and we couldn't even pretend

to be alive...

I found feathers in the hit and run nest
scrub you clean with my soap opera chirping

"Embroglio"

I had a friend who died
for something he really loved
I had a friend who stood
for none of the above
I had a friend whose experience
was riddled with scars
who got drunk one night
in the trunk of *Louie P.'s* car
I had a friend who'd love to scare you
as was his affection
and tremble you did
'cause you weren't worthy of his friendship
I had a friend, but now
he's stranded on the Mesa Street exit
and sometimes I'm jealous
'cause I'm still at the intersection
I had a friend whose heart was too heavy to hold
yes there's blood on the median
like a boat without oars

duct tape the cross on the brown colored box
single file line on the unpaved road
they tipped their hats, respect for the dead
in Juárez, Mexico is where they buried my friend

There are no words to express
the loss I feel since you've been away
you made this typical sad song
a physical classroom
where I learned nothing
just flashes of your face

it's all a facade and nothing really matters now
he's stranded somewhere on the Mesa Street exit
and sometimes I'm jealous waiting at the intersection

I had a friend whose heart was too heavy to hold
yes there's blood on the median like a boat without oars
it's all a facade, and nothing really matters now

"Blue Tag"

I'm an incision
the kind that glistens
and not to mention we appeal
when we've healed
I'm an incision, just an incision
I've got Polaroid value
in a celluloid way

with twelve hard years of currency
and they trade it all
for the current scene
I'm an incision
the kind that glistens
Polaroid value
celluloid way

this air condition
is on intermission
we're burning on the border
like they said that we would

I'm an incision, just an incision
the kind that glistens
and we appeal when we've healed
burning on the borders like they said that we would

with twelve hard years of currency
and they trade it all for the current scene
they're partial to the way you speak
blue tagged, blue tagged and incomplete
burning on the borders like they said that we would

"Porfirio Diaz"

Kiss and kill your boyfriend
And all rich ones, too
Rich kids of the world unite
Dime on the bleachers
Head says not that far away
But the only way up is down
And I keep falling
Flip it again, but the answer
Hasn't spared its change
Doesn't matter how much time

You'll never forget that forgetting's required
Served on a platter of fakes
It's inevitable
We're proud to be pricks
We're proud to be assholes
Picking up the pieces one by one
Don't let it ride
Answer, someone, anyone
Won't you pick up the pieces
You left behind?

"Speechless"

Mother Nature never smelled so good
can I taste the flower that you carry
brilliant minds with pretty faces never cry
pedestal is crumbling down
now you're on the ground
selfless days are way too many
lay back, spread your legs, and don't make a sound

hiding bruises he brings you roses
says "I'm sorry" now it's okay
no hard feelings, no deep meanings
you were once special
but just for a day

he hook and baits you
to break you in two
now no one is saying
that it'll be all right
promises when he says "I love you"
face first to the floor
now you just don't know

speaking up!
because no one's listening

all those lonely nights
you stayed up and cried
sick to your stomach with butterflies
he says "come here and hold me close
you never really seem to smile when I touch you"
saccharine sweet flavored drinks
taste so old
this burning in your mind
makes you feel so cold

no recollection of affection
we're only safe from harm when nothing
matters only 20 years have passed
and you're already feeling old
bell jar is ringing
and no one understands the feeling of
kicking a dead cow
and hoping that I will come alive
when everything is wrong
you just say..
"I'm doing fine."

she's reaching for something right

"Napolean Solo"

cut and paste
were you sitting down
on the beaded impotence of New Orleans
a hint of suspense when that telephone rings
this is forever

it paved a wave of distance
between the syntax error
from Austin's yellow brick road
this is forever

from this Texas breath exhaled
no sign of relief
this you know, this you know
this is forever

march 23rd hushed the wind, the music died
if you can't get the best of us now
it's because this is forever

makes no difference
our alphabet is missing letters
seventeen, embalmed and caskets
lowered into the weather
a drizzle, brisk and profound

from this Texas breath exhaled
no sign of relief
this is forever

strum this broken harp
we were struck by the chords
set from their hearts
this is forever

"A Devil Among The Tailors"

they say that thirteen is just a number
a double agent funded in the secret
of the hive and the workers and their lives
all sweet and honeycombed
a hunger ravenous and funded
incognito razor burns
talcum powered fingerprints
all sweet and honeycombed
stick your tongue on the north pole
read the graffiti splattered on the convertible
this bullet x marked the rumors jet-lagged
stab you with this pitchfork
part your hair on the grassy knoll
a cavity of candy in Havana captivity
we heard the mug shots
a patsy inclined.
let the pollen make you sneeze
all sweet and honeycombed
"hasta la victoria siempre"
manana hay misa para los sordos

"Rascuache"

of fences with switches
turn them on
the moats of your homes
poured salt on
these slugs
mugshot fatigue
shimmering

pacemaker pace yourself
you were slowly clawing
your way out

tourniquet of gossip
on a board of checkered
chess
salt ring probing
in case of emergency

stampede is coming
mastodon infantry
radiate this frequency
and show me just what
the hell you mean

pacemaker pace yourself
you were slowly clawing
your way out

here comes the bride
here comes the bride
lavender and smothered in
black turpentine

"Invalid Litter Dept."

intravenously polite it was the walkie-talkies
that had knocked the pins down
as their shoes gripped the dirt floor
in the silhouette of dying
dancing on corpses' ashes

yeah, they had plans for him
they has spun the last of the pimps
polyester, satin nailed jewelry lips
while the guillotine just laughed again
dancing on the corpses' ashes

paramedics fell into the wound
like a rehired scab at a barehanded plant
an anesthetic penance beneath
the hail of contraband

they had been defected and excommunicated
and all the pulses were subverted
and they made sure the obituaries
showed pictures of smoke stacks

a vivid dissection that mocked
the strut of vivisection
semi-automatic colonies
and a silencing that still walks the streets

in the company of wolves
was a stretcher made of
cobblestone curfews

*the **federales** performed
their custodial customs quite well*

callous heels
numbed in travel
endless maps made
by their scalpels

on my way
nails broke and fell
into the
wishing well

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CURRICULUM VITA

Crystal Robert-Segura graduated from El Paso High School in 1997. She then began her academic career in Theatre Arts and Vocal Music at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, TX. When her grandmother became ill she returned to El Paso, attended UTEP, toyed with various majors in Communication before graduating with a BA in Organizational Communication in 2005. She returned to UTEP and entered the Alternative Teaching Certification Program in Education. Although the Education courses were to her liking, she was more at home in the Communication Department and began the MA program in Fall 2009. Throughout her graduate work she was granted two scholarships for travel. The first was granted in Summer 2009 for travel to study abroad in Indonesia. The second scholarship was granted for travel to the National Communication Association Conference where she presented a “scholar to scholar” paper co-authored with Dr. Stacey Sowards, and Paul Enger.

She has had the opportunity to work as a Teaching Assistant under the tutelage of Dr. Richard Pineda for two years while studying for my MA. Before and throughout entering the MA program she worked as a local music columnist at the El Paso Times, a position she held for six years. She also worked for the Department of Student Publications, where she was the editor for *Minero* magazine, a bilingual student publication for one and a half years, and worked as a special topics reporter for the student newspaper, *The Prospector*.

Crystal Robert-Segura currently works at the El Paso Times as a reporter and copy editor and looks forward to the next chapter in her academic and professional career.