2017-2018 Outstanding Thesis Award Winner Kamiya Stewart

Dorris Kamiya Stewart's groundbreaking thesis, *Losing Control: The Consequences of Individual- and Group- Based Social Exclusion on Latina Women's Self-Regulation of Unhealthy Eating* earned her the 2017-2018 Outstanding Thesis Award for scholarship, originality, and contribution to the field. Written for her Master of Arts in Psychology, Kamiya's work may be the first published research that compares the consequences of individual and group based exclusion. The complexity of her hypotheses required a unique approach, and Kamiya proved she was up to the task.

Kamiya Stewart, MA in Psychology

Kamiya's thesis examined social exclusion and its effects on self-control and eating behavior. Within the field of psychology, there is an ongoing discussion as to whether individual or group-based exclusion is more harmful. Kamiya suggests that the two theories are not at odds but are instead complimentary. The outcome depends on a third component – whether the exclusion is fair (e.g., based on skill level or ability) or unfair (based on ethnicity, gender, or race). Kmiya predicted that fair social exclusion would especially impair self-regulation when it was related to individual identity, and that unfair social exclusion would especially impair self-regulatory ability when it was related to group identity (e.g., ethnicity).

 "Not being able to control your eating behavior might lead to many health problems, like obesity," Kamiya noted. Thus, it's important to understand the situations that might lead to unhealthy eating behavior."

Testing this hypothesis was a complex process that involved developing a video game, training more than a dozen research assistants, and studying the results from 229 research participants. To test her theory, Kamiya decided to create a group player video game that allowed her to manipulate who would ultimately be excluded from the game, followed by a seemingly unrelated taste test for chocolate candy. The study tested four categories of exclusion: 1. Individual fair exclusion; 2. Individual unfair exclusion; 3. Group fair exclusion, and; 4. Group unfair exclusion.

After playing the game, participants completed a survey which included a measure of negative emotion, and were invited to taste test chocolate candies in what they thought was an unrelated study. Kamiya then measured calories consumed to determine levels of self-control after experiencing social exclusion. As predicted, those who were excluded "fairly" based on individual ability, as well as those who were excluded unfairly based on race, showed greater negative emotion and a higher consumption of calories. Her findings not only reconciled two different psychological theories, but were the first to explore the moderating role of perceived fairness.

"I was excited to learn that the findings provided support for the hypotheses," Kamiya said. "Not only is my project a major theoretical contribution to the social psychology field, but it provides avenues for future research."

Kamiya has a few words of advice for future CSUSB Psychology students: "If you're considering an MA in Psychology, speak with faculty members who share your interests. CSUSB has plenty of faculty members in the Department of Psychology who are experts in their respective fields. They can guide you in the

right direction based on your academic development, your research experience, knowledge, interests, and your future career goals."

Having received that guidance from her committee chair, Donna Garcia, Kamiya is now beginning her second year as a Ph.D. student in Social Psychology at Tulane University, where she serves as a graduate researcher, teaching assistant, and mentor to students from underrepresented populations. She plans to become a university professor and research scholar, and is well on her way to reaching her goals.