

The Sociological Eye

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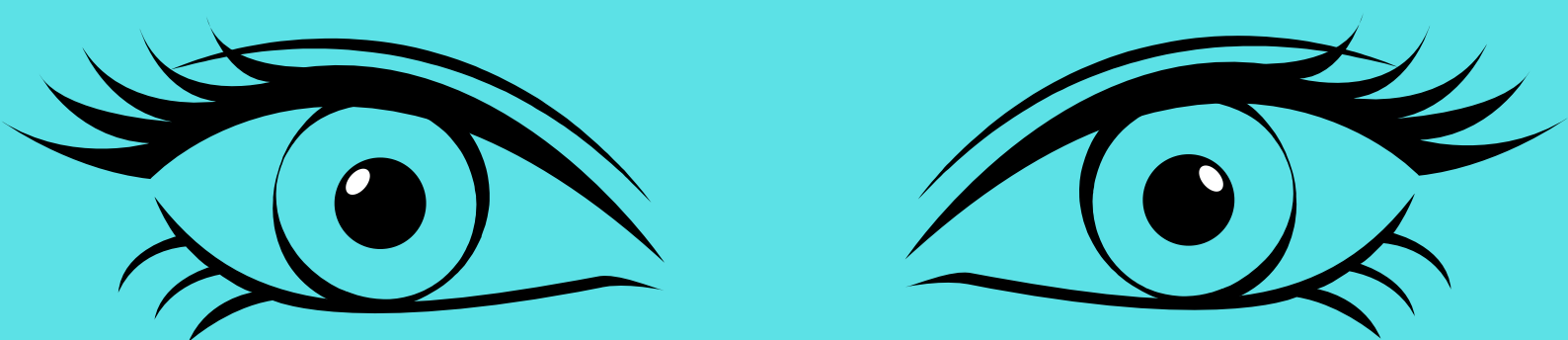


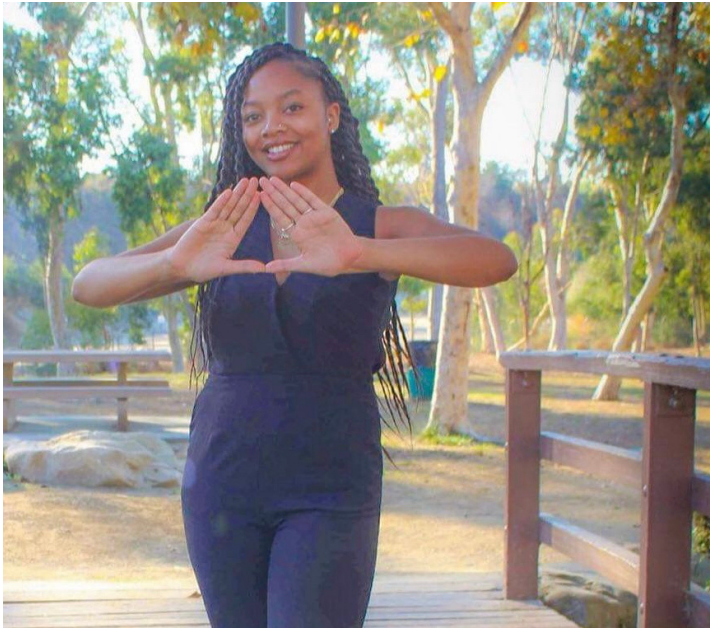
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Preface

THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT IS PLEASED TO PRESENT THE 2022 EDITION OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL EYE. THE PAPERS IN THIS YEAR'S EDITION WERE AUTHORED BY A DIVERSE SET OF STUDENTS AND FEATURE A VARIETY OF TOPICS. ALL THE CONTRIBUTIONS SHARE A COMMITMENT TO SCHOLARSHIP THAT FOCUSES ON CURRENT EVENTS AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SOCIAL PROBLEMS CALLING FOR PROMPT ATTENTION AND REMEDIATION. MANY OF THE PAPERS WERE WRITTEN IN THE SOCIOLOGY SEMINAR, THE CAPSTONE COURSE WHICH STUDENTS TAKE IN THEIR SENIOR YEAR AS THE CULMINATION OF THEIR LMU SOCIOLOGY EDUCATION. THE SUBMISSIONS SHOW A BREADTH AND DEPTH OF SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND MAKE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO IMPROVING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOCIAL WORLD AND ADDRESSING ITS TROUBLED CONDITIONS. SEVERAL OF THE SUBMISSIONS FOCUS ON ISSUES IN IMPORTANT SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING EDUCATION (PATTERSON AND GOMEZ), MEDIA AND GENDER (KOO), HEALTH (KASHANI), AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE (MELENDEZ). OTHER MANUSCRIPTS EXAMINE PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES IN VARIED CULTURAL SETTINGS (SUDZHYN AND MINGO). THE EDITION ALSO INCLUDES TWO CONTRIBUTIONS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON EVERYDAY CONCERNS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND BROADER SOCIAL PROBLEMS (CHAVEZ-CARDENAS AND WALLACK).

Jordyn Patterson



Jordyn Patterson is a double major in Sociology and African American Studies. She has goals of moving on to get her Ph.D. and eventually become a credible sociologist that focuses on intersecting inequities and the impacts these have on low-income communities of color. During Jordyn's time at Loyola Marymount University, she has been a dedicated member of the First To Go program, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, The Learning Community, and the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program

Underfunded High Schools and Their Impact on Students' Education

My topic covers the inequities in education; focusing on underfunded schools and communities and their effects on Black and LatinX high school student graduation rates and matriculation to college. I predominantly highlighted the educational opportunity gap, lack of resources, and mental health of the students during their junior and senior years of high school. The educational opportunity gap is a lack of opportunity that students in underfunded schools experience rather than a lack of achievement based on school and environmental circumstances. The research question that best guided my study was: What factors significantly influence the high school graduation and college matriculation rates of Black and LatinX students in under-resourced schools? This is a social issue for the Black and LatinX communities that examines structural conditions, systems, and policies that greatly impact academic performance and access to college. The U.S. Department of Education admits that "far too many students, especially in underserved groups and communities, lack robust access to the core elements of a quality education" (Paige, 2001). There are so many underfunded schools in low-income communities of color, and research shows that the students who attended these schools are more likely to not graduate high school, be eligible to attend college, or maintain retention during college. A USA Today article states "Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics, 24/7 Wall St. developed an index of measures, including the child poverty rate, the teacher-to-student ratio, per-pupil spending, the share of adults with a college education, and the high school graduation rate to determine the school district where students are least likely to succeed in every state" (Stebbins & Sauter, 2020), which shows how these factors play such a big role in a student's overall success. It is also important to understand that regardless of these statistics, it is very common for lower-income people of color to attend these poorly resourced schools due to the neighborhoods that they reside in; therefore, Black and LatinX students make up large portions of the population at many different high poverty schools.

This is also exemplified in the Commonwealth Institute study in Virginia where it shows that “Among those enrolled in high poverty schools, 83 % are students of color, with Black students (60 %) and Hispanic students (18 %) as the largest racial/ethnic groups” and the numbers are increasing year to year (Commonwealth Institute, 2021). The issues that I have explored affect all the students who attend or have attended underfunded schools. My purpose in this study was to ultimately get a better understanding of the positive and negative implications that attending underfunded schools and communities have on Black and LatinX students. I wanted to shed light on the influencing factors that affect their academic performance, graduation rates, and matriculation to college to help community organizers and educators learn how to best support students with the educational opportunity gap they face.

Literature Review

There is a major disservice happening to students in high minority populated and low-income communities regarding education. The opportunity gap and its effects on students attending under-resourced schools can be very real and long-lasting, in terms of mental health and academics. The dropout rates, the number of students eligible for graduation, and the lack of students applying/attending colleges are mostly due to the opportunity gap. Students from low-income communities of color lack resources such as SAT Prep, personal statement coaching, appropriate counseling support, and many other essentials that high school students need to be college-bound, or just to graduate and/or have the tools to be successful in the future. It is also important to note that external factors such as neighborhoods/environments, socioeconomic status, race, class, and parental and community engagement all affect these students' circumstances, especially in education. When young people encounter such challenges, they can affect the student's academic success, particularly when paired with underfunded schools. Educational and academic success are not the only ways to succeed in life but are important factors in future financial and emotional well-being according to several studies. Caputo, for example, found that those who are not even given the opportunity to succeed in their academics--graduating and/or receiving higher education-- could be more likely to be set in the same set of circumstances that lack beneficial resources such as good healthcare and readily available high paying jobs/careers later in life (Caputo, 2005).

Educational Opportunity Gap

Originally known as the Educational Achievement Gap, schools with more funding/resources are compared to those that are underfunded. It is now widely accepted that students experience an educational opportunity gap rather than an achievement gap because schools and communities do not provide adequate opportunities for students. This gap occurs because there are differences in funding, teacher quality/education, resources, extracurricular activities offered, class sizes, and student achievement. A very important study shows exactly how lack of resources can truly affect a student's academic performance. Wachob examined the effects of class size on students' academic success and found that smaller class sizes promote academic success because they offer more opportunities for students to be active, for the environment to be student-centered, and to have more of a one-on-one between student and teacher (Wachob, 2021). Smaller class size ultimately offer a better quality of education and provides an opportunity to bridge a small gap toward reducing the educational opportunity gap. Data from the US Government notes “the wealthiest 10% of school districts in the United States spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10%” (Smedley, 2001). Other studies show that most racial and ethnic minority students are attending these poor school districts. Along with that, it is shown and known that segregation is still present, and most minority students (about 2/3) attend predominantly minority schools.

Poverty and socioeconomic status also affect students' academic outcomes. Reinking and Bouley back this information up by explaining that most students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds receive lower-quality education and have fewer resources such as lacking in textbooks and computers when compared to their peers from better-resourced districts, yet they end up competing against them when applying to colleges and jobs (Reinking & Bouley, 2021). It may seem easy to suggest that a student should transfer to a better school with better funding allocation and resources, but studies show that commuting can create more adversities for the students as well. Studies also have found that those of middle-class Asian descent were more likely to get into these better and more academically competitive schools compared to the lower-income students (of Latin American descent) (Sattin-Bajaj, C., 2014). Ultimately, existing research shows how it is not as easy as it seems to just up and leave these underfunded schools and go to a better-resourced one in another neighborhood. Lastly, it is important to note that even when these students do end up getting into these well-funded and academically supported schools, they still face many mental, emotional, physical, and financial challenges in keeping up the extra time, space, and effort it takes to go commute to a school that is not near their homes.

Low-income, Underserved Neighborhoods Effect on Student's Academic Performance

It is widely known that one's environment is important to one's identity. As a young adult, this holds even more truth--especially while in school. Prior research addresses home-school environments and their effect on the student's education and desire to graduate high school or go to college. One researcher interviewed 18 low-income, racially and ethnically diverse graduates of high school and found that their neighborhood affected their education (Kenny, 2016). They all graduated, but they discussed how it was hard and how they fought through excessive adversities, but still managed to succeed through those adversities. Some students faced chronic absenteeism that usually led to students dropping out. The reasoning for chronic absenteeism included poor geographic access to school, stressful family events, poor health, and fear of bullying, just to name a few (Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Ilakkuvan, 2021). These events are mostly related to their neighborhood environments and show how they can easily affect school life and attendance. Studies exploring the racial political climate in the country along with discriminatory acts faced locally by students show an impact on their mental health and academic performance as well. For example, Gower speaks of how the constant stigmas and biases that minority communities face--like the LGBTQ+ community-- have negative influences on their academic performances (Gower, 2021). Other studies found that students who live in these communities can potentially experience trauma, violence, victimization, and oppression that can lead them astray in their educational success (Rosenthal, 2009). Furthermore, Rosenthal found that better home life and better emotional and social support can assist in counteracting negative influences, academic performance, and getting through the long and tough journey of graduating high school and applying/attending college.

Health and Education

My research question focuses on the factors that influence students' graduation rates and matriculation to college. One focal point within my study is mental and emotional well-being because I wanted to examine the mental health status of the Black and LatinX students coming from underfunded schools and school districts. My purpose is to exemplify the significant link between health and academic performance using a study that includes an EPOCH measure which shows that students' well-being and positive psychological functioning were associated with and directly related to school connectedness and social skills (Choi, 2021). This confirms that social and emotional well-being is related to school outcomes and performances. Another article examined how it was important to assess and address the psychosocial needs of the students in a school to ensure proper resources are available so that schoolwork can be completed with greater ease despite the possible negative experiences happening in their homes, environments, families, etc. (Cardell, 2020).

Emotional and Mental Health & The Effects on Academic Outcomes

There are plenty of real-life examples that clearly show how positive mental health correlates with positive results in school. An example is why the Empowered Youth Program sought to improve test scores, grades, and to just overall help with extra support. Authors like Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey found that parental engagement, community involvement, and more support overall will increase the number of students going to college and academic success (Bailey, D. F., & Bradbury-Bailey, M. E., 2010). Another set of researchers observed around 10 freshmen in high school who lived in a low socioeconomic status, low-income, and under-resourced community. Their findings suggested that proactive mentoring, daily tutoring, and group activities are the beginning steps to become support systems for these students and it promotes academic success (Oreopoulos, P., Brown, R. S., & Lavecchia, A. M., 2017).

In addition to positive mental health creating positive academic outcomes, the reverse happens as well. If one is creating negative mental health effects or not paying attention to the negative mental health effects of a student, they should not expect the student to perform adequately in the classroom. The students should not have to perform Superman-like qualities and achieve through such adversity when many of their counterparts do not have to. Physical health can also affect graduation rates. Crimmins et. al explain "In the United States, minority racial and ethnic groups, as well as those in lower socioeconomic groups, are at increased risk for experiencing both below-average academic outcomes and worse health outcomes" (Crimmins et. al, p347, 2020). These findings show the disproportionate nature of educational outcomes and illustrate why students experience an opportunity gap versus an achievement gap. Crimmins predicts school-based health centers could improve absenteeism, attendance, graduation rates, overall health, etc. which promotes the idea that good health is congruent with increased positive academic performance. Health problems are linked to a decrease in motivation and ability to learn. "Scientists and stakeholders agree that students must be healthy to be ready to learn" (Basch, 2015). Barriers to healthcare disproportionately affect racial minority youth which can be another factor of the educational opportunity gap and address why dropout rates are high within the minority populations. The idea of health affecting education is just a topic most people do not usually look into and/or link together but it is mandatory that one's mental and physical health is up to par in order to be in the best headspace to learn.

Conclusion

The research was consistent about the negative effect of the opportunity gap on students who attend under-resourced schools, but they varied in their recommendations for remedying the gap. Some sources claim that the gap is due to the environment-- the experience of living in a low-income, underserved community, while some claim that it is simply due to race, class, and/or socioeconomic status. Other sources believe that the gap is due to home/family life while others believe it is the schooling and programs offered or lack thereof. New studies exploring the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic concerning education expose the dramatic consequences of attending underfunded schools and the lack of support and resources outside and inside of school. Overall, the studies mostly show how many factors can influence a student's academic performance and desire to graduate or apply to college. I believe it to be especially important to focus on the student's overall mental and emotional health since the various factors work together to influence their health so heavily. Improving mental health and well-being will increase motivation, desire, and ability to achieve upward mobility in education or even just finish school. One shift in the research on this topic has proposed the implementation of external programs to give the students exactly what they need. Also, studies have found that more policies should be in place to help this issue of the educational opportunity gap.

Methods: Sample

The research question for my study was what factors significantly influence the high school graduation and college matriculation rates of Black and LatinX students in under-resourced schools? I used a qualitative approach that started with a simple screening survey to collect certain demographic information followed by in-depth interviews from those who completed the survey. I conducted 14 interviews with Black and LatinX college-aged individuals. I specifically interviewed Black and LatinX students because they are the students most likely to attend schools in underserved communities. I addressed underserved communities because most of the underfunded and under-resourced schools are in underserved and low-income communities. The common characteristic, or the qualifier for my participants was students who attended an underfunded high school during their junior/senior year. I also only interviewed individuals who attended high school from 2018 to 2020. I found my participants through the systematic process of snowball sampling/ chain referral sampling.

Measurement

Before I began interviewing my participants, I administered a survey to see if they met the criteria for my study. The survey's purpose was mainly to collect demographic data and to make sure the participants met the inclusion guidelines.

The following were my survey questions:

- Name
- Email
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- Gender Identity?
- What high school did you attend?
- What type of high school did you attend? (Public, Private, Charter, or Not Sure)
- What city/state is that school located in?
- *Do you consider your school to be an "under-resourced" school? ("Under-resourced schools are usually characterized as having insufficient resources and tend to serve large numbers of disadvantaged and/or low-income students" (Hammontree et.al, 2021)
- *Did you live in a low-income community? ("Low-income communities are census tracts with median household incomes at or below 80 percent of the statewide median income or with median household incomes at or below the threshold designated" (Shrider et. al, 2021).
- Did you go to school in a low-income community?
- How many college counselors did you have? (Answers will be in ranges)
- Approximately how many students did you usually have in a classroom? (Answers will be in ranges)
- Did you have any SAT Prep? personal statement coaches? resume prep? college fair field trips? (Answer will be in paragraph form)

My participants assisted me with collecting my data with their responses to my interview questions.

My interview questions were the following:

- What were your main goals and aspirations during your junior and/or senior year of high school pertaining to getting additional education?

- What were your school's specific graduation requirements?
- How do you think your school could have prepared you better for life after HS?
- When you were in high school, did you want to go to college?
- If no:
 - What were the reasons you might have been uninterested in going to or applying to college if you do not mind me asking?
 - Were there any mental or emotional factors that had an influence on your rationale? - In regards to your plans after HS, did you feel prepared to tackle those plans?
 - Did you end up pursuing any of those goals/plans?
- If yes:
 - Did you start college applications during those years of HS? If so, how would you say that experience was for you?
 - How did you feel your preparation level was for the college applications and all of the requirements needed for the college applications?
 - Were there any factors that played a part in you finishing/not finishing your college applications? Explain, please.
- Were there any aspects of your school/community that promoted and/or inspired you to go to college? Explain in detail, please.
- Did any of the factors related to going to college impact your academic performance throughout high school? If so, how?
- What other external factors during high school impacted your academic performance if any?
- How would you describe your mental and emotional health during that period in high school (as you were applying to college or getting ready to graduate high school)?
- At that time, how would you characterize your stress levels to be with everything going on (preparation or lack thereof of life after HS) during your junior/senior year of HS? On a scale of 1-10 and why?
- What year did you graduate high school?

In my study, when I addressed resources I was referring to college coaches, teacher-to-student ratio, test prep for ACT/SAT, etc. Also, when I asked my participants about external factors I was referring to any outside factors that could contribute to their schooling experience, like neighborhood contexts, broader political contexts, etc. Lastly, when I spoke on impact, I was asking for positive and/or negative impacts.

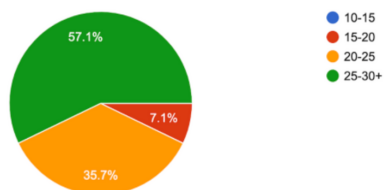
Procedures

I conducted my in-depth interviews through Zoom and turned on the subtitles. I asked my participants for consent to record the Zoom meeting, which allowed the subtitle function to provide transcripts. I downloaded the transcripts and recordings and analyzed responses using those transcripts. I examined interview transcripts to find any common themes between them. I looked closely for any keywords, words that were often repeated by many of the subjects, and for patterns of positive or negative words being used. I also sought similarities and differences between the students and the types of schools in which they attended (magnet, public, charter, etc.). I collected demographic data from my participants so that I could examine patterns and/or differences between identities. This was done through my survey where I asked them about race, gender identity, school, type of school, school location, and resources provided at the school. My survey also acted as a screener for my participants to make sure they met the guidelines for my study.

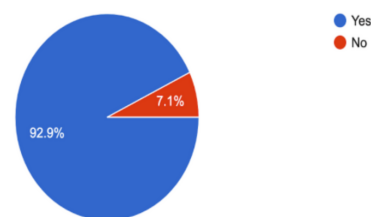
Results

In the data I collected from my study participants, I found very intriguing factors that influence students the most during their last years of high school when they were applying to college and/or preparing to graduate. My survey and interviews identified school factors, individual factors, and external factors that highly impacted their academic achievements. All of the individuals who participated in my study attended under-resourced schools and identified as Black or Latinx. The following charts illustrate my participants' experiences:

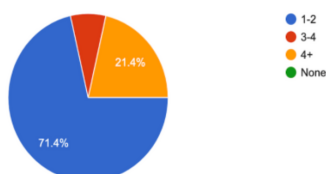
Approximately, how many students did you usually have in a classroom?
14 responses



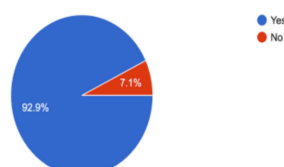
Did you go to school in a low-income community?
14 responses



How many college counselors did you have?
14 responses



Did you live in a low-income community? ("Low-income communities are census tracts with median household incomes at or below 80 percent of...old designated" (California Census Tracts, 2021)
14 responses



School-Related Effects on Student Performance

From my interviews, the data showed that several school-related factors affected the student's academic performance, graduation status, and preparation level to apply/attend college. First, I inquired about the school's general graduation requirements to see how they aligned or did not align, with proper preparation for life after high school. Many of the college prep and magnet high schools required the students to complete community service hours and gave the option to take college courses, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and Honors classes, which are more rigorous classes than an average class and can be very helpful to your GPA. Other schools required their students to complete Senior Portfolios to graduate which included an updated resume, personal statement essays, teacher references, and more. These requirements from the school gave students a head start in preparing for life after high school. Other schools simply made the A-G requirements, a set of high school courses that one must pass to be minimally eligible for admission to the University of California, stand as their graduation requirements. Participant MU discussed her specific graduation requirements and described the classes as "not as challenging as it should've been to prepare me for college." Participant H explained how she did not know that participating in volunteer work or taking AP classes would help her look better on college applications and how she wishes she would have known to do these things earlier like other students did [because of their parents]." This distinction is important when compared to another participant who attended a college prep school and was later very thankful that they were required to do community service hours and take Honors classes because it gave her "something to passionately write about for college applications."

The participants in my study also described the support they received from their respective schools in assisting with graduation and applying to college. Participant A mentioned that "there was a limited amount of staff, but they helped as much as they could." As my survey 5 shows, 71.4% of the students I interviewed attended high schools with just 1 or 2 college counselors to serve the entire student body. The interview data shows that students needed stronger advising, more counselors, and overall, more resources. Some of the interviewees elaborated on these matters and explained how the few resources they had at school made a major difference. Participant F explained, "teachers and counselors were there for me in the best way that they could but it was the education system that wasn't providing me with the necessary resources." Participant B similarly stated that she wished her school could have done more for her, but she knows they could not because of a lack of funds. Another participant noted, "more counselors would be helpful, but my one counselor tried their hardest." Furthermore, the students described how several teachers wrote letters of recommendation, negotiated grade changes, reviewed personal statement essays, and much more to help the students get into college by any means necessary.

Other students felt that they had little access to teachers to ask for help because their schools were overpopulated. Participant B states "there would be around 40 students in a classroom at once, and so many students asking for assistance after class that they did not have time to help me." The pie graph on page 11 shows that around 57% of my study's participants had 25-30+ students in a classroom and over 30% had 20-25 students in a classroom. Multiple participants stated that they lacked 1:1 faculty support at their schools, which they felt could have really helped them during their last years of high school. This lack of support and 1:1 communication led students to decline in their academic performance.

Participant B further mentions how she failed her first class in her junior year of high school because she was trying to balance applying to college and schoolwork all at once and alone. Many of the student participants in this study identified as first-generation college students, so they heavily relied on resources at their school to provide them with information on how to apply to college. Words such as “stress” and “anxiety” came up often as the participants discussed how their emotional and mental health was during this time in high school regarding their preparation or lack thereof for graduation requirements and/or applying to college. Participant MO exemplifies this finding by stating that she oftentimes felt “overwhelmed because I didn’t have too much support; my two advisors could not help all the students at the school so I had to find my own way.” Students mentioned feeling overwhelmed when asked about their mental health during this specific period in their lives.

The last major school-related impact on students’ academic performance during their junior and senior years of high school was the overall push for students to attend college in the school area and/or community. There was a split perspective on the specific type of motivation for students to go to college. Some of the participants recalled that their high schools consistently characterized college as the only option and the only pathway to success after high school. Participant MO said, “it was always going to college, go to college, go to college, but college wasn’t necessarily for me so now I feel stuck and unprepared for life outside of school because that was all they really tried to prepare us for.” Participants A, EK, ET, MZ, and MO all mentioned how their high schools should have included courses on financial literacy such as credit, investing, management, or on trades such as mechanics, firefighting, etc. Many explained how looking at college as the only option was damaging to their mindset because they started to see it as the only way “out of their environment” or the sole way to succeed in life. On the flip side, other students saw the emerging college-going culture of their high school as inspiring. Participant EK stated that “college being pushed on the students so hard almost made me feel like college was really an option.” This is an essential finding for my study because it exemplifies how the more that college is talked about in these spaces, the more it seems that these students have access to it and can succeed in it. The simple act of believing in yourself can take one so far and bringing up college repeatedly seems as though it can create that belief and norm of applying to college into these underfunded schools and/or low-income communities. Other participants mentioned how motivating it was for the college to be portrayed as an opportunity to get out of their current environment. The opportunities gained by attending college were a popular motivating factor amongst their peers and created a college-going culture that normalized applying to colleges. The competitive atmosphere and college-going culture positively impacted participants’ mental health during that time by creating an inspiring environment filled with students of shared interests, goals, and struggles.

External Resources Impact on Student Performance & College-Going

Students also shared that external resources assisted them in furthering their education and/or graduating from high school. One of the most influential external resources were programs and organizations unaffiliated with their high school. My survey asked the participants to explain, in their own words, the kinds of resources they had related to graduating high school or college. Many of the participants explained how they had little to no access to many resources such as personal statement coaching, SAT/ACT prep, college trips, college fair field trips, etc. until they connected with external programs such as Women in Entertainment, EMBODI by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, Riordan Scholars, Upward Bound, and Kid City. Participant ET explained, “I... went to various, different kinds of programs outside of school to try to help push me to get into UCLA or just a UC program.” Participant G stated, “I will never stop talking about my upward bound advisor, she was there from the start and pushed me towards my goals and always reminded me that I had the potential to succeed.” These external programs were discussed in entirely positive ways, with mentions of how the mentorship assisted them so much throughout their process of graduating high school and applying to college. Participant F says she was stressed 1000% of the time during her junior/senior year but was supported by her program and that is what kept her afloat. It was necessary for many of these students to find external help because their schools were unable to provide them with the proper resources to adequately succeed, post-high school. Participant MZ explained how he prepared for the SAT solely through Khan Academy. These students had to take their time and find rigorous academic programs to push them so they could be adequately prepared for the next chapter in their lives. Although these programs required that the students complete more work and could have been an added stressor, they were described as positive influences on the student’s futures and their preparation for their future.

Individual Factors Impact on Student Performance & College-Going

One of the last, but certainly not least, factors that greatly impacted these students’ graduation and college-going activities were individual factors and circumstances. Some of the participants in my study had extenuating circumstances, like having to work after school, and these affected their school life tremendously. Other students described different parts of their lives outside of school that affected their studies and college preparation.

Participant F claimed that she has been working since she was 16 and explained how difficult it was for her to keep up with school, college applications, and work. Participant H discussed her family's lack of access to Wi-Fi, a computer, and transportation which set her back in her academics. Participant ET discussed being regularly chastised by gang members, which would heavily affect his feelings of safety around his school. Also, Participant B stated how she would experience microaggressions and racist comments at her school which made her uncomfortable. All in all, it seemed like various factors of home life, family life, finances, work, and other personal situations played a big role in the student's mental health and well-being. When these factors became negative, academic performance would decline.

However, regardless of what happened in their home/family life, many students were unphased and their academic performance was hardly affected. If anything, participants mentioned that as junior/senior year came around and college applications opened, more students became interested in focusing on their grades and doing better in the classroom. Participant J said, "college app season made me want to work harder and really take care of business so that I can really have a chance at college." Participant G stated that she focused more on her studies during this time as well because she knew where it would lead--college. She mentioned that if her parents could move across the country and create a comfortable life for their kids, then the least she could do is receive good grades in school to go to college.

Although their academic performance was not always affected by these challenges, many of the participants still described their junior and senior years of high school as stressful. I asked for stress levels on a scale of 1-10 and received scores of 6 -11. Some of the stressors included understanding and completing financial aid/FAFSA for college since affording college was a big source of anxiety. As I mentioned before, the majority of the participants were first-generation college students so their fear of not being good enough, disappointing family/friends, and not knowing what to expect in college all caused feelings of being overwhelmed, exhausted, and stressed. These were the adjectives participants used to describe their mental and emotional health during that period. Participant ET stated how a lot of his stress and anxiety was with writing the personal statement for college applications because it made him feel as if he was selling his greatest traumas in exchange for education and that it was the only way his application was going to even be acknowledged. These personal factors and stressors greatly affected their mental health during this time in which they were preparing for graduation and/or college applications.

Discussion

The research question guiding this study was: what factors significantly influence the high school graduation AND college matriculation rates of Black and LatinX students in under-resourced schools? While I cannot address a causal relationship, the results illustrate the barriers that students from under-resourced schools face when they try to graduate, apply for, and attend college. From my survey and interview findings, I saw that mostly school-related, individual aspects, and external factors impacted and influenced students' matriculation to college. All of my participants graduated from high school. However, their mental health, academic performance, preparation for college/college applications, and their high school graduation status were all affected by the need for more resources. Peers and the culture of the school, as well as the school environment, motivated students to graduate high school and go to college. The college-going culture and push to go to college had split effects on different kinds of students. Also, external programs that were not usually affiliated with the student's respective high schools were highly appreciated by the students for giving them the resources needed to adequately apply to college, or graduate high school. School and faculty support meant a lot to the students, but they had a limited amount of time and effort to dedicate to the students and properly meet their needs.

My findings shed light on the additional inequities that students attending under-resourced schools face. Because they lacked adequate resources, the students felt they had to work 2-3x harder than students at better-funded and resourced schools because of the extra steps they had to take to be "competitive" in the workforce or college. The results also exemplify the educational opportunity gap these students face when they apply and attend college with little to no resources. The students mostly had to seek assistance elsewhere, such as from another program/organization after school, and work towards their future goals that way.

Many of the same factors that students identified in their interviews are consistent with prior studies. For example, Jacob and Lovett stated that their subjects' individual-level factors such as stressful family events, poor health, etc. oftentimes led to chronic absenteeism or dropping out of school (Jacob & Lovett, 2017); having a better home life and better emotional and social support can assist in educational success (Rosenthal, 2009). My participants mainly stated how such experiences affected their mental health more than their academic performance, even though both can be affected without anyone ever knowing. This not only confirms that more focus should be placed on the well-being and mental health of these students but also on how effective the strategy can be if taken seriously.

As far as school-related factors, many articles agree that resources are scarce and limited to the students attending these underfunded schools. Participant B complained about 40+ students being in a classroom at once and not having access to the teachers. Wachob explored the effects of class sizes on students' academic success and suggested that more 1:1 support in these schools would be beneficial (Wachob, 2021). Another article discussed the effects of the lack of resources such as textbooks and computers. My interview data routinely shows remarks of the stress and disadvantage due to the lack of these kinds of resources: SAT Prep, access to AP classes, efficient number of counselors, etc. The Princeton Review states that "[AP classes] could ease your transition from high school senior to first-year college student" and "show admissions officers that you're ready for college-level work" (Franek, 2021), but these courses were not as easily accessible to students in my study. Another article discusses what counts in admission decisions and includes "challenging courses as the most significant factor" with personal statement essays and teacher/counselor recommendations following (Education Professionals, 2021). These college sources exemplify the importance of the support that is needed for these students to properly be prepared to apply/attend college.

External mentorships and training programs were highly recommended in prior literature. Many of my participants admitted that they would know little to nothing about applying to college if it were not for their external programs not affiliated with their high school. Some researchers found that community involvement and support would increase the number of students graduating and going to college (Oreopoulos, P., Brown, R.S., & Lavecchia, A.M., 2017). A study of evaluation outcomes of multiple programs shows that these programs help students "perform comparably to other students at [the university] whose backgrounds approximated their own, and importantly, they were persisting at a very selective institution" (Paige, Whitehurst, & Phillips, p40, 2001). These external programs heavily influenced many students to become motivated to apply to college and/or just graduate from high school. Overall, my research shows how stress, mental health, and the well-being of students serve as an influence on academics, especially to graduate and/or apply to college. My purpose was to explore the positive and negative impacts of the factors and find out what the extent of the influence was.

Conclusion

Future research that should be explored with respect to my study would be the overall mental health of students in underfunded and low-income schools and communities. I would also explore how neighborhood factors, home/family life, and the political climate for minorities affect academic performance, high school graduation rates, and college matriculation rates. I believe student mental health should be researched in various kinds of schools because these specific factors can affect minority students in well-funded schools as well. This is true even if they are commuting from their house located in a low-income community to a school in which they attend in a higher income community -- which happens frequently with minority students because the community where they reside is usually far from well-funded schools. One of my limitations in this study was time, so I was unable to do a deeper cross-examination of the different types of schools in these low-income communities and how the resources provided differed at each type of school. With more time and participants, I could have also explored how the school's policies, structure, and curriculum could have impacted students' mental health and academic performance as well.

The academic programs that go into these underfunded schools give the students the resources they would not otherwise have had access to, and many of my participants spoke very highly of the support and mentorship they received from these external programs. Although it may make the students work harder, which is a disadvantage compared to other students who have the resources already in their school, these programs supplement the guidance that students receive in their coursework and interactions with counselors. Until these schools get the proper funding, to have in-house resources, these external programs are the best option yet and seem to work thus far. I would only suggest that the programs be more open and accessible for more students to join and be a part of the experience. Participant H described the external programs and resources offered at her school as on a "hush-hush... basis." If these experiences and resources become more inviting and open, then more and more students at these underfunded and under-resourced schools can get access to these usually privatized and exclusive resources.

Also, I suggest that there be more implementation of mental health programs to pair with these academic programs. It may take up more of the student's time and energy, but it is time well spent that is simultaneously helping them with their lives and not just at school. I am thinking these programs should provide access to therapy, mindfulness breathing workshops, yoga workshops, group discussions, etc, so students can work through the external and individual issues/stressors they face outside of school. These stressors affect academic performance and upward mobility post-high school, so programs can lift some emotional weight off of them to better focus on their studies. As Choi mentioned, "student's well-being and positive psychological functioning were associated and directly related to school connectedness and social skills" (Choi, 2021). A word I heard one too many times throughout this study was "STRESS." I believe stress has impacted these students and affected their academic performance in ways they cannot even begin to think of. The interviewees expressed how stressed they were during their junior/senior years of high school because they were dealing with home life, neighborhood threats, their class assignments/homework, all while trying to navigate and apply to a system that they know little to nothing about.

Their mental and emotional health was drained and the only resources they had offered to them were rigorous academic programs that just made them work that much harder. An article published in 2020 found that increasing mental health resources would help improve student outcomes (Hines, 2020). This makes it evident that it is time to shed light on the importance of positive mental health during this time where many students discuss the “normal” feeling of being overwhelmed or 100% stressed.

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Analyzing Family Dynamics and Latinx Students' Duration in the TRIO Upward Bound Program

Introduction

The United States' educational system is one of the most unequal institutions in society, and students of color have faced the consequences. In the 1960s, most African-American, Latino, and Native American students were educated in segregated schools funded at rates many times lower than those serving whites and were excluded from many higher education institutions entirely (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Because of the many disparities that low-income and soon-to-be first-generation college students face to get into higher education, college preparatory programs like TRIO: Upward Bounds were created to ensure that students can gain knowledge about how to get into higher education. For instance, due to college preparation programs like Upward Bound, students can achieve social and cultural capital, which plays a critical role that increases their likelihood of attending college (Cates & Schaeffle 2011; Partridge 2016; Seftor et al. 2009). College preparatory programs are essential because an increase in participation can improve college readiness, enrollment in college, and the long-run education of the minority population (Jackson 2014).

College preparatory programs encourage minority and lower socioeconomic status students and are designed to meet the academic and non-academic needs of all students they serve, thus helping students access post-secondary resources to enroll and persist in higher education (Farmer-Hinton 2006; Knaggs et al. 2020; Loza, 2003; Pritzker 2005). Examples of college preparation programs include TRIO: Upward Bound Programs, which are federally funded four-year programs. Upward Bound Programs support low-income high school students and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. Upward Bound Programs provide academic support, counseling, tutoring, dual enrollment, and a full-time residential summer program at a post-secondary institution (McElroy et al. 1998). It also engages participating students in an extensive, multi-year program designed to provide academic counseling, tutoring services, and a cultural enrichment component. Additionally, most Upward Bound Programs also provide participants with a college experience through a five to eight-week, a full-time residential summer program at a post-secondary institution (McElroy et al. 1998). Interestingly, there are over 960 Upward Bound programs throughout the United States (TRIO Footprint 2020-2021).

One problem that the program faces is that Latinx/ Hispanic students have the shortest average duration compared to students from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Seftor et al. 2009). It is essential to understand why students have differing lengths of duration in the program to improve their execution and add additional resources for high school students who are on the verge of withdrawing to foster a successful outcome for all participants. This research project studies the social factor of family involvement that influences Latinx students' duration in the UB program. Family involvement can positively impact students because of emotional support, high expectations, and encouragement (Villapando & Solorzano 2005). However, students may also experience family issues or burdens, a lack of family funding, or other challenges such as language barriers, immigration experiences, and/or family advice that is contradictory or limiting for students (Moore & Vega 2012; Partridge 2016; Watt 2008).

My research question is, why do Latinx students have shorter participation in Upward Bound Programs? Specifically, how does family involvement affect duration in Upward Bound for Latinx students? This is an important issue to study because: (1) students who stay longer in the program have better outcomes than students who do not; (2) Latinx students are a growing proportion of all students attending college, and they are now the second-largest group enrolled in higher education (Excelencia Education et al. 2019); and (3) the literature on family involvement is mixed. In this paper, I discuss background information on college preparation programs and describe the scholarly literature that has been conducted, paying particular attention to issues of race and ethnicity. I then describe the survey of former UB students that I conducted in fall 2021. I find that female Latinx students are more likely to play a typical traditional gender role in their household and take on various responsibilities, such as helping raise and take care of their siblings and other family members. These additional responsibilities may be causing female students to leave the program before completion compared to male students. Additionally, the data raised some possible differences in family involvement between Latinx and non-Latinx students that need further research to illuminate how ethnicity and gender influence students' participation in Upward Bound Programs. I close by discussing further research and some possible considerations for UB programs.

Background/Literature Review

Low-income and first-generation students of color have difficulties applying to and getting themselves into college; however, college preparatory programs like Upward Bound have helped students achieve a more significant amount of cultural capital. Cultural capital is Pierre Bourdieu's concept that describes the knowledge that is possessed by a person and is applicable here because most low-income and potential first-generation college students do not know how to apply to or navigate college because they do not have parents who have gone through these processes (Ritzer 2018).

In 1964 during President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty," he signed the Economic Opportunity Act, which developed special programs for students from disadvantaged backgrounds known as the nation's TRIO programs (McElroy & Armesto 1998). One of the first TRIO initiatives was the Upward Bound Program, which was considered to be an intensive college preparatory program for 9th through 12th-grade students (Jackson 2014). The programs continue through today.

Most of the academic literature focuses on different components that make up the Upward Bound Programs, for instance, the program's benefits, the challenges they face, the factors that influence students to remain in the programs, and ways the programs can improve. However, the literature on family involvement is mixed; therefore, this study looks at how family dynamics affect the duration and participation of Latinx students in the Upward Bound Program.

Benefits of the Upward Bound Programs

United States primary and secondary educational systems often fail to adequately prepare underrepresented students for higher education. This leads to lower college entrance rates than for white students and more affluent students. The literature notes a 30% gap in college enrollment between low- and high-income students and a 16%

gap in college graduation (Knaggs 2015; Corrigan 2003). Researchers indicate that former students in the TRIO Upward Bound Programs found it to be an effective program. It helps students with the academic and social skills necessary to graduate from high school and complete post-secondary education (Partridge 2016). Other essential components of the Upward Bound Programs that help students succeed are the staff members who serve as mentors, being in a setting in which other students are facing similar challenges, exposure to college campuses and community service projects, and resources, advice, and support that they cannot receive from their parents (Kinney-Walker 2015; Venegas 2005).

The literature also reveals that the longer participants stay in the Upward Bound Programs, the more beneficial it is for the students. These programs improve high school students' post-secondary outcomes (Seftor et al. 2009). Comparing the performance of a group of Upward Bound students to a group of non-Upward-Bound students, researchers found that the college success rate for Upward Bound participants is significantly higher than for the non-participants (Laws et al. 1999). More recently, an estimation of Upward Bound completion for any post-secondary enrollment is 19% more, raising it from 77% to 96% (Seftor et al. 2009). Upward Bound Programs also lead to civic engagement and good citizenship practice such as voting, paying taxes, abiding by law, employment, and community service (Partridge 2016).

Challenges in the Upward Bound Programs

There are some challenges that these programs face, however. One problem these programs have is that it is difficult for students to stay all four years. Existing research states that an early MPR report demonstrated that students remained in Upward Bound for only a short time due to transportation issues, job-taking, and time conflicts (Myers & Schirm 1999). Another study reported that participants leave the program due to immaturity, family issues, school activities, other educational programs, or joining the U.S. army (Partridge 2016). Some students also leave the program due to being away from home, family, friends, and significant others. According to the literature, these social influences are the most powerful and persuasive power over individuals, especially the impact of those who make up social networks (Paiz 2017).

Latinx Students in the Upward Bound Program

When analyzing racial and ethnic backgrounds of students in the Upward Bound Programs, the literature states that Latinx/ Hispanic students have the shortest average duration at 18.1 months while the other groups' average duration was slightly longer, though only by 1-3 months (Seftor, Mamun & Schirm 2009). Even more important, the same study shows that a more significant percentage of Hispanic students leave the program within the first year, for instance, (42%) for Hispanics compared to (30%) for white and (37%) for African American students (Seftor, Mamun & Schirm 2009). This discrepancy is harmful because longer participation helps boost rates of college enrollment and completion.

Interestingly, recent literature has stated that first-generation Latinx college students were more likely to be in college than other racial/ethnic groups. For instance, almost half of Latinx (44%) were first in their family to attend college, compared to African American (34%) and White (22%) students. (Excelencia in Education et. al. 2019). Additionally, Latinx students are the second largest group enrolled in higher education. In 2015-16 Latinx students represented 19% of all undergraduate students, compared to Whites (56%) and African Americans (14%) (Excelencia in Education et al. 2019). This is interesting because Latinx students are a growing group that could benefit from Upward Bound, but they tend to have a shorter duration in college preparation programs. Why do Latinx students stay in Upward Bound Programs for a shorter duration than students of other racial/ ethnic groups? Since Latinx students are going to college in more significant numbers, why wouldn't they stay for the duration of a college-prep program like UB, which will help them? The literature identifies a few critical factors to consider.

Family Dynamics

While much literature is about peer and staff influences on students in college preparation programs, the literature on families is more mixed. On the one hand, families are thought to have a huge and positive influence on students' participation. For instance, one study found that some reasons why students stay in the program are because of family support, high expectations, encouragement, and involvement, which helps create a connection between their families' expectations, their cultural backgrounds, and the goals of the programs (Villapando & Solorzano 2005). On the other hand, some existing literature indicated that educators blame parents for their perceived lack of involvement in their children's schooling, suggesting that students are less successful without their involvement (Venegas et al. 2005). However, it should be noted that students themselves identified their family members as providing them with the most significant amount of emotional support throughout their schooling experience (Moore & Vega 2012).

The literature also states that although African American students and Latinx students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, there are some differences between their family involvement. For example, a researcher found that many African American students received help from their parents with homework, while a Latinx student received minimal involvement with a lot of emotional support. Many students of color appreciate their parent's encouragement and are attending college for their parents (Venegas et al. 2005). Although family involvement can be beneficial, sometimes students have family issues, family burdens, or a lack of family funding (Partridge 2016; Watt 2008). Sometimes parents cannot understand due to being an immigrant from another country and/or language barriers (Moore & Vega 2012). Lastly, family members provide advice for students but can contradict each other, and this can be limiting to the students (Moore & Vega 2012). These are aspects we know that are important for a student to succeed, but it is possible that families have contradictory effects on students. This is why my research project focuses on exploring family involvement from the perspective of students who have been involved in a UB program.

Methods

To collect information on Upward Bound students and their family experiences, I surveyed 120 former students, 18 years of age or older, who participated in one specific program: the LACC Upward Bound Program. Because these students were likely to be in the program for many years and have more contact with the program staff, I could not survey students according to the length of time that they have been in the program. However, these students did participate, and I wanted to study them to determine if they had thoughts of leaving the program. Of the 120 former students, 51 completed the survey, for a 43% response rate. These students graduated from the program between the years 2016 to 2021.

I created a Qualtrics survey with a consent form and an anonymous link to the survey questions. The respondents read and digitally signed before beginning the survey. This survey included approximately 22 questions asking about their experiences in the program, the program activities they participated in, whether they ever questioned continuing in the program, some of the challenges they faced, how much family involvement and support they had, and family background and demographic information. I emailed the link in a previous email to an Upward Bound staff member at the LACC Upward Bound Program. She and other Upward Bound staff members sent my email out to the former students in the program for the last five years. The email described who I am and my affiliations with the program since I participated in the program as a high school student.

The subjects were also given a description about my study: a brief background, the purpose of my research, and the link to the survey with the consent form. We verified that all subjects were 18 years of age or older. My survey was sent out on October 27th, 2021, and ended on November 25th, with two reminders to complete the survey sent during that time. Those students who completed the survey by November 15th were entered into a raffle for a \$15 Amazon Gift Card by using their emails. Names were not used on the survey, though respondents' email addresses were used as an identifier.

Demographics: overall, 36 participants identified as Latinx, and 11 were not Latinx. While looking at gender, there were 14 males and 33 females. Most respondents who participated in my survey graduated from the Upward Bound Program in more recent years; for example, ten respondents graduated in 2019, 12 respondents graduated in 2020, and 12 respondents graduated in 2021. Most students fell within the income of \$15,000 - \$49,000.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of the survey is that respondents were provided with some open-ended questions that allowed them to give detailed responses. This gave me insight into the respondents' experiences in the program and other involvements that could affect their participation. Although I had a small group of students who filled out the survey, I had enough respondents to draw preliminary conclusions from the data analysis and suggest some issues that could benefit from further research.

A limitation in this research includes that the title of the project might have caused fewer non-Latinx students to participate in the survey as it included the word "Latinx." There were only 11 students who were not Latinx. Another limitation was that some students skipped over space to explain their answers in more detail. For example, a student might respond that their experience in the program was somewhat satisfactory but then did not explain why they felt this way even though space to explain was provided in the survey. Overall, however, I gained much information from conducting the survey, and I compared the answers of Latinx and non-Latinx students and male and female students.

Findings

All of the students were asked if they had ever questioned whether they should leave the program, and I found that most (76%) had not.

Very few Latinx students (n=6) thought about leaving; likewise, few non-Latinx students (n=2) thought about leaving. However, when I looked at the answers by gender, I found a difference: only 1 of the 14 males questioned whether they should continue the program. In contrast, 7 of the 33 females (21%) answered that they question their participation.

Gender

I found that female students are more likely to play a typical traditional gender role in their household and take on various responsibilities, such as helping to raise and take care of their siblings and other family members. According to the survey, 11 of 33 female respondents have chores or have to help out at home, while only 3 of the 14 males chose this option. Girls mentioned raising cousins, cleaning the house, taking care of siblings, taking care of a parent, other housework and childcare. These additional responsibilities may be causing female students to question whether they should leave the program before completion compared to male students.

The survey also showed that 24 of 33 (72%) females were Latinx, and 9 of 33 (27%) females were not Latinx. Seven of 9 (70%) non-Latinx females responded to at least having chores, helping at home, taking care of family members, or working, while 14 of 24 (58%) Latinx females chose those options. Interestingly, only 1 of 9 (10%) non-Latinx students were unsure about going to college, while 5 of 24 (20%) Latinx females chose this option. This means that girls have more responsibilities at home across racial/ethnic groups, which may affect their thoughts about college and their duration in the Upward Bound Program. However, since most girls in the UB program are Latinx girls, gender may be playing a role in the shorter duration of Latinx students more generally.

Not only did female students have responsibilities at home and school, but they also did volunteer work and worked paid jobs. On the other hand, males only mentioned paid work and sports participation. The survey showed that 15 female respondents had to work or take care of family members while doing school. Only one male said that they took care of family members. Interestingly, males participated much more in some aspects of the program, such as tutoring, compared to females, which may be because of other at-home responsibilities they have. Thirteen of 14 males (93%) participated in tutoring compared to 26 of the 33 females (79%). Likewise, slightly fewer girls participated in the junior trip that UB offers (67% of girls participated compared to 71% of boys), but this could have been due to family responsibilities at home, parent protectiveness, or the girls' choices themselves. It may be that females are more likely to participate in program activities because of their friends. For example, in explaining her reasons for not attending the junior trip, one female respondent said, "one of them was because I did not have any friends attending the trip, which I regretted after making that a reason not to go."

Additionally, the survey showed that females were more appreciative of the program for their support. Many females stated that the program was caring, motivational, fun, and tremendous emotional support. At the same time, males appreciated the technical aspects of the program, for example, information about college and tutoring. Females also emphasized mentorship and relationships that they built in the program. One female respondent stated, "I felt really supported by all of the tutors and campus liaisons/counselors. I knew that if I needed help, I had a support system. The program was also really fun because we were able to do fundraisers, field trips, movies, etc. It helped me take college classes while being a high school student and provided me with many professional and communication skills."

Another female respondent said, "Members and classmates were always so nice and respectful. It made me feel safe and comfortable enough to ask any questions I wanted to know the answer of." Males responded by stating, "The program helped me to see what real college campuses were like in addition to allowing me to get ahead in some classes for college, which helped me a lot when I actually started college." Another male said, "The program was very helpful with college advice, setting up a game plan, and provided academic resources to ensure success throughout high school." Twelve of the 14 males (86%) responded with technical aspects of the program, while 22 of the 33 females (67%) responded with emotional and supportive elements of the program.

Ethnicity

The survey showed that 17 of 36 Latinx students (47%) were slightly more likely to mention community support and how fun the program was compared to only 5 of 11 (45%) non-Latinx students. The survey also showed that Latinx parents were slightly more involved, while non-Latinx parents asked students questions about the Upward Bound Program and talked to them about being first-generation college students. Six of 11 non-Latinx respondents (54%) chose both, while only 11 of 36 Latinx respondents (30%) chose both. For example, more Latinx parents went to the Upward Bound events than non-Latinx parents. The survey shows that 18 of 36 Latinx parents (30%) attended Upward Bound events, while only 3 of 11 (27%) non-Latinx parents attended.

Additionally, more non-Latinx parents wanted their children to stay closer to home than Latinx parents. For example, when looking at this question, 7 of 11 non-Latinx respondents (63%) said their parents wanted them to stay closer to home, while only 7 of 36 (19%) Latinx respondents chose this option. The same amount of non-Latinx and Latinx respondents answered that their parents provided emotional support. Twenty-five of 36 Latinx respondents (69 %) said that their parents offered emotional support, while 8 of 11 (72 %) non-Latinx students said that. However, a question about parents attending UB meetings showed more difference, as 11 of 36 (30 %) Latinx respondents chose this option versus 2 of 11 non-Latinx students (18 %). Non-Latinx students were also less likely to receive support from their parents through motivation, but they would get more rides from their parents to UB activities. Six of 11 Non-Latinx respondents (54%) chose motivation as the primary type of support they received from their parents; however, 29 of 36 Latinx students (80%) also reported receiving motivation from their parents. Eight of 11 non-Latinx respondents (72%) said their parents gave them rides versus 22 of 36 (61%) Latinx respondents.

This shows us some differences between Latinx and non-Latinx students in the Upward Bound Program. For example, as slightly more Latinx students wrote about community support from the program than non-Latinx students, maybe there is more sense of community in the program for Latinx students since they are the majority. The data also tells us that Latinx students and non-Latinx students have different levels of support from their parents and responsibilities, which can impact their participation in the program. We need further research to illuminate how students' ethnicity influences their participation in Upward Bound Programs.

Discussion

Based on these findings and the small number of non-Latinx students who participated in my survey, there are some possible differences in family involvement between Latinx and non-Latinx students that need further research to illuminate how ethnicity and gender influence students' participation in Upward Bound Programs. The majority of the participants in the Upward Bound Program are females; therefore, these extra responsibilities may be causing more pressure for these female students to consider dropping out compared to males. The battle that might be considered is that it is harder to get males into the program, but keeping them in the program might not be an issue. However, getting females in the program might not be a challenge, but keeping them in it might be. Overall, this teaches us about the ongoing challenges females have. Latinx families in Los Angeles who have students in UB programs may hold more traditional gender roles that pose a challenge in the participation of these students. It is essential to ensure that students can take full advantage of this program to increase diversity in higher education.

Further research on these issues is essential. We could use research studies comparing students who stay in the program and their family involvement to students who leave the program. That is a complex study to do because you have to find the students who dropped out, but I think this kind of research can help understand the challenges of these students. Additionally, we need studies that look more carefully or more in-depth at gender and family dynamics in girls' participation in UB for different Latinx groups. For example, it would be interesting to see how families with traditional views about gender compared to families with less traditional views may affect different Latinx students attending college. Additionally, future research could look at Latinx groups compared to other students of color and how their family dynamics influence their participation in the programs.

Implementing essential aspects in the program throughout school is important so that students can take advantage of the opportunities. In addition, the programs may want to consider doing more check-ins with female students, alternating program hours, and/or allowing more of the program activities to be during school breaks, for example, lunch or advisory periods to encourage the participation of female students. Additionally, checking in with parents/ guardians more frequently and maintaining communication through the program can help Latinx girls stay more involved. Lastly, implementing the program at home or having virtual components will allow students to have easier access at home. This will allow students to be more engaged and have family members involved.

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Female Gamers and Social Media: How Gender Norms are Perpetuated Online

Introduction

As an avid video game player myself, the topic that I am interested in researching is how female video game players interact with other individuals who play the same games. When scrolling through my social media pages, I will occasionally come across a video from a popular female video game streamer where the only thing she will do in the game is say “hello,” the other players in the lobby, especially men, will berate her for simply existing. This has been a common trend for the types of videos that I see go viral in the video game community on TikTok. While looking through the comments of said posts, I often see women saying that they refuse to talk in the game or even avoid playing video games entirely because of the toxic culture created by other players. They are told that they should stick to the easier, “girly” supportive roles or avoid playing “manly games” such as first person shooters (FPS) because they simply would not be good at them.

Other people even quit the game if they hear a woman speak because of an inherent assumption that women are bad at video games, and by having one on your team in a ranked match, they will automatically lose.

Social media is extremely present in the lives of young adults and teenagers and the ideas that are spread on social media platforms may drastically influence the perspectives of its consumers. As social media becomes more intertwined in our lives, the messages produced by content creators become deeply ingrained into the everyday mindset of individuals. Online gaming communities on social media have become increasingly more popular due to the rise of TikTok, in which content creators post popular highlight reels to show off advanced gameplay or funny moments in public gaming lobbies. Among these viral gaming highlight clips are occasional videos from a popular female video game streamer where the only thing she will say is “hello” and will immediately get degraded for speaking because of her gender.

Although the video game industry is predominantly male, there has been an increase in female video gamers over the last twenty years. In 2020, it was estimated that out of 4,000 responses in the United States, 41% were women, and increased to 45% in 2021 (Clement 2021). In a fan survey of 3,784 respondents conducted by Riot Games in 2020, 12% of the respondents were female (Webb 2020). In an interview with Matt Archambault, he stated that 30 to 40% of Valorant players are female (Takahashi 2021). As more women begin to play video games, the potential toxic environment they may find themselves in creates the possibility of internalizing misogynistic ideologies that women truly are undeserving of playing video games as a hobby. The message that video game players preach is that due to their gender, women are meant to be passive and caring; thus, only good enough to play an “easy support role” so that all the men can do the work.

In April 2021, nearly 1.9 million people played League of Legends. As of August 2021, there were nearly 138 million hours of League gameplay watched on Twitch, one of the most popular streaming platforms currently. League ranks as the second most popular eSport in the world, and ranked third most watched game on Twitch (League of Legends Player count 2021 2021). With Valorant’s release in June 2020, it has quickly become one of the most popular FPS titles in the world with an average of 14 million computer players each month (Loazno 2021). In addition to their popularity, League of Legends and Valorant are notoriously known for its extremely toxic community on social media, despite the fact that Valorant has only been released for a year. Due to this reputation and their extremely large player base, I believe it would be interesting to understand trends of social media and how such trends reflect societal patterns.

For my project, my research question is how do gender norms affect female video gamers in gaming communities on TikTok? This research question is sociological as it explores the social causes and consequences of human behavior on a macro-scale. It addresses how specific social norms (i.e., gender standards) can affect women within video game culture, which is a larger social structure within society. It addresses what social or structural factors may influence male players to react negatively in the videos posted towards female gamers. In order to answer this question, a content analysis will be performed on the top 44 videos under the “GamerGirl” hashtag on TikTok. A content analysis may be able to reveal correlations between TikTok content and societal factors such as patriarchal norms that may influence individuals to act a certain way towards female gamers.

Literature Review

This literature review will address gender norms and stereotypes that affect female video game players, the portrayal of gender in video games and what theoretical frameworks that affect such perceptions, and the presence and internalization of patriarchal or misogynistic ideologies promoted through video games such as League of Legends.

Men and Women in Video Gaming Communities

When people are asked to imagine what a video game player looks like, the most popular image that comes to mind is strongly associated with being male (Paaßen et al., 2017; Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 2009). Since the 1980s and 1990s, research has found that digital gaming has been a predominantly exclusive, heteronormative male activity (Crawford and Gosling 2005). The types of video games are even sorted based on gender: “hardcore games,” such as such as online or traditional video games such as Tekken or Valorant are considered men’s games, and “casual games” such as mobile games such as Pokémon Go, Candy Crush, Farmville (Omar et al., 2018) are considered women’s games. Men are typically believed to make up the “hardcore” gamer stereotype in which they might go to competitions in order to win money or simply play more complex video games than women (Paaßen et al., 2017).

In addition to the hardcore and casual gamer stereotypes, the gender differences in differentiating a “real” (man) gamer from a fake (woman) gamer upholds the ideology of a toxic gaming masculinity (Ruberg et al., 2019). The perception of “real hardcore gamers” is also supported through the video gamer’s self-identification. When participants were asked to say whether they were a hardcore or casual gamer, none of their definitions mentioned video game skill in relation to being a hardcore gamer, but lower skill was assumed to be integral to the stereotype against casual, fake gamers (Paaßen et al., 2017).

Even in many households, technology for video gaming is usually found in male spaces: for example, leisure technologies like the computer or gaming consoles are found in “male spaces” like a brother’s bedroom rather than a woman’s space, and when gaming consoles are in shared spaces, it is usually understood that it is a male-owned object (Crawford and Gosling 2015).

Portrayals of Gender Norms and Stereotypes

However, research has found that there are about twice as many adult women than male adolescents (33% vs. 17%) who play video games, with female video gamers now comprising nearly half (45%) of the gaming community (Kondrat 2019; McCullough et al., 2020) in recent years. In 2020, it was estimated that out of 4,000 respondents in the United States, 41% were women, and increased to 45% in 2021 (Clement 2021). In another study conducted by the Entertainment Software Association in 2006, women over the age of 18 (30%) played more than boys under 17 (23%) (Burgess et al., 2007).

As research has shown that online video game communities had an increase in female gamers within the last decade, video game content has failed to reflect the perspectives and interests of a diverse audience (McCullough et al., 2020) because of preexisting stereotypes of video game players being predominantly male. Gender stereotypes are beliefs about what it means to be a certain gender, including behaviors, psychological traits, and social relationships (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009; McCullough et al., 2020; Kondrat 2019). The video game industry is dominated by patriarchal stereotypes that promote gender norms to both men and women: women are seen as less intelligent, more emotional, and less aggressive than men, and are expected to be soft, feminine, and beautiful (Crawford and Gosling 2015; McCullough et al., 2020). For example, women are over-represented in caregiving and communal professions such as being a nurse or a babysitter which results in the notion that women are warm and nurturing (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009; Paaßen et al., 2017).

Gender stereotypes are especially prevalent in *League of Legends*, one of the world’s most popular video games in the last ten years. Female champions in *League of Legends* are designed to play supporting roles rather than leading ones, and there are fewer female characters available to play out of the game’s 155 champion cast (Gao et al., 2017). Nearly all the utility support characters in the game are female and the tank supports are male. Researchers conducted a fan survey asking why video game players believed utility support characters are subordinate, passive roles related to healing. The top three most frequent opinions were that “healing is for female, combat is for male”; “healing reminds me of mother or sister”; and “how come players can feel natural when tumultuous male gives healing and small beautiful girl sacrifices for the team as a tanker?” (Song et al., 2021), perpetuating the notion that women are meant for passive roles like a healer over more violent, aggressive roles like a tank.

In general, male characters were estimated to show up four times more than female characters in video games (Burgess et al., 2007). When women were featured in video game titles, they were depicted negatively. A content analysis of video game character images from top-selling video games and magazines showed showed “male characters (83%) are more likely than female characters (62%) to be portrayed as aggressive. Female characters are more likely than male characters to be portrayed as sexualized (60% versus 1%), scantily clad (39 versus 8%) and showing a mix of sex and aggression (39 versus 1%)” (Dill and Thill 2007; Crawford and Gosling 2015). In addition to being passive and sexualized, female characters are often presented as a victim, such as the “damsel in distress” archetype, or a prize to be won (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009; Kondrat 2019). These female characters hold unimportant roles as side characters and would often be dressed provocatively to show off their breasts or legs (Kondrat 2019). Female sexuality in video games then becomes centered on extremely revealing clothing rather than the content of her character (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009).

Since the video game market is heavily saturated in patriarchal messages, video game companies cater what games they produce based on gender. Most video games promote various forms of violence, as seen through the shooter and action genre, but some companies have realized that women, or some of them, do not enjoy these types of games. As a result, they decided to make video games such as the Sims in order to cater to women specifically but through a gendered lens: it is believed that girls like to play with dolls and cook, so life simulation games are perfect for women (Kondrat 2019).

The portrayal of female figures in video games is also deeply related to capitalism. Video games that featured women by themselves, unaccompanied by a male character, sold fewer copies than covers with male characters as the focal point or portrayed female characters as sexual side characters to the male characters (McCullough et al., 2020). In addition to the challenge of monetary value that female characters face, video game developers undergo a vicious cycle where they do not create strong female characters in their games, which in turn creates the notion that games with women do not sell well (Kondrat 2019). If a video game is unable to collect revenue for a company, then there is no point in selling a game with strong female characters.

Gender stereotypes are further perpetuated through exposure to media. According to cultivation theory, repeated encounters with messages that perpetuate gender stereotypes through media influence how people

perceive their social reality (Kondrat 2019; McCullough et al., 2020). Media outlets like social media or television provide consumers with mainstream ideas of how a person should act and how the world should behave. As a result, the portrayal of women as pretty, unimportant objects in video games causes individuals to internalize the notion that women are supposed to be weak victims whose only purpose is for sex, further perpetuating the notion gender stereotypes as mentioned above. Researchers hypothesize that with repeated exposure to sexist imagery from video games, video game players would begin to accept those sexist beliefs as truth and begin to play more sexist games over time. It was found that video game and television exposure was linked to higher rates of sexism among male adolescents (McCullough et al., 2020). Even women who played more sexualized characters were more likely to focus on their bodies and experience negative effects on their self-worth and self-efficacy (McCullough et al., 2020; Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 2009).

The Internalization and Effect of Gender Stereotypes and Misogyny

Due to the inherently masculine nature of the video game industry, many women share a similar sentiment of wanting to avoid the “gamer girl” identity in both online and streaming platforms due to the attached stereotypes of not being as good or not taken as seriously as their male counterparts (Omar et al., 2018). In an interview with New York Times reporter, Amy O’Leary, the introduction of voice chat within the last decade contributed greatly to the types of harassment women face in online gaming. Women who get onto voice chat find that when they speak, they become targets for harassment or threats just because they are a woman (“Virtual Harassment Gets Real for Female Gamers.” 2012). While most female gamers feel comfortable using non-verbal forms of communication such as the “ping” system in League of Legends that will flash a symbol on screen to notify people what to do, the majority of women are extremely hesitant to communicate with their online teammates. In contrast, male video game players consistently used both the in-game and voice chat functions in order to strategize with each other or trash talk (Ratan et al., 2015).

Due to the portrayal of gender stereotypes within video games and streaming platforms, female streamers and video game players face an immense amount of harassment compared to their male counterparts. Harassment can be seen through offensive jokes, slurs, name calling, physical threats, mockery, and intimidation. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), nearly 65% of players have experienced some form of severe harassment while playing online video games, and nearly 38% of women suffered from harassment on the basis of their gender (Weinreb 2021). Research has found that exposure to harassment has been associated with lowered mental health conditions such as sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and psychological distress. Studies have even found that harassment in the beginning stages of one’s career has led to long-term effects of depressive symptoms in adulthood (Weinreb 2021).

Verbal harassment on streaming platforms such as Twitch is tied significantly to the streamer’s gender. It was found that female streamers received more body-focused messages while men received more gameplay-focused comments (Omar et al., 2018). In recent history, the term “titty streamer” arose as a derogatory label applied to female streamers who present their bodies in “sexualized ways” to gain attention from viewers. While on the surface, the term seems like a derogatory insult to put down female streamers, in reality, it reveals problematic and discriminatory beliefs about women and their bodies in video game culture (Ruberg et al., 2019).

Viewers believe that these streamers are given an unfair advantage over other streamers who may work hard by promoting their gameplay rather than taking the easy route and showing off their bodies for success. A “titty streamer” would not be naked, but rather position their bodies in angles that make it feel like their appearance is the focal point of their stream rather than gameplay (Ruberg et al., 2019). As a result, many viewers devalue streams with female streamers they assume to be a “titty streamer” because to them it is not a real, or valid form, of streaming. This assumption reinforces gender stereotypes seen in video game portrayals of women as well: the “good” woman wears conservative clothing that covers up her body, whereas the “bad” woman is provocative and uses their boobs for success (Ruberg et al., 2019). Because women distance themselves from the “gamer girl” or “titty streamer” identity, women in contexts of high levels of sexual discrimination such as online video game voice chats or streaming platforms, begin to compete more aggressively with other women for resource like success or being seen as “valid” unlike other women (Omar et al., 2018).

In conclusion, despite the increase in female video game players within the last decade, much of the discourse surrounding video games and video game content is filled with gendered stereotypes about what a woman or a man is and is not. Due to the prevalence of patriarchal influence in video game content, video game developers and companies stray away from creating female characters that accurately represent women in reality. Women are typically seen as supportive or passive characters whose only purpose to the game (if even given the chance to be a part of the story) is for her oversexualized body or potential to be saved as the “damsel in distress.” Because women are stereotyped to be a caretaker or enjoy being a homebody, much of the content that is catered towards women comes in the form of Barbie or the Sims.

Even female video game players are seen as casual and “fake” due to the stereotype that men are the only ones that play video games. The prevalence of gender stereotypes in online gaming communities through the portrayals of female characters and discourse from other players contributes to the eventual erasure and invisibility of women in the gaming industry.

Methods

In order to answer the research question, the sample will comprise the top 44 videos under the “GamerGirl” hashtag on TikTok. In addition to these videos, the top 30 comments of the video’s comment section will also be analyzed. I have chosen this sample of comments to answer the research question because they likely will reflect what women may experience in video gaming communities. Since the top 44 videos are the most popular under the “GamerGirl” hashtag on TikTok, the content creators are able to reach a large audience with the types of messages they post in their videos. They are given a voice to highlight discriminatory attitudes and behaviors that female gamers may experience on a daily basis. For example, “rexchuoctomush” posted a video where men were saying bad things about her in a foreign language, but did not realize that she could also understand them as a way to show a female gamer’s point of view in these scenarios. This video got 1.9 million likes and 7,318 comments. The video’s comment section may be a space where other female video gamers share similar experiences, or individuals with sexist ideologies against women display their biases.

For this content analysis, I will be analyzing both the content of the video and the comment section in order to code for sexist and/or misogynistic behavior towards women playing video games. There are two main datasets for this content analysis: one for the comments (i.e., in-game comments made towards the content creator by other people playing the game) collected from the videos itself, and another from the comment section of the video. I will be coding for comments directed towards other video game players who they perceive to be female because of stereotypically feminine attributes via in-game communication methods, avatars and usernames, and character selection (i.e., playing a utility character, stereotypically known as a female role, versus a damage carry character, stereotypically known as a male role). Each of these comments will then be organized into larger, overall themes of implicit (i.e., nonverbal communication such as sighing and leaving the game) and explicit behavior (i.e., telling someone to “make them a sandwich”). These behaviors/attitudes and comments will be recorded in the video and collected on an Excel spreadsheet. The videos will be downloaded and stored and screenshots will be taken of the comment sections for future reference.

Results

The following themes were identified in the data regarding gender norms and female gamers: non-derogatory attitudes and behavior, the legitimacy of being a female gamer, and male gaming status. Of the top 44 videos under the “GamerGirl” hashtag on TikTok, 10 of the videos did not have any sexist behavior or comments directed towards the creator of the video or female video game players in general. For example, “blackrosecore”, a female gamer, posted a video of herself wearing a low-cut dress while lip syncing to an audio clip of how she does not want any other game to play other than World of Warcraft (WoW). Majority of the comments left on her video were in agreement with her that WOW was a good game rather than focusing on her appearance or making derogatory comments about her identity as a female gamer. Other videos depict stereotypes about the “life of a gamer” such as staying up all night or playing multiple games even though they promised just to play only one, and the comments on such videos were agreeing with the content rather than attacking the creator or other female gamers.

Aside from the 10 videos that had supportive, or neutral, comments towards female video gamers, most of the videos and comments (34 of 44) were related to various stereotypes that questioned the legitimacy of being a female gamer. Some videos highlighted a distinction between the “real vs. fake gamer” stereotype in which a “real” gamer would dress in a hoodie and sweatpants eating junk food, and a “fake” gamer would have a high pitched voice--also known as a “uwu” voice--and dress in stereotypically feminine outfits (i.e., all pink clothes, low cut shirt, short skirts), and ask for people to teach her how to play the game. “Uwu” is an internet emotion that depicts a cute face, or can be used to express warm, happy, or affectionate feelings. In recent history, it was adopted to express an overwhelmingly cute and feminine high-pitched voice (Dictionary.com 2020). One comment thread said that those who did not play on a personal computer (PC) were not considered a “real” gamer, and suggested that the “fake” gamers go back to playing mobile games. Some comments even suggested that some gaming setups may be too expensive for female gamers. For example, “ingremgametech” posted a video that showcased her pink gaming setup with her PC built into a fancy chair before she starts to play League of Legends. Many of the comments complained that her PC was too expensive for someone who only plays one game, saying “Lmfao all that for league. You do you I guess”. League of Legends is commonly known within the gaming community to not be too stressful on a computer’s soft and hardware, so when a girl has an extremely elaborate setup like

ingremgametech", she is highly criticized. Other comments stated that she should "just play lol on [her] phone and give [him that setup]". Interestingly, two videos hinted at the stereotype of the "toxic girl gamer." The "toxic girl gamer" is a stereotype about a female-identifying individual who claims superiority over other women for holding more masculine interests by stating that they are "not like the other girls." The most classic examples of this stereotype in online communities tend to degrade other girls for putting so much effort into their appearance to look overtly feminine by being pink and girly. While many of the comments left on these videos stated that many female gamers were afraid of using voice chat or interacting with male gamers due to how toxic they can be or due to other sexist stereotypes, other comments stated that they were more afraid of meeting other girl gamers because they were more toxic than men.

The content for other videos emphasized a difference between female Twitch streamers to "real" female gamers. Twitch is a large streaming platform where millions of users, also known as "streamers," can come together in order to livestream a variety of content ranging from gaming highlights to streams of their daily lives ("About" Twitch.tv 2021). In online communities, it is commonly known that a female Twitch streamer is female-identifying individual that uses their body for attention and followers. For example, "secretshower" posted a video captioned "Finally! A girl who doesn't show her boobs on stream" and suddenly transitioned to her wearing a dress revealing her chest. Comments such as "Was close to call out the respect card then this... bye" and "Question: why? Answer: money." insinuate that they were going to respect "secretshower" for not wearing revealing clothing, but then decided not to because she showed off her chest in the end. This is one of many comments that state that the only way for women to get attention and followers as a female Twitch streamer is through their bodies rather than the content of their character. Other comments on "bunnyz.xx's" video of her wearing a crop top and underwear stated that it was hard to find an actual "gamer girl" wearing "actual clothes" because they have to wear revealing outfits for views. One user commented "it's hard to find gamergirl with actual clothes", suggesting that all female gamers wear barely any clothing for attention. These comments suggest the stereotype that female gamers, especially those who stream on websites like Twitch, are only able to sell their content if they use their body rather than their gameplay. In addition to the female Twitch streamer stereotype, other videos made a comparison between the "real" gamer girl and the "uwu girl." While some commenters found the high pitched, girly "uwu" voice as cute, many others questioned the validity of the voice by asking what was the point if it were not for attention and free things, accusing her of being a "Pick Me." The "Pick Me" stereotype is commonly used to describe women who go out of their way to impress boys in a way that other girls do not. This is especially seen in a brief video posted by aureliabakerx about the "BEST Gaming setup under \$30 for a GAMERGIRL" where many of the comments accused her of being a "pick me" because the video suggested a frying pan and mop, hinting to sexist stereotypes about women, as the best setup for female gamers.

In addition to sexist stereotypes, 10 of the 44 videos had comments related to another man. These comments such as "Get off your brother's PC" and "That's how he know your sleeping with someone else" suggested that another man, whether that be other video gamers in the game or her significant other, was teaching the female gamer how to play a game, the female gamer was using his video game setup, or that she was cheating. Other comments such as "No way your high rank" and "Are you the one girl who cheated in CSGO?" suggest that the quality and skill of female gamers are underestimated due to their gender and pre-existing stereotypes about female gamers.

Comments on other videos suggested that people were being a "simp" for female gamers, commenting that "Bro hard-core simping" and "Ppl do be trying to simp for ppl these days". The term "simp" is an internet slang term describes someone who shows excessive sympathy and attention towards another person, typically someone who does not reciprocate the same feelings, in order to win their affection or in pursuit of a sexual relationship ("A Short History of 'Simp'" 2020). In one video, the female gamer said she would give her social media out to the other players in the lobby if they are able to catch up in the number of kills she had. In the end, she ended up giving out her Snapchat username. One person on the video commented "Is that all it takes?" to the fact that the men in the video had to do the bare minimum in order to get access to her social media. In a video posted by "egirl", the caption states that everyone wants a gamer girlfriend until they realize she spends a majority of her time playing video games while other boys flirt with her, and her sleep schedule gets destroyed. While most comments were in agreement, there were a couple comment threads that said "Just wait till she plays better than you", suggesting that gamer girls are not wanted unless they are worse than their boyfriend at video games.

Discussion

The research question for this project is how do gender norms affect female video gamers in gaming communities on TikTok? Social media platforms such as TikTok employ gender norms to perpetuate harmful, sexist stereotypes against female video gamers in both the content of the video and the comment section.

The comments on the video that suggested that the female gamer was playing on the gaming console of their brother, boyfriend, or any other male figure in their life stems from the stereotype that only men play video games. Such comments reflect the belief that gaming is a predominantly heteronormative male activity. Gaming consoles and computers have typically been found in male spaces rather than a woman's space, and when consoles are in shared spaces, it is usually understood that it is a male-owned object (Crawford and Gosling 2005). By assuming that only men are the only ones able to play video games, or capable of understanding how to play video games, it delegitimizes female video gamers who do actually play, and further perpetuates the notion that video games are a male-only hobby.

The reinforcement of gender stereotypes leads to a creation of a gendered gaming hierarchy for who is considered a "real" gamer. This hierarchy is reinforced through the video game industry perpetuating stereotypical gender norms for men and women: men are seen as intelligent, powerful, and aggressive while women are seen as less intelligent, soft, feminine, and beautiful (Crawford and Goslin 2015; McCullough et al., 2020). The closer a video gamer is able to embody male traits in the industry, the more legitimacy they are given. At the top of the ladder, "real gamers" are envisioned to be men who play "hardcore" online or traditional video games such as Tekken or Valorant (Omar et al., 2018) and play on a PC or a video game console rather than mobile games. "Real" female gamers are ranked below male gamers because gaming has traditionally been a male-dominated activity. Their legitimacy is questioned when they play on a PC or other gaming consoles, but they are still regarded as a gamer over "fake" girl gamers due to sharing masculine traits. For instance, as noted through the comments and various videos, real female gamers dress in a hoodie and sweatpants, which are seen as traditionally male clothing, whereas fake girl gamers wear extremely revealing outfits and everything they own is pink. Female gaming is only seen as acceptable if it is similar to what male gamers and society deems as legitimate, which in the case of gaming is a masculine cultural ideal.

Women who were labeled as "fake gamers" by commenters on TikTok were typically dressed in revealing or overly stereotypical feminine clothing. The attitudes of these commenters reflect how women are viewed in the media and video games. Female characters are more likely to be sexualized than male characters, and dressed in revealing clothing in order to reinforce the "damsel in distress" archetype (Dill and Thill 2007; Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009). The belief that "fake gamer girls" and "female Twitch streamers" have to use their body in order to get attention or views is reinforced by the video game industry centering female characters and their sexuality around their body and revealing clothing rather than their actual personality and intelligence (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009). The fake girl gamer does not know how to obtain success because she is deemed by the media as unintelligent and valued only for her attractiveness.

Conclusion

The study was limited by the types of videos posted using the "GamerGirl" hashtag. The hashtag has nearly 26.3 billion views on TikTok. Due to its popularity, some TikTok creators used this hashtag in order to get more traffic for their videos despite their content not being related to video games or female gamers. Time was also a factor in how much data was able to be collected for the study. Given how popular the hashtag is on TikTok, a sample size of 44 videos was too small in comparison and too narrow. In order to gain a more complete picture of how gender norms are perpetuated in online gaming communities on social media platforms such as TikTok, it would have been beneficial to perform a content analysis on more videos under other similar hashtags to "GamerGirl".

Further research is needed in order to fully understand how stereotypes are perpetuated in online gaming communities and on social media platforms like TikTok. In addition to researching videos posted under different hashtags, researchers should perform a content analysis on social media specifically for gaming communities such as forums dedicated to specific video games on Reddit (e.g., "r/LeagueofLegends"), or interview individuals who play video games in order to understand their experiences in relation to stereotypes online. It would also be interesting to compare the type of content that is posted under the "GamerGirl" hashtag but on other social media platforms like Instagram. Finally, researchers should consider performing a qualitative analysis on gaming communities on Facebook over a course of time to see potential discourses and stereotypes perpetrated against female video gamers.

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Examining Suicide Rates by County in California

Introduction

Suicide is when a person purposefully takes their own life or does something to make themselves die. Most often, people who choose suicide are severely depressed or mentally ill and believe it is the only way to stop their pain. According to research done here, by the US National Library of Medicine, 90% of people who have died by suicide had a mental illness at the time, and the most common mental illness reported was depression. The ICD-10 codes X60-X84 refer to purposely self-inflicted injury and suicide (attempted). ICD-10 CM stands for International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification. ICD-10 codes are a standardized way of tracking health trends by healthcare professionals in the United States. According to the CDC, in 2020, 44,834 people committed suicide. There has been a nationwide 5.6% decrease in suicide during the global pandemic. However, overall, suicide rates have increased steadily since 2000. According to the CDC, from 1999 through 2018, the suicide rate increased by 35%, from 10.5 suicides per 100,000 to 14.2 suicides per 100,000. The rate increased by approximately 1% per year from 1999 to 2006 and by 2% per year from 2006 through 2018. Suicide was the 12th-leading cause of death in 2020.

California has one of the lowest suicide rates in the country, with 4,060 suicides in 2019. In 2020 the rate was roughly 10.8 suicides per 100,000. This is significantly lower than New Mexico's suicide rate, the highest in the nation at a staggering 25 suicides per 100,000 residents. As with the rest of the nation, California's overall suicide rates decreased during the pandemic. However, there was a dramatic increase in suicide amongst teenagers. Some studies show that suicide rates amongst teenagers has increased by 19%. Suicide is very costly, both in terms of hard dollars

and human suffering. "Suicide and suicide attempts take a tremendous emotional toll on the families and friends of those who died, as well as on attempt survivors." (Suicide Prevention Center). Not only is suicide mentally taxing on family and friends, but it imposes economic costs on those family and friends, as well as on the nation as a whole. Most of the expenses come in the form of medical bills for individuals and families, lost income for families, and lost employee productivity for employers. According to the Suicide Prevention Center, "The average cost of one suicide was \$1,329,553." (This bulk of this number comes from losses to productivity, and a small percentage comes from the cost of medical treatment.) The total annual cost of suicides and suicide attempts was \$93.5 billion. (Suicide Prevention Center). Each year, almost 500,000 people are treated in emergency rooms for self-inflicted injuries (Suicide Prevention Center). This paper will look at the different demographics in 4 California counties with variance in their suicide rates. It will also examine the relationship between divergent county characteristics and the associated suicide rates. Lastly, I will explain the effects of stratification and racial acceptance of suicide on suicide rates in each county.

Methods

For this assignment, my sociology professor provided a list of common causes of death in America. Upon reading the list, I was most intrigued by suicide. I was interested in doing further research on suicide because I had a classmate in high school who tried to commit suicide and, thankfully, was unsuccessful. I wanted to learn more about suicide rates within California, and I was specifically interested in understanding how common suicide and suicide attempts are. I grew up hearing about people who killed themselves in other neighborhoods or within different communities, but never within my community. I always wondered if suicide was more common in certain communities than in others.

I used the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Wonder Compressed Mortality database to collect my data. The Compressed Mortality database includes mortality and population statistics for all U.S. counties from 1968 to 2016. I grouped the results by county (within California), and I used ICD-10 code X60-84 for the cause of death. I was very surprised to find massive disparities in suicide rates between counties. I wanted to see if any demographic indicators could account for such stark differences. I used the Census Quick Facts Database to acquire information on the characteristics of each county's population (from the 2010 census). As I had suspected, there were many divergent characteristics between counties with higher suicide rates and lower suicide rates.

Findings

Cause of Death: Suicide
 State: California

| County | Santa Clara County | Alameda County | Mariposa County | Trinity County |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Suicide rate per 100,000 | 8.0 | 8.6 | 25.0 | 30.4 |

| Demographic Features | Santa Clara County | Alameda County | Mariposa County | Trinity County |
|--|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Population per square mile | 1381.0 | 2043.6 | 12.6 | 4.3 |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent | 30.6 | 30.6 | 79.3 | 81.9 |
| Black or African American alone percent | 5.8 | 5.7 | 4.2 | 4.6 |
| Hispanic or Latino descent | 25.0 | 22.3 | 12.1 | 7.4 |
| Persons in poverty percent | 6.1 | 8.9 | 15.1 | 16.5 |
| Median Income | 124,055 | 99,406 | 48,820 | 40,840 |
| Percent of | 88.4 | 88.4 | 90.6 | 92.4 |

| | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Person with high school graduate degree or higher | | | | |
| Percent of population with Bachelor's degree or higher | 52.4 | 47.4 | 24.6 | 19.5 |

Trinity and Mariposa County are the counties with the highest suicide rates in California, and Alameda and Santa Clara County have the lowest suicide rates. The difference in suicide rates is quite drastic, with a 20 suicide per 100,000 difference. From this graph, we can see that there are more differences in demographics than similarities. The only demographic characteristic that stayed constant between all four counties is the percentage of the population with a high school graduate degree or higher, which was around 90 percent. There is a clear relative relationship between higher suicide rates and poverty, race, and ethnicity. In the graph, we see that Mariposa and Trinity, counties with the highest suicide rates in California, have higher rates of people in poverty and lower average incomes than Alameda and Santa Clara. We also see that Mariposa and Trinity have a higher percentage of white residents and fewer black residents than Alameda and Santa Clara. From this data, we can clearly see that high poverty and a large white population are both positively correlated with elevated suicide rates.

Analysis

Two powerful sociological concepts can help explain why Mariposa and Trinity have higher rates of suicide than do Alameda and Santa Clara: stratification and acceptance of suicide by race. Stratification is the process of separating individuals or groups and allocating resources and rewards to those groups (Ferris and Stein, 2008, 184). Some groups are divided into higher levels than others, and those in higher levels receive more/better resources and rewards due to their ranking. Depending on which group you are in, your access to help can be better or worse. According to Ferris and Stein, one of the most significant systems of stratification in the United States is social class. The higher one's class or socioeconomic status, the more resources will likely be available to them. Socioeconomic status refers to the "measure of an individual's place within a social class system" and uses the combination of education, income, and occupation (Ferris and Stein, 2008, 188). In the case of California, we can see that counties with more lower-income or impoverished individuals have higher rates of suicide. I hypothesize that this is because of the effects of stratification on lower-class individuals - they have less access to resources like doctors, medication, and mental health professionals, which makes it harder for them to get help in times of crisis.

The lack of economic opportunity for many individuals in lower strata is also an essential sociological consideration when linking poverty with increased rates of suicide. Financial pressures, unemployment, and an overall sense of failure to succeed materially can increase inwardly directed anger, which can manifest in suicidal ideation or suicide itself. The United States is, generally speaking, a materialistic and consumer-oriented society in which feelings of self-worth are often profoundly tied to wealth, possessions, and outward markers of economic achievement. When lower-class individuals compare their lives with what they see in media, they can internalize the social message they failed. This feeling of failure can make them angry that they are not afforded the same opportunities as higher-class people. These socially-motivated negative feelings may also be why suicide in California is more common in poorer communities than in wealthier ones.

The second attributing concept to higher rates of suicide in Mariposa and Trinity is their higher rates of white residents. Suicide rates are higher among white people than black (or other non-white) people. Despite a history of racial inequality, suicide rates amongst black people are significantly lower than among white people. Some research suggests that institutions like religion play heavily in the acceptability of suicide amongst a racial group. In Neeleman, Wessely, and Lewis's research, they found that the black community tends to have more religiously conservative beliefs and higher levels of devotion to their faith than white people (Neeleman, 1998, 14). Those beliefs cast suicide in a very negative light. Both white and black churches teach that committing suicide is a sin, but a greater percentage of African-Americans are exposed to this messaging because they attend church more regularly than do white people. Differences between these two communities extend beyond the variable of church attendance. According to Gibbs, four cultural aspects of the black community contribute to the lower suicide rate. In addition to greater adherence to fundamental religious beliefs in African-American communities (compared to white ones), the roles of black women, elders, and extended family also help explain lower rates of suicide among people of color (Gibbs, 1997, 74).

Each aspect provides emotional support for those who might be at risk for committing suicide and promotes traditional beliefs that hold the taking of one's own life as unacceptable. Finally, the cohesive social environment that each of these factors helps create plays a significant role in lowering rates of suicide among people of color because it creates a sense of community and identity that is often present in white communities. This allows for black people in need of help to feel as though they are part of a larger whole. Conversely, feelings of isolation during times of distress may be responsible for the disproportionately high number of white people who consider and/or attempt suicide. Sociologist Émile Durkheim also found in his research that "suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part" (Durkheim, 1897, 209). Thus, the more individuals within a community feel as though they are a part of a larger collective, the less likely they are to commit suicide. This can directly be seen within black communities and the five cultural aspects that Gibbs attributes to a larger sense of community.

A research journal focused on identifying the reasons behind higher rates of premature death amongst white men found that suicide, accidental poisonings, and liver disease death rates are driving increased premature mortality in white people. These deaths are called "despair deaths" by Case and Deaton and are increasing among "working-class whites" (defined as Whites with a high school education or less). This population faces an immense amount of "stress and hopelessness as they enter the labor market and are met with bleaker prospects and lower-paying job opportunities relative to the previous generation. This has led to compounding family dysfunction, poor social support, and addiction—conditions that are the drivers of despair deaths" (Stein Genusso Ugboaja and Remington, 2017, 1545). In other words, the immense pressure on the white labor force causes many working-class white men to use alternative coping mechanisms that are available to them. This also correlates with stratification, as it is specific to working-class white men who do not have access to resources and support because of their socioeconomic status. They often do not have the time or financial resources to pursue healthy coping mechanisms for stress, so they use drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. When that fails to offer them relief from their suffering, they feel as though they have no other choice but to kill themselves. Since, unlike black people, the sin of suicide is not as ingrained in them from their community, suicide is not seen as a bad option. This is, in fact, a natural response to poor social and economic conditions. We do not see similar rates of suicidality among working-class blacks because of the dominant community belief that suicide is sinful and, therefore, simply not an option.

Conclusion

Nationally suicide rates vary from state to state, as well as from county to county. In California, Mariposa and Trinity County have some of the highest suicide rates in the state. They have roughly 20 more suicides per 100,000 people than do counties like Santa Clara and Alameda (the California counties with the lowest rates of suicide). When looking at the demographic differences between counties with the highest suicide rates and lowest suicide rates, the major differences are in wealth, race, and population size. Mariposa and Trinity County had higher rates of poverty, a larger percentage of white residents, and smaller population sizes.

Stratification is directly related to wealth status, and race plays a major role in the acceptance of suicide. Low-income people are at the bottom of the hierarchical scale within America. Therefore, they have less access to resources like mental health facilities, doctors, and psychiatrists - all of which could help prevent suicide. In America, stratification based on socioeconomic status is the most common form of stratification. Those with lower incomes (and particularly those experiencing poverty) are at the bottom of the hierarchy in America and have less access to resources that could prevent suicide, like mental health clinics, depression medication, and routine doctor visits. Thus communities with higher poverty rates are more likely to have higher suicide rates as well. A person's race also plays a factor in county suicide rates because suicide is more acceptable amongst whites than blacks (and other non-whites). Since there is less of a stigma around suicide in white communities, there is more suicide in counties with higher populations of white residents. In light of my hypothesis that religiosity is a primary deterrent of suicide amongst blacks, further research should be done on suicide rate disparities between religious white communities and nonreligious white communities. As religion played a big factor in why black people have lower suicide rates, it would be interesting to see if it goes for white people.

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Life inside Juvenile Detention: The Impact of Educational, Rehabilitative, and Trauma-focused Programs for Incarcerated Youth

By Mirian Melendez

Introduction

The criminal justice system is rooted in a racialized structure that has justified the control of communities of color, specifically Black and Latino individuals. The criminal justice system holds damaging societal implications which shape these structures to oppress, victimize, and disadvantage people of color. The over-policing, stopping & frisking, and police within schools are not providing alternatives for youth to find support for their behavioral, familial, economic, and mental health issues. Instead, incarceration is used as a response to solving these issues instead of finding alternatives (e.g. social services, treatment, therapy, etc.). This topic carries importance in understanding how Black and Latino youth living in communities experiencing poverty, violence, and other social issues are facing these added stressors which produce risk factors that can lead them to engage in delinquent behaviors.

Youth of color are impacted by the societal and ecological aspects of their communities but are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. In the context of the Los Angeles area, "Black youth represent 30% of the youth incarcerated in the County but only account for 8% of the total youth population in the County. Latino youth, on the other hand, represent 65% of the incarcerated youth population and 62% of the youth population" (Dupuy, 2019). These statistics showcase the importance of listening to youth issues and finding intervention services and alternatives that can reduce rates of incarceration. That is why different spaces and communities must build upon assets that can provide a safeguard to social, organizational, and developmental productivity instead of relying on the deficiency of a community. If communities rely on the criminal justice system to solve the issue of youth delinquency, they are ignoring the other underlying issues within the community which is causing youth to engage in delinquency in the first place.

Question: How are youths' lives and perspectives being shaped by their experience within juvenile detention?

Question: In what ways are detention facilities providing juveniles with skills and resources during their incarceration and in preparation for re-entry back into their community?

These questions from a sociological perspective allow for qualitative research which focuses on the very structure (prisons) that impact youth's lives and trajectory. These questions focus on the organizations of prisons, the incarceration system, and how the impact of being within that environment affects youth. As stated by Edwards in his article "Writing in Sociology," while we may be interested in the individual person, through a sociological perspective we can delve deeper into thinking about "organizations and how they operate" (Edwards, 2014). While the individual youth is experiencing different forms of socialization from being incarcerated, these questions take a look into what these facilities are doing that shape youths' experience. Therefore, these questions will look at the way detention centers are operating and what resources they provide juveniles with. Moreover, the structure of these organizations shapes how they fit into our society and overall affect our communities. Focusing on the individual perspective can become more psychological based, but when looking at the effects of societal issues (poverty, policing, racism, etc.) and the systems (e.g. prisons) they create, we can better understand how these organizations affect our society. Therefore, these questions examine how the prison system and structure shape a youth's understanding of their role in society.

Literature Review

Youth in the juvenile justice system are often overlooked within the facilities they are placed in due to a lack of educational opportunities, services, therapy resources, and behavioral treatment. While many facilities do provide youth with treatment services, they often lack educational opportunities which can help them catch up on schooling that they have been unable to receive due to their incarceration process. Additionally, the prison system has become ingrained within the very systems we partake in, as seen within the education system. While there are studies about the school-to-prison pipeline, a process for youth that leads to incarceration, there are fewer details about the outcome and implications of imprisonment on the wellbeing of youth. The fifteen scholarly articles analyzed for this literature review explain the function of these prison systems and the implications they have on youth development while incarcerated. This review will focus on the experiences of youth within juvenile facilities, the educational system provided, as well as the history behind the juvenile justice system.

The question surrounding youth punishment through incarceration has raised major concerns about whether it is beneficial for youth and its impacts on recidivism. Often youth who are released face (recidivism) higher risks of reoffending and relapsing into criminal behavior. Reoffending can then result in their rearrest and reconviction into the justice system. According to US national statistics, "approximately 2.2 million juveniles are arrested and more than 110,000 are incarcerated in juvenile correctional facilities annually" (Macomber et.al, 2010). Punishment is not the purpose of the juvenile justice system, rather it has been used to prevent the furthering of youth's engagement in delinquent behavior. The sole purpose of creating a separate system for youth offenders was to provide intervention services, mentorship, and overall rehabilitation to avoid treating and punishing youth as criminals. However, the creation of juvenile courts grew a concerning controversy due to their failure to provide juveniles similar protections given to adults in their criminal trials (Sullivan, 2018). Historically, youth have lacked rights within the juvenile system and court trials long before the Supreme court granted youth protection within the juvenile system and its process. It is also important to note that historically the transfer process for juvenile offenders to criminal court (adult prison) was made easier to push for harsher treatment on more serious and violent offenders. Juveniles are protected "from placement under adult facilities as a result of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act (JJDA) of 1974" (Augustyn, 2018). While youth are protected they are still eligible to be transferred to adult facilities. However, the purpose of juvenile facilities was developed to address adolescent-specific needs and protect them from adult facilities. Juvenile incarceration has raised many concerns, but over time has focused on ensuring youth are progressing and able to re-enter their communities.

Experiences of Youth in Juvenile Detention

Juvenile facilities function as correctional systems, while they aim to rehabilitate and prevent youth from committing crimes, these institutions include various security and punitive measures to maintain control. For this review, I am demonstrating how prisons are total institutions. As stated by Goffman, "prisons are total institutions that must balance problem-solving with security maintenance and constraints such as limited budgets and potential staffing shortages" (Kupchick, 2007). Juvenile facilities have to maintain a fully functioning institutional structure with the implementation of programming, security, staffing, safety, and the prioritization of youths' well-being (mental, physical, behavioral, and emotional). Unfortunately, youth are still living in a correctional facility environment where they have to assimilate into a highly controlled lifestyle. As explained by Goffman, over time as youth remain in these facilities it can be difficult for them to differentiate an environment outside the facility, and they "typically surrender to the authority of the institution" (Haerle, 2019). However, it is up to the institution to create a proper environment that can facilitate the needs of the youth for their behaviors and mindsets to be shifted from a loss of liberty to the institution and into the rebuilding of themselves so they are prepared to transition into their communities. A difficult reality for youth in facilities is that they "are often placed in specific institutions based on their treatment needs. Youth may then be housed, on average, farther from home than adults, limiting the number of ... visits" (Young et al., 2019). While many youth desire having the support, love, and relationship with their family, it can be difficult for them to face their confinement on their own and not have family close. Overall, youth highly benefit from visitation as it invites both families and youth to reunify and build a stronger foundation that can better suit the youth's wellbeing after incarceration.

Moreover, in preventing youth from committing further crimes, these interventions serve a purpose in reducing recidivism (reconviction). Youth within the justice system experience various risk factors which affect their ability to return to their communities. Many experience exposure to drugs, violence, gangs, family instability, trauma, and other criminal behaviors at an early age. Youth are entering juvenile facilities with an onset of struggles and difficulties within their life which limit their abilities to live in a socially acceptable environment. With the case of recidivism, youth need to have access to services within their facilities that prepare them for reentry into society.

As noted in a New York data sets, “42% of juvenile offenders were rearrested within six months of their first release and over 50% within nine months” (Hartwell 2010). Recidivism indicates the need for facilities to dismantle the correctional aspect of the juvenile justice system. Instead, youth benefit greatly from treatment-based services which provide the proper skills and opportunities to transform their life inside incarceration.

Juvenile facilities can become a safe space for youth through treatment services and rehabilitative resources with access and funding placed into their creation. However, these facilities are still managed and maintained by staff, correctional officers, and security who are at the forefront every day with the juvenile offenders. Often there is a disconnect between correctional officers who do not build or maintain mutual trust and respect in their relationship with youth. The inability of facilities to provide a secure environment poses risks for youths' overall well-being within their incarceration and their reentry experiences. It has been demonstrated that “programs that had effectively reduced, or eliminated, physical intervention with youths offer a wide variety of behavioral incentives that are meaningful and relevant to the population served” (Olson, 2013). Many youths are acting out due to emotional, mental health, and behavioral issues they have been unable to deal with, therefore when staff act on their aggression as well, it produces greater risks for youth. Having open communication, improving attitudes among the staff, and creating a strong sense of community within these facilities creates less tension and builds upon empowering youth (Baetz, 2021). Understanding trauma-informed care principles are essential for staff as they learn more about youths' physical or behavioral issues that are a manifestation of their childhood experiences and create a safe space where youth can heal.

Education Systems Within Juvenile Facilities

Youth experience short-term absences from school often due to miscommunication between detention centers and the education system, leaving them unable to “catch up” accordingly. The education system is not held accountable or responsible for deliberating cohesive communication with the juvenile justice system. This lack of coordination between both systems has resulted in transition problems when juveniles enter and exit the juvenile justice system. In a particular study in Connecticut, “communication between educators working in pre-trial juvenile detention centers and local school districts is not policy-driven, mandated, or in any way systematic” (Macomber et. al, 2010). Instead, this communication is done on a case-by-case basis, based on students' needs and districts reporting to detention centers. As demonstrated in this particular study, teachers working in detention centers received limited to no documentation of students' prior records from their school districts. These disruptions in youths' education have long-term effects on their academic performance and lead to higher dropout rates (Twomey, 2008). The education being provided is not meeting the needs of youth and is not providing them with adequate opportunities to succeed academically and pursue an education while incarcerated. On the other hand, programs such as Gateways workshops allow the youth to get creative and most importantly create community with students outside these facilities (Millhorn, 2020). The main goal of this program is to provide juveniles access to earn high school or college credits. Overall this educational program is helping youth identify their interests and building upon their educational career inside incarceration all the while getting mentorship from faculty and students outside of the facility.

In particular, music and writing have been creative ways for juveniles to express themselves and work to heal their trauma while incarcerated. For incarcerated youth, creative activities are an effective form of therapy, which gives them full autonomy and resilience building through self-expression (Greenbaum, 2017). Such activities provide them with a sense of ownership and act as a powerful psychological function that transforms youths' experiences within these juvenile facilities. Youth can connect with the self which emerges through experience and activity and builds upon an interpersonal connection to themselves and others (Christianakis, 2018). Furthermore, music programs such as guitar classes are giving youth access to something beneficial to them by creating a positive and constructive environment that allows them to work through their emotions. Many of these youth have not experienced the accomplishment and pride in learning new skills, therefore the act of learning an instrument can increase their self-esteem (Marcum, 2014). Through a similar method of music, a teacher in Chicago used music as a strength-based approach. As noted, a strengths-based approach also has become a positive criminology movement in youth rehabilitation because it has strengthened the sense of identity of youth as positive beings rather than focusing on negative behaviors that resulted in incarceration (Hickey, 2018). The music classes create positive feelings and continual learning objectives for students which allows them to enjoy creating music and art-making. At the end of the programs, the students take away the opportunity to create something of their own and most importantly empower them with the new skills.

Methods

Content Analysis

Through content analysis, I collected and analyzed youtube videos about the experiences of youth within juvenile facilities and the various programs and services addressing their needs.

The youtube videos served as secondary interviews to represent their narratives and experiences since in-person interviews could not be completed for this research project. The narratives address life within juvenile facilities and directly discuss the programs and services which they are participating in within those facilities. The interviews provided insight into how youth are engaging with these programs, their perspectives about their life, and changes and transformations they have noticed within themselves throughout the process. Youtube as a platform provides the space for storytelling, education, personal lifestyle vlogs, policy advertising, news, and overall information.

Through youths documented narratives, how are their lives and perspectives being shaped by their experience inside juvenile detention?

Conducting a content analysis using youtube videos about incarcerated youth's documented narratives facilitates an understanding of whether facilities are providing them with resources for their personal development inside and outside juvenile detention. Documented narratives and documentaries hold a special significance to the outside world. As a society, many of us are unable to enter these facilities at any given time and may not have access to do so. Therefore documented narratives provide the opportunity for us all to get an insight into a different world. Documented narratives saved on youtube grants access to us in engaging and educating ourselves on important topics and issues such as the experiences of incarcerated youth. We all have the opportunity to watch and analyze these documented videos where youth are given the space to share with society an in-depth understanding of what it means to be inside juvenile detention.

How are youth gaining access to educational opportunities, skills, and resources during their incarceration within detention facilities which aid in their overall behavioral transformation and in preparation for re-entry back into their community?

Many organizations and educational programs are becoming readily available in granting their resources and services in helping youth during their incarceration. These documented videos surrounding youths' experiences engaging with these programs provided a glimpse into their transformation, interactions, and relationships with individuals in the programs, what they have learned, and how it has impacted their incarceration. A majority of these organizations and programs are outside resources and not directly created by these facilities. Youth can encounter methods that are beneficial to their development and the process of transformational healing. These documented narratives display youths' perspectives about the role these services have played in their incarceration, as well as what happens daily, the setting, and the people conducting the programs. These videos give a better look into how these programs function within a juvenile facility.

Data Collection:

For my data collection, I gathered a total of 30 videos and closely analyzed 15-20 videos. My data analysis included a sample of these documented narratives, which involve youth and young adults of color ranging from the ages of 14-20 years old, who have spent months or years within a juvenile facility. To initiate the finding of these videos the code words and phrases I used to search them included; 'incarcerated youth,' 'juvenile detention,' 'inside juvenile detention,' 'juvenile system,' 'detention education program,' 'juvenile detention rehabilitation program,' 'youth in prison.' The videos which I found were created and published by different media news sources such as The Atlantic, Vice, and New York Times. In addition, videos were created and published by the juvenile facility, non-profit organizations, the programs themselves, as well as other educational youtube channels. Within my content analysis, I noticed manifest (easily observable) items within the video recordings. A few of these items included; paying attention to the attitudes, emotions, and appearance of the youth; the interviewers; demographic information of youth (race, age, hometown); the setting; as well the specific organizations running the interviews. I noticed the youth's actions throughout the videos (expressions, behaviors, emotions, actions, movements, etc.). Focusing on these specific characteristics helped me understand whether their emotions are represented across the screen. It was important that I examined these physical characteristics and closely understood the emotions behind their experiences within juvenile facilities and their use of resources and programs.

In addition, when listening and watching the videos to understand youth's institutional perspectives in regards to their facilities, I paid close attention to their mentioning of the treatment they receive in the facility, relationship with staff and youth, daily routine, resources, emotions, behavioral changes, what they miss about home and the outside world, a reflection of their past, visitations, changes moving forward, fear, worries, hopes, and personal growth. Regarding the programs and services established in these facilities, I noted youth mentioning the benefits of the program, what they have learned, improvements in their behaviors, connection with material and resources given, transformation, personal reflection, trust in teachers, educators, service providers, and steps for their future and possible reentry.

While youths' narratives in these interviews detail their experiences, these videos are edited therefore limiting the potential for us to get full details. That is why paying attention to the material listed above allowed me to not only understand what was said but the emotions and physical expression that comes with their story. Lastly, the purpose of this content analysis was ultimately to listen to the documented narratives of incarcerated youth that are available and gather insight as to what is effectively serving youth and what needs still need to be addressed inside these institutions.

Criteria - Exclusion and Inclusion

Producers may try to reconfigure a video to address specific topics, concerns, positive attributes, and overall edit videos to create a perspective that benefits them. Organizers may have more biased claims towards why they deem their programs effective and produce videos that make it seem as though they are creating only positive changes. Through my observations I looked at who produced the content, paid close attention to the youtube channel names - whether it came directly from facilities, organizations, or individuals apart from the organizations, or journalists. With this in mind I paid attention to how the narrative shifts when a program is in charge of interviews and narratives versus institutions and journalists getting insight on the struggles and experiences of youth within juvenile facilities. Youth are not only behind a camera by themselves, but rather in a room with individuals that care and support their personal growth or work for the facility themselves. Being mindful as to what organization was behind the interview was a vital indicator - helping to understand more about what to take away from the documented narrative and what was noticeably curated.

Results

The sample of the 15 videos derived from Youtube, explore the context of juvenile youth navigating their sentencing and their experience being inside a juvenile facility. Many of these videos were published by educational youtube channels, organizations, and news channels as well. Through conducting a content analysis of these videos, the findings demonstrate what it means institutionally, socially, and personally to be a kid in prison. In the following section, I have provided evidence of the 3 recurring themes throughout all the all the videos watched. The frequently coded categories include "juvenile detention facility," "rehabilitation programs, and "education."

Juvenile Detention Facility

The first objective of this research project was to understand the experiences of incarcerated male youth of color in their set juvenile facilities (treatment within the facilities, day-to-day lifestyle, routines, relationship with staff, visitations, and sentencing). A majority of the interviews that took place were conducted inside the juvenile facility. 6 of the interviews I watched took place in Green Hill School - a juvenile facility located in Chehalis, Washington. As part of a college course and a program offered to both the juveniles and students attending, Gateways "allows students and incarcerated youth to learn alongside each other" (Participant, 2017, 0:37). The interviewer was a college student named Maya who participated in the program and interviewed several of her incarcerated friends. In particular, twenty-year-old Daniel who sat in a room with ceiling to floor windows inside the juvenile facility shared his experience, "I transitioned into the county jail where I was placed with adults. I wasn't allowed to sit amongst them or anything; I had to program alone because I was young" (1:25). He further explains while becoming teary-eyed, choked up, and with a shaky voice, only being able to come out every thirty-two hours for 2 hours, and the difficulty for his non-English speaking parents to set up thirty min video calls through a small video screen. For twenty-year-old Aaron, he details his experience in another juvenile detention center: "because I'm locked up anybody that works here can talk to me however they want and they do talk to me however they want. I think part of the reason why the staff is making it hard for residents here is that staff who are here are not that diverse" (Participant 208, 8:45). Aaron goes on to explain the need to have staff who are readily available to talk to and share relatable life experiences.

In the video "What It's Like To Be A Kid in Prison" actor Michael Kenneth enters Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Facility in Virginia which was built to resemble an adult facility in the 1990s. During the interview, Michael asks Jabbar what has been one of the beneficial parts of being in the facility, to which Jabbar responds, "the resume I got, I've built up such talents and tools. Like I've learned to strip doors with the machines and cut hair. The therapeutic portion allows me to slow down and process situations" (4:58). The Atlantic covered a segment on the same correctional facility in Virginia but focused more on interviewing the youth inside the facility. One of those individuals was nineteen year old Marquez who explains that "one of the good things here is a reassurance of what you're going to be doing in the next two hours - you know when your meals are coming, when you're going to sleep, when you're going to wake up, it's just structure" (The Atlantic, 2018, 0:30). The facility, although built to resemble an adult facility, is creating ways for youth to have access to treatment services and spaces.

Marquez walks into his cell/room and shows his art-drawn walls, posters, and photos he has drawn himself. While he does mention that “everything is about security here making sure everything is accounted for. Getting searched to and from school, I don't feel any way towards it, that's just how it is” (3:30).

Education

Depending on the juvenile facility, youth are granted opportunities to continue their education as well as access to activities, treatment, and mentorship through outside programs brought into the facility. Aaron defines rehabilitation as “something you have to do for yourself ... I kind of reflected on myself and asked myself some questions, what do you want to do with your life? Where do you want to go? This is the first time I asked myself these questions” (Teach With TVW, 2018, 5:06). Many of the videos watched focused on the Gateways program which encompasses both a college class as well as an Academic Mentoring Program (AMP). Terrance who has since been released from prison about twenty-years ago was once a participant in Gateways at its initial start. In the interview with Terrance and Carol Menu, the professor who helped start the program, he begins crying as he spoke about how he “felt empowered because we were at the table. She (Carol) was allowing us to sit at this table to talk about life, education, etc.” (Participant 2018, 3:50). Programs such as gateways have created a space inside of a prison which is uncommon for many institutions. The program today continues to aid youth in Green Hill as they form relationships with mentors, staff, college professors and students. Green Hill students can regain a sense of freedom as they interact with others from the outside whose desire is to build a relationship with them and support them.

Rehabilitation programs

Incarcerated youth leave behind their homes and enter facilities that abruptly place them in isolated settings far removed from individuals they can relate to. As stated by Deante “I want a counselor that looks like me that has been through the same thing I have been through because that's a big tight bond. It's just a different type of feeling, we need more counselors that are more diverse” (Participant 2018, 9:05). Bret the program coordinator for Gateways has been able to be a counselor to these youth. He was released fifteen-years ago from prison. In his interview, Bret expresses his unique ability to relate to these youth as he was in their shoes at one point and his experiences allow him to form a relationship with them. One of his statements included: “while inside the facility many of these youths have been locked down for several days, stripped searched, had all their possessions thrown out on the floor...And when I come in there I can't just ... start a ... workshop. I need to provide a space where they can talk about all this stuff going on” (Participant 2018, 7:32). Another Professor now in his third year of law school was sent to prison as a teenager and was charged as an adult. Throughout prison, Professor Betts began writing poetry which inspired him to continue his education, and now helps incarcerated youth share their stories through a writing program. (PBS NewsHour 2016, 0:40). The encouragement from teachers and mentors provides these incarcerated youth with a motivation and sense of purpose.

Discussion

For incarcerated youth being inside a detention facility can both place them at risk for victimization and or provide them with the resources they need to succeed. The research question focused on how these documented narratives depicted how the lives and perceptions of these youth were being shaped by their experience inside a juvenile facility. Many of these youth were first sentenced to an adult facility, which within the data collected, the stories about youth being convicted as adults were not uncommon. In Daniel's story, he shares his inability to talk directly to the adult inmates and being isolated from everyone. Being a kid placed in a correctional facility with adults presents challenges difficult for a child to understand. Youth are experiencing behavioral changes that come with restructuring their lives into a setting not normal to anyone. As explained by Goffman over time as youth remain in these facilities it can be difficult for them to differentiate an environment outside the facility, and they “typically surrender to the authority of the institution” (Haerle, 2019). Being transferred back to a juvenile facility helped Daniel receive better opportunities, although as Aaron mentions can still present difficulties with staff. But, through programs such as Gateways and treatment centers being built inside facilities such as Bon Air, it is important that “therapy sessions do not focus on addressing problems that youth are having with staff rather preparing them for success after discharge” (Olson, 2013, 64). When programs effectively reduce harsh punishments or physical interventions such as destroying a juvenile's room, placing them in an isolated unit, or use of physical aggression, it can provide youth a greater sense of security as well as support from staff in the facility. For Green Hill students, it was noted that they were able to be in a facility with individuals who cared about their future, well-being, and a place where they can better themselves. Many of the interviews with the students in the Gateways program describe having interactions with mentors, directors, and other students have allowed them to feel like they are listened to and supported.

The second question focuses on the educational opportunities, skills, and resources that youth receive in their set facilities and how it has supported their behavioral transformation and prepared them to reenter their communities. As noted in Jabbar's interview he demonstrated how his facility was teaching him skills such as barbering and other useful skills that will help him once he is released. Youth must be exposed to various skills because "the self...arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relation to that process as a whole and other individuals" (Christianakis, 2018). Incarcerated youth are deprived of the outside, leaving them with the inability to freely express themselves, enjoy the freedom of being a kid, and learning how to interact within society. For example, guitar classes can give youth access to something beneficial to them by creating a positive and constructive environment. Students can use music or guitar playing when they are "feeling frustrated, angry, or sad as a way to work through these complex emotions" (Marcum, 2014). Programs as such demonstrate youth rebuilding a sense of ownership and positive reinforcement allows them to reflect on their experiences as well as regain a new self. Furthermore, during the interviews, the juveniles spoke about their ability to receive their education, many of whom graduated with a bachelor's inside their facility. With the inclusion of educational programs, learning manual skills, and therapy, youth are empowered and motivated in the next step of their reentry process. Such programs have provided "positive criminology ... a movement in youth rehabilitation that has strengthened the sense of identity of youth as positive beings rather than focusing on negative behaviors that resulted in incarceration" (Hickey, 2018). Whether it is through creative writing, poetry, art, reading, and learning a skill, youth are receiving positive reinforcements. Often youth are not allowed to have an outlet and if a facility provides that to them, it allows them to turn the negative aspects of their past into a positive reflection of their transformation.

Rehabilitation, education, and mentorship are pivotal factors in transforming youth's lives and trajectories moving forward. Terrance spoke about his experience twenty-years ago while he was incarcerated and how empowering it felt to be a part of a program that invited him to share his story and express himself freely. Through the cultivation of a safe space Terrance and incarcerated youth moving forward gained valuable mentorship, guidance, and developmental skills that would then help them during their reentry. Programs such as Gateways use a "trauma-informed approach to system-wide change [which] focuses on creating a more therapeutic and supportive organizational culture emphasizing principles such as openness, democracy, healthy relationship building, and nonviolence" (Baetz, 2021). During Jabbar's interview, he details how he learned mechanisms to deal with his built-up emotions and behaviors. His mindset was set for survival and he only knew how to defend himself through the use of physical force, fighting, and verbal aggression. Through continual trauma-focused work, Jabbar like many others has been able to shift their negative mindset into a positive one, allowing themselves to find solutions instead of using negative outlets. In all, the inclusion of these trauma-focused interventions serves a transformative purpose in the lives of incarcerated youth because it provides them with a regained sense of hope and goals for their future.

Limitations

This research project has several limitations. Given the use of content analysis and the inclusion of specific youtube videos, it does not give an accurate depiction of the population of incarcerated youth. Due to various restrictions, covid, and time restraints on this project, I was unable to interview formerly incarcerated youth in person or through zoom. Furthermore, the documented interviews and narratives in these youtube videos are cut short and therefore are unable to provide a full detailed story. To that note, all these videos have been curated to fit a certain time frame, message, and aesthetic. While they do still produce a narrative, the interviews are edited and do not give a raw detailed glimpse into a youth's story. In addition, these youtube videos range across various years, some older than others - there is not a set trajectory following the lives of these incarcerated youth. Many of these youth being interviewed were still incarcerated at the time, while only a few had been released a few years prior. A trajectory must be followed to understand whether rehabilitation, programs, and treatment inside facilities help these youth as they transition back to their community and into adulthood.

Conclusion

This research has provided additional insight into the experiences of incarcerated youth inside juvenile facilities. The findings suggest that incarcerated youth are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior due to their environments and surroundings at home. While incarcerated youth who are given rehabilitation, educational services, and mentorship gain valuable skills and can transform their previous behaviors and mindset that led them to incarceration. It has been demonstrated that how juvenile facilities (programs, treatment services, education, etc.) are run can be detrimental to youth's mental health and behavioral changes. Moreover, the implementation of reform is essential to reestablishing the purpose of juvenile facilities for youth. The criminal justice system as a whole focuses on a punitive structure eager to degrade and punish individuals rather than offer alternatives that can ultimately transform the lives of incarcerated individuals.

The sociological implications of these institutions bring about an awareness as to how confinement socializes vulnerable youth and shapes their lives. Without a doubt, the criminal justice system has targeted communities of color, as noted through the interviews a majority of these youth were African American, Latino, and Pacific Islander. Incarceration is not a solution to the underlying issues affecting predominantly youth of color from low-income communities. Youth require overall support to understand how their environments influence their behaviors and help them navigate through a transition in their development. Therefore, future research should focus on families and following the trajectory of youths' families during their incarceration and after. It is important to include families in the youth incarceration process because their homes are often where they return to. If families are also given the education, resources, and therapeutic support to transform their lives, it can produce a positive impact once youth return home. Overall, it is vital to understand the social, familial, and environmental circumstances that have led youth to face incarceration.

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Maryam Sudzhyan



Maryam is a Sociology major from Los Angeles, California. Having graduated early from LMU, she has spent her months off prepping for her LSAT along with spending time doing the hobbies she has grown to love. These hobbies include growing a fashion instagram account that will be transformed to a shop, writing a novel, and traveling. Maryam has also spent the last year or so working with various Armenian organizations to help those in Armenia which led to her final research project. This summer, Maryam plans to return to Armenia. This time off has given her everything she could have hoped for in terms of figuring out her future and how to incorporate what she loves into that. Next year, Maryam will be attending law school.

The Collective Armenian Experience: Guilt

Armenians have been through countless traumas, however, when a major conflict such as what was branded the Forty-Four Day War was taking place over a long-disputed territory called Nagorno-Karabakh, the international media coverage was lacking. The Armenian community was pleading for people to repost images on social media such as Instagram and Twitter, but the topic never “trended” even after an estimated 100,000 Armenians marched through the streets of Los Angeles during a pandemic on October 11. When this war erupted in historical Armenian lands, and eighteen year old Armenian men were forced to fight and sometimes lose their lives, it almost destroyed a country. The lack of awareness of this topic along with the taboo view that Armenians have on mental health is why I have decided to do research on exactly how this war affected Armenians living in Los Angeles within a specific age group that is composed of young adults from the ages of 18 to 25. Not only will this research contribute to our knowledge of Armenia, but it will also increase awareness of a serious political issue.

Around the world, currently, there are 11 million Armenians, 2 million of which are in Russia making it the most populated country of Armenians besides Armenia (Bolsajian 2018). In America, however, the number varies anywhere from 800 thousand to 1.5 million people that are either partially or fully Armenian (Partizpanyan 2020).

In Los Angeles, more specifically, there are a reported 200,000 Armenians making it the highest populated city of Armenians in America (Partizpanyan 2020). Armenia's population has been consistently decreasing since the break of the Soviet Union as more and more Armenians are leaving their home country. The data collected in Armenia for populations based on sex and age group is done in intervals of 5 therefore there is no data on those from the ages of 18 to 25, but of the data collected, there are 90,776 men from the ages of 20 to 24 that live in Armenia (United Nations 2020). Of the 45,000 active military personnel, 70 to 75 percent are men of the ages 18 to 24 meaning anywhere from 31,500 to 33,750 of the current active military personnel are young adults in the same age range I have interviewed (Global Firepower 2021). In the Forty-Four Day War, it is said that almost 3,800 soldiers were killed, the majority of which were within the young adult age range, however the official numbers may be much higher and are possibly being downplayed per each side of the conflict (RFE/RL, 2021).

With thorough research into this topic, worldwide attention will be brought to the role that countries such as Israel and Turkey illegally played in this war. While much of social media activists and the media itself condemn Turkey's and Israel's actions regarding other topics, there was silence when their actions were affecting the Armenian community. As such a small, close-knit community, much of Armenia's struggles are unheard of even when the most followed people on social media such as the Kardashians and Jenner's speak up on it. The entirety of this is designed to bring awareness to Armenian struggles, something that was unable to be done during the Genocide of 1915 and the first Nagorno-Karabakh war. If actions had been taken by international communities and governments over a hundred years ago, then much of today's issues in the region would have been avoided.

The Armenian Genocide that took place between the years 1914 and 1920 was the first genocide of the 20th Century perpetrated by the Young Turks government of the Ottoman Empire which coordinated a planned, systematic massacre of 1.5 million Armenians that created massive trauma for immediate survivors and the generations to follow after (Mangassarian 2016). The families affected were also under six hundred years of Ottoman oppression previously, and after the Genocide and fall of the Ottoman Empire once again faced oppression by the USSR, Turkey, and other Middle Eastern countries that they migrated to. To make things worse, the Turkish government consistently denies that the genocide occurred which has exacerbated the emotional reaction that Armenians suffer from in terms of hearing and dealing with what their ancestors went through (Mangassarian 2016). The centuries of oppression, genocide and its denial, and having to flee ones country has greatly influenced the psyche of the Armenian people, and as a result, "the theme of survival is a major aspect of today's Armenian culture" (Mangassarian 2016). This denial of genocide created a culture in which there was no incentive to gather the Armenian people's personal data in the years following the genocide and so there is a major lack in literature on this topic and the psychological affects of it (Mangassarian 2016). Another aspect of the denial of genocide is that the oppressors get away with it which means they can do it again — this is happening now in the region of Artsakh.

The main research question that would guide my study is 'How have you dealt with the Forty-Four Day War — during it and after?'. While asking this question, I hope to guide those being interviewed to answer other questions such as 'How has your 'Armenian Guilt' been affected by the 44-day war?', 'What did you think about the media attention to the 44-day war?', 'How did this spark up any intergenerational trauma that you assumed to be dormant?', and finally, 'What kinds of changes in your day-to-day life did you feel after this war?'.

When using 'Armenian Guilt' in this research, I have defined it as a concept felt among the Armenian community, although barely discussed, which includes feeling helpless when living in the diaspora because they are not in their home country, the fear of the Armenian culture being wiped out overtime if Armenians do not marry other Armenians, and the struggle to keep the language alive.

Over social media, I have seen many Armenians discussing their feelings during and after the war and how they have felt lost, discouraged, unsafe, and much more. My goal was to interview Armenians in Los Angeles within a specific age range in order to create a contrast between them and the majority of active military members in Armenia who have been fighting in the war.

Literature Review

Trauma is not something that Armenians are new to; in a way, it has been ingrained into every Armenian whether it is intergenerational trauma from the Ottoman Turks taking over in the sixteenth century, the Genocide of 1915, the first Nagorno-Karabagh war in 1988, the neverending ceasefires that followed for three decades after, or the most recent Nagorno-Karabagh war beginning in July 2020. War in and of itself is not an ideal situation for anyone, but when a global pandemic is introduced into the field things begin to shift. In the summer of 2020, Armenians were left to fend for themselves against COVID-19, while fighting an Azerbaijani force backed by major outside influences such as Turkey, Israel, and Syrian mercenaries. Trying to deal with never-ending intergenerational trauma, a war during a pandemic, and major world powers having undue influence on something not regarding them, has sent Armenians into a frenzy.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY

The Nagorno-Karabakh, also called Artsakh, dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan can be traced back to the end of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution when Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region stated by the Russian Communist Party to be part of Soviet Armenia. Stalin later intervened and this region was established in Soviet Azerbaijan rather than as part of Armenia (Roberge 2020). Nagorno-Karabakh became the symbol of survival for Armenians, but also one for revenge after the Armenian Genocide and the Soviet takeover (Trupia 2020). For this reason, Armenians intended to reclaim part of their historical legacy because the struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh plays into the role of Armenians' Armenian-ness (Trupia 2020). Nagorno-Karabakh being under the control of an enemy state whose predecessors — the Turks — have been out for Armenian blood since arriving in Asia Minor in the eleventh century poses a threat to Armenians in the area. Just as over time Armenians are raised to fear Turks and Azeris for the never-ending attacks on Armenians, Azeris and Turks are taught through their school systems and textbooks that Armenians have “no mercy, drank blood, mutilated the corpses, did not spare pregnant women, etc.” (Hakobyan 2016). When stories of the events of the Genocide of 1915 are being told generation after generation then Armenians get to see, first hand, all of the doings of the Turkish and Azeri government, the trauma stays within the people. Once Armenians believe the hatred and viciousness towards these countries to subside, they are met with war by the same people that massacred their ancestors. Understanding intergenerational trauma is difficult considering psychiatrists who have worked with groups known to have experienced cultural traumas felt powerless in helping these patients. The combination of the intergenerational aspects and effects of trauma and the substandard mental health services means that compared to the rest of the world, treatment regiments and research remains underdeveloped (Isobel 2020, Markosian 2021).

The little research that has been done shows that it is incredibly important to recognize an Armenian's cultural pride and understand how and why such attitudes developed, especially when a third of the country is experiencing depression, and 86% of women are experiencing mental health issues (Mangassarian 2016, Markosian 2021). Research done in 2011 found that women, older people, and those who have lost a close relative or are more emotionally connected to the Armenian community have become the most vulnerable group in terms of mental health, however with the more recent events, almost every single person that I have personally known have lost cousins, brothers, dads, or best friends to the forty-four day war (Karenian 2011, Markosian 2021). With the Armenian Genocide being masked by the First World War and the time it took for a world power such as America to recognize the genocide, the recognition of Artsakh as an independent state is imperative for the healing of the Armenian community. For as long as Artsakh remains unrecognized, and the history is rewritten by those more powerful than Armenia, the cycle of trauma will continue for Armenians (Roberge 2020).

WAR IN A PANDEMIC

The six week long war killed over five thousand people between both Armenia and Azerbaijan, most of the Armenians being teenagers, but it displaced tens of thousands and led to an increase in COVID-19 cases in both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Chick 2021). Testing for COVID-19 became difficult as the war progressed and many healthcare providers in Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, treated patients despite being infected with COVID-19 themselves (Balalian 2021, Chick 2021). This was due to staff shortages that were caused by the pandemic and service to the military (Balalian 2021, Chick 2021). The risk of COVID-19 spreading is reportedly heightened for those living in densely populated community spaces such as overcrowded shelters, especially when there is inadequate access to clean running water, soap and appropriate sanitation and hygiene facilities (Balalian 2021, Kazaryan 2021). The continuous shelling of civilian areas, including healthcare facilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, which under the Geneva Convention is considered a war crime, made it impossible for people to be vigilant with Covid-safety guidelines such as masking and keeping a physical distance (Balalian 2021). The attention of the Armenian people was directed to helping their community at the threat of national security (Balalian 2021, Markosian 2021).

As of August 2 2020, 39,050 cases and 754 deaths due to COVID-19 had been reported, making the infection rate of Armenia one of the worst at over 1%, placing it at tenth in the world for cases per million people (Markosian 2021). By October 8, over half of the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh had been displaced to Armenia (Chick 2021, Kazaryan 2021). The cases in Armenia saw an eight-fold increase in the two months after the war's start (Chick 2021, Kazaryan 2021). In Los Angeles, Armenians took the streets of Beverly Hills and West Hollywood to protest the hostilities, not only blocking major freeways, but also gathering outside the Turkish Consulate in Beverly Hills with a crowd of around 100,000 people (Seidman 2020). Even in America, Armenians put their lives at risk by gathering in a major crowd in order to force politicians to do something about the situation.

POWER DIFFERENCES

In order to understand the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, one must understand how outsider influence of Turkey, Russia, and sometimes Israel plays a role in this Caucasian area in their social and political views.

There has been a long lasting discourse of genocide denial produced in Turkey that has been adopted by Azerbaijan (Cheterian 2018). In the 1980's, Turkish politicians, elites, and most public opinions were extremely xenophobic attitudes towards Armenians which translated to how Azerbaijani politicians and the Azeri public view Armenians (Cheterian 2018, Gasparian 2019). Ceylan Tokluoğlu, a Turkish Sociologist, carried out interviews with Azerbaijani political elite about their views on the conflict and found that they believed Armenians are not natives of the Caucasus, rather they were settled in the region by Russians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so they have no legitimate claims to Karabakh or any other territory in the Caucasus (Cheterian 2018). The denial of the genocide in Turkey helped mold the way Azerbaijanis view Armenians, and with the money provided by Turkey to Azerbaijan in their efforts of massacring Armenians to claim historically Armenian land, it makes their bond that much stronger (Cheterian 2018, Gasparian 2019). Currently, Azerbaijan purchases weapons from Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, Belarus, and other countries, using their \$4.8 billion to purchase T90 Russian tanks, anti-aircraft systems, drones, and missile systems. On the other hand, Armenia only spends \$447 million on weaponry mainly through Russia, using Soviet-era ammunition (Gasparyan 2019). Being rated by the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index as one of the world's most corrupt regimes, to having pipeline operations that allowed for the country to raise its military spending by ten-fold, the power of Azerbaijan continues to triumph that of Armenia's on an international political level (Gasparyan 2019).

Russia has played an incredibly important role in how the countries have dealt with ceasefires and treaties, including Putin sending Russian peacekeepers to make sure that everything stays civil. After the previous four day war in 2016, Russia restored the ceasefires, and now Russian soldiers are the peacekeepers along the borders of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan (Gasparyan 2019). While Azerbaijan is concerned with the indefinite Russian presence on what they see as their lands and the belief they hold that Russia has a bias towards Armenia, Armenians are also weary of the Russians' presence, but Russia has overseen the return of thousands of Armenian civilians to Nagorno-Karabakh along with the return of Armenian prisoners of war (Edelstein 2021). While Russia wants to control the Caucasus mountain region, and is attempting to do so through Armenia, Turkey is trying to advance on their 'Pan-Turkic' movement that would be complete if and only if Armenia no longer exists (Cornell, 1998).

Israel has become an important part of Middle Eastern and Caucasian politics as it has attempted to develop new and improved foreign policy for the area by reconciling relations with Turkey, the US, and Azerbaijan (Aras 1998). Previously, Israel did not have any interest in the Karabakh conflict, in this recent Forty-Four day war though, they supplied more than 60 percent of Azerbaijan's weaponry as a way of strengthening ties in order to use Azerbaijan not only for oil, but also for intelligence-gathering and military operations in relation to Iran (Edelstein 2021).

METHODS

SAMPLING

My study consisted of 15 interviews done with 15 different participants who are of Armenian descent, live in Los Angeles, and are anywhere from eighteen to twenty-five years of age. These characteristics created a juxtaposition to those in Armenia and Artsakh who are on the front lines of the war as most are of similar ages and the same ethnic group. A handful of those who were interviewed were contacted through the list of students in the Loyola Marymount University Armenian Student Association. Another group was found through my own personal contacts as I am part of the Armenian community in Los Angeles and have built connections through the various Armenian High Schools in Los Angeles after attending one for the entirety of my kindergarten through 12th grade education.

PROCEDURE

For the purpose of collecting demographic information on the participants, I sent a survey to all of them through email. Interviews were the main source of information and data that was used in my research. The way that the interviews were conducted was through a semi structured interview where I was able to guide the questions but still allow the participant to deviate. Each interview took anywhere from 15 minutes up to an hour depending on how much the participant had to say. Interviews were done in person or through Zoom/FaceTime and were dependent on what the participant was more comfortable with.

The survey that was asked to be filled out by each participant was to gather demographic information, but also to see how many people knew the term 'Armenian Guilt' in order to find how their attitudes towards the term changed.

My interview questions were kept as simple as possible as the purpose of these interviews was so that the participants did not feel forced to answer the questions in any particular way, rather to express how they felt with some guidance from me to discuss mental health.

My secondary research question dealt with the term 'Armenian Guilt' and this is an unspoken, but understood concept within the Armenian community. This concept includes feeling helpless when living in the diaspora because they are not in their home country, the fear of the Armenian culture being wiped out overtime if Armenians do not marry other Armenians, and the struggle to keep the language alive. With less than 3 million Armenians living in Armenia and over 11 million around the world, there is a disconnect between Armenians and their homeland and so rather than assimilating into the cultures around them, they resist and remain in enclaves to feel closer to their homeland.

In-person interviews were recorded using the voice memos application on the iPhone with the permission of the participants. Zoom recorded interviews were transcribed through the zoom application. Notes were also taken during the interview, however they were not in complete detail in an effort to connect with participants better and actually listen to their stories. Each recorded interview was transcribed into a PDF document. Names are not and will never be used in any public dissemination of this data, online forms stayed online, physical forms were shredded, and all audio recordings are to be kept confidential. I looked to find common themes amongst the answers given to me by those being interviewed, such as themes of guilt, hopelessness, stress, or any other repetitive pattern found in each of the transcriptions. Patterns lead to themes and because of the semi-structured interview and the characteristics it took to be part of this interview process, along with the demographic information they provided before the interviews happened, themes emerged as patterns repeated.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS

In order to answer my research question, I interviewed 15 Armenians living in Los Angeles who were between the ages of 18 to 25. Out of the 15 people interviewed, 7 identified themselves as female and 8 identified as male. In regards to ages, 1 person was 18, 1 person was 19, 2 people were 20, 3 people were 21, 3 people were 22, 3 people were 23, and 2 people were 24. 7 of the 15 participants were only students, 4 were only employed, and 4 were both students while also employed part time. Majority of those interviewed, 13 people, have relatives in Armenia while only 2 do not. In regards to their lifetime spent in Los Angeles, 9 of the participants have lived in Los Angeles their whole lives, 1 person moved to Los Angeles in 2000, another moved in 2001, 1 person in 2010, another in 2013, then 1 in 2015, and finally the last participant moved to Los Angeles in 2016. 12 of these participants personally knew or know soldiers who served or are currently serving in the army, while 3 did not. Finally, of those asked in the beginning of the interview process whether or not they knew what Armenian Guilt was, 9 of the 15 knew it, but 6 did not.

Through all of the data collected, I was able to find that every person felt some type of guilt that was different than 'Armenian Guilt' — guilt for not being there to provide hands-on support to the country and the soldiers, guilt because they were safe in another country, and guilt because their relatives were part of the soldiers that survived. Many participants used their guilt to express the way they felt about the Armenian government, which was not a topic I expected them to discuss. I also found that many participants had strong feelings about the media, or the lack of it. Finally, when discussing Armenian Guilt, the majority of participants believed that there was now an extra added pressure on them to be as Armenian as possible. It is to be noted that the guilt felt amongst these participants is indeed different than Armenian Guilt. Armenian Guilt is one of feeling helpless when living in the diaspora because they are not in their home country, the fear of the Armenian culture being wiped out overtime if Armenians do not marry other Armenians, and the struggle to keep the language alive. The type of guilt felt by those interviewed did not include helplessness, rather it was guilt for not providing hand-on support, guilt for being safe, and guilt because their relatives survived while others' did not.

SHADES OF GUILT

When interviewing the 15 participants to gain an insight into the ways they have dealt with the Forty-Four Day War, every single person stated that they felt guilt. All 15 participants felt guilty whether it was because they were not there to provide hands-on support to the country and the soldiers, if it was because they were safe in another country, or if it was because their relatives were part of the soldiers that survived. Some people's guilt even turned into resentment toward the Armenian government labeling them as 'traitors'. Guilt played a major role in all of the answers that participants provided. The way people dealt with this guilt, however, varied. While almost everyone sent money or supplies to Armenia, a few of the participants worked with non-profit organizations such as Armenia Fund and Eternal Nation that raised millions of dollars. One participant went as far as starting their own non-profit with the help of family members. This participant is still collecting money to hand deliver to the families of soldiers who have passed away or to the soldiers who need financial help for medical issues, rent issues, or just their daily lives.

Every participant who expressed guilt because they physically were not in Armenia and were unable to provide hands-on support worked for organizations in order to collect monetary funds or collected funds through social media. One participant sold stickers with their friends in order to raise money. Another spent weeks raising money by selling baked goods such as brownies, cookies, and cupcakes. From the data collected, those who were guilty for not being in Armenia to help were, unanimously, raising money in many different ways to provide financial assistance to troops.

Another way these participants felt guilty was because they felt too privileged as they were living in another country, far from their homeland, and did not have to worry about a war amongst a pandemic. One of the participants that was born and raised in Los Angeles stated that

"I think the most conflicting thing about the 44 days was that I was in America and men like me were fighting a war. I have a great life, I woke up knowing I'm going to be safe, I woke up knowing that tomorrow is also gonna be a safe day for me and I don't have to worry about my safety whereas kids my age and younger are literally picking up weapons, lying to themselves and lying to their families saying 'I'm gonna be alright, it's gonna be safe' even though they didn't know that and then literally dying for the tiniest plot of land".

Another participant, one who moved to Los Angeles in 2010, said that they were

"Scared that my cousins would get drafted even though they are excused from the army because of their education. I was just scared a lot. I still am. I knew people I went to school with who died in the war, it's just crazy because you grow up with these guys and you play in the playground with them as kids. My childhood friends were gone in an instant, heartbreaking doesn't even begin to describe it. Sometimes I find myself feeling guilty that I'm thinking 'Thank God' it wasn't me, because at the end of the day they were kids I grew up with. My family got extremely lucky that we weren't there for this war", he even went on to ask, "Can you imagine if I died in that war? Or, your brothers? They're at the prime draft age. We could have been those kids if we weren't so lucky".

Every single one of those who felt guilty for living outside of Armenia and being safe identified as male, and of these 8 men, 3 were born in Armenia and moved to the States through a family member who won a green card. These 3 were the ones who expressed the most guilt and told stories of men they knew from a young age who they considered brothers that died or were severely injured. One of these men said he felt even more guilty because he could not even go back to see the family of his friend who passed stating, "I just couldn't take that risk, they would have forcibly taken me to the army even if I am a US citizen, because at the end of the day I am a citizen of Armenia as well". This same man said "nothing will ever make me feel as horrible and as guilty as not being able to be the support system for one of my best friend's family". Those who felt guilty about being safe were also the ones who expressed the severity of their mental health issues.

Some participants' guilt was so intense that it seriously messed with their mental health, and they eventually were diagnosed with depression and anxiety by healthcare professionals. One participant described their mental health by stating "I could not eat or sleep, I could barely open social media apps because everytime I did it was more bad news, but it was also the only way I could stay updated so I had to open Instagram and Twitter". All fifteen of my participants made a point out of just how bad their mental health was — some could not get out of bed for days, others would not see their family or friends, and there were a few who called out of work for days at a time along with some who barely did any schoolwork because they simply could not sit down to do it.

A handful of participants were dreading illustrating their guilt, and when they finally expressed it to the best of their abilities, I understood why. These three participants explained to me that at times they felt guilty because of how relieved they were when their family members, cousins, or family friends were not on the list of soldiers killed. A participant revealed to me that they felt as if they were "the worst person on Earth for feeling relief every morning when I did not recognize any names on those lists on Zartonk Media". Another person who felt the same way asked if their identities would truly stay anonymous before expressing the way they felt because they were fearful of the backlash of people finding out how they felt.

The war took over the daily lives of these participants, but it also drove the Armenian people farther apart than before. One participant expressed

"In a way our country has been divided with political groups and the groups people associate with and even though it has always had corruption, the last couple years we felt a little bit of what it would be like if our government was not corrupt. I mean, at least that's what we thought. I think now we are divided even more. Some sides of my family don't speak to one another because of politics, you know because some viewed our government and [Prime Minister] Pashinyan as a traitor for signing away the lands that are rightfully Armenian, while others thought that was the best case scenario so that more soldiers were not dying. I don't even know where I stand and I don't care to make a stance. It's not my place to comment on because I don't live there".

However, this participant was the only one to stay politically neutral. I decided to stray away from politics as much as possible, but some participants believed that the severity of what they felt could only be conveyed through their stance on Armenian politics. Regardless of the varying political opinions of these participants, they all agreed on one thing — the land lost was Armenian land and will forever be Armenian land.

FEELINGS WITH MEDIA

Media coverage was majorly lacking when it came to the Forty-Four Day War which is something that everyone commented on. Some were disappointed in American media for not discussing it while others were mad, especially at Los Angeles media outlets, considering the massive Armenian population in the city. One participant stated, “Armenians helped build this city along with other immigrants, but the only coverage we got was people being enraged at us for protesting with hundreds of thousands of people in front of the Turkish Consulate during a pandemic instead of being enraged at the Turkish and Azeri Governments for killing eighteen, nineteen year old boys and civilian children”.

When discussing the media coverage with the participants, I asked if they believed there was anything else Armenians in Los Angeles could have done in order to bring attention and awareness to what was happening, but every single person said no. Another participant laughed when I asked that and mentioned that “If people weren’t paying attention to the message behind a hundred thousand of us marching down the streets of Beverly Hills or however many times we shut down freeways in Los Angeles, then there was nothing else we could have done” and they even went on to say

“No one seemed to care about the pandemic when it came to other protests, but when it was Armenians doing it then all of a sudden it was wrong. There comes a point where you ignore the struggles of people just because they fit that ‘model minority’ myth and those people blow up. We can’t keep hundreds of years of trauma just locked up and hope it goes away, it’s gonna come out eventually, and it came out when Armenians blocked the 101 Freeway. But people continued to harass Armenians through social media instead of taking a moment to understand why that was done.”

A different participant stated that

“The Armenians in Los Angeles felt helpless even though in the beginning it wasn’t like that, everyone would contribute and you would hear about the millions of dollars being donated so you would think ‘okay, well, this has to be doing something’, but then reality hits you when the Armenian government says they don’t have that money. All that work that was put into helping our country, our motherland, is just thrown away. That’s when the Armenians of LA felt extremely helpless because we did everything we were told would help and it didn’t help. I don’t think there was more they could’ve done. There were actually Armenians in LA who went to Armenia — sergeants, navy seals, you name it — and the government refused to accept them as volunteers in the army and I think it’s because they didn’t want to risk the fact that American citizens would be dying on Armenian soil. I think LA Armenians got tired of doing what they were doing so they gave up.”

Overall, the Armenians of LA were tired, annoyed, pissed off, frustrated, and disappointed with the lack of media coverage, but were even more irritated when non-Armenians in Los Angeles did not care for what was happening. A participant stated that they felt more hurt by their friends who ignored it than they did by the media, going on to say “their fake activism came to an end when I was begging and pleading for someone to care”. Finally, a participant who did not want to comment much on the media coverage only stated “Armenians built Glendale, half of Hollywood, most of the San Fernando Valley, the least the people of LA can do is pretend to care, but no, everyone is selfish and cares that they had to deal with traffic. Wake up, kids are dying, you can survive an hour of traffic.”

ARMENIAN GUILT

Finally, as the topic of Armenian Guilt came up towards the end of each interview, twelve out of fifteen of the participants felt that the war made that guilt worse for them. A participant said that they “have always wanted to marry an Armenian, have children who speak Armenian who participate in Armenian events and are in touch with their culture, but it was always an afterthought, now it is front and center”. Another stated that

“After this war, I feel like I have more of a reason to marry within my ethnic group, to keep my culture alive as much as possible. Seeing an entire generation be wiped out really opened my eyes to the future and it wasn’t pretty. All I kept thinking was that if this happens a few more times then we might be wiped out, we probably won’t have a country left, my kids and grandkids won’t be able to enjoy our home as much as I have and it’s scary.”

I don't think I'm the only one who feels this way. I think a lot of us Armenians want to marry Armenians more than before because I truly didn't care to marry an Armenian before this. I want my kids to be Armenian and for their kids to be Armenian and so on. Now, more than ever, I want to be around Armenians and be with them and speak Armenian. In a way I feel pressured from the community but I think it's also just pressure we're all putting on ourselves. We're all kind of checking on one another and I find myself hoping my homies go out with Armenian girls and I find myself actively looking to date Armenian women”.

The two people who said that their Armenian Guilt, in terms of marrying an Armenian, did not get worse were born in Armenia, and they both stated that Armenians should keep their culture alive through their children, but marrying someone from a different culture would not do much damage because it would be a way to spread Armenian culture. However, they both expressed that they wished they were in Armenia to fight alongside their cousins and friends.

When I was collecting demographic data, I asked the participants if they knew what Armenian Guilt meant and 9 of them knew, but 6 did not. After discussing the term with them, every participant expressed that they did feel that guilt, but only 2 believed that it did not get worse for them after the war. The aspect of this guilt getting worse was calculated through their view on marrying within one's ethnic group. While 13 others believed that this war gave them a legitimate reason to marry within the ethnic group, the other 2 participants saw marriage as an opportunity to spread culture. All 15, however, felt pressure to be as Armenian as possible and to do anything necessary for the betterment and growth of their country.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The Forty-Four Day War was an armed conflict between Nagorno-Karabakh with the backing of Armenia and Azerbaijan with the backing of Turkey and Israel, while Russia played the role of the middle man. The self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh is an ethnically and historically Armenian land and was stated as such by the Russian Communist Party in 1921 after World War 1, but when Stalin intervened, the land was given to Soviet Azerbaijan and the conflict has been growing worse ever since. This most recent war was the biggest breach of the ceasefire constructed in 1994 and it came during a worldwide pandemic forcing a third-world country such as Armenia to fend for itself while fighting two wars — one against Azerbaijan and one against a pandemic (Roberge 2020). Intergenerational trauma from when the Turks took over Asia Minor to the Genocide in 1915, even including the first Nagorno-Karabakh war in the 80's, and the renewal of this war today has made it so that Armenian mental health continuously gets worse. Although it is difficult for psychiatrists to understand intergenerational trauma, this trauma and the substandard mental health services within Armenia means that treatment regimens and research remains underdeveloped (Isobel 2020, Markosian 2021). This little research is why it is important for Armenians to discuss their mental health in an unfiltered way in order for the people to understand and conquer this never ending intergenerational trauma that seems to follow them wherever they go.

The major research question guiding my study was 'How have Armenians dealt with this Forty-Four Day War — during it and after?'. However, after conducting my research, a secondary question of mine, 'Has 'Armenian Guilt' gotten worse because of this?', actually became an important question in order for me to find the results needed for my main research question. The age group chosen for this interview was done in order to provide some kind of contrast between the Armenians in Los Angeles versus the Armenians in Armenia who are actively fighting in the war. 70 to 75 percent currently serving in the Armenian military are of the ages 18 to 25 which is just the age range that I interviewed (Global Firepower 2021). My results showed me that guilt was a recurring theme in the lives of the Armenians in Los Angeles, and as stated above, this guilt varied into three major categories — guilt for not being there to provide hands-on support to the country and the soldiers, guilt because they were safe in another country, and guilt because their relatives were part of the soldiers that survived. Even with this guilt, Armenians in Los Angeles were providing financial support to Armenia through non-profit organizations, telethons, and other fundraisers. 'Armenian Guilt' was also seen to get worse for 80 percent of my participants. This majority stated that the war gave them more of a reason to marry an Armenian and worsened the fear of the Armenian culture being wiped out overtime if they did not.

There is a lack of literature on Armenia and Armenians whether it is sociological or simple, historic literature, however this research would help answer something that many Armenians have wondered but have been too afraid to ask one another. Opening the doors to the discussion of mental health within the Armenian community is extremely important, and I believe if my findings on guilt and 'Armenian Guilt' are talked about within the community then it would lead to other cultures being able to discuss their own issues. While not every ethnic minority is the same, mental health is looked over in most and it leads to a lot of intergenerational trauma and issues that can be solved. The problem with the Armenian communities' intergenerational trauma is that they are constantly reminded of the trauma. More recently, after data was collected for this research, on November 16 the largest escalation since the Forty-Four Day War took place as Azerbaijani forces attacked the province of Syunik in Armenia, not Nagorno-Karabakh (Kucera 2021).

The war that was once over a plot of land, Nagorno-Karabakh, has now escalated to that of internationally recognized Armenia and its borders.

If Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey and Israel, continues to make attacks such as these, then the future research will be endless. Nagorno-Karabakh is one topic, but declaring war against Armenia is another. Nagorno-Karabakh's ownership can be debated, but that of Armenia cannot. Research into the daily lives of soldiers who fought in the 1990's can be conducted in comparison to the lives of soldiers that are fighting today in terms of their mental health, especially. Also, research can be done into the brainwashing of Azerbaijani citizens when it comes to this topic. Another research that can be conducted is the comparison of the lives of Armenians living outside of Armenia, but not in Los Angeles, and maybe not even in America. Finally, a last research topic that can be discussed is that of the lives of families who lost children, siblings, parents, and friends in this war whether they were soldiers or civilians.

Although my research brought light to a specific group of Armenians in Los Angeles and their mental health, it is only representative of a small group of Armenians. Not every Armenian is in the age group I picked and not every Armenian is in Los Angeles, therefore I cannot make any educated guesses about those who do not fit into these small boxes I have created. However, other limitations not regarding my sample would include the bias on both my side and on the side of Azerbaijan and Turkey. Obviously my research is the personal experiences of Armenians in America and their opinions on politics instead of facts because the purpose of this research was how Armenians have dealt with the war, rather than the factual politics and history of it. In conclusion, research on the mental health of Armenians is severely lacking and conducting research such as this in order to fully comprehend the severity of intergenerational trauma within the community is imperative for the betterment of this ethnic group.

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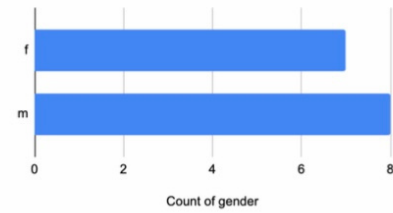
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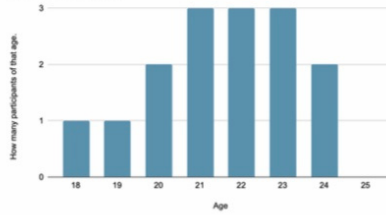
APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1

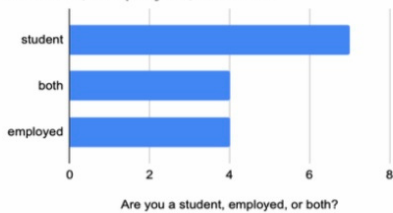
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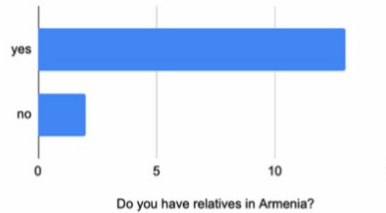
Age of Participants



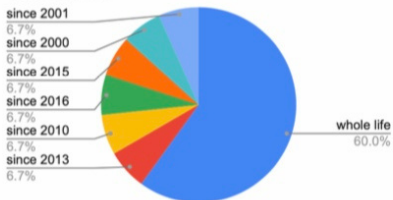
Student, Employed, or Both?



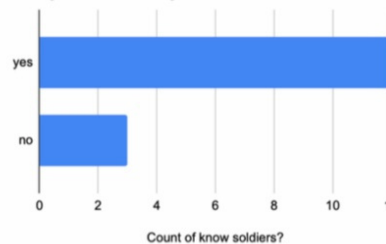
Do you have relatives in Armenia?



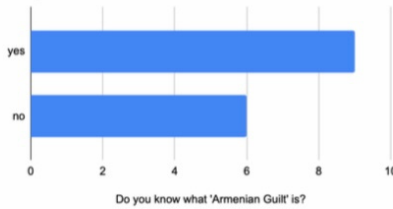
Time in LA



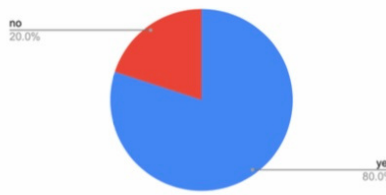
Did you know any soldiers?



Do you know what 'Armenian Guilt' is?



Did your 'Armenian Guilt' get worse after the war?



APPENDIX 2

Survey Questionnaire

- Gender.
- Age.
- Are you a student/working/both?
- Do you have relatives in Armenia?
- How long have you lived in LA?
- Did you live anywhere else before LA? If so, where?
- Did you personally know any of the soldiers in the 44 day war?
- Are you familiar with the term 'Armenian Guilt'?
- Interview Questions
- How have you dealt with the Forty-Four Day War — during it and after? - How has your 'Armenian Guilt' been affected by the 44-day war?
- What did you think about the media attention to the 44-day war?
- How did this spark up any intergenerational trauma that you assumed to be dormant? - What kinds of changes in your day-to-day life did you feel after this war?

Megan Mingo



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Growing Up in a Kibbutz: A Comparative Analysis of the Lives of Children in Kibbutzim

One essential facet of Israeli Jewish history involves kibbutzim, and the dynamic circumstances surrounding their existence. Kibbutz, which is derived from the Hebrew word kvutza meaning 'group', is used to define the closely knit communities that were first established in Israel during the early 1900s (The Jewish Agency, 2018). There are many aspects of the kibbutz lifestyle that go beyond the western expectations of communities and society, but perhaps one of the most distinct of them involves the ways in which children are raised. For this reason, it is apparent that there may be psychological and emotional differences between children that were raised in kibbutzim and those that were not.

Before examining the differences between children that were raised in kibbutzim and their counterparts that were not, it is essential to first understand the origins of the kibbutz. The kibbutz lifestyle stems from Labor Zionism. Labor Zionism is a school of Zionist thought that "envisioned a Jewish working class settling in Palestine and constructing a progressive Jewish society" (Troy, 2018). The pioneers of Labor Zionism intended for this school of Zionist thought to align with the principles of Socialism. Socialism can be defined as a "social and economic doctrine that calls for public rather than private ownership or control of property and natural resources" (Ball, n.d). This movement began in the late 18th century following the French Revolution (History.com Editors, 2019). Similarly, Marxism is an additional political philosophy that heavily influenced the Labor Zionist movement. Marxism began to emerge in the late 19th century and was created by Karl Marx. Marxism "examines the effect of capitalism on labor, productivity, and economic development and argues for a worker revolution to overturn capitalism in favor of communism" (The Investopedia Team, 2021).

When Labor Zionism was founded in the early 20th century, Zionist thinkers were invested in redefining Jewish character, and saving Jews and Judaism by helping the world at large (Diamond, 2021). Essentially, Labor Zionism seeks to “save the world by creating a new model for humanity” (Troy, 2018). Its founding was also a direct response to the Rothschild settlements that occurred during the First Aliyah (*Labor Zionism*, n.d). According to several Labor Zionist thinkers, the Rothschild settlements proved to be ineffective because they were “organized on purely capitalist terms and therefore hiring Arab labor, would undermine the Jewish enterprise” (*Labor Zionism*, n.d).

This school of Zionist thought places an emphasis on Jewish individuals engaging with land and agriculture. Many Labor Zionist thinkers believed that “the core of the Jewish problem was not that Jews existed in Christian and Islamic host countries, but that only a small proportion of Jews were farmers or workers in the mainstream of their adopted societies” (*Labor Zionism*, n.d). Furthermore, Labor Zionism stood as a response to the treatment of Jews in European territories. In many instances, Jews were expected to occupy labor roles and support the economy in European countries such as Russia. A problem developed when the economy became stable, and Jews were evicted despite their significant contributions. This led to instability for many Jewish families in those territories, but also fostered a culture in which the blatant disregard for Jewish life became the norm (*Labor Zionism*, n.d). Labor Zionism alongside settlement in Palestine would not only establish a sense of security and safety but would also enable Jews to create and reap the benefits of an economy of their own.

Additionally, Labor Zionism also puts an emphasis on social justice and universalism. This school of thought's secular origins encouraged Jews of all identities to come together in solidarity and unity. This is seen in the quote, “...founding an old-new Jewish state in the ancient Jewish homeland enabled the Jewish people to bring alive a realistic socialism – one that acknowledged tribalism and respected differences, while seeking equality and social justice” (Troy, 2018).

Zionist thinkers that played an instrumental role in the development of Labor Zionism include Moses Hess, Rahel Bluwstein, and Ber Borochov. Moses Hess was born into an orthodox Jewish family in Bonn, Germany on June 21, 1812. He was a self-proclaimed utopian socialist and philosopher. AQ(Moses Hess, n.d) of the concept. Hess most notably encapsulated his vision for the Jewish state in his booklet titled *Rome and Jerusalem*.

Rahel Bluwstein is known for her literary works and is often regarded as the “founding mother of modern Hebrew poetry” (Diamond, 2021). She was born in Saratov, Russia in 1890 and moved to Palestine with her sister in 1909. She studied agronomy in France and later went on to instruct Russian school children during World War I (Olmert, n.d). Her poetry placed a particular focus on womanhood and femininity in the context of Judaism.

Ber Borochov was born in 1881 in Ukraine. Though he was denied access to a formal education at any of Russia's universities, Borochov is noted as a “scholar of the Jewish people's history, economic structure, language and culture” (*Ber Borochov*, n.d). He took on a universal approach to Zionism and believed that the Jewish problem “stemmed from the fact that the Jewish people were divorced from their homeland” (*Ber Borochov*, n.d). Borochov was also an adamant follower of socialism, and believed that it was closely related to Zionism. He contended that they shared a common purpose as seen in the quote, “He argued that they served the same purpose: to make Jewish life productive again” (*Ber Borochov*, n.d).

These individuals undoubtedly played a significant role in establishing the foundation for Labor Zionism, however the most important figure in the field regarding kibbutzim is Aaron David Gordon. Aaron David Gordon was born in June of 1856 in Troyanov, Ukraine to a religious family. Gordon was compelled to identify with Zionism after working for the estate of Baron Horace Gunzburg, a wealthy relative who lived in Russia (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d). Gordon made Aliyah in 1904 as part of the Second Aliyah where he settled in Petah Tiqwa, a small city located on the east-northeast region of Tel Aviv-Yafo (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d).

Gordon believed that “Jews could end the alienation caused by the Diaspora only if they returned to the Palestinian homeland and worked its soil” (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d). This connection and reverence of nature was interpreted in the literal sense, but also in a more philosophical context. This is seen in the quote “...nature as life – that is, nature as the infinite renewal of all that is” (Turner, 2016). Unlike many of the other individuals who had also traveled to Palestine during the Second Aliyah, Gordon was much older and devoted to immersing himself in the “pioneer lifestyle” (Plen, 2017). Despite having no prior knowledge or experience, Gordon went on to do manual labor on a farm. He believed that his work was reflective of his vision for Judaism and what would later become Labor Zionism.

Aaron David Gordon's contributions to Labor Zionism inspired groups of other Jewish pioneers that would go on to establish the first communal settlements, or kibbutzim. The first kibbutz in Israel was established in 1909. This settlement is known as Degania Alef and was founded by a group called the Hadera Commune (*First Kibbutz in Israel is Established*, 2021). Though Degania is regarded as the first kibbutz, its founders were not alone in establishing communal settlements for Jewish individuals. Manya Shochat, a Jewish revolutionary and supporter of the socialist movement, had previously established a communal space in Sejera, Northern Israel in 1907 (*First Kibbutz in Israel is Established*, 2021).

Additionally, Arthur Ruppin who had served under the office of Zionist Organization in Palestine established a farm near the Sea of Galilee in 1909 (*First Kibbutz in Israel is Established*, 2021).

After Ruppin's communal farm proved to be unsuccessful, he and the Jewish National Fund agreed to lease the land to the members of the Hadera Commune. The group which consisted of ten men and two women changed its name and "proceeded to establish an independent settlement of Jewish workers in the national homeland – a Commune" (*First Kibbutz in Israel is Established*, 2021).

Degania was formally established on October 29, 1910 (Kibbutz Degania, 2021). An essentialism of Degania and the kibbutz lifestyle was group ownership. In this community, there was virtually no privatization of items, food, or resources. There were typically about 200 members in each settlement (Rabin, 2013), and what belonged to one member of the community customarily was available to everyone else. Members of the community spent most of their time together and were expected to gather for things such as meals in communal dining halls (*Life on a Kibbutz*, 2021).

Additionally, all money within the kibbutz was handled collectively. In fact, there often was not a formal system of purchasing items. Instead, whatever cost was acquired by an individual as they were shopping in the community store would be automatically taken from their monthly pay (*Life on a Kibbutz*, 2021). Each family was given the same amount of money in a monthly stipend and decisions were made "by a system of direct participatory democracy" (*Life on a Kibbutz*, 2021). This created a culture in which each member of the community had value and agency over what would occur within the settlement. In many ways the kibbutz was a utopian society that was reflective of the goals and missions of its founders and early Labor Zionists.

Hundreds of kibbutzim went on to be founded following the establishment of Degania. The core principles of community and equality have continued to exist among most settlements however, there have been some changes to the kibbutz lifestyle throughout the years. The most distinct contrast between early kibbutzim and those in modern times involves the financial obligations of the kibbutz members. In present day, kibbutz members are permitted to seek employment outside of the settlement but are still expected to contribute their earnings to the community (*Life on a Kibbutz*, 2021). There are also many more positions within the settlement that are available outside of manual labor such as "different types of factories, little motels, dog grooming, a salon, a spa, and so on" (Lee, 2021). The primary mode of transportation is also typically by automobile, and many families within the settlement own their own vehicle. There are generally also community-owned cars available for use (Lee, 2021). Kibbutz members are also now allowed to spend more time alone or with their individual households and in modern kibbutzim "communal meals are less common" (*Life on a Kibbutz*, 2021).

Perhaps one of the most unconventional aspects of the kibbutz lifestyle involves the ways in which children are raised. Unlike many traditional households, children that lived in early kibbutzim were not raised by their parents. Instead, these children were placed in communal dormitories alongside their peers at as early as six months old. These spaces were primarily monitored by a few men and women within the community (Shpancer, 2011).

There were several motivations behind the communal child rearing that has been practiced in most kibbutzim. One primary cause was to depart from the traditional family structure associated with European culture. As previously noted, Jews living in European regions experienced extreme hardships, so kibbutz leaders were invested in disassociating from the culture as much as possible. Additionally, mass mortality events such as the Holocaust affected many of the family structures of the parents living in early kibbutzim. As explained by Amia Lieblich in the scholarly article titled *A Century of Childhood, Parenting, and Family Life in the Kibbutz*, many parents did not have a connection to their own elders and henceforth "the traditional wisdom of grandparents was not available to them" (Lieblich, 2010).

Economic logistics were also a driving force behind the usage of communal child rearing in kibbutzim. Allowing children to be raised together provided an easier method for dispersing the limited resources that many kibbutzim had. This is further evidenced in the quote, "Economically, raising children collectively made sense during the tough early days – food was rationed, and members sometimes lived in small tents" (Shpancer, 2011). This decision was also made in alignment with Labor Zionism's mission of social justice and equality. Raising children together helped foster a culture of gender equality. For example, allowing children to sleep together in one communal dormitory allowed female kibbutz members to fully engage in community activities instead of being forced to raise children. This is seen in the quote, "There was also a feminist motive, as communal sleeping was supposed to free women to participate equally in community life" (Shpancer, 2011). Traditional gender roles are also not associated with many kibbutz households. When a child is not with their peers, they often spend an equal amount of time with both their mother and father. Fathers are also expected to perform caretaking tasks that may be commonly associated with women. As explained by Kaffman and Cohen, "...in the kibbutz family constellation one does not see the clear-cut sex distinction between the male role as a provider and the female role of caretaker" (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968).

Furthermore, gender equality was also expressed in terms of education. Children of all genders were educated in the same manner and were afforded the same opportunities. This was also an intentional effort towards preparing the next generation of Jewish children to become leaders of their respective kibbutzim, as seen in the quote "...hoped to develop a new type of individual or Jew, a person educated according to its new values and hence well prepared for collective living and strenuous physical labor" (Lieblich, 2010). It also allowed for children to be raised with the same guiding principles and expectations. Kibbutz educational standards were scientifically based and psychoanalytic. This was done intentionally to avoid the "erroneous intuition of parents" (Lieblich, 2010). Instead, the educational philosophy of each kibbutz was based on the findings of several renowned scholars including Sigmund Freud, Rene Spitz, John Bowlby, and Jean Piaget (Lieblich, 2010). This method of raising children was also a strategic and intentional effort to ensure the well-being of the young members of the kibbutz. In the beginnings of the kibbutz movement, "dire physical conditions and high infant mortality rates" (Lieblich, 2010) led founders to maintain rigorous procedures and regulations for rearing young children and infants.

When an infant in a kibbutz was born, they spent the first six months of their lives almost exclusively with their mother. According to the authors of *Children Raised On the Kibbutz in Israel*, this was done because the mother is "a source of nutrition and physical gratification and stimulation in the course of the daily routine and regular care" (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968). Once a child surpassed six months of age, the child rearing responsibilities were slowly transferred to a metapelet, or trained nurse. The metapelet began to teach and encourage the child to independently develop "self-care in the various areas of his development" (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968).

At this stage, the child began to spend less and less time with their biological family. Contact was often limited to a brief period after the parents had completed their work obligations. As the child grew, they would eventually begin to separate from the metapelet and move on to join the "children's house" (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968). From this point onwards, the child typically spent much of their day with their peers. They were permitted to see their parents and siblings daily, but only for brief periods of time according to their age (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968). Designated, professional caretakers in addition to the metapelet were responsible for caring for the children at this stage. They were typically placed in groups of about 12-16 children and were instructed on "the functions of training, discipline, and socialization" (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968) by the metapelet. This includes learning social and physical conditioning such as interacting and speaking with peers, bladder control, and eating habits and routines (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968).

The rigid regulations concerning the amount of time that children were permitted to spend with their biological families was also translated into sleeping routines and habits. Children raised in kibbutzim did not sleep with their parents in their family home. Instead, they slept together in the children's home. Each child had an area within the dormitory and the space was monitored by specific adult members of the community. This is seen in the quote, "The night watchman who patrols the area of the children's houses throughout the night is usually the only adult around at that particular time and is a regular member of the Kibbutz" (Kaffman and Cohen, 1968).

Once the children reached about 4 years old, they moved on from the infant quarters and into the "toddlers house" (Rabin, 2013). At this stage, the children were typically divided into groups of about 18. Unlike the traditional system of education in which kindergarteners are instructed on primitive information and skills, kindergarten in early kibbutzim was much more complex. The quote from A.I Rabin's *Growing Up in the Kibbutz* explains this practice in greater detail. The quote reads, "The kindergarten stage covers a period of about three to four years and includes the equivalent of first grade schoolwork" (Rabin, 2013).

The kindergarteners were housed in their own separate facilities that typically consisted of "bedrooms, a play and work room, a dining room, showers and toilets, as well as porches and a large yard around it" (Rabin, 2013). The area was also retrofitted to support a variety of activities to accommodate both group and individual sports, reading, and playing.

The primary caretakers for children at this stage were their teacher in addition to one metapelet. The metapelet continued to assist the children in their social development while the teacher's "function is to conduct group activities and help each individual child develop his creative potential to a maximum" (Rabin, 2013). The teacher was also responsible for helping the children develop sensory and physical abilities through the introduction of music and art (Rabin, 2013).

The next step for kibbutz children once they had completed kindergarten was primary school. Unlike in the previous stages, the children did not move onwards from kindergarten in cohorts. Instead, they were advanced into second grade on an individual basis. Each child had the ability to move onto this next stage when they "are of appropriate physical and intellectual maturity" (Rabin, 2013). Many kibbutz leaders saw this method of educational progression as an advantage. The children being placed in groups consisting of varying ages allowed the older children to cultivate leadership skills while the younger children had the opportunity to learn from their older peers. Furthermore, the advantages of this system are also expressed in the quote, "Among the other advantages they list

the function of the older children serving as an example to the younger ones, the opportunity for greater individuality of play and less uniformity than in the peer kindergarten, and a broader experience in interpersonal relationships" (Rabin, 2013).

The "Children's Society" (Rabin, 2013) consisted of children of about seven to twelve years old. In early kibbutzim, the children lived and studied within the same facilities like a boarding school or university residence hall arrangement. The children slept in rooms with about three to four individuals per space, and there were approximately 20 to 25 children in total. The classroom served multiple functions. One quote reads, "[the classroom] is often used for recreation, as a general meeting place for the group, and as a party room" (Rabin, 2013). The metapelet began to take on a more implicit role in the children's lives. Their roles became similar to that of a resident advisor at a university. Their primary duties included managing the "physical needs, cleanliness, food, and order in the dormitory" (Rabin, 2013).

From this point on, the teacher, who was typically a man, was the primary adult figure in the child's life. Essentially, he was a "teacher, counselor, work supervisor, and the conscience of the group, all wrapped up in one" (Rabin, 2013). His responsibilities included maintaining a positive culture within the group and ensuring that the children were developing proper emotional and moral standards. The children spent a specific amount of time on their studies according to their age, and they generally were finished with schooling by midday. This incremental method of advancement continued along until the children reached junior and senior high school. Afterwards these individuals were typically expected to remain on the settlement and transition into tasks and roles that were generally occupied by adults. They could also attend college or engage in other opportunities elsewhere, but they first had to gain approval from the community at large. The expenses for these endeavors were completely covered by the kibbutz (Lee, 2021).

In modern day, about 270 kibbutzim currently exist in Israel (What is a Kibbutz, 2021). The philosophy concerning child rearing in modern kibbutzim differs greatly from their predecessors. In kibbutzim in present-day children sleep in separate households and spend much more time with their nuclear, biological family-members. It is a rare occurrence for members of today's kibbutzim to utilize communal sleeping arrangements. This shift in childbearing techniques first began in the late 1990s as evidenced by the quote, "Communal sleeping was in effect for about 60 to 70 years until its demise in the 1990s by kibbutz members themselves" (Yaffe, 2018). This is further evidenced by the quote "Since the 1970s, kibbutz life has become 'family-centered' with all children raised by their parents and living at home" (The Kibbutz & Moshav: Then & Now, n.d).

One major catalyst for this change was the emergence of the Revisionist Zionism movement. The Revisionist Zionism movement began in the late 1920s and was first brought forth by Ze'ev Jabotinsky (Zionism: Revisionist Zionism, n.d). Jabotinsky was born in Odessa, Russia on October 18, 1880. He is most well-known for being an exceptional writer, activist, speaker, and leader of the Betar Movement which was a "youth movement of the Zionist Revisionist party" (Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky, n.d).

This schism of Zionism focuses on establishing a secure Jewish homeland and "the immediate declaration of the Jewish right to political sovereignty" (Revisionist Zionism, n.d). In contrast to Labor Zionism, it also places an emphasis on privatization and capitalism (Diamond, 2021). As Revisionist Zionism began to rise in popularity more kibbutz members became interested in moving away from the community-based economy and toward a more individualized financial infrastructure. These "renewed kibbutzim" (Russell, Hanneman, Getz, 2011) shifted towards privatization which was further reflected in other practices such as the ways in which children are raised.

Over the years, psychologists and sociologists alike have studied the mental and emotional effects that living in a kibbutz may have on children. One major consequence of the kibbutz lifestyle is the inability to express individuality and uniqueness. A scholarly article by Ronen Sidi and Daniela Aisenberg Shafran titled Effects of Kibbutz Communal Upbringing in Adulthood: Trait Emotional Intelligence and Attachment Patterns explains this phenomenon in greater detail. The article reads, "You could not be unique and special; you could not express your own needs, but rather had to be a 2-year-old socialist, a 10-year-old socialist, and a 15-year old socialist. To be a 'good kid' meant to conform to a lifestyle forced upon you without being asked for your opinion or desires" (Sidi and Shafran, 2020).

Furthermore, the primary goal of the researchers in this article is to determine and analyze the differences between "kibbutz children raised with communal sleeping arrangements (CSA)" (Sidi and Shafran, 2020) and their counterparts that were not. The researchers hypothesized that those who experienced communal sleeping arrangements may be more susceptible to emotional and attachment issues. To conduct this study, the researchers focused on a group of 1,185 participants. The group consisted of 735 volunteers who had been raised in communal sleeping arrangement environments and 450 individuals whose familial environment was more closely aligned with a traditional household. Each participant was given a list of 33 statements in which they were expected to scale on a range of 1 to 5 with 1 meaning completely disagree and 5 meaning completely agree. The statements were designed to measure various characteristics of the individuals' mental and emotional states including self-esteem, attachment, dependency, avoidance, and anxiety.

The researchers were able to draw multiple findings from the completion of the questionnaires. They found that individuals who were raised in CSA had similar levels of intimacy and trait emotional intelligence than those obtained by children who had not been raised in kibbutzim. Trait Emotional Intelligence is defined as “a constellation of correlated emotional traits that capture a person’s typical way of processing emotional information and reacting in emotional situations” (Sidi and Shafran, 2020). They also concluded that adults who had been raised in kibbutzim had less sufficient non-verbal communication skills than those who were not.

Overall, the study found that “a minority of the CSA kibbutz children were less resilient to the kibbutz ecology” (Sidi, Shafran, 2020). The article states that those specific children may have been more susceptible to the “effects of limited social options, decreased parental support, and the kibbutz education’s ideological demands” (Sidi and Shafran, 2020). It also concluded that these effects “appear to be long-lasting, extending throughout their adulthood” (Sidi and Shafran, 2020).

This study addresses this topic on a wide scale, but there are also personal accounts and narratives from adults that were once children being raised on a kibbutz. One article by Noam Shpancer reveals his personal experience as a child who was raised on a kibbutz in Israel. He details how he was forced to communicate with night guards via an intercom when he experienced a toothache one night. He goes on to compare this communal sleeping arrangement to being in an “institution” (Shpancer, 2011), and shares how he had both positive and negative experiences as a child living on a kibbutz. “The kibbutz was, in some ways, a wonderful place for kids”, he remarks. Safety was of no concern, and he spent much of his time as a young child riding bikes, building tree houses, and developing games and activities of his own. Shpancer goes on to explain that one major downside to living in the kibbutz was the lack of individuality and freedom. Uniqueness was not encouraged, and “Children who were unusual, eccentric or sought to distinguish themselves, were shunned” (Shpancer, 2011).

He goes on to account one experience of one of his childhood friends. He says that his friend used to sneak out of the children’s dormitory each night to see his parents. When it was discovered that he was doing this, his parents were moved to a location farther away (Shpancer, 2011).

He later tells that another girl who had been in his same kibbutz had been repeatedly sexually assaulted by one member of the community. Shpancer explains that there were not any locks present on any doors within the community as it was believed that no evil would exist within the settlement as seen in the quote, “the community had no consciousness of evil back then, at least not internally” (Shpancer, 2011).

In conclusion, the psychological and emotional differences between children that were raised in kibbutzim and those that were not is like most things in that it is not a black or white issue. There is substantial evidence to support the fact that children raised in a kibbutz lifestyle may have experienced greater challenges with mental and emotional processes than their peers who were not. However, what these children may have lacked in one area may have strengthened their abilities in another. The structure of kibbutzim led children to develop a sense of independence, self-sufficiency, and maturity at an early age. It is also critical to note that each child has their own set of experiences and that it is difficult to generalize such personal effects of this lifestyle. Additionally, as time has progressed, kibbutzim have adapted in ways to address specific concerns and needs experienced by previous generations. My hope is that future research will go on to further explore this phenomenon, and that researchers will be able to make more generalized and well-informed conclusions about the psychological and cognitive consequences the kibbutz lifestyle may have on children.

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Understanding Communities of Color, COVID-19 Vaccination Concerns, and Vaccine Advertisement Strategies

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted low-income communities of color. These communities often live in multi-generational and multi-family households, work essential industry jobs, and experience racial health disparities. During the height of COVID, these communities experienced some of the highest transmission and hospitalization rates in the country (CDC, 2021). Although in California, the vaccine has been available to adults (16 years and older) since mid-April, these communities have some of the lowest vaccination numbers in the state (Los Angeles Times, 2021). The hesitancy surrounding COVID-19 vaccinations among communities of color is rooted in several issues such as misinformation, mistrust in the medical field, and overall fear towards the medical industry. In consequence, many of these communities continue to be at high risk for contracting COVID-19 and experiencing its widespread, detrimental effects. To better protect these communities at risk, not only do their concerns regarding the COVID-19 vaccination have to be addressed but also the centuries of racism and discrimination in the health field.

During the past decade, social media has become one of the leading ways to consume news and stay up-to-date with the latest information. With stay-at-home orders and quarantine, we were able to see how important digital media can be as it helps disperse COVID-19 updates and notifications. However, social media is also a harbor for misinformation and conspiracy theories, and the ability to quickly reshare and repost content makes this problem worse. COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccination information have heavily been subject to conspiracy theories that can be harmful to communities of color, especially. These conspiracies compound pre-existing mistrust and fear and deter many individuals from receiving the vaccination that can ultimately increase their protection from the virus. Since social media is such a vital source of news, it's important to question what strategies are being utilized to combat misinformation and conspiracy theories, and what is actually working to connect with these communities. For this project, my goal is to analyze the strategies that health-related social media ads are utilizing to reach communities of color, and how the COVID-19 vaccine is being promoted to communities of color.

This project engages sociological thinking due to its close analysis of how health organizations (health institutions, often heavily driven by politics and economics), can influence communities of color. Moreover, sociological analysis is involved when looking at the communities that have experienced oppression due to their social and educational backgrounds and economic status. As vaccination eligibility and availability increases across the United States, it's important to understand who is being vaccinated, who is not being vaccinated, and why that is. Acknowledging the history of racist medical malpractice and discrimination that people of color have faced is crucial to address issues of mistrust alongside other disparities in the health sector (Germani & Biller-Andorno, 2021). This research will focus on the role of social media in highly affected communities, and how the social media accounts of local health organizations utilize social media as a tool to alter COVID-19 vaccination perceptions. There is little existing research on social media, health, and communities of color, so this research hopes to spark questions and demonstrate the need for this type of intersectional research.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

It has nearly been two years since COVID-19 was first discovered and declared a pandemic (Carvalho et al., 2021). Over this time, we have learned the multiple ways that COVID-19 has impacted communities of color across the nation. However, although there are three COVID-19 vaccinations available in the country for people over the age of 12, communities of color have some of the lowest vaccination rates of the population due to misinformation, fear, and medical mistrust. As the virus continues to spread and mutate, COVID-19 continues to pose an even greater danger to these populations. Increasing vaccination rates among these communities is one of the most effective ways to combat the virus. With social media platforms being one of the leaders of news and information delivery, how can they best be leveraged as a tool to improve COVID-19 vaccination perceptions and overall trust with the medical field for communities of color? The goal of this literature review is to understand the existing concerns of communities of color when it comes to COVID-19 vaccinations, ways to improve vaccination perceptions and trust in the medical field, and strategies utilized to implement this via social media.

Health Relations And Communities Of Color

In order to better understand and support the health of communities of color, it is important to learn and acknowledge their thoughts, concerns, and complaints regarding the medical industry. This entails first understanding historical events, past and present systems of oppression, and cultural aspects of these communities. Intergenerational oppression and trauma –due to slavery and years of dealing with systems of oppression– are unfortunately very prevalent in the Black community. This intergenerational oppression and trauma not only affects socioeconomic status, but also contributes to the loss of cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions (Chandler 2010). Additionally, quality health institutions can be incredibly inaccessible, expensive, and far from the local community (Chandler, 2010; Snyder et al., 2020). In addition, there are legacies of medical mistrust. Examples of discriminatory medical malpractice such as the Tuskegee experiments can be huge influencers of mistrust towards physicians and medical institutions (Kricorian & Turner, 2021). These cases, paired with a lack of accessible information surrounding disease, treatments, and medicine can cause fear, mistrust, and discomfort surrounding medical institutions.

Measles Vaccination Perceptions as a Comparison

In 2000, Measles was considered eradicated in the U.S, however with travel, outbreaks continue to occur– in 2019, the U.S experienced the highest number of Measles cases since 1992 (CDC, 2021). This measles outbreak recorded over 1000 cases across the U.S (CDC, 2021).

Measles, similar to COVID, is a highly contagious disease that is transmitted via bodily fluids such as spit or mucus (CDC, 2021). Measles can cause fever, cough, runny nose, and a rash, but can become extremely dangerous as well (CDC, 2021). Similarly, there are a number of myths, concerns, and controversies surrounding measles and the measles vaccine such as vaccine side-effects, virus potency, and immunization methods (Kim & Hawkins, 2020).

Social Media Strategies

It's evident that social media played a major role in the sharing of information regarding the pandemic, however, misinformation was also spread widely (Abbas et al., 2021). This misinformation is incredibly damaging as it can deter people from obtaining medical services. When misinformation is shared and there is already a lack of accessible information for communities, this misinformation will take precedent. Social media can be beneficial to sharing and interpreting information, however, it is best when keeping in mind how different communities might best receive the messages (Kim and Hawkins, 2020). Presenting information in formats in which they encourage self-efficacy, according to Kim and Hawkins, is a psychologically-appropriate way to get people to better connect with information being shared and believe it.

Germani and Biller-Andorno demonstrate how "people-centered, first-person narratives with emotional language" can be most effective to support the goals of health organizations and individuals (2021, p. 11). When personal narratives are shared, people are more likely to be empathetic, and this is due to seeing themselves represented in some way or another (Germani & Biller-Andorno, 2021; Snyder et al., 2020). This can also be applied to health campaigns such as those for the COVID-19 vaccination, especially if the content is coming from governmental organizations: sharing stories, statements, and endorsements from diverse communities can create connection, trust, and empathy—encouraging these communities to receive health treatment or become vaccinated (Kim & Hawkins, 2020; Laurencin, 2021; Snyder et al., 2020).

On the contrary, Oehler's study discusses how physicians, organizations, and other medical institutions need to make adjustments to their practices to address social media trends, "medical bloggers" and other misperceptions shared (2020). Oehler declares that at the end of the day, physicians and medical institutions are their patient's best advocates. However, physicians and medical institutions need to go beyond this and also ensure that they are understanding their patient's cultures, religious beliefs, and overall concerns. They need to advocate for more inclusive and accessible services and check their own beliefs and biases in the patient room. Otherwise, these physicians are just contributing to the existing problem.

Conclusion of Literature Review

It is evident that there is a lack of significant research regarding adult vaccination practices, advertisements methods to communities of color, and the use of social media as a tool to reach communities of color. Overall, issues of misinformation, medical mistrust, and accessibility are huge issues influencing the underutilization of medical services and negative vaccination perceptions. It's important that as physicians, health organizations, and others advocate for vaccination, they are also addressing and acknowledging the concerns of the communities they are serving to create lasting effects. In terms of engaging these communities on social media, more research must be done, but tailoring information that connects with their cultural and religious beliefs, and creating empathy can be great tools.

II. METHODS

Sample

For my project, "Understanding Communities of Color, COVID-19 Vaccination Concerns, and Vaccine Advertisement Strategies," I studied the Instagram pages of 5 accounts housed in Los Angeles that predominantly serve communities of color. These accounts were: @puebloyasalud, @bienestarla, @forwardapi, @heyhj, and @thewellnesscenter. *Pueblo y Salud* is a non-profit organization that focuses on "education, civic participation, health, culture, and drug/alcohol/tobacco prevention services" (*Pueblo y Salud, Inc.* 2021). *Bienestar Human Services* is a social services organization that focuses on "addressing emerging health issues faced by the Latino and LGBTQ populations" (Bienestar Human Services 2021). The *Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement* is an organization that focuses on addressing "a range of community health and environmental justice issues" (Forward Movement 2021). The Center for Health Justice is a non-profit "dedicated to serving individuals with a history of incarceration", and they provide health education and health services (*Center For Health Justice* 2021). The Wellness Center houses a number of different nonprofit organizations and provides "culturally sensitive wellness and prevention services and resources" (*The Wellness Center* 2021).

My goal was to analyze and understand how COVID-19 vaccination narratives are shared among communities of color, and what strategies are being utilized to reach this audience. For this study, I only looked at posts from April 15, 2021 (the date the COVID-19 vaccine became “readily” available to everyone in California ages 16 and older) until July 15, 2021 (3 months after that date). Also, I only analyzed posts that directly mentioned the COVID-19 vaccination via the post or caption to ensure clarity. For these posts, I looked at all of the “feed-available” types of media shared on Instagram such as: Original Posts (pictures/videos), Reels (quick, 15-second clips), and Instagram TV (categorized as videos over 60 seconds long). Instagram Stories were not included because they cannot be tracked after 24 hours unless “highlighted”, while the other posts remain on your profile. This range of media was analyzed to understand if local non-profit organizations are utilizing one form of media over another to connect with their communities.

Measurement

I looked for posts that specifically mention the COVID-19 vaccine with language such as: COVID-19 vaccine, COVID, coronavirus 2019, etc. After identifying these posts, I analyzed the content to check for the use of trust or connection to cultural values to share the vaccination narrative. Trust will be defined as comfort, confidence, and reliability. Cultural values will be defined as beliefs, practices, religions, and moral values that are unique and respected by a community. For these, posts will be coded for words such as: family, tested, safety, culture, legal status, racism, questions, approved, safe, doubt, confidence, friends, religion, and protection. Based on the analysis, we will be able to further understand what type of narrative is being shared regarding the vaccine (if it relates more to trust and cultural values, or both) and what strategies are being focused on.

Procedures

I organized my data by collecting each post from April 15, 2021, to July 15, 2021 period that contains COVID-19 vaccination information. Then, I individually looked at each post to code for trust or cultural value by looking for keywords or key graphics like those mentioned prior. I not only looked directly at the post itself but any caption attached for wording. In the end, I analyzed my findings for common themes and conclusions.

III. RESULTS

After analyzing the posts containing COVID-19 vaccination keywords from the selected health organizations, there were two main findings: (1) representation and connection are being utilized and (2) content from official health accounts is being leveraged and reshared.

Connection and representation

As media shifts to being more inclusive, it's important to see this across various platforms, topics, and industries. The organizations analyzed are using content that has diverse representation, such as illustrations with physicians of color, community members of color posing post-vaccination with a bandaid, and even highlighting individual community members' vaccination experience with individual photographs. This representation is incredibly important so individuals are aware that others in their communities are utilizing these services and entering health spaces. This creates confidence, which in turn, can create more comfortable utilization of clinics and other medical facilities to seek service, support, or care relating to the COVID-19 vaccination and beyond.

Of the posts analyzed, 40% contained information in multiple languages. In order to make information accessible to all audiences and ensure that nobody is being left behind on important news and updates, this is an important finding. Of the languages found, most posts provided information in Spanish, but Mandarin was also found. The majority of this information was digital posts reposted from official sources such as the Los Angeles Public Health Department, however, language variation was not readily found in the caption. Typically, the images were translated repeatedly in numerous languages and posted in a carousel post.

On top of this, words relating to trust and culture were used throughout posts and captions. Top keywords included: family, friends, and protection. Unrelated to trust and culture, sharing that the vaccination was free, was also among the top keywords utilized.

Use of official content

65% of posts analyzed are content from official, government sources such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local public health departments like the Los Angeles Public Health Department. These posts, as well as original content created by the organizations, contain diverse representation and an aspect of cultural or linguistic connection.

The exception to this, however, was the *Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement* (@forwardapi) account, which received funding and collaborative support from the CDC and the organization: *Community Catalyst* or several of their posts mentioning the COVID-19 vaccine. Their captions exhibited: "Made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (@cdc) and in partnership with Community Catalyst" (*Forward Movement* 2021). These posts featured specific community members and shared their experiences with the vaccine, engaging the aspects mentioned earlier such as connection and diverse representation.

On the other hand, the *Wellness Center LA* cites information from official sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, however, they create their own digital media with their own branding. Since the *Wellness Center LA* works with a number of nonprofit organizations, it's possible they have a larger team and increased funding to create this content.

IV. DISCUSSION

In regards to language, it is important to question the predominant language of service for an organization, and how this can affect the content they disperse. For example, while many accounts served predominantly bilingual communities, they still shared information predominantly in English. This could be seen by accounts sharing information and posts in English first, before those in Spanish or Mandarin, for example.

With a significant amount of content being reposted from official accounts such as the Los Angeles Public Health Department and California's "My Turn", it raises the questions: (1) how is governmental content being interpreted and (2) how do individuals feel about the content from these institutions, even given efforts of representation and connection. It could be possible that in instances of governmental mistrust, individuals are increasing their trust in governmental health departments because the community organizations they trust and have received services with are resharing this type of information.

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to bring attention to the digital strategies utilized to reach communities of color, specifically in relation to the COVID-19 vaccine, and create ideas on how to leverage social media to connect with these communities heavily impacted by the coronavirus. There is little research on how communities of color utilize social media and how digital media is created for communities of color, especially in relation to public health topics. This is important because communities of color have been significantly impacted by the effects of COVID-19 and there is a large amount of mistrust and disbelief towards the virus and its treatments. By utilizing Instagram and other social media, this information is dispersed and addressed in unique ways. This study, specifically, aimed to answer the question: what are the strategies that health-related social media ads are utilizing to reach communities of color, and how is the COVID-19 vaccine being promoted to communities of color? Through the findings, we can see that Instagram is being utilized as a tool to disperse COVID-19 vaccine information out to communities of color, and is utilizing strategies formed around representation and trust in forms to connect with the communities they serve.

Limitations of study

It is important to consider that these findings are based on a small sample of Instagram accounts. The social media accounts analyzed for this study could have been selected with more precision, incorporating things such as the following size, account activity, and target audience for a more standard sample. If a target audience among communities of color had been specified, it may have provided further insights as to what social platform to utilize and what strategies are being utilized to target these groups. The health accounts chosen work with different communities, which likely had an impact on the specific languages found in the content.

As organizations were researched, I began to notice that it was difficult to (1) readily find health organizations serving communities of color and (2) many of the existing health organizations do not have social media accounts or alternately do not have the bandwidth to actively keep a social media presence. In addition, some health organizations may be more active on some platforms than others, which can affect the frequency of posts being created and published. Alternatively, a larger sample could have been analyzed drawing from more local health organizations serving a wider range of communities. Not to mention, this study could have been performed by engaging other social networks such as Facebook or Twitter to find more ample conclusions and/or compare and contrast findings from these platforms.

Suggestions for future research

Vaccination hesitancy, social media, and communities of color are all under-researched topics that must be studied. To begin, further research on vaccination hesitancy must be conducted to more deeply understand the roots of hesitancy and what shapes them individually. This project was a small content analysis, but a study utilizing interviews could offer more insights into an individual's social media usage, thought process, and

opinions on content. Moreover, communications and marketing scholars should consider expanding research on campaigns and strategies for connection to communities of color. These findings can serve as guidelines as to what works and what does not and can be used to compare existing and future content.

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Emily Wallack



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The Shadow Pandemic

Domestic violence is an increasingly dangerous problem worldwide. Many incidents are overlooked and often go unreported. Rarely do we hear about domestic violence cases, and when we do, it usually involves a celebrity. Researching the effect of Covid-19 on domestic violence brought attention to recognizing the effects the pandemic had on people being quarantined at home with their significant others. The media primarily focused on the issue of the pandemic, rather than the possibility of an increased rate of domestic violence caused by family members being together for such extended periods of time. Every day the media covered statistics on the virus itself, how the virus impacted mental health, and the increasing impact on children, but ignored the issue of domestic violence. Through my research, I hoped to bring more awareness to domestic violence and the effect Covid-19 played during this time.

Given the media's lack of reporting on the pandemic's effect on domestic violence, I was surprised to find an abundance of information on the topic. My study included domestic violence statistics globally, although I primarily focused on national data. The pandemic began in March 2020 (starting point for all data) and, as of this writing, has not officially ended. The United Nations reports that during the pandemic, 243 million women worldwide were subject to some type of physical or sexual violence (United Nations 2020). The Asian Journal of Psychiatry indicated there was a 100% increase in domestic violence complaints after the April 2020 lockdown in India (Vora et. al 2020). They also reported that within Chinese social media, the hashtag, #antidomesticviolenceduringepidemic was searched more than 3000 times (Vora et. al 2020). The British Journal of General Practice reports that a domestic abuse hotline had a 66% weekly increase with abuse being at an all-time high since Covid-19 began (Gibson 2020).

Domestic violence has also risen nationally. In *Domestic Violence Has Increased During Covid-19. Here's How To Create A Quarantine-Friendly Safety Plan*, Forbes reported a 7.5% national increase in 911 calls related to domestic violence disputes during the pandemic (Brooks 2021). During Covid-19, shelters for domestic violence were forced to turn away victims due to social distancing. To stop the spread of the virus, shelters limited the number of people they would take in. According to the American Journal of Criminal Justice, Dallas, Texas, saw an 8.4% increase in reports of domestic violence in the days following their issue of the stay-at-home-order (March 24, 2020) (Piquero et al. 2020). The California Health Report states that California's numbers also rose, with Orange Country reporting a 50% increase in calls for help on domestic violence hotlines (Boyd-Barrett 2020). It is important to note that most of this data comes from reported cases of domestic violence and websites that track searches and users. It must be considered that this data is not entirely accurate as there are so many cases that have not been reported. This is in part, due to victim's fear of retaliation from their significant others, stigma surrounding domestic violence, or the lack of resources for victims to seek help.

Lele from the Anhui Province, in eastern China, was abused by her husband prior to the pandemic, however, the quarantine escalated the violence. She tells New York Times journalist Amanda Taub of how the abuse became so hostile after her husband attacked her with their child's highchair, she called the police (Taub 2020). However, nothing was done, the attack was only documented (Taub 2020). In another attempt at escape, Lele tried to divorce her husband, but this was postponed due to Covid-19 (Taub 2020). At the time of the publication of this article (April 6, 2020), Lele was still waiting for the court's decision. Lele was also unable to flee as finding housing during the pandemic was increasingly difficult (Taub 2020). She also could not economically support herself and her daughter, thus, she was left with no choice, but to stay with her abusive husband.

Nationally, survivor's stories of abuse have also surfaced. Jeffrey Kluger of Time Magazine writes the story of Sheila (a pseudonym) who fled her abusive husband in May of 2020 (Kluger 2021). Her husband started using methamphetamine triggering delusions of infidelity, resulting in severe beatings (Kluger 2021). The California Health Report describes the story of Los Angeles County resident, Lydia (pseudonym) who fled her abusive husband during the pandemic after severe beatings (Boyd-Barrett 2020). Lydia was also left with little freedom after her husband tried to control her every move taking her keys, cellphone, and paycheck even going as far to surveil her over Bluetooth while she worked. Lydia is quoted saying, "I was getting beat because he had no money, because there was no meat at the market. Everything became my fault, and I just became a punching bag." (Boyd-Barrett 2020).

The American Journal of Emergency Medicine reports that isolation led to alcohol abuse, depression, and post-traumatic stress symptoms, increasing domestic abuse (Boserup et. al 2021). Economic uncertainty was placed on the partner. The Review of Economics of the Household reports that prior to the pandemic, domestic violence numbers were decreasing as the cost of divorce decreased (Hsu et. al 2021). They found that with rising costs during the pandemic, specifically those applied to leaving a relationship (finding a new job or home), people were less likely to end a relationship, resulting in increased violence (Hsu et. al 2021). Covid-19 measures led to major psychological ramifications.

On a positive note, to combat violence, resources are said to be increasing globally. In California, Governor Gavin Newsom approved \$100 million in state funding for the Victims of Crime Act in 2021 (Boyd-Barrett 2020). This was directed to help with healing and legal services and contribute to funding in services for rape crisis and violent crime victims. Sexual and domestic violence prevention programs were also allocated \$15 million (Boyd-Barrett 2020). The British Journal of General Practice reports that in response to rising abuse, \$2 million in funding was allocated to support domestic violence helplines and online support in Great Britain (Gibson 2020).

What I found to be important, is that domestic violence is a global problem. It does not matter where a victim lives, whether it is a city or a rural community, or what their income level is. I think that society has this preconceived notion that domestic violence only takes place in developing countries or places where women are treated as "second class" citizens. However, what must be emphasized is that that domestic violence has no limits, it can happen to anyone, no matter the circumstance. And, domestic violence is often hidden, thus the term "shadow pandemic" (UN Women 2020). What I also found to be important was that domestic violence victims are not just women. Although the majority of violence is done by men, men are also subject to partner violence.

In two of three stories I referenced, the women were able to flee their abusive husbands. In my opinion, based off of these stories, I believe people formulate a theory around domestic violence, thinking that victims are just able to flee their situation; if one person can do it then everyone should, or if they have not, it must not be that bad. The reality is, there are just not enough resources for victims to seek sanctuary, and this was especially evident during the pandemic. In a group discussion, the coded 911 call was referenced where victims call 911 pretending to order a "pizza." Lauren Brooks article referenced a similar plan, as did the United Nations when discussing France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Spain's plan to implement a code word for victims to use in pharmacies and supermarkets to ask for protection to try and combat abuse (Brooks 2021). Again, I feel that this is not always the reality that victims face. The pandemic helped to highlight this, because when people were in total isolation there was no possible way for escape.

My research made me question how the United States can pride itself on being a champion for human rights, when domestic violence is ravaging our country. How can a country with so many resources to combat major illnesses be so lacking in its resources to help people suffering domestic violence? I was surprised at the total lack of awareness within our society. Yet, my research also gave me a newfound look at what needs to be done to help more people. I hope to be part of a positive change in our society that can bring domestic violence out from the shadows.

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