



**THE
SOCIOLOGICAL
EYE**

Loyola Marymount University
Sociology Department
presents...

The Sociological Eye 2023

Student Editor:

Katie Flint

Faculty Editors:

Stacy Burns &

Rebecca Sager

Design and Layout:

Katie Flint



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4** PREFACE
By: Stacy Burns
- 5** MASS INCARCERATION AS A SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION EXPLAINED BY
CONFLICT THEORY
By: Cheyenne Wahlheim
- 12** ANALYZING HOW BEING A FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT
AFFECTS AN INDIVIDUAL'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
By: Veronica Gomez
- 28** FEMALE CHICANO GANG MEMBERS
By: Carisa Aguilera
- 39** AMERICAN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM VS PEOPLE OF COLOR
By: Bailee Ojogho
- 44** PREVENTING THE FOSTER CARE-TO-PRISON SYSTEM PIPELINE
By: Gianna Segura
- 49** MENTAL HEALTH IN LGBTQ+ YOUTH: THE DISPARITIES WITHIN
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND TREATMENT FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH
By: Riley Broughton
- 54** HOW INEQUALITIES IN HOUSING AFFECTS HEALTH ISSUES
By: Grace Bolander
- 58** STEREOTYPES, STANDARDS OF BEAUTY, AND WHITENESS IN SOCIAL
MEDIA: A FORM OF COVERT RACISM
By: Isabella Chhina
- 63** A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION AND INFIDELITY
By: Lauren Swenson-Lennox



PREFACE

Each of the papers in this edition of *The Sociological Eye* addresses a distinctive and important social problem and some innovative societal and policy responses to eliminate (or at least reduce) these problems.

Many of the contributors consider problems of inequality in the criminal justice system or in the mental health and public health systems. The first paper entitled, "Mass Incarceration as a System of Oppression Explained by Conflict Theory," by Cheyenne Wahlheim is the 2023 Best Paper awardee. Cheyenne's paper discusses the pressing issue of mass incarceration and racial injustice. The historically grounded analysis uses several important sociological concepts to study mass incarceration and its disproportionate impacts on African American individuals and communities. The paper contributes to calls for reversing mass incarceration and for a broader racial reckoning in the United States.

In the next chapter, this year's Honorable Mention awardee, Veronica Gomez, relies on qualitative data that she collected first-hand to explore how being a first-generation college student affects an individual's political participation.

Carisa Aguilera's paper on female Chicano gang members considers the gender gap in the existing research on gangs. The research offers coverage of a timely topic and usefully relies on interview data to access the lived experience of female gang members.

The next chapter by Bailee Ojogho examines the American juvenile justice system and its disproportionate and harmful impacts on youth of color. Along similar lines, the following paper by Gianna Segura looks at efforts to prevent the foster care system from becoming a pipeline to the prison system.

The paper by Riley Broughton considers disparities in mental health treatment for LGBTQ+ youth. The next paper by Grace Bolander discusses health effects that are related to inequalities in housing.

Isabella Chhina's chapter investigates gender stereotypes of beauty and whiteness in social media as a form of covert racism. The final paper in the collection by Lauren Swenson-Lennox uses a quantitative approach to study the relationship between religion and infidelity.

Cheyenne Wahlheim



My name is Cheyenne Wahlheim, and I am a current 1st year freshman sociology student from Phoenix, Arizona. I hope to use sociology as a discipline to analyze and better understand social and systemic inequality, and through study of these inequalities, help work to eliminate them from our society.

MASS INCARCERATION AS A SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION EXPLAINED BY CONFLICT THEORY

Introduction

The National Anthem of the United States describes the U.S. as “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” The U.S. prides itself on being the land of the free, a place of equality, opportunity, and freedom for all. In this so-called land of the free, 25% of the world’s inmates are housed. 25% percent of the world’s inmates are housed in a country that only makes up for 5% of the world’s population (DuVernay, 2016). This country, founded on the principles of freedom and equality, currently has the highest rate of incarceration in the world (DuVernay, 2016). This paper will examine how mass incarceration acts as a continuation of oppressive laws in the United States such as Jim Crow Laws and segregation. Using conflict theory, I will examine how African American communities are more likely to be incarcerated in the United States, and how this limits their overall freedoms. I will use the sociological concept of the power elite to examine how those with power in America controlled what was illegal, and manipulated the criminal justice system to target African American communities. Using the sociological concept of the caste system, I will examine how America has moved as a country from a legally enforced caste system of slavery and segregation to a less overt but just as oppressive system of mass incarceration. Finally, using the sociological concept of the prison industrial complex, I will discuss how private companies and businesses manipulated the criminal justice system for profit to the detriment of African American communities.

Literature Review

To study mass incarceration and its effect on African American communities in the United States, it is important to define mass incarceration as a concept compared with incarceration in general. The United States, like many other countries, has systems in place within the criminal justice system to sustain social control through legislation and corrections facilities. The United States criminal justice system is made up of three distinct but interrelated units: police, courts, and corrections systems. All three units work together to maintain social control and uphold the state and federal laws. Although the definition of mass incarceration

varies slightly from researcher to researcher, many scholars, including Becky Pettit and Carmen Gutierrez in their Article Mass Incarceration and Racial Inequality, define mass incarceration simply as “The widespread incapacitation of people in prisons or jails” (2018). Michelle Alexander, author of the book *The New Jim Crow*, expands her definition to include not only those currently being held in prison but all those who live every day struggling with the long-term effects of imprisonment. Her definition specifically applies to an American system of social control. (Childress, 2014).

To fully understand the topic of mass incarceration in the United States, one must first understand the history of racism in America. Chattel slavery in America, founded in white supremacist ideology and far different than the bondservant system that came before it, came into full fruition around the mid-1700s (Alexander, 2010). This chattel slavery served as the first racial caste system in America (Alexander, 2010). With the end of slavery came the beginning of a whole new set of struggles for African Americans in the United States. Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, while discussing the transition from one form of oppression to another, notes, “Any candid observer of American racial history must acknowledge that racism is highly adaptable” (2010). One can observe this adaptability of systems of oppression clearly in the shift from slavery to new methods meant for controlling African American communities. With the fall of slavery came black codes, meant to restrict the freedoms of African Americans and force labor (Alexander, 2010). In the era of reconstruction, as corrupt as many aspects of it were, Black Americans took many strides forward in the Civil rights arena, including the 13th Amendment and increased literacy rates (Alexander, 2010). However, the backlash from this perceived progress came quickly. African Americans were incarcerated arbitrarily and became “slaves of the state” (Alexander, 2010).

Following this increase in the prison population came another system meant to control African Americans. Michelle Alexander, discussing the emergence of Jim Crow laws as a new racial caste system explains, “History seemed to repeat itself. Just as the white elite had successfully driven a wedge between poor whites and blacks following Bacon’s Rebellion by creating the institution of black slavery, another racial caste system was emerging nearly two centuries later, in part due to efforts by white elites to decimate a multiracial alliance of poor people” (Alexander, 2010). Segregation served as a government enforced caste system, keeping African Americans separate from white society in all aspects of life, and restricting their freedom of monetary and educational equality. Following years of this racial caste system, with *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, desegregation had begun (Alexander, 2010). However, racism and deep-rooted systems of oppression never really disappear, but instead, change shape. Following desegregation came a reemergence of the Klu Klux Klan, a desperate struggle by white southerners to maintain control, and the creation of more Jim Crow Laws throughout the south (Alexander, 2010). These new attacks on freedom were met with the bravery of those within the Civil Rights movement, who put their lives on the line in a fight for freedom and equality. Now that Jim Crow was no longer at work in the United States, conservative white Americans looked for a new system or control. Explaining this new transition from the old racial caste system of Jim Crow laws to the new racial caste system of mass incarceration, Michelle Alexander explains, “Proponents of racial hierarchy found they could install a new racial caste system without violating the law or the new limits of acceptable political discourse, by demanding “law and order” rather than “segregation forever.” (Alexander, 2010). The rhetoric of “law and order” entered the political landscape

as a covert method of attacking the civil rights movement. The Southern strategy, used by Republicans at this time such as Richard Nixon, played on the fears of low and working-class whites and their frustration at the Democratic party's support of the civil rights movement to gain their votes (Alexander, 2010). Ronald Reagan, just like Nixon before him, spoke about a "War on Drugs," using purposely 'colorblind' language that had a subliminal message (Alexander, 2010). Then came the War on Drugs, and the spread of crack cocaine. Instead of tackling the problem of drugs through welfare or other government programs, the Reagan Administration waged a 'war' against the criminal enemy, an enemy that years of charged rhetoric has deemed as the black American. Along with the emergence of crack cocaine came mandatory minimums and the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. Michelle Alexander explains how The War on Drugs and its calculated rhetoric helped maintain systems of oppression, stating, "The War on Drugs, cloaked in race-neutral language, offered whites opposed to racial reform a unique opportunity to express their hostility toward blacks and black progress, without being exposed to the charge of racism" (Alexander, 2010).

This deep-rooted system of racism and hidden rhetoric provides background for mass incarceration and how it came to exist as it can be observed today in America. But another key question remains: what are the effects of mass incarceration on someone who is/has been incarcerated in America, specifically black Americans who have been incarcerated? Michelle Alexander describes three stages within the vast system of control called mass incarceration. The first stage involves African Americans being stopped by police and the racial bias present in the police system. The second stage is the stage of "formal control," which describes how many black Americans are forced to plead guilty, and the lives they live while under the direct control of the criminal justice system. The final stage is the stage of "invisible punishment," which describes how black Americans who have been incarcerated are stripped of rights, even after their reentry into society. (Alexander, 2010).

Methods

I used two related charts from the 2018 article in *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* titled *The War on Drugs, Racial Meanings, and Structural Racism: a Holistic and Reproductive Approach* for my data. The first data set came from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. The second data set was collected by the U.S. National Research Council. This data is collected through face-to-face or computer assisted interviewing of a sample population. The second data set is cited from the U.S. National Research Council, and published in the book *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*. However, the data itself was collected by the Bureau of Justice Statistics for 1980 to 2011, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation from 1972 to 1979. This data set analyzed drug rates of white vs. black Americans per 100,000. *The American Journal of Economics*, in which both of these data sets were used, is a peer-reviewed journal. The data limitations originate from the lack of specific numbers in the data representation, which caused me to have to estimate numbers in my representation of the data. Further, there is potential for error in the data collection method: because the research method of the first data changed during the collection period, there is room for inconsistency. I do have personal bias involved in this topic. I am personally passionate about criminal justice reform. In order to remain as objective as possible, I conducted research from multiple sources, and analyzed the issue of mass incarceration from a sociological rather than emotional perspective.

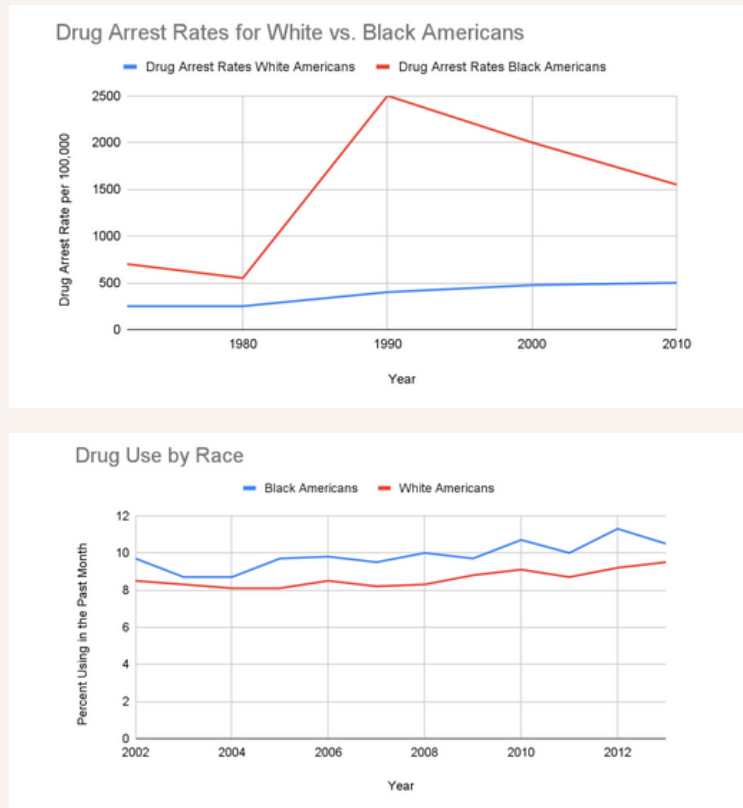
Analysis and Data

Mass incarceration and the effects of this system on African American communities in the United States can be studied using the sociological framework of conflict theory. Conflict theory studies society on the macro level, viewing society as a struggle to obtain limited resources. This idea can be further expanded to analyze race relations and racism in general. Looking at the history of American society through the lens of critical theory, it is clear that white Americans, particularly white men, held the resources. Further, conflict theory argues that crime and events such as mass incarceration indicate unequal power. It views deviance and crime as an indication that the current system is not working, and that inequality exists in the current system. Therefore, conflict theory is best fit to study mass incarceration and systems of racial oppression because it views society as containing some form of inequality, an inequality evident in the system of mass incarceration, and can be used to study how different groups gain access to/are restricted from various resources.

Sociologist C. Wright Mills, using the idea of conflict theory in his book *The Power Elite*, defined the sociological concept of the power elite. A struggle for resources is key to the idea of conflict theory. In a struggle for resources, some members of society have control of the resources, leaving less for those without power. In society, the power elite are the few members of society who have access to power, money, and resources. The power elite, because they hold the power and resources in society, can control what is defined as a criminal offense, and can manipulate the system to remain in their position of power. Power elites, when observing mass incarceration as an organized system of oppression similar to Jim Crow laws, can be defined as wealthy white politicians and southerners. With the end of slavery, wealthy southern farmers sought to control the African American population in the south. These power elites, because they had control over what was defined as a criminal offense, used black codes and arbitrary incarceration as a method to control what they perceived as the threat of African American liberation and a loss of labor. As the power elites continued to fear equality as a threat to their position of power in society, they used their position to once again redefine the term 'criminal,' making it a crime for a black American to exist in the same space as a white American. Because they had control of the resources in society, they were able to redefine what being a criminal meant in a way that benefited them. Following the fall of the racial caste system of segregation and Jim Crow laws, the power elite once again redefined the idea of which crimes the American public should be most concerned about in a way that helped maintain their position of power. By using language such as "War on Drugs," power elites such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan were able to use rhetoric to define African Americans as criminals. They redefined crime in a way that disproportionately affected black Americans, with policies such as longer sentences for crack cocaine and mandatory minimums. In this way, from the previous racial caste system of segregation to the current racial caste system of mass incarceration, power elites used their position in society to redefine the term criminal and maintain their positions of power.

The charts below illustrate how the War on Drugs and power elites contributed to the lie of black criminality and mass incarceration in general. In the first chart, the effect of the War on Drugs can be seen in the tremendous increase of drug arrests of black Americans following the 1980s. The second chart further illustrates how these numbers are caused by the legislative decisions of the power elites, and not caused by black Americans having a significantly higher rate of drug use than white americans.

Although the second chart differs in date range from the first, it still illustrates that the disparity of drug arrests between white and black Americans is not caused by black Americans having a higher rate of drug use.



Crucial to this understanding of mass incarceration is the idea of a racial caste system and caste systems in general. A caste system is a closed system of social stratification that, unlike an open system, does not allow for movement between social classes and standing. Caste systems, as a closed system of social stratification, also do not allow people of different social standing to have certain social relationships with one another. In this system, members of society are born into their social position and are given little or no opportunity to improve their social standing. Their social standing is fixed at birth. Slavery served as the first racial caste system in the United States. Under slavery, African Americans were born into their social position and were forced to remain in this social position through threats of violence and the laws themselves. After reconstruction, Segregation and Jim Crow laws served as the next major racial caste system. Within this caste system, African Americans were completely isolated in all aspects of life from white Americans, including education, housing, and healthcare. This caste system was government-enforced, and those within it were bound to their social position.

From these oppressive laws and this closed racial caste system came the racial caste system that can be observed in the United States today: the current system of mass incarceration. It is more difficult to observe the current system of mass incarceration as truly being another racial caste system. The United States seemingly has social mobility and equal opportunity for all, both of which would contradict the presence of a caste system. However, upon looking at the criminal justice system in the U.S, one can observe the similarity between the Jim Crow caste system and our society today. Both Jim Crow and mass incarceration

serve as a form of legalized discrimination. A person in America who has been convicted of a crime is subjected to a life of inferior caste for the rest of his life. Just like Jim Crow before it, within the system of mass incarceration the government restricts the freedoms of anyone who has been incarcerated, forcing them to remain outside of 'mainstream, white society' (Alexander, 2010). Black Americans who have been convicted lose their right to vote, just as black Americans were barred from voting through disenfranchisement methods in the Jim Crow era. It is important to note that the relation between Jim Crow and mass incarceration is not a perfect or straightforward analogy. Much progress has been made from then to now, and African Americans are not the only people harmed by America's current criminal justice system. However, upon looking at the history from Jim Crow to the War on Drugs, it is clear that race is a key piece of the puzzle. The War on Drugs and the rhetoric that it used continued to paint a picture of black Americans, particularly black men, as criminals. From a focus on crack cocaine to the imagery used in ad campaigns, the War on Drugs played a key role in mass incarceration and its effect on African Americans. The War on Drugs defined African Americans as criminals, and the U.S. government defined criminals as part of an inferior social class. Thus, the system of mass incarceration has become a racial caste system, similar to the Jim Crow racial caste system that came before it.

When looking at the system of mass incarceration and how it disproportionately affects African Americans, it is important to remember who profits from this system. The sociological concept prison industrial complex can be used to describe both the system of mass incarceration, and the businesses that directly benefit from this system (DuVernay, 2016). One key player in the prison industrial complex is CCA. CCA, or the Corrections Corporation of America, is the largest private prison organization, with 1.7 billion dollars in profit. CCA, working with ALEC (a lobbying group that is made up of both politicians and corporations) was able to gain profit from bills proposed by ALEC that put more Americans in their prisons. Although ALEC has distanced itself from CCA, the prison industrial complex is still at work, and ALEC is still benefiting from mass incarceration. The American Bail Association (ABA) is still a member of ALEC, and both ALEC and ABA directly profit from the privatization of parole and probation. Aside from ALEC and ABA, many other companies across America benefit from mass incarcerations. Many corporations, including JC Penney and Microsoft, directly benefit from mass incarceration by using prison inmates for labor to create their products. (DuVernay, 2016). All of these companies are included in the prison industrial complex, directly benefiting from a system of mass incarceration.

The concepts of the prison industrial complex, the caste system, and the power elite all fit within the sociological framework of conflict theory. Conflict theory is based on society as a competition over resources, and views society as having some form of inequality. In the system of mass incarceration, some benefit and some suffer. Using conflict theory, this system can be viewed as a competition over resources, with private businesses and corporations within the prison industrial complex as well as politicians and wealthy members of the power elite profiting from a system that serves to keep African Americans oppressed. These companies and the power elite work to perpetuate this system, a system that can be defined as a racial caste system. Through legislation created by private companies and the power elite, African Americans who have been convicted are stripped of their rights and forced into a second-class social status that offers no room for redemption.

Conflict theory and the sociological concepts of prison industrial complex, caste system, and power elite all explain how mass incarceration works as a system that disproportionately affects African Americans and restricts their freedoms.

Conclusion

The current situation of mass incarceration in America is horrifying, but for anyone well aware of American history, it is unfortunately not shocking. As discussed before, systems of oppression do not simply disappear, but instead change form. When the caste system of slavery was dismantled, Jim Crow took its place. Now, in a period of time of apparent racial equality, a more hidden racial caste system exists, one that has become so normalized in our society that many are unable to see the correlation between mass incarceration and other systems of oppression. Conflict theory views mass incarceration as a struggle over power and resources in society. Using the ideas of conflict theory, mass incarceration can be seen as a racial caste system that works by increasing the likelihood that black Americans will end up in the prison system, and then limiting the rights of these individuals. The power elite aid this system of oppression, redefining the term criminal in a way that secures their position of power. Finally, while African Americans struggle in this unequal society, private businesses within the prison industrial complex profit from this system. As of now, American society continues to turn a blind eye to a massive racial caste system of control and profit at work within its own communities. Although change is possible, American citizens from all backgrounds must first recognize the issue before them. Only once this issue is seen and recognized, only then can Americans begin the work of undoing the system of mass incarceration.

Resources

Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow*. New York: The New Press. Retrieved September 30, 2022. (http://electra.lmu.edu:2048/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=489643&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_Cover)

Childress, Sarah. 2014. "Michelle Alexander: "A System of Racial and Social Control." Retrieved September 29, 2022. (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/michelle-alexander-a-system-of-racial-and-social-control/>)

DuVernay, Ava. 2016. *13th*. Netflix. Oakland, CA: Kandoo Films. Gutierrez, Carmen, and Pettit, Becky. 2018. "Mass Incarceration and Racial Inequality," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, May-September, pp. 1153-1182.

Hughey, M. W., & Rosino, M. L. (2018). The war on drugs, racial meanings, and structural racism: a holistic and reproductive approach. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 77, 849-892.

VERONICA GOMEZ



Veronica Gomez is a Sociology major with minors in Peace and Justice Studies & Political Science ('23) from Los Angeles. On-campus she is involved in the First to Go Program as Lead Peer Instructor and Student Lead Administrator, the Ignacio Student Support Services as a Peer Outreach Assistant, and the McNair Scholars Program. She is also involved in a multi-cultural sorority called Sigma Lambda Gamma National Sorority holding the position of Vice President of Marketing. For her final semester at LMU, she was an Alternative Breaks Leader for Belize. She hopes to attend graduate school and become involved with educational leadership and/or policy. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her friends and family.

ANALYZING HOW BEING A FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT AFFECTS AN INDIVIDUAL'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Introduction

First-generation college students (FGCS) experience college differently than other students. FGCS face disparities in higher education; however, they gain social and cultural capital that can provide upward mobility (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016, p. 3). Sunshine Hillygus (2001) stated that education increases political participation among college students; however, there is no definitive answer that addresses if and how FGCS's negative and positive experiences ultimately shape their view of politics and their political involvement. FGCS are underrepresented and marginalized students, so they often are politically aware in order to fight against policies that may harm them. This study examines an underrepresented and marginalized group, FGCS, and analyzes the consequences and potential outcomes of their political involvement taking into account their backgrounds and faced inequalities. For instance, FGCS tend to be at a disadvantage concerning basic knowledge about post-secondary education, cost and application processes, level of family income and support, processes of attaining educational degrees, expectations, and plans (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 250). FGCS face barriers and inequalities that can shape their beliefs, values, and personal and academic lives.

Through this study, I will analyze social factors and perceptions that affect first-generation college students' political participation, including intersectional identities, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, parental socialization, and education. Additionally,

social and cultural capital are sociological factors that influence first-generation college students and may impact their political involvement and stance. When FGCS start college, they may lack the social and cultural capital of their peers, but they can increase these forms of capital through higher education. This study aims to fill the gap in research about how FGCS' experiences in life and higher education impact their political involvement. The research question that guides this study is, "How does being a first-generation college student (FGCS) affect an individual's political participation?" For this study, FGCS are defined as individuals whose parents/parent/guardians did not complete a baccalaureate degree from a 4-year university in the United States (Department of Education: Higher Education Act of 1965, 2008). Political participation is not only defined as behaviors but also various attitudes. For example, political interest and activity includes: voting, wearing buttons, representing campaigns, attending rallies/marches/demonstrations, participating in social/cultural/civic/political groups or unions, campaign organizing, or signing petitions. It is also essential to define social and cultural capital since they are incorporated into my study. Social capital is information, resources, and support individuals can utilize from relations through social networks. Cultural capital is an individual's knowledge, learned symbolic acts, and behaviors that show social standing or familiarity with the norms and culture of institutions (Ritzer, 2018, p. 206).

Literature Review

Higher education allows first-generation college students (FGCS) to gain new knowledge, skills, and exposure to different fields and experiences they cannot gain from their parents. Interestingly, the experiences that FGCS face in higher education may shape how they view politics and their political involvement. Scholars have argued about the existing correlation between education and political participation. Despite what others have said, there is a relationship between education and political participation (Hillygus et al., 2001). The literature explains that education increases political participation among college students; however, it is unclear if education increases political involvement among underrepresented and marginalized students, specifically. As higher levels of education increase political involvement among students, does this also apply to first-generation college students? This study seeks to narrow the gap in the literature that does not address how FGCS experiences impact individuals' political involvement.

First-Generation College Students Versus General College Student Population

In this research, FGCS are defined as individuals whose parents/parent/guardian did not complete a baccalaureate degree from a 4-year university (Department of Education: Higher Education Act of 1965, 2008). FGCS in undergraduate education includes 24% who had parents with no post-secondary education, 56% who had parents who did not have a bachelor's degree, and 59% whose parents did not have a bachelor's degree and were also the first sibling in their family to attend college

(Firstgen Center 2015-16). One of the most significant factors affecting FGCS is their parents' lack of knowledge about higher education because they did not attend (Engle, 2007). FGCS tend to be at a disadvantage concerning basic knowledge about post-secondary education, cost and application processes, level of family income and support, attaining educational degrees, expectations, and plans (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 250). Additionally, FGCS navigate, form, and act upon their multiple cultural and social identities in college differently; other factors include intersectional identities, status, communities, and classes they take (Huynh, 2018; p. 44, Nguyen & Nuyen, 2018). Researcher Hamilton (2016) states that lower SES parents have fewer tangible resources used in higher education and are significantly less likely to be involved in their children's academic careers, which diminishes their transmission of cultural capital (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016, p. 2). FGCS face barriers that shape their beliefs, values, and personal and academic life. The literature about FGCS describes the challenges they face; however, they do not specifically indicate how their experiences affect how they interact with politics.

Cultural and Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu defines cultural capital as an actor's various kinds of legitimate knowledge and learned symbolic acts and behaviors that show social standing or familiarity with the norms and culture of institutions (Ritzer, 2018, p. 206). Interestingly, parents can transmit cultural capital through socializing their children into the norms and culture of institutions (Lundger et al., 2007, p. 58; Tucker, 2014, p. 22). Scholars note that intergenerational relationships can influence students' views and politics. When attending college, they may question their previous beliefs and values, which can cause them to change their perspectives and opinions on topics (Miller & Tatum, 2008, p. 43). FGCS can increase their cultural capital and potential for upward mobility as they navigate college. College is essential for FGCS since it provides upward mobility; however, these students face internalized processes of cultural change that may create obstacles to success (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016, p. 3).

Bourdieu further describes social capital as information, resources, and support that individuals can utilize from their relations in social networks (Ritzer, 2018, p. 206). College students with college educated parents can gain social capital from parental connections. FGCS may step foot into higher education without connections; however, they can meet new people and increase their social capital through mentorship and connections with different individuals across campus. FGCS can gain exposure to different ideologies, including "individuals connected to people in power, often in political or institutional power" (Szeter & Wookcock, 2004). Overall, it is essential to gain more information on how the cultural and social capital of FGCS develop and if they are changing the ways that FGCS are becoming more politically aware and involved.

Education and Political Participation

Some examples of political participation include voting, contacting elected representatives, wearing buttons to represent campaigns, working in campaign organizations, attending demonstrations, and signing petitions. Erol Turan and Ozlem Tiras (2017) state that political participation cannot be limited to behavior and is closely related to various attitudes, such as political interest and activity (pp. 107). Some theorists believe that education correlates with politics, as it is more likely to cause individuals to engage in political participation and provides skills for civic engagement depending on the student's major and classes (Hillygus et al., 2001). Some scholars state that education is a precursor or predictor. Others state that confounding variables such as high social status play a role in political involvement instead of just education (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Mendelberg & Willeck, 2022). Additionally, some argue that political participation does not increase due to higher education but increases due to pre-adult characteristics of socialization (Kam & Palmer, 2008; Berinsky et al., 2011). Since there is no definitive answer on whether education increases political involvement, it is essential to analyze what factors specifically affect FGCS to gain a better understanding.

Additionally, not only parents are influential factors in their children's political awareness, but also peer groups, types of schools, neighborhoods, campus organizations, student governments, and mentors (Kam & Palmer, 2008; Jarvis, Montoya, & Mulvoy 2005). According to prior research, education is essential for political participation because it plays an influential role by helping young people develop cognitive and civic skills that enable comprehension of political content and fosters political action (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Kam & Palmer, 2008). Education provides students with necessary skills like speaking well, working with groups, having discussions, deliberating, developing literacy, and having resources revolving around politics that can be implemented in political participation.

It is evident that there needs to be more research regarding FGCS and how their experiences in higher education impact their involvement in politics. The existing literature focuses only on general students instead of on underrepresented and marginalized students like FGCS. The most prominent research available does not consider the FGCS demographic. FGCS benefit from civic skills and resources in higher education; however, they undergo different challenges to integrate and fit into college and are influenced by parents, family, peers and on-campus involvements. These experiences and factors may affect their involvement in politics.

Methods

Sample

My study is based on interviewing 10 first-generation college freshmen and 10 first-generation college seniors. I chose to include college freshmen and seniors in

my sample to compare how college experience impacted these students' political behavior. My sample was comprised of first-generation college students, which are individuals whose parents or guardians did not complete a baccalaureate degree from a 4-year university in the United States (First To Go Program At Loyola Marymount University, 11/12/22). I identified my participants by getting a list of emails from the LMU First To Go and Ignacio Student Support Services Programs, which constituted a convenient and purposive sample. I emailed freshmen in one group and seniors in another group. In the emails, I briefly described myself and my project, emphasized confidentiality, and described the deadlines for my project. Once I had students confirm their participation, I provided them with further information on setting up an interview session. I contacted some participants through text messages or GroupMe because they did not respond to my email. Individuals excluded from my data were those with a parent/parents or guardian/guardians with a degree in the United States. Also, I excluded individuals younger than 18 years old and those who were not college students. Additionally, I did not ask participants to identify their citizenship status.

Measurement

The goal of this study was to understand how being a first-generation college student affects political involvement. I looked for themes by identifying patterns and kept track of similar answers from the first-generation students. For example, I analyzed how participants described their political involvement and saw to what capacity they had similar experiences that overlapped with one another. For political involvement, I asked if students were involved in low-stake and/or high-stake political involvements, like, wearing a button and working for a candidate. I also asked if they kept up with news outlets.

In this study, I also looked for answers that described parents' political involvement and where their parents were born. Additionally, I asked participants about demographics, campus- involvement, political affiliations, religion, political awareness, majors, on-campus networks, and classes they have taken related to politics. For this reason, some of my key concepts of interest were first-generation college students and political participation, which includes: wearing a button, signing petitions, protesting, working for campaign organizations, and working for a candidate. Other key concepts were political affiliation, political stance, religion, political awareness, majors, and on-campus networks. I had to alter two questions for the freshmen since they are just beginning their college journey. My interview questions were:

Backgrounds and Demographics:

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- What is your gender? And what are your pronouns?
- What is your ethnicity?

- Where did you grow up? What is your hometown?
- What is your religion?

Campus Involvement/ Major/Networks:

- What is your major? And minors?
- What are your on-campus involvements? What do you participate in with these organizations? (freshmen: What are your on-campus involvements? What do you participate in with these organizations? Or what do you want to get involved with and why?)
- Do you have mentors on campus? From which departments?
- How have your college experiences influenced you to change your mind about a candidate or political issue or partake in any form of political participation? (freshmen: How have your educational experiences influenced you to change your mind about a candidate or political issue or to partake in any form of political participation?)
- Have you ever taken a class that revolved around politics? If so, which ones?
- Has this changed your mind about politics?

Respondents / Parents:

- Where were your parents born?
- What is your parents' highest level of education?
- How involved are your parents in your life? Are they involved in your college life?
- Like how often do you talk to them? How often do you see them?
- How would you describe your parent/parents' political awareness?
- Are they more aware of politics in their home country?
- How would you describe your parent/parents' political involvement?
- How have your parents influenced you politically?
- How have your friends influenced you politically?
- Have your friends encouraged you to vote? Have they helped you learn about any political topics?

Political Involvement/Awareness

- How politically involved are you?
- What has motivated you to be politically involved?
- What political party do you identify with the most? Why?
- What political news channels or social media political pages do you follow?

Low-stake:

- Have you worn a button for specific candidates or campaigns?
- Have you reposted a political issue on social media? What kind?
- Have you signed a petition? What kind?

Medium-stake:

- Have you voted in a US election? If so, which ones?
- What protests or demonstrations have you participated in?

High-stake:

- Are you involved in any political group on or off campus? How about activist groups?
- Have you worked to help get a candidate or campaign elected? What made you participate in this?
- What other ways are you politically involved if they were not mentioned previously?

Ending:

- What keeps you from engaging in political activity?
- How has being a first-generation college student affected your views on politics?
- Would you like to add anything at all?

Procedure

I collected my data by interviewing and recording my conversations with individuals via zoom. I saved and transferred the recordings from my computer to a google drive for storage. I used the zoom feature that transcribed my conversation; however, I rewatched the interviews and edited the transcription. I rewatched each interview about three times and wrote a summary after each interview. This helped me remember what each participant said. I analyzed the interview transcripts, sentence by sentence, and coded for themes regarding the factors that influence political participation. For example, words often repeated were lack of time, frustration, fear, mistrust, BLM, COVID, social media, and “college was a huge influence on my political views,” etc. I also noted timestamps and wrote down repeated words and phrases in each interview. Through comparing and contrasting the responses among respondents, I developed a deeper understanding of the relationship between the first-generation college student experience and political involvement and perception.

Results

Barriers to Political Participation

Time

Throughout the interview process, many first-generation college freshmen and seniors mentioned reasons they did not engage in political activity. Half of the freshmen and six out of ten seniors said that limited time and busy schedules were reasons for their lack of political engagement. Most freshmen and seniors are involved with more than one organization, conduct research, and work on campus in addition to taking classes. Participant L (freshmen) stated, “I’m always thinking of what I have to get done for school and extracurriculars that I haven’t had time to really focus on or consider looking into politics.” Freshmen set expectations to join organizations, get jobs, and do well in school while learning to navigate a new context. Many freshmen are already involved with organizations and have on-

campus jobs. Seniors also vocalized that keeping busy schedules and focusing on their career goals prevented them from being engaged in political activity. Participant M (senior) states, “I think it would be time. I’m looking towards my career goals, like finishing school, so I don’t have time to attend protests or anything.” Seniors must ensure they are on track to graduate on time and are forced to deal with the pressure to plan for life after college.

Mistrust, Doubt, and Judgement

The data also revealed that mistrust, doubt, and judgment prevent FGCS from engaging in political activity. News channels frame content that benefits specific candidates or political issues so that information may be altered or excluded. Participant L (freshman) stated, “I don’t know much about politics, and I don’t want to get the wrong filtered information. Sometimes I don’t know whether or not something is true or false.” Participant AG (freshman) mentions, “I am not that informed. I don’t want to be wrong, and then, like, what if I make the wrong choice?” Interestingly, both freshmen and seniors vocalized that doubts and concerns prevented them from being politically engaged. Participants B and M (seniors) mentioned that they were not confident about their political awareness and often experienced imposter syndrome because they felt they were not educated enough about political issues to speak about them. They are intimidated and do not want to be judged by others, so they refrain from talking about politics. Participants Q and J (seniors) also stated, “I do not trust the information received from the news. The government is also very distrusting.” Participant J said, “I often have to be critical, I ask myself: can you trust this news? Is this source credible?”

Lastly, FGCS freshmen and seniors also stated that politics affects their mental health by causing fear, frustration, and defeat. Participants Z, M, and D expressed that they often see harmful content on the news that instills fear and prevents them from attending protests because they are shown to be dangerous. For example, the participants vocalized the fear of getting tear gassed or experiencing violence, including gun violence. Undocumented participants also mentioned fear when speaking about their immigration status. Participant Z stated that they were afraid of people calling ICE on them. Participants S and LE noted that they have too much to risk with their legal status and do not want to be deported or seen as disobedient; that can be enough to write them up.

Frustration

Frustration with the lack of progress toward equality is another barrier that participants mentioned among both freshmen and seniors. FGCS protect their mental well-being when nothing changes and policies directly affect them or their loved ones. For example, participants stated that “seeing bad things on the news can be overwhelming, frustrating, and a mental bandwidth because nothing is ever done” (Participant J). Additionally, Participant AR mentioned that much of their frustration came from learning about injustices people face. For example, they stated, “I get

frustrated and angry at things [resources] that people don't have, or sometimes I don't even have, and we should be able to have these [resources]. Participant G described his frustration by explaining that they grew tired of fighting with people in their classes since they couldn't change their perspectives.

Contributors to Political Engagement and Awareness

Peers and Friends

Although FGCS experience barriers preventing them from being politically engaged, the data shows that seniors are more likely to be influenced and informed about politics through classes, campus involvement, peers, and friends. For example, compared to all seniors, only four freshmen said they were influenced or informed by their friends about a political issue or encouraged to vote. Some freshmen stated that they were not influenced politically by their friends. They said, "my friends are not really hung on to like the whole political aspect. I try not to bring politics because it ruins the mood" (Participant L). Additionally, Participant X stated that they are more influenced by their sister because politics is not a topic of conversation with their friends. Participant G describes their friends as "the definition of avoiding all problems." Other participants noted that they were influenced more by their friends than their parents since their friends have taught them about political matters, encouraged them to vote, and are open about discussions.

Courses

Interestingly, all seniors listed classes that either opened their minds about politics, provided them with more information about political issues, or made them more politically involved. For example, some classes encouraged them to vote or made them participate in polling. Two freshmen said that core classes had opened their minds under Studies in American Diversity; however, the rest said their classes were not influential. Instead, they learned about the branches of government through their government class in high school. Almost all freshmen talked about classes they took in high school since they had not taken a class that touched on politics in college. Participant BR (freshman) stated, "the only class that might be considered is my Econ class that I took in high school since we slightly touched on politics, but it hasn't influenced me."

On the other hand, seniors mentioned various ways that classes have influenced them to be more politically aware and involved. For example, Participant D stated, "coming to college, I learned a lot of various perspectives and became educated through class discussions and opened my mind. They have impacted my political beliefs." Other seniors also mentioned that Loyola Marymount University requires students to take elective courses in political science and other departments. This requirement allowed seniors to take classes like Campaign 2020, United States Politics, Social Movements, Migration and the Borders, Gender and Sexuality, etc.

On-Campus Involvements

Another contributing factor to political engagement and awareness is on-campus involvement. Freshmen participants of this study were involved in two organizations or fewer as they are new to LMU and still adjusting to college. Seniors typically had two or more involvements: service organizations, multicultural sororities, ethnic clubs, ASLMU, MECHA, and research. Seniors stated that their participation in campus involvement has helped them be more politically involved by either learning about political issues, participating in demonstrations with their organizations, or conducting research on issues affecting specific populations. Participant E (senior) stated, "I'm a general member for Resilience and MECHA, and they got me more familiar with certain topics and seeing how certain policies would directly affect my peers." Senior Participants S, J, LE, GU, E, B, and Q mentioned their affiliation with Resilience or MECHA. Participant LE spoke about their research in the Political Science and Psychology Department that revolved around understanding the disparities experienced by the vulnerable population in access to mental health and community organizing. Participant S described their involvement in ASLMU as their goal since freshman year. They explained how they were politically involved throughout high school because they had learned about their undocumented status and identity, so they knew they had to fight back. Now, Participant S has taken a step back because their involvement was sometimes unhealthy. Many seniors attributed their political awareness and involvement to their identities and life experiences.

Social Media and Party Identification

Lastly, it is essential to note that freshmen and seniors described their political involvement differently. Some were more involved than others; however, mostly all participants said they had reposted political issues on social media, especially in 2020 for Black Lives Matter. Participants also mentioned reposting stories about immigration, environmental policies, gender rights, and abortion rights, specifically Roe versus Wade. Many participants did not attend protests; however, those who did mention that they attended the Black Lives Matter Protests in 2020. Additionally, everyone stated that they identified as Democratic because they had more liberal views and would never be considered a Republican. Participant AR (senior) described it as the "lesser of two evils."

First-Generation Identity

The data showed that some freshmen did not see a correlation between their first-generation college student identity and politics. Additionally, some freshmen had interesting responses when asked about their first-generation identity and politics. Participant V stated, "I don't know, I personally don't see a correlation yet, but I'm sure there is a correlation somewhere." Additionally, a participant felt that politics is often "shoved down your throat" because FGCS are a minority group, and there is a lot of pressure to fight for injustices. For example, Participant L stated,

“the fact that there are so many younger people my age who are participating in politics, it sort of puts a pressure on me like if I should participate or not because if I don’t...will I be bashed for not fighting back?” Other freshmen explained that because they were FGCS, they did not have many resources to be informed about policies or changes. They cared more about policies that directly affected them or their family members, like immigration, education, and equal access to health care.

Interestingly, all seniors explained how their experiences as FGCS affected their political views. It was clear that FGCS’s experiences in college made them politically aware and involved. For example, the senior group stated that because of their disadvantages, they have to care about politics to see how it affects them. Participant S mentioned, “it has made me have to care about them [politics], not just want to care.” Participant B mentioned, “being a low-income immigrant first-gen student automatically makes me not to be a super conservative person; it’s by default where I land on the political spectrum.” Additionally, Participant LE mentions “just the fact that I feel a lot of the system is put in place to keep first-gen individuals at the back has annoyed me and angered me, which is why I want to provide as many resources as possible and advocate for us.”

Additionally, seniors mentioned that being around other FGCS helped them feel like they were not alone. For example, Participants M, D, and E stated that having a first-generation community on campus provided reassurance that other people think like them and come from similar backgrounds. “We experience the disadvantages together” (Participant D). Participant E mentioned, “we experience things on our own for the first time, and we have to mess up and learn as a collective community. We listen and think together.” Seniors also mentioned that they would vote against anything harmful to the community. For example, Participant K stated that it is an essential identity for them and shapes their decision, so if a policy negatively affects the group, they will vote against it.

Lastly, many seniors stated that college helped them become more politically informed than their parents since their parents could not teach them. For example, Participants GU, AR, and J stated that they did not know much about politics since their parents did not go to college but going to college helped participants learn about politics. “My parents were less politically involved, which made me less involved. But being exposed, especially when going to a school like LMU, I learned a lot” (Participant GU). Participant AR stated, “if I didn’t go to college, I would probably align more with my parents; this is where I learned more things and became politically aware. If I wasn’t a first-gen student, I would probably not be aware or had a delay.” Participant J stated a similar statement, “my education helped me learn more about how politics work and how much it affects us.”

Discussion

The guiding research question of this study is, “How does being a first-generation college student affect an individual’s political participation?” This study’s results

reflected that some FGCS freshmen and seniors do not engage in politics due to time constraints, mistrust, doubt, judgment, and frustration. Reflecting on Pascarella (2004) and Hamilton (2016), FGCS tend to be at a disadvantage concerning basic knowledge about post-secondary education and tend to have fewer tangible resources. Many participants vocalized how being a FGCS was challenging because their parents did not provide them with prior knowledge about college or politics. Many participants were Latinx and stated that their parents were born in a different country. College experiences for first-generation immigrants' children who will most likely be first-generation college students will be influenced by college experiences (Carlos, 2018). FGCS who are Latinx may not have the assistance from their immigrant parents to be more partisan towards one side since they are unfamiliar with the United States' political system. For this reason, FGCS figure most things on their own, including political topics and issues. Some participants described the mistrust and doubt they felt due to not being exposed enough to politics earlier.

Additionally, FGCS get frustrated with politics because they feel that none of the inequalities they experience are changing, especially since many policies may negatively affect them. Scholars argue that FGCS navigate and act upon multiple cultural and social identities in college, including other factors like intersectional identities, status, communities, and classes they take (Huynh, 2018; pp. 44, Nguyen & Nuyen, 2018). Freshmen participants stated that they were figuring out how to navigate college; therefore, politics was not their top priority. Seniors stated they were too busy with school work, extracurriculars, and planning for their future after graduating to be politically active. Additionally, the results showed that all seniors were influenced or informed about politics through their peers and friends, classes, and on-campus involvement. The students identified influential classes as Gender and Sexuality, Social Movements, Campaign 2020, United States Politics, Migration and the Borders, and International Relations. This is related to findings by Hillygus (2001), who states that individuals engage in political participation depending on the majors and classes students take. Some on-campus involvements that influenced or informed seniors included participation in service organizations, ethnic clubs, multicultural sororities, Resilience, MECHA, ASLMU, and experiences conducting research. This is consistent with research that finds peer groups, campus organizations, and mentors influence individuals' political awareness (Kam & Palmer, 2008; Jarvis, Montoya, & Mulvoy, 2005). These results also highlight how vital the college experience is for FGCS to gain exposure to different ideologies, including those in political power (Szeter & Wookcock, 2004). Also, many participants said that going to college influenced them to be more politically aware and involved rather than assuming their parents' political beliefs, which is supported by Miller and Tatum (2008). Attending college may inspire students to question their previous beliefs and values, which can cause them to change their perspectives and opinions about political issues or social media topics, like Black Lives Matter in 2020,

immigration, abortion rights, environmental issues, gender rights, etc. Some also mentioned attending protests in 2020 in response to the death of George Floyd. According to political scientist Jamila Michener, racial disadvantages and negative financial consequences made protests explode (Arora, 2020).

Additionally, Arora (2020) states that media attention helped fuel protests as there was more coverage than any other protests in the previous 50 years. These results prove that FGCS and their past experiences like discrimination, lack of resources, etc., and their college experiences impact their political participation.

Limitations of Study

There are some limitations of the study that should be addressed in future research. One limitation is that I only looked at a liberal arts college that is more politically inclined due to its Jesuit mission and smaller size than other universities. Additionally, most participants were Latinx. In the senior participant group, most identified as female, as only two were males. There was more balance in the freshmen group since I interviewed five males out of the total ten students. Future research should strive to have a sample of FGCS from different ethnicities to see if there is a difference among racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, studying sophomores and juniors would allow researchers to compare all levels of education. Future research should interview the current freshmen in this study when they are seniors to see if there were any changes in their political beliefs and involvement. The last limitation to note is that mostly all participants were liberal arts majors in the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts; majors in the college are more likely to address social and political topics.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to address the gaps in the existing literature about FGCS and their involvement in politics. This is an important area of study because it allows us to analyze social factors and perceptions affecting this population and examine how social and cultural capital influence FGCS. This study supports the fact that FGCS can gain more social and cultural capital by joining organizations, having peer interactions, and taking classes that can help them become more politically aware and involved. Participants acknowledge that they can be more politically engaged; however, one of the main ways of involvement was reposting political issues through social media. Seniors, more than freshmen, understand the connection between the FGCS identity and politics as they have more experience in higher education. Seniors were more politically involved than freshmen, so I would like to conduct future research that interviews the same group of freshmen when they are seniors. This will help see if there is any shift in their political awareness and involvement. By conducting the interviews with FGCS freshmen and seniors, I found that being a FGCS has positive and negative impacts on individuals and their political participation.

Bibliography

Arora, M. (2020, August 4). Analysis | How the coronavirus pandemic helped the Floyd protests become the biggest in U.S. history. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/05/how-coronavirus-pandemic-helped-floyd-protests-become-biggest-us-history/>

Berinsky, Adam J., and Gabriel S. Lenz. (2011). "Education and political participation: Exploring the causal link." *Political Behavior* 33, no. 3, 357-373. Burns, Nancy, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carlos, R. F., (2018, September 11). Late to the party: On the prolonged partisan socialization process of second-generation Americans: *Journal of Race, ethnicity, and politics*. Cambridge Core. Retrieved November 23, 2022, from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-race-ethnicity-and-politics/article/late-to-the-party-on-the-prolonged-partisan-socialization-process-of-second-generation-americans/A320077AF0526D500EBCA98BBB70CC57>

Engle, J. (2007). Postsecondary Access and Success for First-generation College Students. <https://doi.org/http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/328327> Hillygus D. S., (2005) THE MISSING LINK: Exploring the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement1 *Political Behavior*, Vol. 27, No. 1. DOI 10.1007/s11109-005-3075-8

Huynh, A. (2017). "Being a person of color and a first-generation student, there's power behind that": An Intersectional Analysis of First-Generation Students and Cultural Identities in Higher Education. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.31072862?>

Kam, C. D., & Palmer, C. L. (2008). Reconsidering the effects of education on political participation. - jstor home. *The Journal of Politics* . Retrieved June 25, 2022, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/S0022381608080651>

Kam, Cindy D., and Carl L. Palmer. (2011) Rejoinder: Reinvestigating the causal relationship between higher education and political participation." *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 3:659-663.

Jarvis, S., Montoya, L., & Mulvoy, E. (2005). *The Political Participation of College Students, Working Students and Working Youth*. The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Participation. Retrieved June 25, 2022, from

https://circle.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/2019-12/WP37_PoliticalParticipation_CollegeWorkingStudentsWorking%20Youth_2005.pdf

Lundberg, C, Schreiner, L., Hovaguimian, K., and Slavin Miller, S. (2007). First-generation status and student race/ethnicity as distinct predictors of student involvement and learning. *NASPA Journal*, 44(1), 57-83. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Laurie_Schreiner/publication/255589920_FirstGeneration_Status_and_Student_RaceEthnicity_as_Distinct_Predictors_of_Student_Involvement_and_Learning/links/56cbabb008ae5488f0db194c.pdf.

Mendelberg, T., Merola, V., Raychaudhuri, T., & Thai, A. (2021). When poor students attend rich schools: Do affluent social environments ... Retrieved June 25, 2022, from <https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/talim/files/when-poor-students-attend-rich-schools-do-affluent-social-environments-increase-or-decrease-participation.pdf>

Miller, R., & Tatum, S. (2008). The Association of Family History Knowledge and Cultural Change with Persistence among Undergraduate Low-Income, First Generation College Students. *JSTOR*, 24. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/42802309?searchText>

“National Data Fact Sheets.” About the Center for First-Generation Students, <https://firstgen.naspa.org/journal-and-research/national-data-fact-sheets-on-first-generatin-college-students/7A515490-E6AA-11E9-BAEC0242AC100002>.

Nie, Norman, and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2001. “Education and Democratic Citizenship.” Pp. 30– 57 in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*, edited by Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Nguyen, T. H. & Nguyen, B. M. (2018). Is the “first-generation student” term useful for Understanding inequality? The role of intersectionality in illuminating the implications of an accepted—yet unchallenged—term. *Review of Research in Education*. 42(1), 146–176

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75(3), 249–284. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2004.0016>

Ritzer, George & Stepnisky, Jeffery (2018). *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots: The Basics*. SAGE Publications.

Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. (1993) *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Longman.

Szreter, S., Woolcock, M. (2004). Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 33, 650–667.

Turan, E. & Özlem T. “Family’s Impact on Individual’s Political Attitude and Behaviors.” *International Journal of Psycho-Educational Sciences*, London Academic Publishing. 27 Old Gloucester Street WC1N 3AX London, UK. e-Mail: Contact@Lapub.co.uk; Web Site: <https://Www.journals.lapub.co.uk/Index.php/IJPES>, 31 Aug. 2017, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1254813>.

Tucker, N. D. (2014). *Educational identity formation and transformations: Life-history analysis of first-generation, adult college students* (Order No. 3641442). Available from ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global Wilbur, T. G., & Roscigno, V. J. (2016). *First-generation disadvantage and college enrollment/completion*. *srd.sagepub*. American Sociological Association. Retrieved June 24, 2022, from <https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/attach/journals/sept8feature.pdf>

Willeck, Claire, and Tali Mendelberg. (2022) “Education and Political Participation.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 25 (2022).

US Department of Education (ED). (2022, June 14). *Trio home page*. Home. Retrieved June 24, 2022, from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, & Henry Brady. (1995) *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Carisa Aguilera



My name is Carisa Aguilera and I am a recent graduate from LMU. I majored in Sociology and Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies. I currently work in ABA therapy and plan on attending a Master's program in Social Work. This paper was the culmination of my work during my time at LMU.

FEMALE CHICANO GANG MEMBERS

Introduction

Gangs have long been a topic of interest in social science. In California, Chicano gangs have existed since at least the 1920s (Diaz-Cotto 2006). However, gang research has primarily focused on male gang members, despite the fact that women have always been a part of gangs (Harris 1994). It was not until the 1970s that researchers began to include women in their gang research, however, they were not accurate depictions and the research is now outdated (Hughes, Botchkovar, and Short 2019; Molidor 1996). Researchers typically explained female gang members as “maladjusted tomboys or sexual deviants” (Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001:366). Until recently, there has been a dearth of understanding to explain female involvement in gangs. Researcher Molidor (1996) explains,

“Perhaps one reason why so few theories explain female gang participation is that the female role is often described by male gang members to male researchers and interpreted by male academics, rather than being described by the girls themselves” (252).

In addition, female gang members have become a topic of popularity, especially in the media, because they are challenging traditional gender roles by engaging in violent criminal behavior (Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001). It is important to note that there are different variations in the sex composition of gangs. The most common type of gang is a mixed-gender or sex-balanced gang where there are similar numbers of men and women in the gang, with one study finding that 65% of female gang members and 40% of male gang members belong to sex-balanced gangs (Peterson, Carson, and Fowler 2018; Peterson and Howell 2013). In the same study, 18% of female gang members belonged to majority-female gangs and 17% belonged to majority-male gangs (Peterson et al. 2018). Majority-female gangs sometimes called clickas, are often connected to the majority-male gang operating in the area, however, it is important to note that these types of gangs are the rarest (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Peterson and Howell 2013). In addition, the aforementioned study found that Chicanos “make up the largest proportion of gang youth in all categories except all-/majority female gangs” (Peterson et al. 2018:953).

There are many conditions that contribute to the formation of gangs. It has been widely acknowledged among researchers that gangs form as cultural adaptations to poverty and segregation (Bigalondo 2013; Fleisher and Krienert 2004; Gutierrez-Adams, Rios, and Case 2020). Gangs exist in areas with high rates of poverty, substance abuse, violence, and a lack of social services (Kolb, Palys, and Green 2019; Molidor 1996; Sutton 2017). There are also a number of risk factors that make joining a gang an attractive option for young women. Many of the women who become gang members come from backgrounds rife with physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from family members, as well as, drug and alcohol addictions within the home (Bloom et al. 2003; Deuchar et al. 2020; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Harris 1994; Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001; Molidor 1996; Peterson and Howell 2013; Sutton 2017). Among gang-involved women, it is commonly reported that they experienced sexual abuse perpetrated by family members starting at a young age (Deuchar et al. 2020; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Peterson and Howell 2013). Gang-involved women also often reported having neglectful or disinterested mothers, despite this, they often maintained a connection to their mothers (Deuchar et al. 2020; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001). Intergenerational gang membership and relationships with gang-affiliated peers also increase the risk for young women to join gangs, as young women are repeatedly exposed to the gang lifestyle they begin to internalize the norms (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Harris 1994; Sutton 2017). Furthermore, even if young women do not have relatives in gangs they most likely have family members that hold deviant values (O'Neal et al. 2016; Sutton 2017). Another important risk factor for young women is peer pressure, gang-involved women often reported being worried that they would lose friends if they did not join the gang (Sutton 2017). Much of the research that exists today, does not specifically focus on women in Chicano gangs. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the female experience in Chicano gangs using non-fictional works.

Literature Review

Point of Entry

There are many reasons why women join gangs. Research has shown that a common reason young women join gangs is that it offers agentic expression, with small amounts of social mobility in the neighborhoods these women come from, joining a gang is a way to achieve perceived status (Bigalondo 2013; Deuchar et al. 2020; Diaz-Cotto 2006; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Molidor 1996; Sutton 2017). Often coming from chaotic home environments, many female gang members report that the gang provided some type of community for them, whether it be a place to belong or a surrogate family (Bloom et al. 2003; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Harris 1994; Molidor 1996). In this way, the gang is used as a coping mechanism for trauma (Fleisher and Krienert 2004; Hughes et al. 2019; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020). Despite the hierarchical and misogynistic structure of gangs, women also report joining gangs as a way to rebel against traditional gender roles (Diaz-Cotto 2006; O'Neal et al. 2016). With parents or siblings already in the gang, joining the gang is a normative process for some young women (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Harris 1994; Sutton 2017). Another common reason women report joining gangs includes protection either from the dangers of the street or from abusive family situations (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Sutton 2017).

For some young women, joining a gang is a way to get attention or release anger (Bloom et al. 2003; Diaz-Cotto 2006). It is also important to note that women typically join and leave gangs at much younger ages than men (Miller and Brunson 2000; Sutton 2017).

There are multiple different modes of entry for women who join gangs. It has been documented that the method of entry into the gang will determine a woman's position within the hierarchy of the gang, as well as the amount of social capital they gain (Deuchar et al. 2020; Panfil and Peterson 2015). This hierarchy exists within Chicano gangs due to machismo culture, which views women as subordinate to men and expects women to take up more traditional gender roles (Bigalondo 2013; Deuchar et al. 2020; Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001; Miller and Brunson 2000; Panfill and Peterson 2015; Peterson, Cason, and Fowler 2018). One mode of entry into the gang exclusive to women is to be "sexed in" or to "pull a train," which involves having sex with multiple male gang members in order to gain entry (Deuchar et al. 2020; Molidor 1996; Panfil and Peterson 2015). This method of entry ascribes these women to the lowest level in the hierarchy, often other female members do not consider them to be members of the gang (Deuchar et al. 2020; Panfil and Peterson 2015). Women who are sexed in are often most vulnerable to victimization as they are seen as sex objects by male gang members and female gang members believe they are deserving of their victimization because they chose their fate (Deuchar et al. 2020; Panfil and Peterson 2015). Another form of entry is to be "jumped in" or to "walk the line," in which a prospective member must fight or be beaten up by one or more male or female members, depending on the sex composition of the gang, for an allotted amount of time (Deuchar et al. 2020; Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001; Molidor 1996). Being jumped into the gang allows for more mobility within the gang and more respect from fellow members (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Harris 1994; Sutton 2017). For some women, being jumped in is a formality, as these women have grown up in the barrio, participated in gang activity, and proven themselves to be loyal to the gang (Diaz-Cotto 2006). Another mode of entry is through having siblings or relatives as respected members (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Deuchar et al. 2020). This type of entry allows for greater mobility than other methods as these women have connections in the gang and are not seen as viable sexual partners by the men in the gang (Deuchar et al. 2020). Other modes of entry include getting tattoos, participating in a robbery or drive-by shooting, and drug or financial debt, however these are less common (Deuchar et al. 2020; Molidor 1996).

In The Gang

Women's participation in crime and gangs has largely been overlooked by researchers. Until recent years, many studies overlooked women's participation in gang activities, explaining away women as auxiliary members of the gang (Bigalondo 2013; Bloom et al. 2003; Deuchar et al. 2020; O'Neal et al. 2016; Sutton 2017). It has been well documented that young women who are active gang members have higher rates of delinquency and violence compared to non-gang-involved young men and women (Fleisher and Krienert 2004; Sutton 2017). Women in gangs engage in all forms of violence, however, they are less likely to use firearms compared to male gang members (Moloney, Hunt, and Joe-Laidler 2015). For women in mixed-gender gangs, violence is often used as a way to gain status and protection within the confines of patriarchal machismo culture (Deuchar et al. 2020; Harris 1994; Sutton 2017), while women in majority female gangs mainly resort to violence to protect their ability to make money or for protection (Sutton 2017). For some women, portraying themselves as "bad" is used as protection due to the patriarchal nature of the street,

thus pushing back against traditional gender norms (Deuchar et al. 2020; Harris 1994; Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001). Research has also shown that female gang members participate in many of the different activities within gangs such as property crime, economic crime, violent crime, and drug sales (Deuchar et al. 2020; Moloney et al. 2015; Molidor 1996; Sutton 2017). Typically women in gangs are involved in the lowest roles of the gang's drug operations (Deuchar et al. 2020; Moloney et al. 2015; Sutton 2017). The low level duties typically include selling drugs on the street, use of their residences as drug and weapons storage locations, or transportation of drugs or money to other locations for the gang (Deuchar et al. 2020). However, some women earn enough status to be in higher positions on the supply chain, sometimes even running the operation, but this is quite rare (Deuchar et al. 2020; Moloney et al. 2015). While women's bodies are noted as being the biggest sources of vulnerability, some gang-involved women see this as an advantage as the police are less likely to suspect women of selling drugs and women have more places on their bodies to hide drugs than men (Deuchar et al. 2020; Moloeny et al. 2015).

Victimization

Young women involved in gangs are particularly vulnerable to victimization not just because of the violent nature of the street, but also because of the patriarchal structure of gangs. Evidence suggests that female gang members are more likely than male members to experience sexual assault at the hands of rival gangs and their own peers, sometimes being forced into sex work (Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Molidor 1996; Moloney et al. 2015; Peterson and Howell 2013; Peterson et al. 2018; Wesche and Dickson-Gomez 2019). However, one recent study found that sexual victimization may not be as prevalent as previously recorded (Deuchar et al. 2020). Gang membership also increases the risk of intimate partner violence (Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001; Peterson and Howell 2013; Sutton 2017; Wesche and Dickson-Gomez 2019). Female gang members also face victimization at the hands of other female gang members (Hughes et al. 2019; Peterson and Howell 2013; Peterson et al. 2018). With limited status and mobility under the gang hierarchy, one study found that some friendships between female gang members can be one-sided in order to maintain the hierarchy (Hughes et al. 2019). Female gang members are often aware of the disadvantages of being a woman on the street, however, they also find ways to use their gender to their advantage (Moloney et al. 2015). Researchers Moloney et al. (2015) found that female gang members used their gender to their advantage when selling drugs on the street, as male sellers tended to attract the attention of the police through their performance of masculinity. Research has shown that women in gangs must project a look of toughness and act aggressively in order to protect themselves against victimization from clients and rival gangs, as well as, to be respected by the men in their gangs (Moloney et al. 2015; Peterson and Howell 2013).

Desistance

The area of research into female gang members that is the most lacking is that of desistance. Many older studies found that pregnancy and motherhood are the primary reasons women leave gangs (Deuchar et al. 2020; Fleisher and Krienert 2004; O'Neal et al. 2016; Sutton 2017). Studies have also argued that incarceration is also a reason women leave gangs (O'Neal et al. 2016; Sutton 2017). However, more recent research has disputed such

black-and-white theories of desistance and come up with more salient theories (Deuchar et al. 2020). One study found that motherhood may decrease gang involvement due to the requirements of child care, but it is not the primary reason for desistance (Pyrooz, McGloin, and Decker 2017). Most researchers agree that gang desistance involves different “push” and “pull” factors (Deuchar et al. 2020; Kolb, Palys, and Green 2019; O’Neal et al. 2016; Sutton 2017). Push factors are typically moments in gang life that cause the gang member to look inward and consider an identity change, while pull factors are typically things outside of gang life (Decker et al. 2014). Furthermore, desistance is a non-linear process in which individuals encounter both failure and obstacles (Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule Jr. 2014). Studies have shown that many gang members do not fully disengage as they may still maintain ties to the gang or consider themselves a gang member even though they are no longer active in the gang (Kolb et al. 2019; O’Neal et al. 2016). Most female members are able to exit the gang passively, however, occasionally members must be “jumped out” of the gang, which is a similar process to be initiated into the gang (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Kolb et al. 2019; Sutton 2017). Some of the push factors, which begin to signal an identity change, include motherhood, generational changes in the gang, violence and victimization by male gang members, and incarceration (Deuchar et al. 2020; Kolb et al. 2019; O’Neal et al. 2016; Sutton 2017). Pull factors that motivate women to leave the gang include social services, gainful employment, disillusionment, moving to a different neighborhood, aid from family, and religion (Kolb et al. 2019; O’Neal et al. 2016; Sutton 2017). However, it is important to note that social services are not often used as there is a lack of programming specific to female gang members (Kolb et al. 2019; Peterson and Howell 2013).

Methods

The question guiding this paper seeks to answer how non-scholarly sources can provide ethnographic insight into the lives of female gang members. This paper uses content analysis as the method of data collection. Content analysis can be defined by researcher Patricia Leavy (2011) as, “[T]he systemic study of texts and other cultural products or nonliving data... the researcher does not create or co-create the raw data through surveys, ethnography, or interviews but rather collects preexisting data (pp. 225).” The sample criteria for the data were articles and books published within the last 15 years that included interviews with current or former female Chicano gang members. Data that were excluded were fictional works, works published outside the time frame, works that did not include interviews with female gang members, works that did not include interviews with female Chicano gang members, and non-published works. These criteria guaranteed a diverse, yet grounded set of data. Data was organized and analyzed in a separate document. Key themes that emerged were: entry into gang life; status within the gang; and victimization and desistance.

Results

The data gathered for this paper comes from three different sources. The first source is a biography, *Lady Q* by Reymundo Sanchez and Sonia Rodriguez (2008), which details the life of Sonia Rodriguez as she became the leader of the Almighty Latin Kings and Queens Nation (ALKQN) in Chicago in the 1980s and her subsequent departure from gang-life. The next source was the article, “The Queen of Florencia,” which details how Arlene Rodriguez became the first and only female leader of Florencia 13 in Los Angeles (Quinones 2017).

The last source is an article by Celeste Fremon (2017), which features the story of Claudia Gonzalez as she fell in and out of gang life in California and her aspirations to complete her education. The stories from these three women will subsequently be discussed and analyzed for their ethnographic insights.

Entry Into Gang Life

As evidenced by previous research, gang members often come from abusive and impoverished childhoods. The biography, *Lady Q*, tells the story of Sonia Rodriguez, a female gang member, who was raised by a neglectful and abusive mother in gang-infested neighborhoods of Chicago (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Sonia Rodriguez was molested by multiple different family members throughout her childhood (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). As noted previously, research has shown that female gang members often come from backgrounds of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (Bloom et al. 2003; Deuchar et al. 2020; Hunt and Joe-Laidler; Molidor 1996). Arlene Rodriguez interviewed for *Los Angeles Magazine*, grew up in Los Angeles where her uncles were active gang members and she was shuffled between family members throughout her childhood (Quinones 2017). Claudia Gonzalez, interviewed for *Witness LA*, grew up with a family legacy of gang members, her father spent most of her life in prison for his involvement in a gang (Fremon 2017). Young women from families with intergenerational gang membership are more likely to join a gang (Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020). For Sonia Rodriguez, joining a gang was a way for her emotional needs to be met, as an older respected gang member took her under her wing and gave her the attention she desperately craved from her mother (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). The hardships of living in impoverished neighborhoods and chaotic family environments often make gang membership a normative process, as it can fulfill emotional needs through friendships with other gang members and practical needs, such as protection or earning an income through selling drugs (Bloom et al. 2003; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Peterson and Howell 2013; Sutton 2017). For others, like Claudia Gonzalez, gang membership was what she thought was her future, with family members already in the gang and being arrested for truancy (Fremon 2017). Women who grow up around the gang lifestyle can begin to internalize the norms and attitudes, so that gang membership seems like a logical progression in life (Deuchar et al. 2020; Sutton 2017).

Initiation into the gang is important for determining a woman's role and status. Sonia Rodriguez was jumped in, which involved a 3-minute beating head-to-toe by three other female members, at the same time as her sister (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). At the time, Sonia was 16 and already well-respected in the neighborhood, however, her sister was not and an older female member ordered that her sister be initiated out of the gang (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Claudia Gonzalez was 14 years old when she was jumped in to an all-male gang, which is especially rare (Fremon 2017). Jumping in is one of the most common initiation rituals for a gang, it is typically done as a formality because it shows that fellow gang members respect and trust the prospective member, it also allows for a woman to showcase her toughness and loyalty to the gang (Diaz-Cotto 2006; Sutton 2017). Arlene Rodriguez was only 10 years old when she became a gang member (Quinones 2017). Research has shown that women tend to become gang members at younger ages than men, as well as exit the gang earlier than men (Miller and Brunson 2000; Sutton 2017). It is important to note that there are many different modes of entry into gangs for women,

however, the data collected only show one of the more common modes of entry for Chicano gangs.

Status Within The Gang

Research into female gang members has often depicted women as auxiliary members, sexual objects for male gang members, or tomboys rejecting femininity. Little research has focused on women who make it to the top of the hierarchy in a gang. Sonia Rodriguez climbed the ranks in her gang, which was rare for a woman (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Early on in her career, Sonia Rodriguez was one of the few women invited to assist with hits on rival gang members (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Research has found that due to the patriarchal structure of gangs, male gang members often exclude female members from some gang activities, in addition, female members are less likely to be involved in gun violence (Sutton 2017). As such, for Sonia Rodriguez to be included in hits meant that she was a well-trusted and well-respected member of the gang, despite being a woman. When Sonia turned 18, she was asked by a local gang leader to lead the formation of a new sector of the gang and she eventually became the “Queen of Kings,” through her relationship with the gang's highest leader Tino (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). As the Queen of Kings, Sonia Rodriguez liaised between Tino and other high-ranking gang members, made sure taxes were collected from drug dealers in the gang's territory, and was the arbiter of disagreements between members (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Arlene Rodriguez ascended to her status as Llavero (key-holder) when the previous Llavero was taxing her legitimate real estate business and she complained to the leader of the gang, Arturo Castellanos (Quinones 2017). Fortunately for Arlene Rodriguez, Castellanos had taken a special interest in her when she was a child before he was incarcerated for life (Quinones 2017). While Claudia Gonzalez did not become a leader in her gang, due to her intelligence she was a valuable resource to those in the gang who relied on her to advise them (Fremon 2017). These three narratives go against the literature that women do not have as much agency as men in the gang and do not obtain positions of power in the gang. Although, some research acknowledges that women may have the ability to obtain more status in a gang, however, it tends to be dependent on men (Moloney et al. 2015). In the case of Sonia Rodriguez and Arlene Rodriguez, their status was dependent on their relationships with men.

Victimization and Desistance

Women involved in gangs face unique forms of victimization due to the patriarchal structure of the street. Sonia Rodriguez and her daughter were kidnapped by rivals for several days in order to exact revenge on the ALKQN, however, she and her daughter were released unharmed (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Sonia Rodriguez and her daughter were immediately moved to a different location for their safety (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). However, rival gang members shot through the floor after attempting to break in, injuring one of the gang members serving as Sonia Rodriguez' guard (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Research has shown that female gang members are more likely to be victims of violence by clients and rivals, and women are also more likely to experience unique forms of victimization that include kidnapping and sexual assault or exploitation (Moloney et al. 2015; Sutton 2017). Arlene Rodriguez faced the threat of death for her and her children when a federal agent mentioned her name during a trial against the leader of Florencia 13,

which implied she was an informant, however, she denies being an informant (Quinones 2017). Research has found that gang members are at an increased risk of prematurely dying, mainly due to gun violence (Rima et al. 2020; Loeber et al. 1999). Claudia Gonzalez held her friend as he died due to being stabbed by a rival when she was 12 years old (Fremon 2017). Later, at the age of 20 Claudia Gonzalez had 5 close friends die within the same year (Fremon 2017). Another example of the victimization and traumatization female gang members face. Gang members also experience negative health outcomes regarding their physical health (Rima et al. 2020). Sonia Rodriguez knowingly lived with cervical cancer for years, but she left it untreated due to her chaotic life as a gang member (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Arlene Rodriguez suffered a mini-stroke during her time as a Llavero and went on to suffer a heart attack after she left the gang (Quinones 2017). Furthermore, gang members have higher levels of depression and suicidal thoughts than their non-gang peers, and gang membership only exacerbates their depression and suicidal thoughts (Watkins and Melde 2016). Sonia Rodriguez was 10 years old when she began having suicidal thoughts, and her suicidal thoughts only increased as she grew older (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Claudia Gonzalez suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder due to her time in the gang, she eventually became so depressed that she had to drop out of college (Fremon 2017).

Research into desistance has mainly focused on how pregnancy and motherhood encourage female gang members to leave the gang. However, newer research has disproven this assumption, but desistance among female gang members is under-researched and not well understood. Sonia Rodriguez had a daughter in the middle of her career in the gang, and for the next several years she was a neglectful mother, often leaving her daughter in precarious situations around illicit substances and sexual behavior (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2008). Arlene Rodriguez had her first child when she was 18 and had multiple children by the time she was Llavero (Quinones 2017). These two narratives clearly disprove the notion that motherhood is a driving factor for desistance. Sonia Rodriguez slowly began to back out of gang life by moving away and cutting ties over the course of several years after becoming disillusioned by the violence and greed within her own gang (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2007). Sonia Rodriguez eventually committed to desisting when she faced losing her daughter and time in jail for violating the terms of her probation (Sanchez and Rodriguez 2007). In this case, motherhood play a role in her desistance, but it was in combination with several other factors. Claudia Gonzalez committed to desisting once she was arrested in case of mistaken identity and realized she had the opportunity to continue her education (Fremon 2017). Researchers understand gang desistance as a combination of push factors, such as witnessing violence and disillusionment; and pull factors, such as moving away, social services, and help from family (Kolb et al. 2019). For Sonia Rodriguez, her disillusionment served as a push factor, and moving away from the neighborhood and incarceration served as pull factors. Similarly, Claudia Gonzalez became disillusioned after losing 5 close friends in one year serving as a push factor, and her incarceration and subsequent commitment to education served as pull factors for her to leave the gang. For Arlene Rodriguez, she was forced into desistance due to the threat of death and her physical relocation to the other side of the country (Quinones 2017). Geographical relocation has been shown to be a strong factor in helping women disengage from the gang (Kolb et al. 2019). In the case with all three women, geographical relocation allowed them to commit to desistance.

Conclusion

The data agrees with the literature in regard to the life histories of women who join gangs. All three women included in this study came from areas rife with poverty and gang activity, thus making gang membership and normative process for them. All three women also had intergenerational membership in gangs through parents, siblings, or other relatives. As previously stated, the literature has also acknowledged that intergenerational gang membership is a risk factor for youth (Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Sutton 2017). The three women also came from family environments that were at best neglectful and at worst abusive and unstable. Neglectful and abusive parents or relatives, and dysfunctional families have also been proven to be risk factors for young women who join gangs (Deuchar et al. 2020; Gutierrez-Adams et al. 2020; Harris 1994; Hunt and Joe-Laidler 2001; Sutton 2017). While two of the women from the data were jumped in to their gangs, there was little else on the various other forms of initiation. Due to the limited nature of the data, they cannot be interpreted as a representative sample of female Chicano gang members. Furthermore, the women in this study showed that women are capable of achieving high levels of status within a gang, despite the existing research that women rarely climbed high in the hierarchy of a gang. However, this sample is not representative and each of these women's status was dependent on their relationships with men in the gang. Each of the three did women face unique forms of victimization that are more commonly experienced by female gang members. The women also experienced negative health outcomes due to their membership in a gang, both physical and mental. Furthermore, the three women in this study also proved that motherhood is not necessarily the driving factor for women to disengage from gang life.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to use ethnographic examples of the lives of female gang members in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of female gang members. While the data was carefully selected, it does have limitations. The data cannot be considered a representative sample of female Chicano gang members. The data in this study may not be an accurate reflection of most female gang members, as the media tends to favor sensational stories as opposed to the mundane. As such, the findings of this paper should not be applied broadly and should be understood within the context of this research.

It is clear that female gang members are highly understudied. More importantly, desistance for female gang members is severely understudied. As such, the insights from this paper should be used as further evidence that female gang desistance needs to be researched further. In addition, there is a limited amount of ethnographic research into female gang members. Thus, ethnographic research is crucial in this area. Future research would greatly benefit from focusing on desistance for women in gangs. This research is crucial in order to create policies and programs that adequately serve current female gang members and at risk youth.

Works Cited

Bigalondo, Amaia I. 2013. "Chicano Gangs/Chicana Girls: Surviving the "Wild Barrio.""
Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies 48:1137-6368.

Bloom, Barbara, Barbara Owen, Jill Rosenbaum, and Elizabeth P. Deschenes. 2003. "Focusing

on Girls and Young Women: A Gendered Perspective on Female Delinquency.” *Women & Criminal Justice* 14:117-136.

Decker, Scott H., David C. Pyrooz, and Richard K. Moule Jr. 2014. “Disengagement From Gangs as Role Transitions.” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 24(2):268-283.

Deuchar, Ross, Simon Harding, Robert McLean, and James A. Densely. 2020. “Deficit or Credit? A Comparative, Qualitative Study of Gender Agency and Female Gang Membership in Los Angeles and Glasgow.” *Crime & Delinquency* 66(8):1087-1114)

Díaz-Cotto, Juanita. 2006. “Barrios and Gangs.” pp. 76-97 in *Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice: Voices from El Barrio*. Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press.

Fleisher, Mark S., and Jessie L. Krienert. 2004. “Life-Course Events, Social Networks, and the Emergence of Violence Among Female Gang Members.” *Journal of Community Psychology* 32(5):607-622.

Gutierrez-Adams, Erin, Desdamona Rios, and Kim A. Case. 2020. “Female Gang Members Negotiating Privilege, Power, and Oppression within Family and Gang Life.” *Women & Therapy* 43(3-4):287-308.

Harris, Mary G. 1994. “Cholas, Mexican-American Girls, and Gangs.” *Sex Roles* 30(3/4):289-301.
Hughes, Lorine A., Ekaterina V. Botchkovar, and James F. Short Jr. 2019. ““Bargaining with Patriarchy” and “Bad Girl Femininity”: Relationship and Behaviors among Chicago Girl Gangs, 1959-1962.” *Social Forces* 98(2):493-517.

Hunt, Geoffrey and Karen Joe-Laidler. 2001. “Situations of Violence in the Lives of Girl Gang Members.” *Health Care for Women International* 22:363-384.

Fremon, Celeste. 2017. “The Journey of a Girl Gang Member Turned Justice Activist and Leader,” *Witness LA*, August 14.

Kolb, Abigail F., Ted Palys, and Ashley Green. 2019. “When You’re Out, You’re Not Really Out: Exiting Strategies Among Gang-Affiliated Chicanas.” *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology* 11(2):1-13.

Leavy, Patricia L. 2011. “The Feminist Practice of Content Analysis.” Pp. 222-248 in *Feminist Research Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Loeber, Rolf, Mary DeLamatre, George Tita, Jaqueline Cohen, Magda Stouthamer-Loeber, and David P. Farrington. 1999. “Gun Injury and Mortality: The Delinquent Backgrounds of Juvenile Victims.” *Violence and Victims* 12(4):339-352.

Moloney, Molly, Geoffrey Hunt, and Karen Joe-Laidler. 2015. “Drug Sales, Gender, and Risk: Notions of Risk From the Perspective of Gang-Involved Young Adults.” *Substance Use & Misuse* 50:721-732.

Miller, Jody and Rod K. Brunson. 2000. "Gender Dynamics in Youth Gangs: A Comparison of Males' and Females' Accounts." *Justice Quarterly* 17:419-448.

Molidor, Christian E. 1996. "Female Gang Members: A Profile of Aggression and Victimization." *Social Work* 41(3):251-257.

O'Neal, Eryn N., Scott H. Decker, Richard K. Moule Jr., and David C. Pyrooz. 2016. "Girls, Gangs, and Getting Out: Gender Differences and Similarities in Leaving the Gang." *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 14(1):43-60.

Panfil, Vanessa R. and Dana Peterson. 2015. "Gender, Sexuality, and Gangs Re-envisioning Diversity." in *The Handbook of Gangs*, edited by Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz. New York, NY: Wiley Blackwell.

Peterson, Dana, Dena C. Carson, and Eric Fowler. 2018. "What's Sex (Composition) Got to Do with It? The Importance of Sex Composition of Gangs for Female and Male Members' Offending and Victimization." *Justice Quarterly* 35(6):941-976.

Pyrooz, David C., Jean M. McGloin, and Scott H. Decker. 2017. "Parenthood as a Turning Point in the Life Course for Male and Female Gang Members: A Study of Within-Individual Changes in Gang Membership and Criminal Behavior." *Criminology* 55(4):869-899.

Quinones, Sam. 2017. "The Queen of Florencia," *Los Angeles Magazine*, September 25, pp. 1-14.

Rima, Dzhansarayeva, Malikova Sholpan, Atakhanova Gulzagira, Bisenova Meruert, and Kevin M. Beaver. 2020. "Exploring the Potential Association Between Gang Membership and Health Outcomes in a Longitudinal Sample of Youth and Young Adults." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 66:1-7.

Sanchez, Reymundo, and Sonia Rodriguez. 2008. *Lady Q: The Rise and Fall of a Latin Queen*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press.

Sutton, Tara E. 2017. "The Lives of Female Gang Members: A Review of the Literature." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 37:142-152.

Watkins, Adam M. and Chris Melde. 2016. "Bad Medicine: The Relationship Between Gang Membership, Depression, Self-Esteem, and Suicidal Behavior." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 43(8):1107-1126.

Wesche, Rose and Julia Dickson-Gomez. 2019. "Gender Attitudes, Sexual Risk, Intimate Partner Violence, and Coercive Sex Among Adolescent Gang Members." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 64:648-656.

Bailee Ojogho



Bailee Ojogho is a junior at Loyola Marymount University, she is currently studying Business Marketing with a Sociology minor. Within her classes she has been able to do extensive research on different social groups sparking her passions for helping and understanding people who are a part of a minority. This is what led her to be interested in race and criminal justice.

AMERICAN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM VS PEOPLE OF COLOR

Introduction

In the United States criminal justice system there has been a longstanding history of racial disparity. Racial and ethnic disparities exist in every processing stage in juvenile justice, and they worsen as a child continues deeper into the system (Majumdar 2017). People of color, specifically African Americans are targeted unfairly and face harsher prison sentences than their white counterparts. While the juvenile system should be a place for rehabilitation it has turned towards a focus of punishment. Lives of these minors are altered while being entangled in the lifelong effects of the criminal justice system which creates barriers that not only significantly impact their childhood but impacts them growing and building a stable life in their years to come. African American youth comprise 32% of all juvenile arrests, 36% of juvenile court cases, and 40% of incarcerated youth (Anderson 2015). Further research tells us about the systematic bias that is disproportionately harming black and other youth of color. Conflict theorists understand the social structure is inherently unequal resulting from the differences in power based on age, class, education, gender, income, race, sexuality, and other social factors. For a conflict theorist, culture reinforces issues of "privilege" groups and their status in social categories (Griffiths et al. 2015). This paper will examine the negative effects the justice system has on juvenile delinquents. Using conflict theory, I will assess the American criminal justice system's harsh sentencing laws on black and other groups of color in the juvenile community.

Literature Review

The existence of racial and ethnic disparities is a disturbing feature of the juvenile justice system. Although black youth represented approximately 15 percent of the U.S. population ages 10-17 in 1997, they represented 26 percent of all juvenile arrests, 30 percent of

delinquency referrals to juvenile court, 45 percent of pre adjudication decisions, 33 percent of petitioned delinquency cases, 46 percent of cases judicially waived to adult criminal court, and 40 percent of juveniles in public long-term institutions. The proportion of blacks under the supervision of the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems is more than double their proportion in the general population (National Research Council 2001). Black youth are more than four times as likely to be detained or committed in juvenile facilities as their white peers, according to nationwide data collected in October 2019 and recently released. In 2015, Black youth's incarceration rate was 5.0 times as high as their white peers, an all-time peak (Rovner, 2021). Another measurement of disproportionate minority confinement is to compare the committed population to the population of American youth. Slightly more than 16 percent of American youth are African American. Between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of committed juveniles who were African American grew from 38 percent to 40 percent. Between 2003 and 2013, the percent of committed juveniles who were white fell from 39 percent to 32 percent (Rovner 2016). When it comes to holding children accountable for crimes they commit, race matters (Donald 12).

These statistics include the lives of members of the juvenile system who undergo this real life racial disparity on a daily basis. Today there are numerous stories that solidify that all of the studies and statistics are true but one real life story that caught the attention of many in the media was the case of Cyntoia Brown. In a recent Netflix feature her story was told through a documentary called "Murder to Mercy: The Cyntoia Brown Story." Cyntoia Brown's case follows a complex social and legal path, but her story is common to thousands of young people in the justice system (Birman 2020). In 2004, 16-year-old Cyntoia Brown shot and killed a man who paid her for sex – a position she was forced into by an older man who took advantage of her. Brown never denied shooting the man (in fact, she was the one who called the police the next day), but she claimed it was an act of self-defense because she believed the man was grabbing a gun to shoot her. Brown was charged and convicted of aggravated robbery and first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison (Stevenson, Bottoms, and Burke 2020). Brown's case attracted national attention for a number of reasons. Many felt Brown was unfairly sentenced because shooting the man was self-defense and they needed to acknowledge her long story of sexual abuse. Although what raised a number of issues was juveniles receiving life sentences and many felt Brown's case reflected the legacy of racism in the United States justice system because she was a Black girl. Brown already had a difficult childhood, while she eventually ran away and lived on the street, she was in and out of the juvenile justice system before that. Brown spent 15 years behind bars after receiving her life sentence, and although she was set free it doesn't add to the time lost and unfairness she endured. There are numerous negative outcomes at many levels once racial minorities come into contact with the legal system. Many are stereotyped as criminals. Cyntoia Brown's case illustrates the multifaceted ways in which racism influences minority youth's life experiences as well as their interactions with the legal system. As of 2017, there were nearly 44,000 juveniles locked up in America, and more than two-thirds were Black or Latino (Birman 2020). Many are serving life sentences with and without parole. Like Cyntoia, they all have stories of their own, stories that the law may not be sensitive to (Birman 2020).

Methods

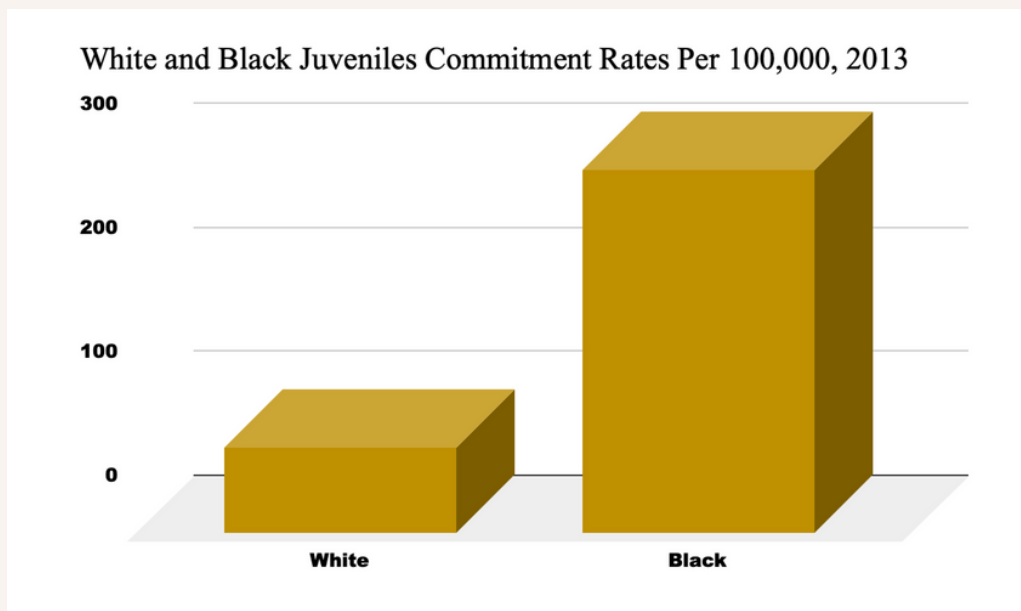
A significant source I collected data from to give me information and statistics on juveniles of different races was The Sentencing Project. The data focuses and reveals the disparities of

current racial commitment. Collected in 2013 from six states (Rhode Island, Connecticut, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Utah, and New Jersey), The Sentencing Project was able to evaluate the number of African American juveniles vs. White juveniles that are committed to secure facilities. While the data represents both White and Black juveniles some limitations remains in the fact that states with low numbers of youth of color have shifts in commitments among youth of color which can have a significant impact on ratios. An example of this is in Connecticut where there is a relatively low rate of African American commitments. The commitments of African American delinquents can still be significant if the White commitments are particularly low. Also this data does not include specifics of exact areas of the state the youth live in, class status, or what the juveniles are being charged for. For this analysis I have some partial bias because I myself am part of the African American community which makes me sympathize and have an emotional upset with the fact that youth in my community are being treated unfairly and differently because their race seems to play a factor in the justice system. However, to remain objective I try to remember that there are several people out there trying to correct the corruption of the justice system and are fighting everyday to get Black youth the justice and fairness they deserve.

Analysis or Data

Racial disparity sparks from the fact that we live in a society that inherits inequalities which help maintain an unequal social structure. When it comes to understanding this view on society, a theory and perspective that sociologist Karl Marx created is called Conflict Theory. Conflict Theory focuses on the way inequalities contribute to social differences and perpetuate differences in power (Griffiths et. al 2015). For a conflict theorist, culture reinforces issues of "privilege" groups and their status in social categories (Griffiths et al. 2015). These "privileged" groups include anyone but groups of color. A history of race-based oppression, intergenerational trauma, and resulting poverty puts racial minorities at risk for becoming victims to stereotypes (Stevenson, Bottoms, and Burke 2020). These stereotypes that influence how people respond and perceive juveniles of color are often the reason for hate crimes. Hate crimes are attacks based on a person's race, religion, or other characteristics (Griffiths et al. 2015). Eighty-one percent of the juvenile victims of hate crimes were ages 12 to 17 (NIBRS 1997). Daily examples of this are police officers taking more action against black men because they are perceived to be thugs and drug dealers. Similarly, in the Cyntoia Brown case, she was tried as an adult and labeled a teen prostitute because the stereotype of girls in a minority is they are deviant and wild, leaving them more likely to be tried in adult court rather than juvenile court. These stereotypes however don't transfer over to those our society sees as top tier, exclusive, and a non racial minority. The power elite, a small group of wealthy and influential people at the top of society who hold the power and resources (Mills 1956). I felt this was important to share and relate to juveniles who are a part of groups of color because the power elite shows how our society is stacked in favor based on wealth and privilege. Black and other groups of colored juveniles' lives get negatively affected and changed every day because many don't live this top tier lifestyle. Many have financial issues or come from hard family backgrounds and don't have the privilege to live or grow up in the best atmosphere. Instead of getting help and support they get hate and harsh jail times. The sad part is these power elites created so much

manipulation to stay on top and have so much privilege that even if they commit a crime the odds of them suffering are slim to none. Thus leading me into the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system is an organization that exists to enforce a legal code (Griffiths et. al 2015). It's made up of the police, the courts, and the corrections system. The criminal justice system is designed to deliver "justice for all." This means protecting the innocent, convicting criminals, and providing a fair justice process to help keep order across the country (Goodwin University 2020). The question on the table is what groups get special accommodations when it comes to providing this fair justice. As we saw above, power and status often get you a pass within the system but as we've read throughout this paper, the color of your skin and the stereotypes that surround you often bring you deeper and into the negative aspects of this system. The criminal justice system is a significant part of our society, they are supposed to restore justice and work to make things better, right, and fair but questions consistently surround why this duty changes when a Black or person of color is the person who deserves those rights.



This graph shows the commitment rates of both White and Black juveniles. As of 2013, Black juveniles were more than four times as likely to be committed as White juveniles. The commitment rate for Whites is 69 per 100,000 while for Black juveniles it was 294 per 100,000. While this graph doesn't show exactly what harsh sentences these juveniles may be getting, it clearly shows which groups are targeted more for being committed as well as the racial disparities. In this analysis hate crimes, social elite, and the flaws of the criminal justice have been explained and this graph and the statistics researched speak for themselves furthering those concepts. 69 and 294 are very substantial numbers to each other, showing that there is a pure racial disparity between whites and groups of color.

Conclusion

In closing, the negative effects and harsh sentencing laws the juvenile justice system has on black and other groups of color are significantly important. Looking at conflict theory along with the concepts of hate crimes, the power elite, and the criminal justice system, they all gave a perspective as to why our society operates in a specific way. While reading the

analysis, the power of stereotypes, status, and unfairness our society has created is very transparent. The criminal justice system isn't getting better and neither is our society when it comes to the negative effects and harsh sentencing Black and other groups of color go through. While in reality these groups of colored people deserve just as much justice and help as Whites, they are still stereotyped being seen as criminals and wild and unworthy of rehabilitation, they are judged based off the status they were born into and their past not what they could grow up to be, and the saddest part is they are treated with unfairness by this justice system just for the color of their skin. Juveniles are still children which needs to be remembered, they need help and guidance, not an up to life sentence in a cell. These negative effects and harsh sentences shape their lives, killing their potential and affecting the better people they could be. The juvenile justice needs to change their perspective on colored groups but more specifically so does our society.

References

Birman, Dan. "Reflecting on the Case of Cyntoia Brown - Talking with the Director of 'Murder to Mercy'." USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, 29 May 2020, <https://annenberg.usc.edu/news/research-and-impact/reflecting-case-cyntoia-brown-talking-director-murder-mercy>.

Crimes Against Children Research Center - Unh.edu.
https://www.unh.edu/ccrc/general/factsheet_overall.html.

Donald, Brooke, and Brooke Donald. "Stanford Psychologists Examine How Race Affects Juvenile Sentencing." Stanford University, 24 May 2012, <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2012/may/race-juvenile-offenders-052412.html>.

Goodwin University Goodwin University is a nonprofit institution of higher education and is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE). "The Importance of the Criminal Justice System." Goodwin University, 28 Dec. 2020, <https://www.goodwin.edu/enews/importance-of-the-criminal-justice-system/>.

"The Importance of the Criminal Justice System." Goodwin University, 28 Dec. 2020, <https://www.goodwin.edu/enews/importance-of-the-criminal-justice-system/>.

McCord, Joan. Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice. National Acad. Press, 2001, <https://books.nap.edu/read/9747/chapter/8>.

Nwoko, Sobem. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities across the Juvenile Justice System." Racial and Ethnic Disparities across the Juvenile Justice System, <https://www.ebpsociety.org/blog/education/451-racial-and-ethnic-disparities-across-the>.

Rovner, Josh. "Black Disparities in Youth Incarceration." The Sentencing Project, 15 July 2021, https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-disparities-youth-incarceration/?mc_cid=e8470a08ad&mc_eid=bc3eefebb8.

Stevenson, Margaret C, et al. "Cyntoia Brown and the Legacy of Racism for Children in the Legal System." OUPblog, 7 Aug. 2020, <https://blog.oup.com/2020/08/cyntoia-brown-and-the-legacy-of-racism-for-children-in-the-legal-system/>.

Gianna Segura



I'm a sophomore sociology major from Long Island, New York. Exploring areas in sociology has highlighted apparent issues in systems that are meant to help people who have been continuously held back by the circle of poverty. I am currently working to revamp The Sociology Society, a club at LMU where students with similar interests can come together and have complex conversations as well as make a hands-on difference through service work. I'm so lucky to have had the opportunity to share my research and hope to continue searching for how the foster care system can be improved.

PREVENTING THE FOSTER CARE-TO-PRISON SYSTEM PIPELINE

Many are familiar with the concept of the “school-to-prison” pipeline which created advocacy for many of the problems in the schooling system. More recently, the “foster care-to-prison” pipeline has been introduced. This concept brings to light the severe lack of support foster youth receive which has been proven to funnel this demographic into a path toward the criminal justice system. This problem is so extreme that within two years of leaving the foster care system, one-quarter of youth will have had involvement with the criminal justice system (Strangler 2013). There are hundreds of thousands of kids in the United States foster care system, which includes group homes, wards, or private foster homes. Minors are put into these placements which are meant to provide a safe environment for youth who cannot live with their families but due to a system that lacks proper training and resources, youth in foster care are disproportionately at risk of incarceration. Studies have shown that in a child’s formative years, a positive sense of community promotes aspects such as learning and a feeling of belonging (Shonkoff 2004). Advocates in favor of incarceration believe it scares youth away from committing crimes and sets them on the right path; however, a prison study found that the rate at which juveniles were arrested again after serving time was 84% within five years (The Council of State Justice Center 2014). Since the criminal justice system isn’t an adequate solution to helping foster youth, it is important to look at options that will. It is important to converse with foster youth and learn through speaking with them, rather than making assumptions that may do more harm than good. This research project will explore factors that contribute to the foster care-to-prison pipeline and will also discover the needs of foster youth through surveying. As an individual who eventually wants to become a foster parent, researching this topic is very important to me as well as raising awareness about problems in the system. I will be aiming to answer the main question, what measures could be put in place in the foster care system to

prevent frequent placements and the path to the criminal justice system? These structures include more extensive training for foster parents, implementation of non-discriminatory policies, and reallocation of where the money goes in the foster care system.

In the United States, there is 437,500 youth in the foster care system (Administration for Children & Families 2017). Foster care is a system that is meant to provide proper protective care to youth whose birth families may not be able to care for them. Contrary to popular belief, most children in foster care aren't put into the system because of abuse, most of the time it's because of neglect due to extreme poverty (Pac 2017). However, the government spends ten times more money funding foster parents than providing resources to impoverished families to keep them together (Brico 2019). Using this money for families who are in need can be much more successful than feeding money to parents to take care of kids who are not theirs instead of giving it to families that want to stay together. When children stay with their original families, this leads to a sense of community which many people in foster care don't have due to the constant moving. Keeping non-abusive families together prevents severe distress and psychological issues. Strong familial relationships are crucial to childhood development which is why it's important to place youth in healthy living situations. Research has found that youth with improved community life strengths were at significantly lower risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system (Shonkoff 2004). For youth, having a stable and loving family is crucial to childhood development which contributes to the reason why children in foster care face a disproportionate risk of incarceration.

Over 20,000 youth age out of the foster care system every year (AFCARS 2020). Aging out of foster care happens both when youth can never be placed back with their original family and also when they can not find a forever family. Foster youth are moved from placement to placement, decreasing the likelihood of community life strengths which put them more at risk of incarceration. Repeated foster placements are proven to increase the risk of incarceration, with research showing that 90% of children with five or more foster placements end up in the justice system (Krinsky 2010). To disrupt this cycle, it's important to recognize problems in the foster care system. Foster parents aren't adequately trained to deal with a child's emotional and educational needs, this is a problem that inhibits community life strengths in youth (Stone 2017). It's not uncommon for foster parents to call the police on youth for minor infractions because they are not trained to properly deal with minor infractions, this leads to too many foster kids having a record before they turn 18. Jarel Melendez, an advocate for foster care who has gone through the system and works at Lawyers For Children said, "Behaviors for which group home staff call police include verbal arguments, physical fights, throwing things, running away, smoking marijuana or even masturbation, according to advocates" (Anspach 2018). Improper training also contributes to why foster youth may get moved from placement to placement. It's also often reported that foster parents stop providing services due to a lack of support from child welfare agencies (Lee 2020). Foster youth are also targeted at higher rates by sex traffickers, it is projected that over 60% of sex trafficking victims have been in the foster care system (Voices For Children 2022). This leads to higher rates of incarceration due to the illegality of sex work. Another factor that contributes to higher rates of incarceration for foster youth is when caregivers call the police on their foster kids, a common phenomenon that leads to foster kids getting into legal trouble for minor infractions.

Black youth are disproportionately affected by the foster care system since black families are more likely to be reported than their white counterparts (Schoenherr 2016). Because of racial prejudices, black youth are two times more likely to be placed in the system. One solution to improve the inequalities in the foster care system has been taking place in Nassau County, New York, and surrounds the concept of “blind removals”. A blind removal is when welfare professionals study a family to observe whether or not a child should be removed from their parents. The aspect that makes it “blind” is that the race of the family is hidden, which prevents biases. After blind removals were implemented, the percentage of black children removed from their homes went down from 55.5% to 29% (Pryce 2018). Expanding upon this practice could greatly change racial bias in the foster care system.

The biggest takeaways I have found from reviewing the literature on foster care are certain solutions that may be worth focusing on. These include reallocating how money in foster care is distributed and implementing blind removals. Reallocating how money is distributed in foster care can give impoverished families the money they need to stay together, limiting the number of children in foster care. Blind removals also limit the number of children in foster care by preventing racial biases that cause more black children to be removed from their families. Limiting the number of children who get placed into the foster care system can prevent feelings of hopelessness and a lack of community which pave the path to incarceration. A strategy that could help prevent children already in the system from falling on the path to involvement with the criminal justice system includes better training for foster parents. What I’ve found from many of these studies is that most of them consider quantitative research and they provide statistics on the effects of foster care. Still, few of them gather qualitative data from people who have been through the system or have worked in the system. This data can greatly help produce findings that align with the interests of foster youth rather than what the researcher feels is the best approach.

Fostered youth is one of the most vulnerable groups among Americans. To them, it may be easy to feel susceptible to manipulation due to a lack of support. The foster care system is failing them, and to correct it, it’s important to look at the system and all of its issues on a macro level. Many people are working in the system and fixing it on smaller, micro levels, and these individuals would be the most important to learn from in fixing the existing issues. Using research in fields such as sociology, social work, and psychology I am eager to find and implement a plan to help put fostered youth on a different trajectory.

References

Anspach, Rachel. “The Foster Care to Prison Pipeline Impacts America's Most Vulnerable Youth.” *Teen Vogue*, 25 May 2018, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-foster-care-to-prison-pipeline-what-it-is-and-how-itworks>.

Brico, Elizabeth. “The Government Spends 10 Times More on Foster Care and Adoption than Reuniting Families.” *Talk Poverty*, 23 August 2019, <https://talkpoverty.org/2019/08/23/government-more-foster-adoption-reuniting/>.

“Foster Care and Human Trafficking.” *Voices for Children | CASA Program, Voices For Children*, 29 Jan. 2022, www.speakupnow.org/foster-care-and-human-trafficking/.

Krinsky, Miriam Aroni. "Disrupting the Pathway from Foster Care to the Justice System-a Former Prosecutor's Perspectives on Reform." *Family Court Review*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2010, pp. 322–337., doi:10.1111/j.1744-1617.2010.01313.x.

Lee, Mike. "A Place to Call Home: Improving Foster Care and Adoption Policy to Give More Children a Stable Family." *A Place to Call Home: Improving Foster Care and Adoption Policy to Give More Children a Stable Family - United States Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress Joint Economic Committee*, 9 Sept. 2020, www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/analysis?ContentRecord_id=92090252-D871-4829-B697-51E671D6C1E0.

Lune, Howard, and Bruce L. Berg. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd, 2018.

Measuring and Using Juvenile Recidivism Data to Inform Policy Practice, and Resource Allocation. The Council of State Governments Justice Center, July 2014, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Measuring-and-Using-Juvenile-Recidivism-Data-to-Inform-Policy-Practice-and-Resource-Allocation.pdf>.

"Number of Children in Foster Care Continues to Increase." Administration for Children & Families, 30 Nov. 2017, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/archive/media/press/2017/number-children-foster-care-continues-increase>.

Pac, Jessica, et al. "Poverty among Foster Children: Estimates Using the Supplemental Poverty Measure." *Social Service Review*, vol. 91, no. 1, 2017, pp. 8–40., <https://doi.org/10.1086/691148>.

Pryce, Jessica, et al. "A Case Study in Public Child Welfare: County-Level Practices That Address Racial Disparity in Foster Care Placement." *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2018, pp. 35–59., <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2018.1467354>.

Schoenherr, Neil. "1 In 3 Children Investigated for Abuse/Neglect by 18 - the Source - Washington University in St. Louis." *The Source*, 15 Apr. 2016, <https://source.wustl.edu/2016/12/one-third-us-children-reported-investigated-child-abuse-neglect-age-18/>.

Shonkoff, Jack P. "Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships." National Scientific Council On The Developing Child, 2009.

Stone, Deb. "U.S. Foster Care: A Flawed Solution That Leads to Long-Term Problems?" *STIR Journal*, 8 May 2017, <http://www.stirjournal.com/2014/05/12/u-s-foster-care-a-flawed-solution-that-leads-to-more-long-term-problems/>.

Strangler, Gary J. "Toolkit For Jim Casey Youth Initiative Sites." *Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Second Edition*, 2013, p. 4.

The AFCARS Report. Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), 23 June 2020, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcarsreport27.pdf>.

Summersett Williams, Faith, et al. "Can the Development of Protective Factors Help Disrupt the Foster Care-to-Prison Pipeline? an Examination of the Association between Justice System Involvement and the Development of Youth Protective Factors." *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2019, pp. 223–250., <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2019.1696912>.

Riley Broughton



Riley Broughton is a freshman Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies double major from Sammamish, WA. In her free time, Riley participates in community service efforts within the Ignations Service Organization and enjoys spending time with friends and family as well as doing a variety of art forms. Riley hopes to eventually attend graduate school and become involved with educational and advocacy efforts to enact change and promote inclusion amongst underrepresented communities.

MENTAL HEALTH IN LGBTQ+ YOUTH: THE DISPARITIES WITHIN MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND TREATMENT FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

Abstract

The community of LGBTQ+ youth includes individuals at or below the age of 24 who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or others. Due to the typical factors that cause mental health issues among all people combined with the added minority stress based on sexual identity, LGBTQ+ youth face greater levels of mental health issues and disparities in accessing treatment. This paper aims to evaluate past research as well as incorporate new data that describes the story of mental health issues within the United States. Overall, research is critical in understanding the disparities within mental health causes and treatment that LGBTQ+ youth experience and ensuring a better future for all.

Key Words: LGBTQ+, Youth, Mental Health, Minority Stress

Introduction

Understanding how health disparities affect different communities within society has been a long-term goal of many sociologists and public health officials. Research suggests that LGBTQ+ youth are statistically more susceptible to mental health issues compared to cisgender and/or heterosexual youth. LGBTQ+ youth include people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more at or under 24 years of age. The correlation between LGBTQ+ youth and mental health disorders is complex and has been studied thoroughly over the last few years. The cause of this problem can be attributed to both added minority stress and lack of access to inclusive healthcare. It is critical to evaluate the sources and symptoms of this issue in order to fully grasp its density and begin the necessary steps to ensure the wellbeing and safety of LGBTQ+ youth.

Past Research

In the past few years there has been a variety of research conducted to assess the mental health epidemic among LGBTQ+ youth. Recent studies show that mental health issues among young LGBTQ+ people have been skyrocketing; in the last year, 45% of LGBTQ youth have reported that they seriously considered attempting suicide (Paley 2022). These findings, in comparison to the rate of suicidal thoughts among young people not identifying as LGBTQ+ are astonishingly high. Increased rates of anxiety and depression continue to plague this community, leading researchers to question what the cause may be.

LGBTQ+ Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic

As a result of large-scale disasters in the United States, populations experience increased levels of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse. Therefore, it comes to no surprise that the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) caused a major spike in mental health issues. However, by evaluating the methods used to address psychological symptoms of global disaster, international research suggests predetermined policy and practice around mental health care is created on the basis of heteronormativity and cisnormativity. This reality causes the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals to be systemically ignored and mistreated. By analyzing the reported levels of mental health issues within surveys taken by 1,223 teens during the pandemic, research reported that during the pandemic, LGBTQ+ youth had a greater likelihood of experiencing mental health issues, trauma, and economic instability (Washburn, et al. 2022). Surveys administered during this time also reveal a rise in stress levels, anxiety, and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although all populations of youth are affected by this, some groups are more disadvantaged than others. With the lack of research put into LGBTQ+ mental health treatment and understanding, LGBTQ+ youth are less likely to get care suitable for their unique identities and experiences. Coupled with the added minority stress of identifying as LGBTQ+ youth in a heteronormative and cisgendered society, the LGBTQ+ community experiences higher levels of mental health abuses that go untreated. The data within this study is majorly important for its purpose of showing the disparities of mental health treatment during times of public disaster. However, this study only focuses on impoverished and foster LGBTQ+ youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore this data cannot be utilized to determine the overall issues among LGBTQ+ youth mental health.

LGBTQ+ Mental Health Post-Trump Presidency

Beyond the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic, further research has been done to analyze the increase of bullying among LGBTQ+ youth as a result of Donald Trump's presidency and the negative mental health side effects that accompany this harassment. According to research conducted in public high schools in 2018, the amount of generalized bullying based on attributes such as race/ethnicity, immigrant status, and sexual orientation increased greatly (Kosciw et al., 2018). After surveying approximately 30,000 LGBTQ+ youth across public high schools in the U.S., research revealed that school environments remain hostile for many LGBTQ+ students, most likely contributing to the rise of minority-based stress levels (Meyer, 2003). These rates were especially high among public schools in conservative leaning districts. As the influence of Donald Trump's presidency grew, sociologists have reviewed that 35-60% of LGBTQ+ students reported feeling unsafe within their school environment

(GLSEN). This data, coupled with increased levels of verbal, physical, electronic, and sexual harassment identify the correlation between the values spread during Trump's presidency and the discrimination that LGBTQ+ youth face. With increased bullying among LGBTQ+ students, rates of psychological distress have raised, causing individuals to feel unsafe and unsupported at school and within their community. This research is necessary in evaluating the leading causes of LGBTQ+ mental health disparities yet, it only describes students in public high school, failing to provide adequate information on LGBTQ+ youth beyond this category.

With the combination of research conducted in the past, this paper will help to highlight the possible causes of higher rates of mental health issues among LGBTQ+ youth and evaluate possible solutions. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the relationship between individuals at or below 24 years of age, their identified sexual orientation, and history of mental health issues. In doing so, it is possible to determine how a multitude of factors governed by the sexual orientation of young people can cause increased risk to mental health issues. This research is critical to understanding and addressing possible solutions within the care of LGBTQ+ youth.

Methodology and Quantitative Analysis

The data for this study comes from the 2018 United States General Social Survey (GSS). To evaluate the population of youth the samples are limited to respondents at or below 24 years old. After letting go of cases with missing data, the total sample size consists of around 1,372 individuals.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, self-reported mental health condition, is an ordinal measurement based on the following question: "How many days have you experienced poor mental health in the last 30 days?". The answers range on a scale from "0 days" to "30 days" with (1=1 day, 2=2 days....30=30 days). The mean number of days with poor mental health is 5.17 days with a standard deviation of approximately 8.35 days. Approximately 44% of youth responded that they have had 0 days of poor mental health in the past 30 days; about 41.6% reported having 1-12 days of poor mental health and 6.2% fell in the middle range recording 14 to 18 days of poor mental health. Lastly, approximately 8% recorded having 25 or 30 days of poor mental health in the past 30 days. This data provides a general scope of the mental health issues and need for treatment within the U.S. youth population. However, it fails to evaluate the possible causes and disparities within mental health problems and treatments.

Independent Variable

The key independent variable present in this study is sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is defined as a person's identity in relation to the gender or genders to which they are sexually attracted. Within this study, the categories of sexual orientation are broken up into 3 parts based on the question: "what is your sexual orientation? (1=gay, lesbian or homosexual, 2=bisexual, 3=heterosexual or straight)". The second independent variable that is taken into account is the age of respondents. When the variable of age is recoded to represent the population of individuals at or under the age of 24 years-old—the determined category of youth defined by United Nations—it is possible to isolate the amount of youth who have been treated for a mental health concern at some point in their life. When this

factor is applied to the question of sexual orientation, the percentages of LGBTQ+ youth and heterosexual youth can be determined. Approximately 3% of respondents are gay, lesbian, or homosexual; 8% are bisexual; and approximately 88% are heterosexual or straight. This data does not account for those who declined to answer or who answered “do not know”.

Results

The purpose of these independent variables when paired together and compared to the dependent variable, mental health treatment, is to show the relationship between sexual orientation and mental health issues amongst LGBTQ+ youth. When the variables of sexual orientation among youth are evaluated within cross-tabs for mental health treatment received, the results are statistically significant. For young people identifying as LGBTQ+, approximately 5% reported that they had experienced poor mental health for all of the last 30 days. On the other hand, approximately 4% of heterosexual youth reported that they have experienced poor mental health every day in the last 30 days.

These results may seem surprisingly close considering the additional research that has proven higher rates of poor mental health within LGBTQ+ youth. However, it is important to note that the percentage of youth respondents in this study that identify as homosexual is only 3.7% and those identifying as bisexual is only 8%. However, in recent years surveys suggest that the number of youths coming out as identifying as LGBTQ+ is increasing to approximately 7-9% of the youth population. Therefore, research is still limited in understanding the causes and disparities around mental health within LGBTQ+ youth. Realistically, this study could be improved by changing the question asked to respondents. Instead of asking “how many days have you experienced poor mental health in the last 30 days?” a more suitable question may be “have you ever experienced one or more mental health issues?”. In changing the question, there is more possibility for accurate answers that reflect on life as a whole instead of just a short month period. Additionally, future research could focus on the suitability or accessibility of mental health care to determine the disparities within access to productive mental health treatment for LGBTQ+ youth. This research could be critical in determining new forms of treatment and care to address the unique identities and experiences of LGBTQ+ youth within healthcare at large.

Conclusion

Overall, data on the mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ youth is still grossly under-researched. However, it is clear through a multitude of surveys and evaluations that the many causes of mental health issues combined with the added minority stress of being LGBTQ+ causes increased levels of poor mental health and lack of adequate care. Further research will be important in determining the multitude of factors that go into this issue and presenting new solutions to address it. This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between individuals under the age of 24, their sexual orientation, and recent state of mental health. Although more research must still be done, this analysis allows the opportunity to determine how some of the factors governed by the sexual orientation of young people can cause increased risk to mental health issues. Therefore, it shows the need for attention to be placed towards the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth and how to work towards building a safer and more equitable future.

References

Gorse, Michael. 2022. "Risk and Protective Factors to LGBTQ+ Youth Suicide: A Review of the Literature: C & A." *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 39(1):17-28 (<http://electra.lmu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/risk-protective-factors-lgbtq-youth-suicide/docview/2626113434/se-2>). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00710-3>.

Hobaica, S. et al. 2021. "Bullying in Schools and LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health: Relations with Voting for Trump". Retrieved (osf.io/s2q4w).

Jones, Tiffany, Jennifer Power, Adam O. Hill, Nathan Despott, Marina Carman, Timothy W. Jones, Joel Anderson and Adam Bourne. 2022. "Religious Conversion Practices and LGBTQA + Youth." *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 19(3):1155-1164 (<http://electra.lmu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/religious-conversion-practices-lgbtqa-youth/docview/2713863101/se-2>). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-021-00615-5>.

Paley, Amit. n.d. "2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health." The Trevor Project. Retrieved November 29, 2022 (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>).

Washburn, Micki, Miao Yu, Catherine LaBrenz and Ashley N. Palmer. 2022. "The Impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ Foster Youth Alumni." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 133:1 (<http://electra.lmu.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/impacts-covid-19-on-lgbtq-foster-youth-alumni/docview/2726059674/se-2>). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105866>

Grace Bolander



Grace is a junior sociology major and public relations and international relations minor. One of her biggest goals is to make a difference in other people's lives, which drove her initial interest in studying sociology. Through her classes, Grace has expanded her knowledge of various issues happening within her community. She wrote this essay to dive deeper into the overlap between inequalities in housing and health issues. Her goal was to offer solutions to the current problems so many people face, and by publishing this paper, Grace hopes that readers realize the importance and necessity for change.

HOW INEQUALITIES IN HOUSING AFFECTS HEALTH ISSUES

Where someone grows up and what opportunities they have available to them impacts their health. Inequalities in housing and health issues are correlated because there is a lack of nearby affordable health care and an increase in environmental issues that affect community members' health. The dependent variables in the research presented will be the health issues that come as a result of the inequalities within housing, or the independent variables. Health issues are defined as a risk to containing disease. Inequalities within housing are defined as disparities in the quality of housing as a result of economic inequality. The following question will be answered in the paper: does housing instability among low-income communities lead to high rates of disease?

Literature Review

Social Determinants of Health

The articles "Health Inequities, Social Determinants, and Intersectionality" and "The Solid Facts: Social Determinants of Health" discuss the social determinants of health that explain why this research is important for a sociological study. One of the articles started off examining social gradient, which is when people do not have the economic status to see a doctor, and a person's longevity declines the longer they are unable to visit a hospital. When people live in low-income housing, they usually deal with a lot of stress trying to make ends meet, providing for their family, and so much more. Stress produces the chemical cortisol which can end up affecting the heart and immune system, and this can lead to infection, diabetes, high cholesterol, etc. (Wilkinson et al., 1998, p. 10-11).

When children grow up in poor housing, their parents usually deal with a lot of financial problems as well, so they may receive a lack of emotional support. One of the articles states that they "are observable at birth, particularly pronounced when prenatal care is

unavailable, when the importance of care is not understood fully, and when young children are not exposed to the cognitive and social-emotional stimulation needed to thrive” (Lopez et al., 2016, p. 2). In turn, this threatens a child’s growth through their cardiovascular system, respiratory system, kidneys, etc. (Wilkinson et al., p. 12-13). In addition, a child who experiences social exclusion can end up having depression, premature death, and addiction (Ibid, p. 14-15). Lastly, because there is not enough healthy food available for those that live in low-income housing, and it is more costly to purchase, poor nutrition can lead to mental exhaustion and depression (p. 24-25).

There are many ways to improve these current conditions. First and foremost, there needs to be support groups available for parents dealing with a lot of stress. Also, increasing parents’ knowledge of their child’s emotional needs through emotional and practical resources can help improve health conditions. Children feeling socially excluded should have free therapy available to them too. Finally, there needs to be an adequate food supply to better feed people in low-income housing.

Genetic Determinism

Dr. Bruce Lipton created the theory of genetic determinism, or the idea that our thoughts are our environments for cells sending messages. He states that our perception controls our behavior, so our thoughts can change the chemistry of our blood (Cancer Wisdom TV, 2022). He provides data that shows that “90% or more of disease is actually due to a lifestyle and belief and behavior” (Ibid, 7:12). Genetic determinism is crucial when discussing inequalities in housing because someone’s perception of their environment can have a large influence on their mood and daily life. Therefore, if someone lives in an unstable household, they are more likely to act out or feel differently than if they lived in a stable household, which could also have an impact on their mental health. Another point Dr. Lipton made was when people feel stressed out, they are more likely to get sick because their immune system becomes weak. Additionally, since the subconscious mind is more powerful than the conscious mind, self-worth is necessary for people that are more vulnerable to negative thoughts because they are more susceptible to depression. For these reasons, it is important to be in a good mental state to stabilize one’s health.

Genetic determinism is similar to the social determinants of health since its emphasis is on mental health affecting physical health. People that live in low-income housing cannot afford resources to help them. Also, many people are unaware of Dr. Lipton’s genetic determinism theory, which they can implement in their life. If more people knew about how their thoughts affect their health, there could be a decrease in health issues. This ideology relates to everyone, but it can be most harmful to those living in low-income housing since they experience a large amount of stress. Thus, spreading the word about Dr. Lipton’s theory and creating more programs to help families deal with stress at home can help improve health conditions.

Redlining

In the article, “Associations Between Historical Redlining and Present-Day Heat Vulnerability Housing and Land Cover Characteristics in Philadelphia, PA,” redlining is defined as “a historical form of institutional racism that contributes to present-day racial residential segregation,” and it lines out the regions that minorities live in as “dangerous” (Schinasi et al., 2022, p. 135). For background, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is one of the most

segregated cities in America, and the city has had a heat issue which has led to many deaths. In addition, African Americans have been placed in unequal housing and end up having asthma, are at a higher risk of mortality, and diagnosed with cancer at a later stage (Ibid, p. 135). Housing has had a disinvestment in the environmental infrastructure as well.

The authors conducted a study using virtual images from 2019 to observe homes in low-income neighborhoods to see what environmental resources were available. The research revealed that “70.2% of the properties had low or no mature tree canopy cover” (p. 138). Also, the “percentages of properties with heat vulnerability characteristics [which include housing with dark and flat roofs, low or no mature tree canopy, and no immature street trees] increased as levels of present-day racialized socioeconomic segregation increased” (p. 139). Hence, people living in these areas are not given enough shade and safety from the sun, which results in many health issues. Climate change makes the current issue even worse for low-income communities as well. Therefore, there needs to be legislation put into place to make sure that Philadelphia has safe housing.

Racial Covenants

Racial exclusion in Bay Area housing is discussed in the article, “Roots, Race, & Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area.” The main issue with racial covenants is when people of color want to move into an area with better resources, they are unable to because white people have the most control over the area and are racially motivated to keep the neighborhoods white. The article states that racial exclusion in housing is “a systemic process fundamentally tied to the control of land and the power to decide who is able to call a place home” (Moore et al., 2019, p. 16). The Bay Area has had a history of racial discrimination with mob violence in the late 1880s to remove Chinese Americans from the Bay Area and many anti-black threats being carried out. The land that was once conquered and overtaken by white people has continued to have the same structure to this day.

According to Moore et al., “Bay Area cities lead the country in creating zoning regulations motivated by racial exclusion,” and the foundation of many cities had racial covenants starting with Daly City (Ibid, p. 29). For example, after the *Shelley v. Kraemer* case, sellers continued to bar African Americans from purchasing property by requiring them to be members of the community association (which was mainly made up of white real estate developers). In addition, policies through the 1950s stated that African Americans could only live in public housing where other African Americans lived. There was an informal quota system that put them at a disadvantage, and overcrowding began in low-income housing. Much of the housing was poorly made and on “landfill sites near railroads and industrial facilities along the waterfront, exposing residents to environmental and safety hazards,” which made people sick (p. 39). The article states, “A person’s zip code is one of the best predictors of life expectancy” (p. 60).

Today, this is still happening in Santa Clara. In 2016, Mexican Americans were discriminated against by an apartment building and told that they were not allowed to live there because of their race (p. 61). Sellers are not allowed to discriminate against a potential buyer, and it has been illegal for over 50 years. Even though the Bay Area praises themselves for diversity, there still are inequalities in housing. It is necessary that sellers are inclusive of all people so that minorities can have better opportunities for themselves and their family.

There needs to be more affordable housing so that those that come from a low-income background do not have to experience great health risks. Research conducted on both ends of the country shows how there are just as many inequalities in housing nationwide.

Conclusion

The lack of stable, safe, and secure housing leads to declining health outcomes within low-income communities. If the water is not clean or the air is polluted, people living in low-income housing are already at a higher risk of illness. Racial and ethnic minorities also have less access to health options because they tend to be in the lower-income bracket. Affordable health care is therefore necessary. Additionally, there needs to be an improvement in housing conditions since it greatly influences these community members' health. Providing resources like support groups, therapy, a more adequate food supply, and knowledge of genetic determinism can help in improving current health issues. Overall, there needs to be legislation put into place to protect people's rights, have resources available to people living in low-income housing, and a removal of healthcare barriers that could prevent people who need treatment from being able to receive it.

References

Cancer Wisdom TV. (2022, January 14). Bruce H. Lipton, Ph.D: Our Genes Don't Make Us Sick – Epigenetics [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrePOrTLRcw>.

Lopez, N. and V. L. Gadsden. (2016). Health Inequities, Social Determinants, and Intersectionality. National Academy of Medicine.

Moore, E., Montojo, N., & Mauri, N. (2019). Roots, Race, & Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area. Haas Institute. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edssch&AN=edssch.oai%3aescholarship.org%2far%3a%2f13030%2fqt2j08r197&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Schinasi, L. H., Kanungo, C., Christman, Z., Barber, S., Tabb, L., & Headen, I. (2022). Associations Between Historical Redlining and Present-Day Heat Vulnerability Housing and Land Cover Characteristics in Philadelphia, PA. *Journal of Urban Health : Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 99(1), 134–145. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-021-00602-6>.

Wilkinson, R. and Marmot, M. (1998). *The Solid Facts: Social Determinants of Health*. World Health Organization.

Isabella Chhina



Isabella Chhina is a psychology major and sociology minor from Berkeley, California. After undergrad, Isabella plans on obtaining a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology with a focus on helping communities of color. During her time at LMU, Isabella has been involved with the Academic Community of Excellence, Belles Service Organization, and works at a research lab on campus.

STEREOTYPES, STANDARDS OF BEAUTY, AND WHITENESS IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A FORM OF COVERT RACISM

Abstract

This paper focuses on social media's effect on racism. There is a specific focus on analyzing stereotypes within social media, because it is as a main way that racial ideas are expressed throughout different apps and platforms. This analysis of stereotypes and other methods of oppression within the media will allow for an understanding of how racism is being displayed in the age of the social. It will also reveal the role that power dynamics have on technology, and how privilege and social hierarchies do not disappear when going online. Furthermore, the idea of silent and loud identities will also be analyzed to acknowledge the positives that may come with social media.

Introduction

Social media and technology have become a large part of everyday life, and its influence is growing everyday. Many believe that social media is generally positive for the general public, while others believe that it is ruining lives and producing little to no benefit. Regardless, the fundamental problems that exist within this realm must be addressed and reduced. One of the main issues that social media has been contributing to is racist ideas and ways of thinking. This is done by spreading false stereotypes and white standards of beauty. This might come as a surprise to some, as social media is sometimes seen as way to help people create communities and a sense of a belonging. While this is true, social media also poses a real threat to preexisting stereotypes and other forms of oppression against people of color. This is important to address so that the fallacious nature of social media can be analyzed. Social media is usually seen as separate from the real world, as many believe that worldly problems do not necessarily apply to the online world. However, the world's problems and hierarchies (including those regarding racism) are reflected and sometimes enhanced through social media and the way it operates, which can be extremely damaging for people

of color and other minority communities. Social media and its effect on racism reveals the impact of power dynamics, as new technology may be somewhat beneficial for people of color, but its deeper impact contributes to oppressive ideas, because those in high positions remain in control of online social messaging.

Social Media and Its Usage

As mentioned earlier, social media is a growing force in the world, and its influence deeply affects people's daily lives whether they are aware of it or not. One of the main ways that social media has been able to garner so many people's attention is by the "constant checker" phenomenon. A constant checker is someone who is consistently looking at their phone to check emails, texts, and social media accounts. Constant checking has become a big part of people's lives, so much so that more than 8 in 10 Americans are attached to their gadgets on a typical day (APA, 2017). 45% of American adults during a typical work day are constantly connected, while 34% are constantly connected on typical non-work days (APA, 2017). This allows for the understanding that social media and technology has transitioned into work life, as it is not only something that people use for entertainment but is now necessary for occupational reasons. Furthermore, for constant checkers stress runs higher compared to those who do not engage with technology as frequently, as the average reported stress level for constant checkers on a 10-point scale is 5.3, and for non-checkers it is 4.4 (APA, 2017). When looking at social media in particular, 48% of millennials and 37% of gen x-ers worry about negative effects of social media on their physical and mental health, which exemplifies the growing understanding of how bad these apps can be (APA, 2017). However, 36% of millennials and 22% of gen x-ers believe that social media has helped them find their identity, as social media can provide a safe space for some and does have its positive attributes (APA, 2017). Overall, when looking at this data it is clear that social media's presence in everyday life is something that is unavoidable, and quite damaging especially for young people. However it is important to note that there can be positives that come with technology and social media use, and that it has the ability to help others feel less alone in their struggles.

Social Media and Its Positives

Social media's ability to help people, especially those from marginalized communities, stems from the power of creating or consuming counter narratives. The influence of counter-narratives is best understood when looking at the transformation of silence into language, as social media is a platform that allows users to turn their once silent identities into "loud ones". Forming loud identities allows people to fight back and create true change within themselves, as society usually forces oppressed communities to silent certain parts of themselves because they are different and "unacceptable" (Lorde, 1977). Once these loud identities are created, it allows for the formation of counter-narratives. Counter-narratives and loud identities are so important because they allow for the erasure of the "mythical norm" that exists in so many places within society. This mythical norm (in America at least) is usually defined as white, thin, male, straight, heterosexual, etc (Lorde, 1977). Social media allows for people to step outside of this mythical norm because of how communities can be formed within apps, as those who have felt alone in the real world can find some kind of comfort in the online world. It is for this reason that many young people turn to social media when the outside world fails them.

However, just because social media has this positive effect doesn't mean that its negatives should be ignored, because its harms may override its ability to do any good at all.

Social Media and Its Negatives

Although social media may have its benefits, its deeper impacts contribute to oppressive ideas through deliberate racial messaging. These harms can be understood when looking at power dynamics. Social media is a space where passive social power can be used, which is defined as a control that exists even when it has no particular agent behind it, as the point of any operation of social power is to show social control (Friker, 2007). This is why passive power is so impactful, because it really shows how much control one group has over another when it exists in spaces where equality may seem more possible. An example of a space like this is social media. Because it is an online world, many believe that 'real world problems' such as racism do not exist. However, racism is deeply imbedded within the online world, especially in social media, because these power dynamics do not disappear when logging onto a computer or phone.

When looking at the specific ways that this passive social power is presented in social media, stereotypes must be analyzed. Racial stereotypes in the media are important because they are a significant contributor to upholding racial myths by consistently presenting the white standard of beauty (Gorham, 1999). Furthermore, racial stereotypes in the media can influence our interpretations of media content in a way that supports dominant racial myths, as these stereotypes maintain harmful and unjust understandings of race (Gorham, 1999). This ties back to the "mythical norm" issue discussed earlier. Because the white standard of beauty is often unrealistic and unattainable for people of color, it makes for an alienating and self deprecating experience for minority communities when using social media, as these apps may not be as positive and community building as they appear to be.

Whiteness Within Social Media

White privilege is something that exists within every area of America, including online spaces. In social media, white privilege is expressed through stereotypes, as those in high positions on and offline contribute to upholding whiteness. A main way that this is expressed in social media is through influencers and celebrities who use their white privilege and standards of beauty in order to create a living and/or grow their following. This is seen when looking at two parallel sets of Instagram images, one of Beyoncé and another of Kim Kardashian. In 2017, Beyoncé Knowles announced her pregnancy through an Instagram post. However, this post received a lot of backlash, as many began to speculate that her pregnancy was fake because her baby bump did not seem natural (Franklin, 2017). Afterwards, critics started to judge Beyoncé on her outfit saying that it was tacky and classless, and that she was showing too much of her body off, which was odd given the fact that most of her body was covered. (Franklin, 2017). This senseless critique of Beyoncé's pregnancy announcement reveals the racist undertones of many of the arguments against her, especially when comparing it to Kim Kardashian's post.

When Kim Kardashian posted a completely nude Instagram picture for her pregnancy reveal during 2015, many were praising, complimenting, and applauding her (Franklin, 2017). Kim was never questioned on the legitimacy of her baby bump or the amount of skin she was showing, even though it was a noticeably more nude photo than Beyoncé's (Franklin,

2017). Her Instagram post was never criticized in a way that questioned her character as a woman or mother, and instead it was praised because of how beautiful she looked. Kim Kardashian's whiteness offered her a type of privilege that Beyoncé does not have; one in which her whiteness gave her the accessibility to be "sexy" or "desirable" (Franklin, 2017). This is just one example where black and other women of color are held to a much higher standard of beauty than white women. Beauty standards are a way in which power dynamics exist in social media. It is nearly impossible for women of color to try to live up to the unrealistic white standards of beauty, or compete with other white celebrities and influencers on social media, as they won't be able to win against the never-ending white agenda that has transgressed into online realms. Whiteness will always be seen as good and blackness or other races will be seen as bad, and social media is such a dangerous place for these stereotypes to live in because the importance of beauty, and the ability to get critiqued is enhanced.

Concluding Arguments and Proposed Solutions

Although racism and stereotypes are powerful, they can be fought against, and ways to reduce racism within social media must be addressed. The first step towards making for a more equitable experience in social media is to educate others and oneself on how harmful these apps can be, and how societal issues exist and are sometimes even enhanced online. The second step is to continue the use of counter-narratives and erasure of the "mythical norm", as people of color such as Beyoncé should not shy away from displaying their beauty online in order to grow the confidence of others. This is important because providing a diverse display of beauty within social media can allow for a white beauty standard to become less apparent on people's timelines and home pages. Finally, it is imperative that people in power make changes, as that is where the true transformation lies. It would be very revolutionizing for brands to work with more creators of color, or for the CEOs of social media apps to change the designs of their company, to make for more racially equitable platforms.

Although Beyoncé and Kim Kardashian are two very powerful people in the media, there is a clear difference in which of the two hold tangible social and racial power, as the lack of critique towards Kim's pregnancy post compared to Beyoncé's reveals how white privilege manifests within social media. White beauty standards and the increased judgement and critique of women of color within social media have a great effect on today's social environment. Because social media has become such a big part of everyday life, social media is contributing to racial and political areas of society. This means that white beauty standards have a real impact on people of color within America, especially through structural racism, which is seen through the "bird cage" analogy. The bird cage analogy explains how when a bird is in a cage (to symbolize how oppressed people are being oppressed), the bird won't know that they are trapped if they only look at one wire alone (Frye, 1998). In order to understand structural oppression (and that they are trapped), one must look at the whole cage, or in other words, every factor that contributes to racism and oppression (Frye, 1998). In this case, social media and white standards of beauty may only be one "wire", but it is a part of an entire cage that is consistently oppressing people of color in active and passive ways. This is why it is so important to attempt to fight back against these forms of structural oppression, as learning more about how whiteness presents itself on and offline must be continued.

Works Cited

American Psychological Association (2017). Stress in America: Coping with Change. Stress in America Survey.

Gorham, B (1999) Stereotypes in the Media: So What?, Howard Journal of Communications

Franklin, A. M. (2017). My black is radical and sensual: White privilege and the policing of black women on instagram. Digital Commons @ Columbia College Chicago.

Friker, M. (2007). Power Dynamics.

Frye, M. (1998). Race, class and gender in the united states: An integrated study.

Lorde, A. (1977). The transformation of silence into language.

Lauren Swenson-Lennox



Lauren Swenson-Lennox is a sophomore at LMU with a major in sociology and minors in dance and psychology. She grew up in Pleasanton, CA, where her interests in law and sociology first developed. She plans to further her education after graduating LMU by attending law school. On campus, she enjoys being an active member of the school's mock trial team, Creare service organization, and Phi Alpha Delta.

A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION AND INFIDELITY

Abstract

Extramarital relationships, aka cheating, is commonly defined as a spouse engaging in physical sexual acts with someone other than their spouse. Cheating is something that most people agree is immoral, yet it is still prevalent in today's society. Using data from the General Social Survey (GSS), this paper explores the extent to which being religious reduces the odds of engaging in acts of cheating. It also dives into how the religion someone practices has an impact, although it is a lesser impact than how religious one is on how likely one is to engage in cheating. Religiosity seeming to prevent cheating is most likely due to religious teachings and how much social consequences could result from the act of cheating. SPSS is being used to quantitatively analyze the data points of "What religion are you?", "How religious are you?", "Is extramarital sex wrong?", "How often do you attend church" and "have you had sex with someone other than your spouse while married"? The findings are that the more religious someone is and the more someone attends church, the less likely they are to commit infidelity.

Introduction

Extramarital sex is a point of fascination and derision in America. It's a common plot line in TV shows and movies to villainize someone, and it's a common concern among many couples. Despite it being looked down upon by the majority of society, it still happens and it happens quite frequently. The question of this study today, however, is how cheating is affected by religion, another popular phenomenon in today's society. Religion has a long and sometimes complicated history in America. One thing that cannot be disputed however, is that it plays a big role in the country's history and in many people's lives today. Many religions are not subtle about their displeasure in regards to sexual freedoms, as evident in the way they have rules and limitations in regards to extramarital sex and a huge emphasis

on the sanctity of marriage. However, people differ in regards to how religious they are, how seriously they take Church teachings, and in what religion they are. Not all religions stress the sanctity of marriage to the same degree or in the same way. Today, whether or not there is a religious link to lesser amounts of cheating will be explored in addition to whether the different religions of those answering the surveys impacted whether or not they have cheated.

To do so, there are two dependent variables being studied today. The first is Xmarsex1, or the survey question “Is Extramarital Sex wrong?”. The second is Evstray 222, or “Have you had sex with someone other than your spouse while married?”. The three independent variables being studied today is Rel, or “What religion are you?”, Feelrel, or “How religious are you?”, and Atten, How often R Attends Religious Services. To analyze this data, SPSS has been used to generate a mean, median, and standard deviation graphs; Chi square, Gamma and Cramer’s V tests have been performed; cross tabs analysis charts have been generated; and column percentages have been calculated.

This study is intended to examine the effects of religion on infidelity given the new GSS data. A lot of the studies conducted were conducted with previous GSS data and could be outdated due to changes over time. This study provides a bridge between old data and new data. Overall, the findings are consistent over time.

Limitations of This Study

This study has some noteworthy limitations. The first is the ambiguity of the definitions of some of the terms. Many people could interpret “extra marital sex” differently- some could interpret it to be intercourse only, some might include oral sex while others do not, some might interpret the question as any sexual act performed, and others might include acts of emotional cheating. Without having a more clear definition, analysis of results must take into account that there might be under or over reporting to this question depending on how people interpreted it. Additionally, another limitation is that this study is confined by the questions SPSS has on the topic. It therefore means only married couples and only physical sexual acts are examined in this study- long term-committed dating relationships and emotional cheating are excluded. It also means that only the questions asked can be studied, which eliminates questions on sanctification of marriage and how individuals view their relationship in relation to their religion. Another limitation is that these results were based off of self-reports of cheating, which also leaves room for error since people are answering based on their own self-perception of events. It must also be noted that for some of the questions, only about half the people asked responded or had the question apply to them. This means that the missing percentage is quite high for the questions, sometimes as high as 50%. This is especially impactful to this study when it comes to what religion people are- only a few categories have enough people in them to study them effectively and all the others have too low of a response rate to be included in the analysis.

Methods

SPSS is a statistical software that is used to analyze GSS (General Social Survey) data. Data has been collected since 1972, and the most recent data available (the data used in this paper) is from 2018. SPSS was used as a tool to conduct analysis on GSS data. Some of this analysis included mean (the average of a set of values), median (the midpoint of a data set), and standard deviation (the statistic computed by summing the squared deviations of the scores around the mean, dividing by N, and taking the square root of the result). The ANOVA (analysis of variance) was used as a test of significance for situations in which the difference between more than two sample means was of concern and the Chi Square Test was used (which is a nonparametric test of hypothesis for variables that have been organized into a bivariate table) to compare observed results with expected results. Gamma was also used in my analysis, which, when expressed as a percentage, tells us the extent to which knowledge of one variable improves our ability to predict the other variable. Cramer's V was additionally used in the analysis, which is a chi-square based measure of association for nominally measured variables organized into a bivariate table.

Literature Review

This is a topic that has been studied before, and each study has its specific point of focus, its strengths, and its weaknesses. These studies are explored below.

The Potency of Religious Influence on Marital Sexual Infidelity: Evidence from Demographic and Health Surveys in Ghana and Nigeria

This study, while it provides valuable information, has one major limitation: it doesn't take place in the United States. Despite that major limitation, it is a study that confirms that religious involvement and values reduce marital sexual infidelity through use of Durkheim's theory of religion and logistic regression analysis. Durkheim's theory, in part, relates to the sanctification of aspects of daily life, like relationships, which is a common area of focus in studies conducted in and relating to the US. This study finds that infidelity is more common among Christians than Muslims, as well as hypothesizes that infidelity is impacted by marital satisfaction, imposition of one's partner, and the social consequences that would occur if revealed to be unfaithful. This study overall suggests a universality in patterns of infidelity.

Religion, Infidelity, and Divorce: Re-Examining the effects of religious behavior on divorce among long-married couples

This study examines how religiosity and infidelity relate to one another, but this study is to specifically study divorce as an outcome of infidelity. The author has noted that, at the time of this study being conducted, that scholarship about infidelity and divorce had two main limitations: not taking religiosity into account and focusing only on young marriages. This study focuses on couples married at least 12 years and uses data from the panel study of marital stability. The study's methods for handling data include structural equation modeling and proportional hazards modeling. This study found that religiosity does reduce the likelihood of marital infidelity but that there is no clear association between marital infidelity and divorce- there may be an indirect link through marital happiness levels, however (religiosity, if couples have the same religion, promotes stronger marital bonds, higher marital happiness levels, and subscription to sexual norms). The findings in this study that relate to my paper are that more religious people are more likely to be faithful, in part

due to sanctification of their relationship and feeling a personal responsibility to following God and his word, and that often the potential for social ostracization from church community plays a role in policing the actions of couples. (See appendix; Graph D and E.)

Graph D shows the relationship between how religious one is (their religiosity level) and the likelihood that they will view extramarital sex as wrong. The relationship is that the higher the religiosity level, the more likely they are to view extramarital sex as wrong. This is a moderate relationship for both Gamma and Cramer's V. This supports the findings in this study about religiosity playing a role in the prevention of acceptance or acts of infidelity. Graph E shows that having sex with someone other than spouse while married and how religious is R is not correlated according to gamma, lambda, chi, and cramer's v. The graph does, however, show a pattern of a higher percentage of non-religious respondents cheating than religious respondents. The percentages overall show a trend that the more religious someone is, the less likely they are to cheat.

While the findings above were backed by the data, the findings about divorce were inconclusive; the only supported finding, while not significant, was that highly religious people are more likely to get divorced after infidelity, probably because it is a more egregious violation of their values.

Are There Religious Variations in Marital Infidelity?

This study investigates how religious affiliation, participation, and biblical beliefs explain the differences in self-reported marital infidelity using data from 1991-2004 General Census Surveys. One of their findings is that church attendance results in lower odds of marital infidelity. The odds of infidelity for someone who attended services several times every week was 66% lower than the odds for someone who never attended services. This holds true in the 2018 GSS data (See Appendix: Graph C) which shows that, overall, more people consider extramarital sex wrong the more often they attend church. Of the people who never attended church, only 69.3% said it was always wrong to cheat. On the other extreme, people who attend church more than once a week, 93.8% of them said it was always wrong. The overall trend is less religious service attendance means more ambiguous answers as to when it is wrong and the more often someone attends church the more clear cut their beliefs are that it is always wrong to cheat.

This study additionally found that there was denomination variation in odds of infidelity, especially in groups who strongly affiliated themselves with their religion. Protestant and Catholics were found to have the least infidelity, most likely because those groups have made marriage a focus of their teachings and therefore social ostracization of those who violate their teachings is more likely to occur. (See Appendix: Graph A, F). In Graph A, the groups with most data to compare- Protestant, Catholic, and None- show that Protestant and Catholic had a lower mean of people committing infidelity than people who are non-religious. Due to low response rates, however, we cannot compare Protestant or Catholic to other religious groups, but they have been included for reference. This supports this study's finding that Protestant and Catholic groups have lower infidelity than other groups, but, without more data, that's all that can be said about it. Graph F shows how the question "Is extramarital sex wrong?" and the variables of one's religion relate to each other.

This relationship has moderate strength for both Gamma and Cramer's V. Lambda was not found to show significance. This chart shows that more people from the Protestant and Catholic religions say it is always wrong than people who claim no religion. 87.5% of

This relationship has moderate strength for both Gamma and Cramer's V. Lambda was not found to show significance. This chart shows that more people from the Protestant and Catholic religions say it is always wrong than people who claim no religion. 87.5% of Protestants and 83.1% of Catholics said it was always wrong, compared to 59.75% of those with no religion. A higher percentage of non-religious people than Catholics or Protestants additionally said it was never wrong. Interestingly, a higher percentage of Protestants than Catholics said it was always wrong to cheat and a lower percentage of Protestants did cheat compared to Catholics, although the difference in percentages was small.

Devout Catholics and Christians were less likely to cheat the more devout they were; for other religions, odds of infidelity were equal regardless of how devout someone is. The statistical results of this study were that 17% of those studied had cheated; Catholics displayed a 32% reduction in the odds of infidelity compared to their non-affiliated counterparts; Moderate Protestants showed a 37% reduction compared to their counterparts. Non-traditional conservative religious groups and non-Christian faith are not associated with reduction in odds of infidelity. The sample size in the study's GSS data was too small to study groups other than Protestants and Catholics, but the data shows that while a distinction between Catholic and Protestant groups exists, it is nowhere near as significant as whether one is as a variable or as significant as being religious versus non-religious.

Ambiguity, Religion, and Relational Context: Competing Influences on Moral Attitudes?

This study focuses on how morality and religion intersect with each other, particularly in morally gray situations relating to infidelity. One of these situations is whether or not it is acceptable to cheat on your partner if they have cognitive decline or dementia due to old age. This study used a subset of the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project, a nationally representative population based sample of 3,005 adults ages 57-85. This study, after controlling for past cheating and sexual activity, has confirmed previous results that the more religious one is, the more one finds cheating morally wrong more of the time. In this study, when asked if infidelity was wrong in the case of one's partner having dementia, 92% of Christians said yes and only 71% of those who are non-religious said yes. This gap holds true when asked if infidelity is wrong in general: 97% of Christians said yes and 90% of those who are non-religious said yes. This backs up data from the 2018 GSS survey (See Appendix; Graph D) which shows that the more religious someone is, the more likely they are to find extramarital sex wrong all of the time. Those who are non-religious or not as religious have more ambiguity in their answers as to when extra marital sex is wrong.

Religiosity and Intimacy with an Extradyadic Partner in Emerging Adulthood: a Developmental Perspective

This study focuses on the relationship between intrinsic religious motivation and lack of infidelity in a marriage. It studied 188 participants aged 18-25 (college students). 50% reported being intimate either physically or emotionally with someone other than their romantic partner. This study was conducted to fill in the gaps in the research that disregard emotional intimacy or physical intimacy that is not sex and to study internal instead of external religiosity. An intrinsic religious motivation scale and an infidelity scale was used in the study. This study found that intrinsic religious motivation was significantly and positively associated with being intimate with a person outside of one's current romantic relationship.

This contradicts findings in other studies and contradicts the data in my own study. Possibly reasons for the contradiction could be the data sample- it was a convenience sample of college students enrolled in a psychology course and therefore cannot be generalized-, due to the age of the participants (college students who might be trying to navigate their identities and morality) and due to the fact that there was no external religious motivator. It has been shown that church attendance correlates to lowered odds of infidelity, (See Appendix, Graph C) possibly because of the social check it provides on people in the community- social ostracization might occur if one cheats on their spouse. Despite these explanations, the fact that this study contradicted other findings must be noted and suggests that further research must be conducted before a definitive answer can be known.

Sanctification and Cheating Among Emerging Adults

This study evaluates cheating through the concept of relationship sanctification (the degree to which someone views their relationship as sacred). In this study, 716 college students who were in a long-term committed relationship filled out a survey three times in a school year. This study found that those who reported higher levels of relationship sanctification were associated with a lower likelihood of both physical and emotional cheating and associated with less permissive sexual attitudes. One point higher on the sanctification scale used in the study resulted in a 22% decrease in the odds of emotionally cheating and a 26% decrease in odds of physically cheating. This is predicted to be because higher sanctification levels are associated with higher levels of religiosity and spirituality. This study found that 21% of men and 16% of women cheated physically over the course of a semester and that 30% of men and 28% of women cheated emotionally over the course of the semester; viewing their relationship as sanctified reduced these odds. This is similar to the study at hand that utilizes 2018 GSS data. (See Appendix: Graphs D, E and G.) Graph D found that the more religious one is, the more likely they are to view extra-marital sex as wrong, similar to how cheating and sanctification (a product of religious values) are inversely related. Graph E shows a pattern of the more religious someone is, the less likely they are to cheat. Sanctification and religion, as stated above, often go hand in hand. Graph G shows the percentages for infidelity occurring in different tiers of religiosity: Extreme religious- 5.8% cheated; Very religious- 11.4% cheated; Somewhat religious-10.23% cheated; Not religious- 10.6% cheated; Somewhat non-religious- 14.28% cheated; Very non-religious- 11.11% cheated; and 17.64% of extreme non-religious cheated. This was calculated using column percentages and shows a trend of “extreme religious” having the lowest percentage of cheating and “extreme non-religious” having the highest. These results, of course, should inspire skepticism since never getting married is a category of varying sizes in each column and the extremes (extreme non-religious and extreme religious) have the lowest number of people in that category. The table does however show a clear pattern.

Forsaking All Others: How Religious Involvement Promotes Marital Fidelity in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Couples

For this study, in depth interviews were conducted with 57 highly religious, middle-aged married couples from the major Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam). Grounded theory was used to create a conceptual model that describes ways these couples have drawn on their beliefs and practices to stay faithful to each other.

It was found that in extremely religious couples, faithfulness to each other is increased by sanctification of their marriage (which improves marriage quality), religious involvement (which increases commitment to being faithful to their spouse), religion strengthening moral values, and by the couples positively viewing their relationship to God (and therefore avoiding actions that they viewed would displease God, such as cheating on their spouse). This study has additionally found that church attendance is a factor that correlates with lower rates of cheating on spouses, which is backed up by data from the 2018 GSS. (See Appendix: Graph C) Other findings of this study included couples mentioning sanctification of their marriage a significant amount and mentioning that peer referencing and social pressure plays a role in them staying faithful. This study did not find any significant differences between religions, but it was also smaller in scale since they only studied 57 couples.

Religiousness and Infidelity: Attendance, but Not Faith and Prayer, Predict Marital Fidelity

This study focuses on the inverse correlation between church attendance and infidelity and the degree to which church attendance reflects religiosity. This study used data from the 1998 GSS to develop nine religiousness sub scales. The study found that attendance, nearness to God, prayer, and other religious attitudes and actions was related to lower levels of infidelity; faith, interestingly, was not. People who viewed themselves as highly religious but did not attend church were more likely to have an affair than those who viewed themselves as highly religious and did attend church. It was found that, compared to those who attend service regularly, those who do not are four times more likely to have an affair. There is also a possibility that marital happiness could be a link between religiousness and infidelity; signs of this link appeared in the data, but it was not studied thoroughly enough to reach any conclusion. Since the GSS in 1972 to the time of this study, there have been over 42,000 respondents answering over 3,300 different questions, many of which related to religion. Of participants who had been married, 82.1% reported never having sex with another person while married; 48.2% indicated attending a religious service at least once a month and 59.5% stated that they found strength and comfort in religious on most days; 82% affiliated themselves with Christianity (with only 4% claiming a non Christian religion and the rest claiming no religion). This GSS data also reported a high level of stability in religion- 85.6% said they are current believers and always have been. This data is about 20 years old, but it supports trends that are shown today. Today's data shows that most people still are Christian and that church attendance is correlated with lower rates of infidelity. (See Appendix, Graphs C, F). Explanations given for the data is that those with high religiosity but low church attendance may have a different religion or degree of religiosity than their spouse, which can cause marital discontent. Marital discontent would then be an intervening factor. Another explanation for high church attendance being correlated to low levels of infidelity is that attending church brings you into contact with a social group that believes infidelity is wrong and introduces the possibility of ostracism if infidelity occurs.

Conclusion

It is clear there is a trend between how religious someone is and how often one attends church with a reduction in the odds of marital infidelity. There is not, however, a clear trend between what religion someone is and how likely they are to cheat. There has been

conflicting information and an overall lack of data to support analysis on this topic. Only Protestant, Catholics, and No Religion are big enough categories to compare and analyze. It is therefore unknown how other religions compare to Protestant, Catholic, and No Religion in regards to the odds of marital infidelity taking place. It can be noted, however, that identifying with a religion strengthens the odds of taking a firm stance that moral infidelity is wrong as compared to those who do not identify with any religion.

Appendix

A.

Descriptives								
Have sex other than spouse while married								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
PROTESTANT	679	2.12	.607	.023	2.08	2.17	1	3
CATHOLIC	275	2.18	.543	.033	2.12	2.25	1	3
JEWISH	23	2.17	.650	.136	1.89	2.46	1	3
NONE	337	2.36	.664	.036	2.29	2.44	1	3
OTHER	21	2.19	.602	.131	1.92	2.46	1	3
BUDDHISM	15	1.93	.704	.182	1.54	2.32	1	3

ANOVA					
Have sex other than spouse while married					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	17.641	12	1.470	3.930	.000
Within Groups	513.272	1372	.374		
Total	530.913	1384			

The groups with most data to compare- Protestant, Catholic, and None- show that Protestant and Catholic had a lower mean of people committing infidelity than people who are non-religious. Due to low response rates, however, we cannot compare Protestant or Catholic to other religious groups, but they have been included for reference.

B. Mean, Median, and Standard Deviation Chart

	xmarsex1	evstray	feelrel	relig
mean	1.29	2.19	3.41	2.28
median	1	2	3	2
standard deviation	0.63	0.62	1.559	1.832

C.

			Crosstab										Total
			NEVER	LT ONCE A YEAR	ONCE A YEAR	SEVRL TIMES A YR	ONCE A MONTH	2-3X A MONTH	NRLY EVERY WEEK	EVERY WEEK	MORE THN ONCE WK		
Is extramarital sex wrong?	ALWAYS WRONG	Count	232	43	102	90	64	75	30	174	61	871	
		% within How often R attends religious services	69.3%	71.7%	76.7%	81.8%	79.0%	84.3%	83.3%	91.6%	93.8%	79.3%	
	ALMOST ALWAYS WRONG	Count	65	12	16	15	14	8	5	11	2	148	
		% within How often R attends religious services	19.4%	20.0%	12.0%	13.6%	17.3%	9.0%	13.9%	5.8%	3.1%	13.5%	
WRONG ONLY SOMETIMES	Count	34	5	11	4	2	6	1	3	2	68		
	% within How often R attends religious services	10.1%	8.3%	8.3%	3.6%	2.5%	6.7%	2.8%	1.6%	3.1%	6.2%		
NOT WRONG AT ALL	Count	4	0	4	1	1	0	0	2	0	12		
	% within How often R attends religious services	1.2%	0.0%	3.0%	0.9%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	1.1%		
Total	Count	335	60	133	110	81	89	36	190	65	1099		
	% within How often R attends religious services	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	65.604 ^a	24	.000
Likelihood Ratio	72.698	24	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	41.857	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1099		

a. 13 cells (36.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .39.

This data is significant. On the whole, more people consider extramarital sex wrong the more often they attend church. Of the people who never attended church, only 69.3% said it was always wrong to cheat. Compared to the other extreme, people who attend church more than once a week, 93.8% of them said it was wrong. The overall trend is less religious service attendance means more ambiguous answers as to when it is wrong and the more often someone attends the more clear cut their beliefs are that it is always wrong to cheat.

D.

			Is extramarital sex wrong? * How religious is R Crosstabulation						Total	
			EXTREME RELIGIOUS	VERY RELIGIOUS	SOMMHWAT RELIGIOUS	How religious is R NOT REL OR NON	SOMEHWAT NON-REL	VERY NON-REL		EXTREME NON-REL
Is extramarital sex wrong?	ALWAYS WRONG	Count	67	215	358	94	46	47	40	867
		% within How religious is R	93.1%	90.3%	85.0%	74.0%	59.0%	56.0%	55.6%	79.4%
	ALMOST ALWAYS WRONG	Count	1	15	47	24	20	19	21	147
		% within How religious is R	1.4%	6.3%	11.2%	18.9%	25.6%	22.6%	29.2%	13.5%
WRONG ONLY SOMETIMES	Count	4	7	13	7	11	16	9	67	
	% within How religious is R	5.6%	2.9%	3.1%	5.5%	14.1%	19.0%	12.5%	6.1%	
NOT WRONG AT ALL	Count	0	1	3	2	1	2	2	11	
	% within How religious is R	0.0%	0.4%	0.7%	1.6%	1.3%	2.4%	2.8%	1.0%	
Total	Count	72	238	421	127	78	84	72	1092	
	% within How religious is R	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.336			.000
	Cramer's V	.194			.000
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.469	.042	9.404	.000
N of Valid Cases		1092			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Graph D shows that the more religious one is (their religiosity level), the more likely they are to view extramarital sex as wrong. This is a moderate relationship for both Gamma and Cramer's V.

E.

		How religious is R							Total	
		EXTREME RELIGIOUS	VERY RELIGIOUS	SOMWHAT RELIGIOUS	NOT REL OR NON	SOMEWHAT NON-REL	VERY NON-REL	EXTREME NON-REL		
Have sex other than spouse while married	YES	Count	1	8	13	5	4	4	3	38
		% within How religious is R	5.9%	11.4%	10.2%	10.6%	14.3%	11.1%	17.6%	11.1%
	NO	Count	11	47	76	26	14	16	4	194
		% within How religious is R	64.7%	67.1%	59.8%	55.3%	50.0%	44.4%	23.5%	56.7%
	NEVER MARRIED	Count	5	15	38	16	10	16	10	110
		% within How religious is R	29.4%	21.4%	29.9%	34.0%	35.7%	44.4%	58.8%	32.2%
Total	Count	17	70	127	47	28	36	17	342	
	% within How religious is R	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Having sex with someone other than a spouse while married and how religious is R is not correlated according to gamma, lambda, chi, or cramer's v. The graph does, however, show a pattern of a higher percentage of non-religious respondents cheating than religious respondents. The percentages overall show a trend that the more religious someone is, the less likely they are to cheat. The lack of connection could have something to do with the small sample numbers for each category or the numbers in the never married category interfering.

F.

		R's religious preference											Total		
		PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC	JEWISH	NONE	OTHER	BUDDHISM	HINDUISM	MOSLEM/ISLAM	ORTHODOX-CHRISTIAN	CHRISTIAN	NATIVE AMERICAN	INTER-NONDENOMINATIONAL		
Is extramarital sex wrong?	ALWAYS WRONG	Count	460	196	15	148	9	5	4	9	3	16	1	1	867
		% within R's religious preference	87.5%	83.1%	75.0%	59.7%	50.0%	62.5%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	76.2%	100.0%	100.0%	79.2%
	ALMOST ALWAYS WRONG	Count	48	29	4	57	7	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	148
		% within R's religious preference	9.1%	12.3%	20.0%	23.0%	38.9%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	13.5%
WRONG ONLY SOMETIMES	Count	16	7	1	38	2	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	68	
	% within R's religious preference	3.0%	3.0%	5.0%	15.3%	11.1%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	6.2%	
NOT WRONG AT ALL	Count	2	4	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	12	
	% within R's religious preference	0.4%	1.7%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	
Total	Count	526	236	20	248	18	8	4	9	3	21	1	1	1095	
	% within R's religious preference	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.326		.000
	Cramer's V	.188		.000
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.413	.046	7.635
N of Valid Cases		1095		

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

Double-click to activate

Graph F shows how the question “Is extramarital sex wrong?” and the variables of one’s religion relate to each other. This relationship has moderate strength for both Gamma and Cramer’s V. Lambda was not found to show significance. This chart shows that more people from the Protestant and Catholic religions say it is always wrong than people who claim no religion. 87.5% of Protestants and 83.1% of Catholics said it was always wrong as compared to 59.75% of those with no religion. A higher percentage of non-religious people than Catholics or Protestants additionally said it was never wrong.

G.

Count		How religious is R							Total
		EXTREME RELIGIOUS	VERY RELIGIOUS	SOMWHAT RELIGIOUS	NOT REL OR NON	SOMEWHAT NON-REL	VERY NON-REL	EXTREME NON-REL	
Have sex other than spouse while married	YES	1	8	13	5	4	4	3	38
	NO	11	47	76	26	14	16	4	194
	NEVER MARRIED	5	15	38	16	10	16	10	110
Total		17	70	127	47	28	36	17	342

Extreme religious- 5.8% cheated; 11.4% of very religious cheated, 10.23% of somewhat religious cheated; 10.6% of not religious cheated; 14.28% of somewhat non-religious cheated; 11.11% of very non-religious cheated; and 17.64% of extreme non-religious cheated. This was calculated using column percentages and shows a trend of extreme religious having the lowest percentage of cheating and extreme non-religious having the highest. These results, of course, can't be taken without skepticism since never getting married is a category of varying sizes in each column and the extremes (extreme non-religious and extreme religious) have the lowest number of people in that category.

References

- Burdette, Amy M., Christopher G. Ellison, Darren Sherkat, and Kurt A. Gore. 2007. "Are There Religious Variations in Marital Infidelity?" *Journal of Family Issues* 28:1553-1581.
- Dollahite, David C. and Nathaniel M. Lambert. 2007. "Forsaking All Others: How Religious Involvement Promotes Marital Fidelity in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Couples." *Review of Religious Research* 48:290-307.
- McAillister, Paige, Elena Henderson, Meghan Maddock, Krista Dowdle, Frank D. Fincham, Scott R. Braithwaite. 2020. "Sanctification and Cheating Among Emerging Adults". *National Library of Medicine* 49:1177-1188.
- Norona, Jerika C, Brianna E. Pollock, Deborah P. Welsh, and Jennifer Bolden. 2016. "Religiosity and Intimacy with an Extradynadic Partner in Emerging Adulthood: A Developmental Perspective." *Journal of Adult Development* 23:45-50.
- Schafer, Markus H. 2011. "Ambiguity, Religion, and Relational Context: Competing Influences on Moral Attitudes?" *Sociological Perspectives* 54: Pages
- Tuttle, Joshua D. and Shannon N. Davis. 2015. "Religion, Infidelity, and Divorce: Reexamining the Effect of Religious Behavior on Divorce Among Long-Married Couples." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 56:pages
- Wusu, Onipede. 2022. "The Potency of Religious Influence on Marital Sexual Infidelity: Evidence from Demographic and Health Surveys in Ghana and Nigeria." *Sexuality and Culture* 26:1-15.