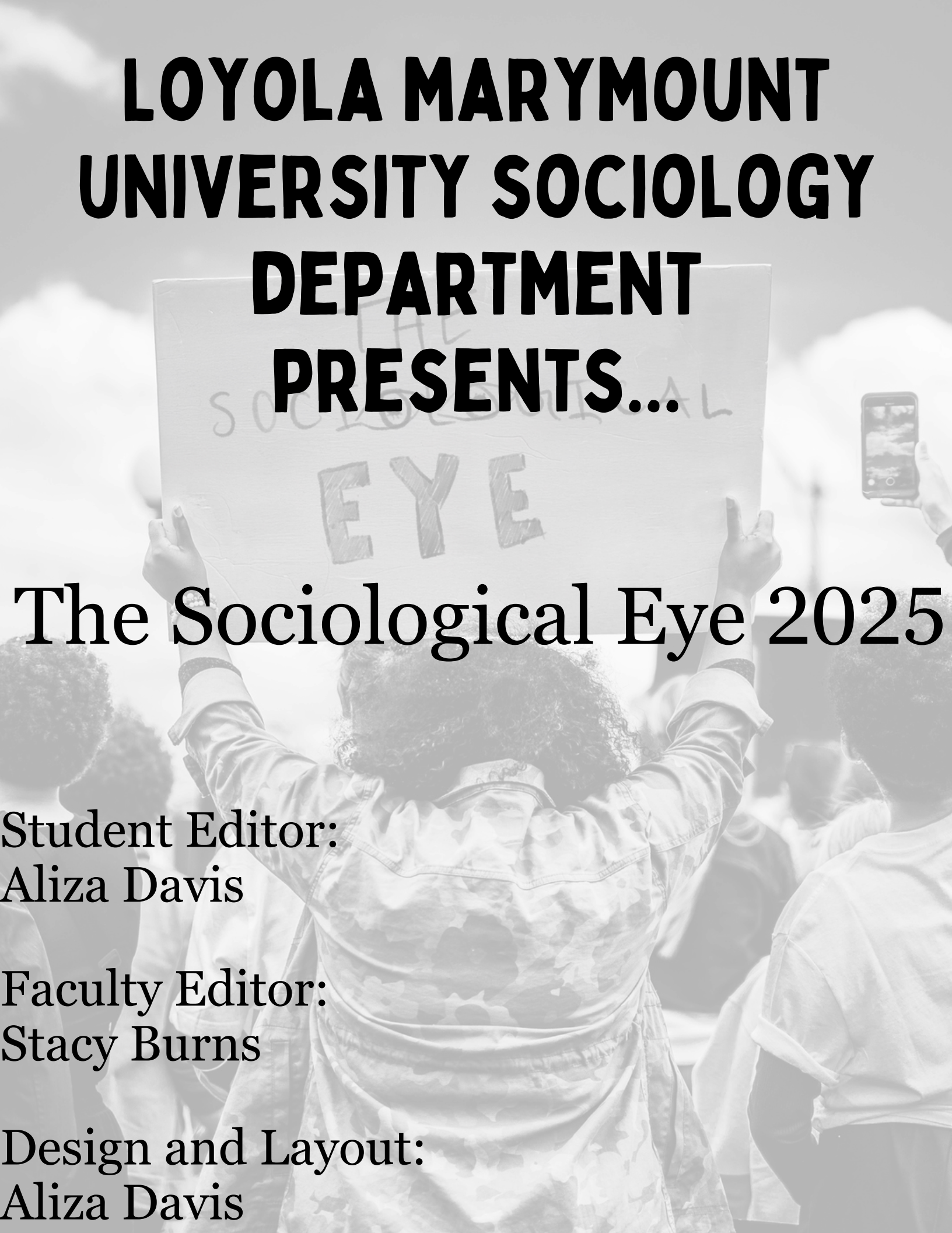


2025 ISSUE



LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT PRESENTS...

The Sociological Eye 2025

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PREFACE

This edition of The Sociological Eye presents papers on a wide range of topics that were developed in various sociology courses, including Introduction to Sociology, Qualitative Methods, Human Trafficking and Senior Seminar. The first article is the winner of the 2025 Best Paper award authored by Hannah Robins. Hannah's paper is entitled, "The Intersectionality of Sex Trafficking, Law Enforcement and Legislation: Where Are We Today and Where Do We Need to Go?" and discusses the global problem of human trafficking or transporting someone into a situation of exploitation, including forced labor and prostitution. The question she discusses is: How effective are current laws and law enforcement policies in reducing sex trafficking and identifying and assisting victim/survivors. The irony is that federal laws designed to protect victims of human trafficking are often at odds with state laws which frequently treat victims as criminals, including when they are minors.

The next paper in the collection is by this year's Honorable Mention award winner, Amelia Rodrigues. Amelia's paper entitled, "Fraternity Culture: A Literature Review and Research Proposal," analyzes the social context of fraternities and how 'fraternity culture' drives sexual violence against women on college campuses.

PREFACE

The third paper in this issue is by Leo Maldonado. Leo's contribution entitled, "How McDonald's Made You Single..." focuses on how the principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control ('McDonaldization') effect the behavior and relationships of Generation Z (Gen Z) and specifically impact a range of 'coming-of-age' activities, like getting a driver's license and the desire to date.

The fourth paper by Claudia Saunders continues the theme of relationships and is entitled, "The Effects of Gender Roles on Intimacy in Same Sex Friendships: How Men and Women Bond." Claudia discusses how gender roles influence the ways people form and maintain friendships as men and women.

The fifth paper by Cheyenne Wahlheim entitled, "The Lifeboat Project: A Critical Analysis of the Human Trafficking NGO," considers the issue of human trafficking in the context of a non-profit organization and how it aims to provide comprehensive supportive services and care to human trafficking victims and survivors.

PREFACE

The sixth paper by Ella Jackson entitled, “Government-Sanctioned Tension: Racism and Policing,” traces the impact of race and racism in the policing of crime and law enforcement in America throughout American history.

The seventh contribution by Chaiya Jeffries entitled, “The Educational System: Private and Public Schools,” examines the US educational system and the many differences between public and private K-12 schools, with a focus on providing equitable opportunities that give all students the potential to succeed and excel.

The eighth paper by Morgan Keating entitled, “Influencing Autistic Queer Experiences,” considers the effects of identity building on the experiences of queer people with autism.

The last paper in the collection by Paulina Fischbach is entitled, “Social Media and Consumerism.” Paulina looks at how various social media platforms turn personal opinions, preferences, and connections into profitable business in a capitalist world.



HANNAH ROBINS

My name is Hannah Robins and I am a Senior Sociology major with a minor in Peace and Justice Studies. After graduation I will move to Washington DC, and would love to work on Capitol Hill, or for a non profit organization. This research paper is my Senior Capstone in which I discuss sex trafficking in California.

The Intersectionality of Sex Trafficking, Law Enforcement and Legislation: Where Are We Today and Where Do We Need To Go?

Human trafficking is a historically entrenched global human phenomenon that affects people in all continents and specifically affects vulnerable adults and children. Worldwide, between 2022 and 2023, 133,943 victims were identified with a corresponding 7,115 convictions (2024 Trafficking in Persons Report). In California, human trafficking accounts for 13% of the known cases in the United States. The majority of these cases pertain to sex trafficking (2021 Polaris Project Annual Report).

Sex trafficking can be attributed to systemic disparities on a macro-level through globalization, capitalism, organized crime, poverty, racism, and misogyny. It can also be attributed to micro-level issues which focus on local communities and individual experiences of socialization, resocialization, trauma, and societal norms. Burke states in their article, “In order to begin to adequately address the issue of human trafficking, we need to change laws and social policies, as well as address the economic and social conditions that contribute to human trafficking globally” (Burke 2017: 71). While addressing all of these issues at once is unrealistic for one research paper, by reviewing past literature and conducting qualitative interviews with law enforcement and a survivor of sex trafficking, I aim to answer the question: How effective are the current laws and law enforcement policies and procedures in reducing sex trafficking overall and identifying and assisting victims in California?

In this paper, I discuss that due to lack of law enforcement training, minimal use of victim services, distrustful relationships between law enforcement and victims, misguided legislation, and a lack of legal

punitive action amongst exploiters and customers, sex trafficking is only increasing, and assistance to trafficked victims remains scarce and underutilized.

Literature Review

Literature proves there are vast efforts, research, and policies to combat sex trafficking but notes the impossibility of diminishing the issue as a whole, the inability to obtain accurate statistics (Tlydum 2010; Swanson 2016), and hesitations between law enforcement and victims (Musto 2016; Swanson 2016; Krell and Dhanoa 2021). This literature review reflects past research scholars have conducted over the last few decades. It identifies a primary focus on several components regarding sex trafficking: a clear definition of human trafficking, quantitative and qualitative limitations, the involvement of law enforcement, and effective rehabilitative programs.

Defining Human Trafficking

Sex trafficking is a violation of bodily autonomy and human rights and is a significant global issue affecting millions of individuals. Despite its prevalence, the Government, NGO's (Nongovernment organizations), and activists have historically struggled to define it. In 2000, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime defined Human Trafficking as "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation" (cited in Aronowitz 2009: 2). In the California Penal Code, trafficking is defined as "Anyone who deprives or violates the personal liberty of someone else with intent to obtain forced labor or services, procure the person for commercial sex, or exploit them in obscene matters, is guilty of human trafficking" (CA Penal Code 236.1). In order for an individual to legally be deemed a sex trafficking victim, recruitment, transfer, and sexual exploitation must be apparent. Some scholars identify sex trafficking with modern-day slavery characterized by violence, lack of free will, and exploitation (Bales 2000), while others (Davidson 2010) are reserved in what they deem exploitive behavior. "'Trafficking' would therefore require us to make a judgment about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate exploitation, and what counts as force, in a huge number of vastly different contexts" (Davidson 2010: 249).

Limitations in Research and Statistics

Literature also aims to cover what groups are more commonly victims of sex trafficking. Disproportionate numbers of youth of color, as well as individuals who identify as LGBTQ, females, and persons who experienced neglect and abuse as youth are heavily affected by sex trafficking. The Polaris

Project (2021 Polaris Project Annual Report) reports that in 2021, 79 percent of sex trafficking victims were disproportionate numbers of youth of color, as well as individuals who identify as LGBTQ, females, and persons who experienced neglect and abuse as youth are heavily affected by sex trafficking. The Polaris Project (2021 Polaris Project Annual Report) reports that in 2021, 79 percent of sex trafficking victims were females, 55 percent were people of color, and 31 percent were under 18 years old. It is necessary to note such percentages are only representative of the 7,629 documented sex trafficking cases, and this is likely a large undercount. In Alameda County, Butler states that 66 percent of youth who were referred to an agency serving sexually exploited children were African American. (Butler 2015). In terms of criminalization, it is noted by the UNODC that women are convicted of trafficking at high rates. Although men are more commonly the trafficking perpetrators, women are convicted at higher rates (UNODC Glo Tip 2022). Moreso, Krell, and Dhanoa found that black women are overrepresented in the prison system, even when the majority of those women have been victims of sexual exploitation and abuse (Krell and Dhanoa 2021). This demographic pattern underscores the racial and socioeconomic factors contributing to vulnerability such as economic status, racism, and cultural norms. (Burke, 2017).

One of the largest issues researchers face is the lack of reliable statistics. Researchers emphasize the difficulty in quantifying the scale of the issue, as many victims do not come forward due to fear of law enforcement or lack of trust in the system (Farrell and Pfeffer 2014). Much of the literature on human trafficking is unverified and underestimated regarding the scale of the issue (Swanson 2016). Tlydum (2010) discusses how empirical research on human trafficking is critical to developing effective policies and legislation, but existing studies fall short of legislative and academic standards. Much research lacks identification of trafficking victims, leading to biased or incomplete data. Tyldum (2010) acknowledges how in order to accurately study trafficking, researchers must define their target population clearly, distinguishing between groups: at-risk individuals, current victims, and former victims. Each group presents challenges for data collection. Current victims are particularly difficult to study ethically, as researchers risk exploiting trafficked victims further by conducting research but doing little to improve their situation. Studying former victims offers more potential for data collection, but data may still suffer from biases due to selection criteria in assistance programs and an overall lack of representation. Consequently, findings from research studies cannot be generalized to all trafficking victims. These limitations make it difficult for researchers to obtain accurate data and for legislators who rely on data to make informed policy decisions (Tlydum 2010).

Law Enforcement

The role of law enforcement in addressing human trafficking has sparked perhaps the most significant

debate, due to critiques emerging from their methods of viewing and supporting victims. Local law enforcement faces several challenges, including a lack of training, inconsistent application of laws, and issues with corruption (Swanson 2016). Often, victims are treated as offenders rather than receiving the help they need (Musto 2016). Despite laws intended to protect them, the justice system frequently criminalizes victims for their actions, threatening sanctions amongst offenders (Bernat 2011). This approach can lead to long-term negative consequences, pushing victims further into a cycle of criminalization rather than offering protection and justice. Research highlights a culture of mistrust toward law enforcement among victims, who see police actions as self-serving and not in the interest of the trafficked individual (Krell and Dhanoa 2021). Victims can face additional stigma which complicates their ability to be active community members, including securing employment, housing, and support services, which can further entrench their risk of exploitative involvement. Research advocates for a shift in law enforcement focus from victims to convicting and imprisoning buyers and traffickers (Musto 2016). A transformation in how society and law enforcement view and support trafficking victims is essential, moving away from punitive responses towards more compassionate and effective, rehabilitative solutions. In California, local law enforcement agencies and nonprofit organizations have attempted to collaborate in anti-human trafficking task forces.

Rehabilitation Programs

It is important for victims to receive the support they need in order to stay away from further victimization. Two studies stand out as positive rehabilitative efforts. First, Liles (2016) discusses The California Child Welfare Council which aims to create a coordinated response for survivors of child sexual exploitation (CSEC) by integrating efforts from various agencies, including juvenile courts, public defender offices, district attorney offices, and mental health providers. Currently, four specialized courts in California have included this into the system: LA County STAR court, Alameda County Girls' Court, San Diego Sexual Assault Court, and Sacramento CSEC court. (Liles et al., 2016). This multidisciplinary team employs a strengths-based approach to address each individual's unique needs and aims to enhance their success in the community following release. Special counseling is provided to traumatized youth, with professionals trained to understand their behaviors and divert them from further sexual exploitation risk. Additionally, the Resiliency Interventions for Sexual Exploitation (RISE) program in Santa Barbara offers trauma-informed care specifically for females and LGBTQ youth (Whaling et al., 2020). RISE emphasizes empowerment and positive self-identification, encouraging participants to reframe their narratives from victimhood to personal strength and survival. The RISE program follows a four-stage model focusing on stabilization, coping strategies, maintenance, and leadership.

Conclusion

Sex trafficking is a multifaceted issue and while significant progress has been made in understanding and combating trafficking, ongoing research is necessary to ensure effective policies, laws, and justice. Given concerns about law enforcement's effectiveness in rescuing and protecting victims, it is essential to conduct in-depth research into their sex trafficking operations and procedures. This research, when combined with an analysis of current laws and insights from survivors and law enforcement professionals, can foster collaboration to develop a more effective action plan and ensure justice for sex trafficking victims.

Methodology

Sample

I conducted interviews among two target groups: Survivors of trafficking, and law enforcement officials. My criteria for law enforcement officials was that they must have worked, or formerly worked in the human trafficking unit of their office. Criteria for survivors were that they had successfully exited the sex trafficking life, were not in contact with their perpetrator, and were not being investigated by law enforcement.

From the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, I reached out to two individuals (through my mother who is a District Attorney) who work/have worked in the human trafficking unit. For sex trafficking survivors, Participant 1 provided me with the email or LinkedIns of a few survivors. One of these survivors I messaged on LinkedIn wrote back to me and had me reserve a Zoom meeting with her. Ideally, I would have liked to have interviewed more survivors, however the others I contacted either did not get back to me or did not take interviews, understandably.

From these purposeful and snowball samples, I obtained three interviews in total: 2 law enforcement officials and 1 survivor:

Participant 1: Currently Inspector 2 at the Alameda County DA's office, in the Human Trafficking/Missing Persons Unit.

Participant 2: For the past 3 years has been a Sergeant of Police at Oakland Police Department in the homicide department. This person worked for eight years as an investigator in the Human Trafficking Unit, and for 2 years after, supervising the Special Victims Unit.

Participant 3: Survivor of underage sex trafficking and adult exploitation in Santa Barbara County. She exited "the life" successfully in 2018 after over a decade of exploitation. She is now the Director of Aftercare at a nonprofit organization that combats sex trafficking in Ventura.

Procedures and Measurement

Two of my interviews were conducted over the phone. I recorded each meeting through the Call Recorder app and later downloaded the full transcripts. One interview was done through Zoom, and I did not record this meeting as I was not the host, but I took detailed notes. All participants gave consent to be recorded/ gave permission for me to take notes. For coding data, I identified key ideas that each participant discussed and arranged them in subsections pertaining to interview questions.

Results and Discussion

Collaboration Between Law Enforcement and Nonprofit Organizations

Collaboration between law enforcement and nonprofit organizations is one of the tactics taken to address sex trafficking. In my interviews, I asked the law enforcement participants if their offices partner with outside organizations and if so, how. I asked the survivor participant if she had ever been aware if there were shelters available to her when she was being trafficked.

Participant 1 highlighted the state-wide collaborative efforts of multiple law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, HSI (Homeland Security Investigations), county probation departments, and state parole through the Innocence Lost Working Group, where they share information on suspects involved in trafficking and meet every two months in person. CalTIPA (California Trafficker Investigation and Prosecutors Association) is another, newer association Participant 1 discussed. CalTIPA is composed of law enforcement officers alongside prosecutors and works to foster collaboration and provide critical training, information, and education about traffickers and victims. These groups, which operate primarily in the Bay Area extend to regions like Arizona, Southern California, and Las Vegas.

Participant 2 mentioned the work of nonprofit organizations, such as Bay Area Women Against Rape (BAWAR), who provide on-scene advocates who extend recovery services to victims of trafficking during police sting operations. Participant 2 lauded their agency's "victim-centered approach" crisis counselors who can assist with referrals to emergency shelters, legal advocacy, and counseling. While these efforts are intended to connect victims with resources and services, Participant 2 noted the lack of "follow-up" due to these programs being optional, pimps withholding necessary documents of identification, low success rates, and an overall belief that these forms of victim services are not particularly effective in reducing sex trafficking.

Participant 3 agreed that while it is true shelters and sexual exploitation organizations have an overall low success rate, law enforcement never even gave her any such information in the multiple encounters she had with them. When she did seek service, it was many years after her exploitation had begun. She stated how she only knew of available programs from one girl that she knew who entered a program and successfully left the "life."

Participants 1 and 2 may be outliers as they promote services to victims. Oakland Police Department may do their outreach differently than other areas in the state, such as Santa Barbara, where Participant 3 was trafficked. I believe the majority of law enforcement is untrained and unaware of the services they can offer victims, or do not recommend them. It can be discouraging for law enforcement to promote services and then see little follow-up success, and watch these same people return to the streets. However, it is necessary that they are: 1. Aware of services and 2. Mention these services to victims, otherwise, this creates a large gap in victims knowing they have an out and possibly receiving the help they need to live a safe life away from exploitation.

From these interviews, I learned how the Alameda County District Attorney's Office works with other law enforcement agencies and collaborates with other departments in their justice system. They also provide victims with the option of seeking support like rehabilitation and housing through nonprofit organizations, though a lack of follow-up with these services is noted. While it is apparent that law enforcement in Alameda County does partner with organizations, it is not clear whether victims of sex trafficking are actually knowledgeable about these services.

Is Alameda County better than other counties in providing knowledge and recommendations to victims about anti-trafficking organizations? What would victims in Oakland say about their knowledge of support and how does this differentiate from what law enforcement is claiming? These are questions future research can explore.

Identifying Victims

In order to reduce sex trafficking, law enforcement must be able to effectively identify current victims. I asked the two law enforcement participants questions pertaining to how they identify victims of sex trafficking.

Participant 1 said patrol officers will conduct sting operations on the streets and hotels. Once a hotel room has been identified as being used for commercial sex, the officers identify everyone in the room and check to see if anyone is listed as a juvenile or a runaway, look for signs of injuries, ask the potential victims simple questions such as do they know what day it is, and ask them if they know who they are with or what they are doing there. They also take note of the apparel a girl is wearing and the tattoos she might have. Common tattoos for trafficking victims are princess crowns, words like "daddy", and even the name of their pimp. During car stops, they take note of how many girls are in the car, whether they know where they are, if they have their ID, and when they last ate or slept. Condoms and other sex-related items are also noted.

Participant 2 remarked that victims of trafficking are easy to identify on the street. In Oakland, the

pimps do not tolerate “renegades,” who are girls on the street who do not work for a pimp. They quoted, “they aren't out there if they don't have somebody exploiting them.” Participant 2 mentioned that while they were part of the sex trafficking unit, they would conduct proactive operations twice a week. They would go out to the “tracks,” (neighborhoods with a high rate of prostitution), watch what was happening, and identify the girls who were working. Once they saw evidence of an exchange of money for a sex act, they could arrest them for prostitution. The minors would be taken to the police station and interviewed, and the adults would be taken to jail, but would often get a citation and then be released. When interviewing minors, Participant 2 and their team would attempt to get them to disclose that they were victims of trafficking. “If a minor could explain that they were engaging in sexual services sales and that their proceeds would go to somebody else, then they've already articulated they were a victim” whether or not they realized the legal implications of what they were admitting. Participant 2 noted how adults waited until they wanted to come forward. “We didn't really touch the adult cases. But I wonder if we could have gotten more out of them, but we didn't really try.”

By asking Participant 3, “Did law enforcement ever try to intervene?” I found out that she was never identified as a victim even though she worked in this business for many years. Participant 3 recalled that while she was being trafficked, she had many interactions with law enforcement while she was both a minor and an adult, but they never identified her as a victim of trafficking. She was never asked if someone was taking her money, or if she was getting abused. The law enforcement she came into contact with knew she was at least doing sex work, but never asked any questions which would indicate she was being trafficked. Participant 3 revealed to me how even she was unaware that she was being trafficked and exploited, and believes if a police officer had asked her any of these questions, she may have been able to get out sooner.

While law enforcement officers employ various tactics to identify victims of trafficking, the failure to ask critical questions during routine interactions can result in missed opportunities to intervene and offer necessary support to those who are victims. As policy and education rely heavily on accurate statistics, the lack of identified victims creates barriers to proper research and legislation to further assist sex-trafficked victims (Tlydum 2010).

Training

Effective law enforcement training is one of the most important anti-trafficking strategies a state can take. Through my interviews, I sought to discover the extent and usefulness of training that California law enforcement receives about sex trafficking, and whether or not both law enforcement and survivors believe it is sufficient in addressing the needs of victims.

All three participants stressed the necessity of more quality law enforcement training. Both participants 1 and 2 noted that there are only a few days of specialized training in the police academy classroom which all potential officers have to attend, however, it is not sufficient to cover all topics. In addition, the departments generally offer some victim-centered interview training and occasional workshops on prostitution. New officers receive their hands-on training by accompanying more experienced senior officers on the job during their field training but what they learn is highly dependent on the quality of their Field Training Officers. Participant 2 noted that overall training has decreased and that there is a lack of experienced people to conduct the proper training due to attrition, retirements, and difficulty in overall recruiting. Participant 1, as a DA Inspector, has put together a proposal to offer the police agencies in Alameda County to teach human trafficking to patrol officers, but noted resistance and how “a lot of officers are afraid to touch human trafficking work.” Participant 3 agreed that, from a survivor’s perspective, officers also need more training. Her own experiences with law enforcement were never in her words “cruel,” or “messed up,” but she recalled how they were never helpful. She stated that she could tell they wanted to help her, but they didn't know what they could do.

Responses from all participants clearly indicate that law enforcement does not receive enough training in the police academy, relies on inconsistent in-field practice, and optional training spottily attended. Therefore, gaps remain in victim identification, intervention opportunities, and victim-centered approaches to investigations. This is surprising to me, as many anti-trafficking organizations have options for survivor-led training for law enforcement. Why is more training not mandated? Why are these training workshops not utilized?

Relationship Between Law Enforcement and Victims

Through my literature review, it is apparent that prior scholars have found that victims and law enforcement lack respectful, trustful relationships with one another (Musto 2016; Swanson 2016; Krell and Dhanoa 2021). I asked each participant whether they generally had positive or negative personal interactions with their counterpart, as well as what they deemed necessary to improve the overall relationship.

Participant 1’s opinion is that the relationship is generally poor. She discussed how some sex trafficking victims have had negative experiences with law enforcement in the past, such as prior arrests like thefts and robberies. In criminal investigations, Participant 1 informed me, however, that an identified sex trafficked victim is assigned a victim/witness advocate, who helps them navigate through the legal process and has resources for them including relocation and therapy if needed. Her job, along with the prosecutors and advocates, is to keep the victim informed on what is happening with their

trafficker's case. She also noted that it can take years to make it to final adjudication in court which can cause victims who have previously disclosed that they are being trafficked, to retract their statements later on.

Participant 2 believed their experiences were positive while acknowledging that victims would likely view the relationship as negative. They noted that victims were often resistant to open up to law enforcement but their approach of treating victims with patience and understanding their experiences was positive. Participant 2 highlighted again that their own team at OPD spent a lot of time trying to provide services and leveling honestly and compassionately with women on the street, instead of being purely punitive, saying "I think they ultimately know that we're doing our job." Sex "tracks" are inherently violent, and the possibility of being raped, kidnapped, and beaten are likely to occur in those areas which creates an overall disruption to the neighborhood. Participant 2 discussed that they had never met someone who wanted to work in the sex crimes units who wasn't gentle, and understanding. Participant 2's approach also involved encouragement to the victims, that there is a way out. They acknowledged how this approach may be softer than other agencies, who only conduct raids. Participant 2 mentioned that sometimes, some of the women would remark that they were glad they were put in police vans because they were glad to be off of the street away from their exploiter. However, regardless of the services which were then offered, the victims would often go back to the same life.

Participant 3 mentioned her encounters with law enforcement had always been friendly, but as discussed above, unhelpful. Many of the other girls she knew did not have these experiences. She recalled many girls feeling humiliated during raids and arrests. She stated how overall, the general consensus and perception of victims was that law enforcement wasn't there to help them. This distrust supports the research that has previously been conducted and can provide an explanation for why many victims seek help in other ways, without law enforcement's assistance (UNODC Glo Tip 2022).

While some interactions between law enforcement and victims are positive, participants had ideas of how law enforcement can work to better their relationships with victims. Participant 1 highlighted the importance of trust and honesty and in their words, "don't bullshit them." They emphasized the need to let the victims know that they care, and are there to help them. Participant 2 reinforced the importance of acknowledging sex trafficked victims are not "ideal victims" in the sense that they do not have 'clean hands' and are often saddled with mental health and drug addiction issues but that their traumatic baggage needs to be understood in the context of their circumstances and treated with caution and respect. They highlighted that the arresting officers were encouraged to take a respectful approach, but would also have to be somewhat confrontational because they need information for their investigations.

“We need them to tell us stuff so we can’t piss them (victims) off, alienate them from the jump.”

Participant 2 said treating victims with respect is crucial to a successful encounter, but victims also “almost respect people for being firm with them.” Additionally, if one victim is butting heads with one officer, Participant 2 noted that it would be better practice for them to put their ego aside, acknowledge that it isn’t working, and try to get them to talk to a different officer -- possibly one of a different gender, race, or personality. They also underlined the importance of appreciating where each victim is situated in the social hierarchy of “the game,” their uniqueness as an individual, and their own specific story.

The current literature also shows an overall distrust between law enforcement and sex-trafficked victims (Musto 2016; Swanson 2016; Krell and Dhanoa 2021). However, I was able to find instances of positive interactions from my interviews. While this may be out of balance with the amount of negative interactions, I hope in the future there will be advances in the training and education of police officers which will improve the overall relationship. I am aware this is difficult given abuse of power, racism, and misogyny (Musto 2016; Swanson 2016; Krell and Dhanoa 2021) which many victims have faced historically and currently, but my research offers attestation that the relationship can improve through treating each person with respect and that both survivors and law enforcement appear open to this shift. I believe if more positive relationships are formed, the effectiveness of combating sex trafficking will improve, victims will trust “the system” and not fear for their safety when seeking support.

Laws

In my research, I wanted to hear from both law enforcement and survivors about what laws in California have helped and/or hindered the state’s ability to reduce sex trafficking. Through speaking with participants, four laws from the past several years were brought to my attention: Senate Bills: 1322, 357, 14, and 1414. In this section, I analyze each bill and found how despite their initial intent of shifting criminalization of victims to the pimps and customers, both law enforcement and survivors agree each one contains drastic setbacks, as they ultimately increased street prostitution, and eliminated the mechanisms that law enforcement previously found to be more effective.

Senate Bill 1322, passed in 2016, stopped the criminalization of commercially sexually exploited children victims by decriminalizing prostitution charges for minors. While this law is beneficial in that it does not criminalize victims for acts of prostitution, all participants believe it has an even worse effect on victims. Once a minor is identified, one of three possibilities can now occur: One possibility is the police bring the minor back to their parents or legal guardian. This is problematic because many minors who have engaged in the lifestyle come from abusive, unstable homes. All participants emphasized this and discussed how pimps typically prey on minors with an unstable and unhappy home life. They essentially

sweet talk, spoil, and manipulate their way into these girls' lives, gain their trust and affection, and then introduce them to sex work.

Participant 3 mentioned that although some homes are “safe,” parents and guardians often have no idea how to help their child who is being sexually exploited. In her own case, her grandmother's home was safe, but not understanding. She and the other 2 participants said that even when a minor is brought back home, once the police leave, the minor often goes right back to their pimp. Another possibility is that the police can bring them to the juvenile hall if they are on probation for another crime. There, they are not treated as a victim of trafficking, but as a criminal who broke their probation. Senate Bill 1322 is therefore somewhat counter-productive, as minor prostitution is decriminalized, but minors who have been trafficked and who have also violated their terms of probation are still criminalized and do not receive support or services. The third possibility is that the minor will be dropped off at a shelter, but Participant 3 noted that the girls’ pimps find out where the shelter is and the girls will abscond almost immediately after arriving. Participant 3 stated, “I’ve had many minors tell me that they would rather be in juvie (locked up), than be here (at a shelter).”

Senate Bill 357, passed in 2022, stopped the ability of patrol officers to arrest adult victims for loitering with the intent of prostitution. Prior to 2022, when these arrests were legal, black and transgender women were disproportionately targeted and arrested as a result of racism and sexism. While this law was aimed to create equity and decriminalize prostitutes, it has also had a negative outcome, benefitting pimps and customers. Trafficked workers are ordered to loiter by their pimps. It is one way of getting customers and generating income for their pimps. Participant 1 explained some rules of “the game” in Oakland: Victims of sex trafficking do not get to keep any of the money that they make, as pimps require that they receive all of it; a worker (whom the pimps call bitches and hoes) must make \$1000 a day for their pimp. Car dates (oral sex) are around \$40, and hotel dates (sexual intercourse) are about \$120. Generally, workers need to provide “dates” at least 10 times a day to make the required amount. If a girl does not make her pimp enough money, he subjects her to mental, physical, and sexual abuse.

Participant 2 said that a girl will not be out on the streets if she is not getting exploited. In the current day, police are no longer able to arrest, or take in any victims. Pimps know this is the state of the law, and have used it to their advantage. Victims are now forced to be out on the dangerous streets. When arrests were legal, this was an intervention method for victims to get away from where their pimp was. Victims who were arrested, or taken in vans were given an opportunity to be separated from their exploiter. To avoid arrests prior to 2022, Participant 2 recalled asking the workers to get off of the street. Since there was an incentive of “I don't want to go to jail,” they would often agree, however, with the passing of the

Senate Bill 357, they now just “laugh at you and be like, no, I'm just gonna do whatever the fuck I want.” All participants discussed the lack of any new incentives put in place of arrest as other means to combat trafficking. The unfortunate result of these laws, Senate Bills 1322 and 357, as identified by all participants, is the increase of victims out on the “tracks” which have been taking over city blocks. “These neighborhoods get completely overrun”(Participant 2). “Tracks and tracks of people, especially minors.” (Participant 3). Pimps know that police can no longer arrest a woman out on the street, which has created an influx of trafficking and a lack of protection for victims from law enforcement whose main purpose is to prevent crime and protect their community.

Senate Bill 14, and 1414 are two bills, both passed in 2024. Senate Bill 14 amends current law, and adds human trafficking of a minor to the preexisting “Three Strikes Law.” This amendment ultimately creates harsher punishment for pimps and exploiters. While Participant 1 exclaimed how this was a “huge” victory, Participant 3 saw it in a less favorable light, as she believes that while pimps are clearly an issue, she and the majority of victims face the most abuse and assault from the customers. She believes it would be more beneficial for harsher punishments to be levied against them. The amendment of Senate Bill 1414 had the potential to do this. Participant 3 is on the California State CSEC (Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children) Action Team's Advisory Board and has interacted and spoken with legislators to put these harsher sentences into law. Unfortunately, Senate Bill 1414 was originally written to accomplish this but underwent changes to the original bill before it was passed. This law increases the punishment for buyers who “purchase” a minor, and increases punishment for the exploiters who have been trafficking a minor. While this is necessary, 16 and 17-year-olds are specifically excluded from these protections, and their buyer only faces repercussions if 2 crimes are proven: the minor was being trafficked and the buyer knew they were underage. Participant 3 criticized the legislators, as many of them argued that customers of 16 and 17-year-olds should not be penalized for purchasing sexual favors, because it “pays their rent and other necessities” and refused to ‘demonize’ buyers. Coercion and trafficking are difficult to prove in court given debates about what constitutes coercion (Davidson, 2010). Similarly, it is difficult to prove trafficking and proving without reasonable doubt that a customer knew they were a minor. As a result, this bill will only help a small portion of youth. Participants 2 and 3 noted in their interviews how even they could not tell a minor apart from an adult- as their apparel and makeup make even 13-year-olds look over 18.

While societal pressures to decriminalize victims of sex trafficking have been signed into law, the converse has happened and ultimately increased sex trafficking, and removed mechanisms for law enforcement to get women off the street, or even temporarily separate them away from their exploiter.

While all participants believe criminalization is not the answer, they highlight the complete lack of laws to protect and rescue victims of sex trafficking. A call for the punishment of exploiters and customers who exploit women and minors is sought by law enforcement and survivors. Although survivors are vocal in these legislation efforts, ironically, our state senators have pushed back on sanctions, and have passed bills which allow the rape of 16 and 17-year-old victims and allow pimps to visibly exploit their victims without the risk of arrest.

Future research can aim to find out why our state legislators are so hesitant to criminalize perpetrators. What other more effective anti-trafficking strategies should take the place of arresting victims?

Ideas for General Improvements

I believe that in order to effectively reduce sex trafficking overall, the voices of survivors and law enforcement need to be heard as to what would best assist them. To conclude my interview, I asked all participants what changes and improvements they would like to see moving forward.

Participant 1 calls for more education and training that law enforcement receives directly from survivors of trafficking. She also believes in education by providing a sex trafficking curriculum in grade school, as she has seen victims as young as 12 years old being trafficked. Participant 3 was 13 when she met her trafficker, and was 14 when she began being sexually exploited by a pimp.

Participant 3 highlights how the anti-trafficking measures should not be based on arresting victims, but other mechanisms need to be put in place. She suggests creating a policy which recognizes exploitation as an immediate safety issue. Affirmative defense in court, mandated training laws, case worker laws, mental health facilities that are specific to victims of trafficking, and implementation of more youth boards and conversation spaces are also ways she discussed that the current laws can have backup mechanisms. She calls for shelter improvements such as more mental health counselors and therapy from professionals, more life goal-oriented programs, and more programs displaying survivor leadership. She believes more money from the government should be devoted to the issue of trafficking. Survivors should be taken seriously when it comes to passing legislation, laws need to be less reactive and more proactive, and sex trafficking needs to be included in the discussion of overhauling systems along with conversations around housing, food insecurity, and poverty. She also believes a 72-hour hold at a shelter is crucial (as it provides a few-day detox from trafficking and their pimp), a suggestion Participant 2 also deemed necessary.

Participant 2, unlike 3, thinks victim services get lots of money thrown at them, and they are ultimately unsuccessful. "They should really just have a bunch of these facilities where they just force these girls to go into these treatment programs. But it's hard to get them in. Plus the DA's office spends hundreds of

thousands of dollars on one girl who just keeps running away, getting caught up with a new guy, all this other stuff and really nothing ever changes. Then she ages out and that's it. Then she's over 18 and they can't do anything." They believe it would be helpful if shelters offered immediate intake to victims, regardless of ID status or financial status- which often turns victims away from services. They also discuss their idea of having a few specialists in a department who work closely with officers and victims interested in rehabilitation through outreach and interactions.

All participants also favor research and money towards getting pimps off of the streets, punishing customers, and saving potential future victims.

Conclusion

So, how effective are the current laws and law enforcement policies and procedures in reducing sex trafficking overall and identifying and assisting victims in California?

While I was hoping the newer laws and policies aimed at preventing sex trafficking and assisting victims were being effectively created and enforced, my findings did not confirm this as they are instead, mostly detrimental to this goal. Training for law enforcement individuals in sex trafficking units lacks extensivity and quality, creating a high risk of not being able to identify victims. The lack of resources that victims are offered allows a bigger gap in who successfully escapes and who remains a victim. Relationships between law enforcement and victims remain complicated. Law enforcement does not trust that many victims can successfully leave their trafficker. Victims either fear law enforcement or are hesitant to believe they can help. Recent legislation in California increases exploitive street prostitution, denies law enforcement intervention, and refuses to create harsh punishment for pimps and customers.

As I have stated in my introduction and literature review, sex trafficking is a global phenomenon that is a result of both macro and micro-level sociological factors. While my research focuses on one specific topic, I would like to see future researchers pivot their attention to:

1. Why sex trafficking rehabilitation programs have a low success rate, and does it pertain to the psychological bond between victims and pimps' manipulation tactics?
2. In the United States, citizens are constantly hearing that powerful individuals in our country are being accused of sexual harassment and sexual assault of women and minors. We excuse this behavior and elect them into positions of power. With this information, can we as a country truly combat sexual exploitation if we elect leaders who partake in it?

While my findings may be discouraging, it is important to acknowledge the positives. In my interviews I conducted with Participants 1 and 2, I was shown each of their true commitment to assisting victims of sex trafficking as law enforcement officials. While it is important that they uphold the law, they were not

hesitant to critique their own shortcomings and offered their suggestions for the overall improvement of victim services and legislation. Participant 3, a survivor of over a decade of sex trafficking now dedicates her life and career to assisting current victims at a nonprofit organization. She also consistently speaks to legislators about the issue of sex trafficking and continues to educate the public about this phenomenon, from a survivor's perspective. She too, works to combat some of the shortcomings that legislation and law enforcement face.

Despite past literature's identification of distrust between law enforcement and sex trafficking victims, my research suggests sex trafficking victims actually want and need help from law enforcement, and peace officers are willing to provide it. It is the lack of appropriate training that officers receive and the detrimental effect of current laws that is preventing this effective engagement. Re-working the applicable laws and improving law enforcement training could improve efforts to reduce sex trafficking and effectively identify and assist victims in California.

APPENDIX

Specific Interview Questions I Asked Participants

Survivors

1. What age were you when you were first introduced to your trafficker?
2. How many years were you trafficked for?
3. When/how did you successfully escape?
4. Did law enforcement ever try to intervene in your case?
5. Did you feel supported or dismissed?
6. Were you aware of any legal protections or shelters available for trafficking victims while you were being trafficked?
7. In what ways do you think current laws and law enforcement efforts have helped victims?
8. In what ways do you think current laws and law enforcement efforts have hindered victims' recovery process?
9. What changes to sex trafficking laws would you advocate for based on your experience/other stories you have heard?
10. How do you believe the legal system can better address the needs of trafficking survivors?
11. What message would you like to convey to lawmakers and law enforcement regarding the needs of victims?

Law Enforcement Officials

1. What is your job title?

2. How long have you been at this role?
3. Would you say that sex trafficked victims have an overall positive or negative relationship with law enforcement?
4. What are the key indicators that law enforcement looks for to identify potential victims of sex trafficking?
5. How do you collaborate with other agencies or organizations to combat sex trafficking?
6. What training do law enforcement officers receive specifically related to sex trafficking?
7. How often do victims disclose that they are being trafficked?
8. What resources are available to victims of sex trafficking once they are identified?
9. How often do victims themselves get arrested for prostitution?
10. What laws would you say have helped victims?
11. What laws have negatively impacted victims and your ability to help them?
12. What changes or improvements would you like to see in sex trafficking laws or enforcement practices?
13. How do you think law enforcement and victims can better their relationships with one another?

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AMELIA RODRIGUES

Hello! My name is Amelia Rodrigues, and I am currently a junior sociology major at LMU. Throughout my time at this institution, being a sociology major has allowed me to go through the world with a more critical, imaginative eye. Therefore, with my involvement in Greek life, I became interested in exploring fraternity culture from a sociological lens, which ultimately lead me to write this paper.

Fraternity Culture: A Literature Review and Research Proposal

According to the University of New Mexico, there are one hundred and twenty-three different sororities and fraternities with over nine million members in the U.S. Out of the fifty largest corporations in our nation, forty-three are run by men who once belonged to a fraternity. Since 1910, forty of the forty-seven U.S. Supreme Court justices were fraternity men. Such information, along with popular forms of media in our country, illustrates the salience of Greek life in American society. Although these social institutions have provided women and men alike with meaningful friendships and positive college experiences, there is a dark underside to the American Greek system, largely ignored by many.

Fraternities are notoriously high-risk environments for sexual violence against women. Through their research, John Foubert, Jonathan Newberry, and Jerry Tatum were able to conclude “fraternity men were three times more likely to commit sexual assault than non-fraternity men” (739). Additionally, Seabrook et. al explain how being a fraternity brother indicates you are more likely to possess “accepting attitudes toward sexual violence” and perpetuate such barbaric actions (10). In understanding the popularity of Greek life in America, along with the sexual violence fraternities so often commit and sustain, it is transparent the given organizations must be better understood to prevent further violence against women on college campuses. Therefore, my research aims to uncover the cultural aspects of such groups to answer the critical question: how does fraternity culture foster an environment that perpetuates sexual

violence against women on college campuses? Within my research, three important themes have emerged, which help to answer the aforementioned, crucial question: toxic masculinity, objectification of women, and rape myth acceptance. As I've searched for answers through my literature review, I've altered my research focus and formulated the following question for potential research: what external factors contribute to the toxic masculinist culture within fraternities?

Within "Fraternities and Rape on Campus," Martin and Hummer aim to analyze the social context of fraternities driving sexual violence against women, as they additionally describe how such a macro perspective has been absent in past research (458). Though individual attitudes and perspectives can be valuable, they fail to fully encapsulate the social circumstances which allow sexual violence against women on college campuses to occur. Furthermore, Martin and Hummer's research supports how "fraternities are vitally concerned—more than anything else—with masculinity" (Martin and Hummer 461). However, the specific form of masculinity within the aforementioned environment is toxic, expressed through "highly masculinist" features endorsed by these organizations. Such features include stereotypical forms of masculinity and heterosexuality, widespread use of violence and physical force, and fixation on competition, superiority, and domination (457). These attributes embody toxic masculinity, as they function to reinforce traditional, widely accepted notions of masculinity: aggressive domination by men and subordination of women. Kalof and Cargill's research advances the notion of toxic masculinity embedded within fraternities, discovering how both men and women in Greek life uphold "the assumption that dominance and aggression in interpersonal relations are appropriately masculine behaviors" (422). Including both fraternity and sorority members in their research creates an even more holistic perspective Martin and Hummer aimed to achieve, and underscores how toxic masculinity reinforces traditionalist gender roles, encouraging fraternity brothers' aggressive domination; ultimately manifesting in sexual violence against college women.

Although Boyle draws attention away from the macroscopic lens Martin and Hummer aimed to work within, she underscores the individual pressures fraternity brothers feel to maintain this "certain type of masculinity" (391). She describes how fraternity members "self-verify by acting in a masculine way. If signals from his encounter (reflected appraisals) suggest others do not see him as masculine, he experiences identity disruption and may adjust his behavior" (391). When considering the process of self-verification in context with fraternity's "highly masculinist features" described by Martin and Hummer, it becomes all the more clear that fraternity members must sustain their masculine identity through expressions of the most visible, aggressive, and thus toxic form of masculinity. Due to the all-male environment, along with the intense heckling and hazing present, there is immense pressure within

fraternity culture to uphold such toxic forms of masculinity and live up to these narrow gender expectations. The outcome of such a harmful form of masculinity is evident within Boswell and Spades' work; when they asked fraternity brothers if they treated women on campus with respect, they most commonly responded with: "On an individual basis, yes, but when you have a group of men together, no" (141). Although Boswell and Spades address impactful gender expectations, they fail to unpack how external forces outside of fraternities may influence the traditional gender norms, which are perpetuated in these organizations.

Through the toxic masculinity embodied and endorsed within fraternity culture, harmful consequences have manifested, one of which is the objectification of women. In a study comparing fraternity and non-fraternity men, Bleecker and Murnen not only found more images of women in fraternity men's rooms but significantly more sexually degrading images (490).

Bleecker and Murnen's research makes a significant development in the fraternity culture scholarship, as their results show how toxic masculinity is more than what is said or expressed explicitly. It is the normalization of harmful processes, such as the display of such degrading images, that are dispersed throughout this environment. The normalization of such processes, coupled with the toxic masculinist context, can allow violence against women to become normalized as well. In other words the domination and aggression, deemed appropriately masculine traits in such a toxic male environment, allow sexual violence to be a legitimate outcome of this objectification. Although their research is limited, because it does not explore the implications of the relationship between more sexually degrading images and more accepting beliefs about rape, their conclusions support the idea; the degradation of women "might lead women to be seen as legitimate targets of sexual assault" (491). Whilst their discussion is more focused on degradation rather than objectification, Bleecker and Murnen explain how these images reduce women to "sex objects" (491).

Seabrook et. al's findings run parallel with Bleecker and Murnens, discovering through their research that fraternity members "more readily objectify women," which they find is significantly tied to sexual violence (9). Both sources indicate the significant tendency of fraternity men to create an environment that supports and perpetuates objectification, which they see as a gateway to sexual violence. Such objectification, through my understanding of toxic masculinity within fraternities, stems from the traditional, rudimentary binary of domination and passivity between men and women. The given power dynamic allows men's sexual desires to take the forefront, while women become playthings devoid of humanity, designed for male manipulation. With the normalization and perpetuation of toxic masculinity so readily apparent within fraternity culture, this objectification (and therefore sexual violence) becomes

commonplace. Such a recurrence is important to consider, as consistent events in a social group often morph into an accepted cultural norm.

Furthermore, Seabrook et. al explicitly explain the inner workings of objectification Bleecker and Murnen failed to address; writing about how this process “dehumanizes women and reduces them to objects, devoid of thought and feeling,” which ultimately makes it easier for sexual violence to be committed against these “objects” (9). The fraternity culture perpetuates such objectification through assorted practices, and because they dominate the party scene on college campuses, such procedures are widely accepted (Jozkowski et. al). Their objectifying practices, examined by Jozkowski et. al, include “sexist behavior in which women are used as ‘bait’ for recruiting new members, and servers of brothers’ needs and as sexual prey” (Jozkowski et. al). Through various party themes, signs, and chants, there is the continued objectification of women. Such processes, infused with the “highly masculinist” attitudes of fraternities, lead to women being viewed as the object of men’s domination and aggression; ultimately leading to an increased level of sexual violence.

With the fraternity environment, another consequence of toxic masculinity reveals itself; a dangerous ideal known as “rape myth acceptance”: harmful, sexist, and false beliefs about rape employed to excuse sexual violence, which then allows this harm to occur. Beliefs within this ideological concept include “women like to be physically roughed up, women want to be forced into sex, women have secret desires to be raped, men should be the controllers of the relationship, and sexually liberated women are promiscuous” (Boeringer 85). Unsurprisingly, Boeringer found the aforementioned beliefs to be significantly more accepted by fraternity members than controls (88). It’s also important to note how male collegiate athletes were found to support almost all of the rape myth acceptance statements presented by Boeringer (88). Murnen and Kohlman’s work uncovers this significant relationship between male collegiate athletes and rape myth acceptance as well. Their research makes an important discovery, as it underscores the danger of all-male organizations, and how harmful values and beliefs around women can go unchecked in a culture dominated by masculinity. Murnen and Kohlman’s findings support Boeringer’s results, as they too find a significant tie between fraternity men and more supportive attitudes toward rape myth acceptance (153). An approval of rape myths among fraternity brothers, that can so easily go uninhibited in these highlight masculinist cultures, can become a “proxy for acceptance of sexual violence” (Seabrook 43).

Furthermore, Seabrook indicates a significant positive relationship between hostile sexism and rape myth acceptance among fraternity men; illuminating how toxic masculinity generates these harmful beliefs, which sequentially manifest into sexual violence. Murnen and Kohlman explicitly

underscore the dangers of this toxic masculinity, describing how it embodies attitudes of “sexual callousness, male dominance, and acceptance of aggression” which can “legitimize the use of violence against women” (153). Although Murnen and Kohlman fail to explicitly state how toxic masculinity leads to rape myth acceptance, which then leads to sexual violence, they find through their research that fraternity men are more likely to support the endorsement of rape myths (155). Rape myth acceptance stems from the toxic masculinity embedded in fraternity culture, which functions to form such attitudes, as well as allow and excuse sexual violence. In an environment where domination and aggression are highly valued, it comes as no surprise that such attitudes are present within fraternities. Furthermore, these attitudes, just like the objectification of women, has become so normalized that their perpetuation is commonplace.

Through my analysis, I’ve come to understand the detrimental assumptions integral to toxic masculinity function to foster an environment that sustains sexual violence against women. It is evident in the research that fraternities uphold and fixate on such a harmful form of masculinity, creating a culture which allows the consequences of this ideology to occur. Within such a culture, there is a large amount of pressure to express the kind of masculinity these environments support. Furthermore, I have not only come to understand the toxic masculinist environment but the two major consequences of this masculinity which include the objectification of women, as well as rape myth acceptance.

Reducing and dehumanizing women to objects, coupled with the dominance and aggression associated with toxic masculinity, ultimately allows and perpetuates sexual violence against women. Rape myth acceptance embodies the sexist attitudes and assumptions significantly held by fraternity men, which ultimately excuse, permit, and maintain the sexual violence that transpires within this culture. The majority of scholarship provided moves beyond the individualistic perspectives many researchers have had toward fraternities and illuminates the toxic masculinist culture of fraternity organizations. However, it fails to explain the origins of toxic masculinity adequately. For future research, I aim to examine external factors, such as parental figures, media, etc., to understand how this masculinity formed within fraternities.

Ultimately, I’ve come to understand the environmental factors conducive to fraternity brother’s perpetuation of sexual violence against women. However, similar to the literature I have previously reviewed, I have not unpacked the external forces behind the toxic masculinity that ultimately drives the perpetuation of women’s harm. Therefore, I will reformulate my question to look outside of the fraternity environment to truly understand the larger forces at play in perpetuating toxic masculinity. In reformulating my research focus, I came up with the following question: what external factors

contribute to the toxic masculinist culture within fraternities?

As I aim to uncover the external forces instrumental to toxic masculinity within such college organizations, a central hypothesis building on my prior knowledge of toxic masculinity has developed. From my data, I believe I will find a significant relationship between fraternity brother's conception of toxic masculinity and external forces such as parental figures, media consumption, and sports environments. In other words, I hypothesize the given external forces will have played a significant role in shaping fraternity brother's toxic ideals about being a man. For the survey portion of my mixed methodological approach, I have identified parental figures, media consumption, and sports environments as my independent variables. Toxic masculinity, then, is my dependent variable, as I see such external forces shaping and largely affecting these men's harmful conception of masculinity. As I will unpack later in this research proposal, I intend to use my survey to measure the relationship between my dependent variable and independent variables.

Before embarking on my methodological approach, it's essential to define the multiple variables I have presented within my proposal. Most importantly, because of the cultural and social connotations the term "toxic masculinity" has taken on in recent years, I must address the central tenets of this concept. In his explanation of toxic masculinity within "What is Toxic Masculinity and How It Impacts Mental Health," Kevin Foss identifies these core tenets central to understanding the meaning of toxic masculinity. The three he focuses on are toughness, anti-femininity, and power. He further unpacks the idea of toughness associated with toxic masculinity, and explains how men are expected to be aggressive, strong, and "emotionally hardened" (Foss). Anti-femininity, as Foss defines it, is the rejection of any stereotypically feminine traits, such as expressing emotion, being vulnerable, or accepting help from others. Lastly, Foss delves into this tenant of power by explaining how, through such a harmful masculine ideology, "men are only worthy if they have money, power, status, and influence" (Foss). Moreover, Terry A. Kupers in "Toxic Masculinity As a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison" illustrates several tendencies rooted in toxic masculinity. I believe such "proclivities" are useful within my proposal, as they help to further exhibit the meaning of this key ideological concept. These various inclinations, which ultimately stem from the core tenants Foss has identified, include "extreme competition and greed...a strong need to dominate and control others, an incapacity to nurture, a dread of dependency, a readiness to resort to violence, and the stigmatization and subjugation of women, gays, and men who exhibit feminine characteristics" (Kupers 717).

About the "media consumption" variable, I will operationalize it within my methodological approach by

by creating questions around the consumption of television, movies, music, and any other form of media the participants identify within the focus group. Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, within their work “Possible Selves,” illustrate the importance of media in the construction and perpetuation of our socially shared gender ideals. Their stressed importance of this idea, along with my previous knowledge of toxic masculinity, drove me to use “media consumption” as one of my key independent variables. They describe how our definitions and “categories” of gender are “made salient by the individual’s particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media” (Markus and Nurius 954).

Since parental figures play such a key role in the socialization process, I knew it was essential to include the idea of parental figures, both mother and father, in this research of toxic masculinity. Prior research has identified that “Boys learn how to be masculine at home through their parents, family, and home life” (Nelson 42). Additionally, because of the aggression, strength, and power so many male sports require, such as football, ice hockey, and boxing, I knew such environments would be important to analyze from a toxic masculinist perspective. Rachel Madsen and Annemarie Farrell support this thinking by explaining how “Men’s sport often includes a culture of toxic masculinity, misogyny, and homophobia particularly in contact, team sports such as football, rugby, and ice hockey” (Madsen and Farrell 71).

To best collect data on the external sources conducive to the toxic masculinist culture within fraternities, I believe it’s best to engage in a two-pronged methodological approach. I plan to administer surveys to LMU fraternity brothers and conduct a focus group made up of these men. As I pondered the best methodological approaches, I found several important reasons for choosing surveys as my initial method. First, surveys are known to be the best methodological approach available for collecting data on a population too big for direct observation. Because the population I wish to examine, fraternity members, contains hundreds of thousands of men nationally, employing a survey method allows me to obtain valuable data on a small portion of fraternity brothers. Additionally, surveys serve as great instruments to measure attitudes, orientations, and perspectives. Because I want to understand the relationship between my independent variables (sports environments, parental figures, and media consumption) and my dependent variable (toxic masculinity), I need to understand the extent to which their outlook aligns with toxic masculinist ideals. Furthermore, by asking open-ended questions that prompt the subject to consider the independent variable’s effects on their manhood, I can sufficiently operationalize the given key variables within my research. However, one pitfall of survey research is that many researchers in the past have struggled to provide their subjects with adequate questionnaires. In the past, some of the most

reputable institutions have failed to provide respondents with clear, relevant, unbiased questions. Therefore, within my research, I must be careful to construct questions my respondents can understand and accept as both appropriate and relevant to the topic.

For my secondary method, I found focus groups to be an important addition to my methodological approach. One reason why I choose this kind of obtrusive research is because researchers, utilizing focus groups, can learn about the sociocultural processes and characteristics of a particular group. Since I wish to unpack the social and cultural factors that contribute to toxic masculinity within fraternities, I can utilize this methodology to unpack the social and cultural processes conducive to fraternity's toxic masculinist culture. Similar to surveys, focus groups are also great vehicles for answering a central research question. However, I think some obstacles could arise within the focus group as a result of the toxic masculinist culture found in fraternities. Toxic masculinity formulates the belief among men that they should avoid any instances of emotionality or vulnerability. Therefore it may be difficult to spark a conversation about their difficult experiences with toxic masculinist influences.

Additionally, this methodology hones in on the group itself as the unit of analysis. Such an analytical focus is different from surveys, in which the unit of analysis is the individual respondent. Although their unit of analysis is different, this will only function to enhance the value of my work. The surveys will illuminate the potentially significant relationship between the hypothesized external factors and toxic masculinity while the focus group will further unpack the effects of such external variables through discussion and collaboration. Overall, a two-pronged methodological approach will allow a deeper inspection of the causes behind toxic masculinity in fraternities.

To begin my research, I will first select my unit of analysis for the survey: a fraternity brother. The population, which consists of the subjects my research applies to and hopes to conclude about, is fraternity men. Because I cannot reach every fraternity brother across the United States, I will create a sampling frame. This involves the formulation of a list (including contact information) from which a sample (a subset of the population) can be drawn. In creating a sampling frame to collect my data, I will do my best to get the contact information of at least forty to fifty members of each fraternity on campus, which includes the following: Alpha Delta Gamma, Sigma Chi, Sigma Phi Epsilon, Beta Theta Pi, Delta Sigma Phi, Delta Upsilon, Lambda Chi Alpha, and Phi Delta Theta. Because I am involved in sorority life, I can ask the sorority sweethearts of each fraternity to ask their presidents to post my survey on their Facebook page. If there is low engagement through this social media platform, I will reach out to the fraternity president myself and ask him to promote my survey once again. As previously indicated, the survey will be in the form of an online questionnaire; administering physical surveys would likely be a

much more tedious task. Tracking down and going through hundreds of individual surveys on paper would be much harder than tabulating and analyzing results online.

In the beginning of the online questionnaire, I will ask each respondent what fraternity they are a part of. Besides their fraternity membership, any other demographics they could provide will not be needed for my research. Then, I will provide respondents with three statements which will function to determine their levels of toxic masculinity. To operationalize this variable within my survey, I will use the core tenants of toxic masculinity Foss identified in his work; toughness, anti-femininity, and power. More specifically, I will create statements revolving around such key tenants, and use the Likert scale to determine how strongly the men involved agree or disagree with the given claims. The statements I formulated are listed here: “Manliness inherently involves being strong, aggressive, and tough, both emotionally and physically,” “I don’t respect or associate with men who possess feminine traits”, and “Men’s ultimate life goals should revolve around wealth, power, and influence.” Below each of the statements I will provide a scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” I will then include several questions and statements that operationalize my independent variables of parental figures, media consumption, and sports environments. The questions given to my participants include “Did your father or mother ever tell you to stop ____ like a girl? Could include hitting like a girl, sounding like a girl, crying like a girl, acting like a girl, etc.” This will be a close-ended question where respondents can either respond with yes or no. Another question includes “How would you describe most of the popular male heroes (Marvel or DC superheroes, Disney Princes, etc.)?” In response to the question, respondents will have the following answers to choose from: a) stoic, aggressive, tough b) compassionate, kind, caring c) sensitive, domestic, and gentle. The same answers will be available to the following question: “How would you describe most of the male athletes popular in the mainstream media? Such answers, in my mind, present a range of the most toxic masculinist traits (exhibited in choice a) to the most stereotypical female traits (exhibited in choice b). Additionally, I will also ask “Did your coaches ever say phrases such as ‘don’t be a wuss/wimp’ or ‘man up!’ or call you demeaning names like ‘sissy’ or ‘pussy’”? Respondents can answer yes or no.

To conclude my survey, I will ask respondents to answer two open-ended questions. I only included two within the survey because I predict most of the participants will not want to take the time or effort to write out a thoughtful answer. The two questions include the following: “How do you feel the media, sports environments, and/or parental figures have played a role in shaping your idea of masculinity?” “How do you believe toxic masculinity is perpetuated in our society?”

Once the survey is administered, I will use the same sampling frame to draw a new sample for my focus group. Because researchers advise that complex topics should be addressed with a small number of focus group members, I will only select eight participants; one from each fraternity at LMU, and this group of men will be my unit of analysis. Furthermore, by keeping the focus group small, it is less likely one or two participants dominate the conversation. Moreover, a more intimate focus group lessens groupthink; such a phenomenon occurs when people band together in agreement on one issue, topic, or subject because they feel pressured to within the larger group. To facilitate the group, I will hold our session within a study room on campus, as it is a quiet space that will allow the participants to focus on the task at hand. I will be the facilitator, ensure confidentiality for all participants, take notes when needed, record the conversation, refrain from interrupting the discussion, and ask thirteen prepared questions. The given questions are as follows: 1) What were the typical characteristics of your favorite male characters in movies and television shows? 2) How do you feel like this media shaped your idea of masculinity? 3) How often do you listen to rap music? What patterns, if any, have you noticed within the lyrics or general themes of songs? 4) What do you find to be the general persona of male rap artists today? 5) How are male athletes often portrayed by the media? Have you noticed any general patterns in their behavior? 6) How do you feel men in the mainstream media (male athletes, rap artists, popular male characters) have shaped your (and other men's) sense of masculinity? I've purposefully started with questions about the media, because I feel like discussing bits of popular culture will be a good way to ease the respondents into the exercise.

Additionally, the given questions require less vulnerability than the following questions, which allows participants to gradually adjust to the more vulnerable questions. Next, I will ask: 7) As a child, do you remember any distinct experiences with your parents that shaped your idea of manhood? How have such experiences impacted you, either negatively or positively? 8) Did you play sports as a child? 9) How did your coach's coaching style affect your sense of manhood? What were your coach's expectations of the boys on your team? 10) Did you feel pressure to conform to a certain standard within these environments? 11) What attributes/characteristics were celebrated within your sports realm? 12) How do you feel like the media, sports environments, and/or parental figures have played a role in shaping your idea of masculinity? 13) How do you believe toxic masculinity is perpetuated in our society?

In terms of the sensitive aspects of my research, I think a focus group discussion may bring up some harmful, even abusive, experiences from the respondent's childhood(s). In response to the potentially difficult discussions of childhood experiences, I will emphasize the confidentiality and anonymity of the exercise. I will make sure to let all participants know the only personal information I am recording is the fraternity they associate with. Before the focus group is conducted, I will make sure to receive the full

consent of all parties involved to record the session, and confirm that the recording will not be shared with any external groups or individuals. Moreover, before beginning this exercise, I will confirm all information will be used in sociological research. A confirmation of confidentiality, anonymity, and consent will be replicated within my survey; I will reassure each respondent their personal information will not be shared. Similar to the focus group respondents, I will inform survey participants that their information will be used in sociological research to ensure transparency and honesty.

An issue which may arise while conducting the focus group and administering surveys is the validity and reliability of my research. Moreover, because I am affiliated with Greek life on campus, some may assume that I have a biased outlook on the participants. This particular assumption would be especially prevalent within my focus group; I can allow complete anonymity for my survey respondents but there is a chance I will recognize my focus group participants. To combat this issue, I intend to randomly select names from each fraternity until the participant I choose is a stranger. This will minimize the potential bias I may have towards the focus group participants, curbing the possible invalidity and unreliability of my research.

To begin the analysis of my data, I will first look at the correlation between the answers to the first three statements about toxic masculinity, and the responses from the last four questions involving my hypothesized toxic masculinist forces. More specifically, I will look for the level of agreement with the three statements about toxic masculinity, and see if the participant's agreement correlates with answering "a" to questions two and three and answering "yes" to questions one and four. I will specifically look for these answers because the correlation between agreements with toxic masculinist statements and acknowledging experiences with toxic masculinist influences (sports environments, parental figures, media) illustrates the significant relationship I hypothesized. Therefore, I will systematically evaluate each individual's answers; comparing the initial three responses to the following four.

Then, for the two open-ended questions I provided, I will use two different coding processes to systematically analyze the responses to each question. For the first question, I will use the following categorical themes to identify, sort, and organize similar phrases, words, and statements: pressure, toughness, strength/power, lack of vulnerability/emotionality, and competition. For the second question, I will apply different categorical themes to the participants' responses. The themes I formulated are as follows: media (sports entertainment, television, film, podcasts, music), institutions (education, government, religion), parental figures, and powerful male figures (presidents, popular athletes, musicians, politicians). The questions provided will also function to highlight the potentially significant relationship I hypothesized.

To efficiently analyze the data collected from my focus group, I must first convert my recording into a typed transcript. Once this is sufficiently achieved, I will engage in yet another coding procedure. To identify and sort similar phrases, words, and statements within the transcript, I will employ the following themes to the aforementioned focus group questions: 1) tough, strong/powerful, aggressive, domineering, 2) pressure, influence, modeled behavior, 3) degradation of women, aggression, boasting about wealth, objectification, toughness 4 and 5) aggression, toughness, pridefulness, power, 6) pressure, influence, modeled behavior, 7) belittling, name-calling, degradation, pressuring 8) yes or no, 9) belittling, degradation, name-calling, pressuring, 10) yes or no, 11) aggression, toughness, pridefulness, power. For questions twelve and thirteen, I plan to code them with the same themes employed in the survey coding process. Additionally, I intend to conduct a pilot study with this methodological approach. Such a methodological procedure will help to better shape the organization of my coding process; I've never personally dealt with the pressures and forces which perpetuate toxic masculinity, so conducting a pilot study will help me understand some basic patterns to construct my coding procedure.

With a two-pronged methodological approach, I will not only be able to measure the significant relationship I hypothesized through my survey, but I can further unpack the potential correlation as well. By providing open-ended questions within my survey and conducting a focus group, I can more deeply comprehend the way these social and cultural forces have shaped the toxic ideals of masculinity fraternity brothers so often possess. As previously indicated, while many scholars have identified the toxic masculinist features of fraternities and their harmful consequences, they have failed to uncover the root causes of it. Ultimately, with my research, I can come to understand the multitude of external factors conducive to toxic masculinity within fraternities.

Upon reflection, my method of data collection solely revolves around the LMU population and does not involve students from other campuses. I think this is a major limitation within my research, as I cannot see the patterns of toxic masculinity across fraternities from several different colleges. Therefore, I cannot understand how geographical differences play a role in the presence of toxic masculinity within various fraternities across the U.S. Additionally, because of the geographical limitation of my proposed research, it is not generalizable. Future research on this topic should expand my methodological approach to various campuses across America. More research beyond this initial study would not only make the results generalizable, but would help sociologists gain a better understanding of the toxic masculinist influences in American society. Moreover, the aforementioned limitations bring two research questions to light that future scholars should investigate: how do the toxic masculinist influences in fraternities vary across

America, and what external toxic masculinist forces are most prominent across all American Fraternities? provided, important strides can be made towards dismantling this harmful ideology. By presenting such research to the administrators of our larger institutions, they can see how their actions have negatively impacted the men of this generation and beyond. The given body of research could awaken powerful executives to the issues their organizations have been perpetuating and could allow them to instill procedures and programs to promote healthy forms of masculinity. Ultimately, this entire body of work is integral to uncovering and dismantling our society's institutionalized patriarchy, which has allowed toxic masculinity, and its violent consequences against women, to flourish.

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LEO MALDONADO



Leo S.C. Maldonado has spent years studying society, historical patterns, and the unspoken norms governing human interaction, all while finally perfecting the art of silently nodding along in class. In the spring of 2026, he will graduate with a bachelor's degree in Sociology, along with minors in Economics and English.

Leo has devoted his academic career to understanding how the world works and, more importantly, why absolutely none of it makes sense.

How McDonald's Made You Single: An Exploration of The Effects of McDonaldization on Generation Z's Behavior

Social institutions have been reshaped by digital platforms, particularly for Generation Z, who have demonstrated a notable behavioral shift from previous generations. In particular, a lessened ability to engage in coming-of-age activities, including getting a driver's license, and of specific interest, the desire to date. This paper examines how McDonaldization, characterized by efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, has reshaped Gen Z's social behaviors, particularly their approach to relationships, contributing to their reluctance to engage in traditional milestones compared to previous generations.

When examining differences between age groups, studies view society through the metric of "generations" unofficial categorizations of cohorts usually spanning 15-18 years. While there is disagreement about when Gen Z begins and ends, experts at Pew Research agree Generation Z is categorized as individuals born between 1997 and 2012. While still a young cohort, studies show Gen Z has demonstrated a clear set of characteristics across different statistics, particularly a decrease in what previous generations viewed as "coming-of-age" behavior. A major behavior includes sexual activity, as reported by the California Health Interview Survey through UCLA. According to the study, "the number of young Californians ages 18 to 30 who reported having no sexual partners in the prior year reached a

decade high of 38%." The given statistic is corroborated nationally by the University of Chicago, which found 3 in 10 Generation Z males and one in four Gen Z women also reported not having had sex the year prior.

It's not just sexual activity that has decreased from past generations. Data shows in 2021, 25 percent of U.S. 16-year-olds and 42 percent of 17-year-olds had a driver's license. Contrast such statistics to the equivalent data in 1997, where 43 percent of 16-year-olds and 62 percent of 17-year-olds had licenses. Moreover, further studies indicate adolescents are increasingly less likely to engage in obtaining part-time employment or consuming alcohol. In response to the previous observations, Dr. Haley Stephens states, "Kids are socially and behaviorally developing more slowly" compared to past metrics established by former generations. San Diego State University psychology professor Jean Twenge has dubbed it the "slow life factor," where young people are not growing up as quickly as previous generations. They explain Gen Z are slower to hit significant milestones in life, adding kids are starting college later, dating less, and living with their parents for longer.

Twenge rationalizes the above phenomenon as a combination of extended lifespans and longer education times, which slows down the developmental track, stating, "You're going to notice that in dating, romantic relationships, and sexuality." However, when asked, Gen Z provided different insights. In news reports, the reasons teenagers offer for not obtaining their license were dominated by preferred engagement in online communities as well as anxiety surrounding driving. Interviewers curious about why Gen Z is not dating echoed similar observations, stating, "From what I've observed, members of this generation are overly cautious. Or maybe acutely indecisive." Such perspectives are supported by the data, with reports stating, "Less than half (47%) of Gen Z Americans are thriving in their lives," with thriving meaning describing their mental health as excellent. The above percent is the lowest out of all generations today and lower than millennials at the same age. From such a perspective, lessened participation in milestones makes sense. Milestones often accompany significant unknowns to those who have yet to achieve them. Learning to drive for the first time, engaging in sexual activity, getting a first job, and, of particular interest to this paper, dating, is coupled with variables and mystery, which can be stressful and thus put off or avoided. Such an explanation naturally leads to another question—Why has Generation Z become less resilient to social and variable stress than past generations? Milestones have not changed between generations, yet Generation Z's ability to tolerate them has. One possible explanation has already been voiced: the preferred engagement in online communities and the digital McDonaldization surrounding the space, which has led to an over-reliance on control and predictability.

Conceptualized by sociologist George Ritzer in his 1995 book *The McDonaldization of Society*, McDonaldization refers to integrating "fast-food" principles into society with traditions and unique experiences replaced by standardized and hyper-rational products. Ritzer explains the four core tenets of McDonaldization popularized by the titular fast food chain: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. These tenets were expanded in the digital age, with sites like Amazon providing an efficient and isolated virtual shopping method. By removing human elements of unpredictability, such as parking and cashiers with predictable systems, companies can standardize their operations and make significantly more capital compared to traditional systems. The financial motivation has led other industries to follow suit. There are countless consequences of mass adoption, such as the rise of presumption, hyper-consumerism, and digital monopolies. However, what is not discussed is what happens physiologically to the generation that grew up under and became accustomed to the principles of McDonaldization. Gen Z is the first example of the long-term effects of digital McDonaldization and its expectations. With lessened exposure to traditional, human-dominated stressful environments, the cohort's ability to tolerate them has decreased, leading to shifts in Gen Z's behavior and reflecting the influence of digital McDonaldization.

There have been direct examples of such occurrences, such as the rise of texting, leading to increased anxiety over making phone calls. Recent studies out of Australia show "90 percent of Gen Z are anxious about speaking on the phone" and even go as far as to say, "An awkward phone call is one of the top three things they would want to avoid in life." The growing reluctance to engage in phone calls is being labeled "phone phobia" as teenagers become more comfortable using other forms of communication. When interviewed, teenagers explain, "It's so easy to just text someone quickly," as well as "I'd rather just text," and "It's a lot of effort to pick up a phone and talk all the time." Phone calls require immediate responses, time commitment, and, above all else, unfiltered exchanges.

Meanwhile, a text message offers a McDonaldized equivalent, allowing one to comfortably craft a response to ensure it is well received. They are more efficient, predictable, and controllable, thus more preferred. By not needing to exit their comfort zone, the ability and willingness to engage in spontaneous social exchanges has atrophied. Gen Z has less experience in dealing with unpredictable events out of their control, such as getting a license or asking someone out on a date in person.

The latter example has obtained a digital McDonaldized counterpart with the introduction of dating apps. Dating apps are digital platforms that help people meet and connect with potential romantic or casual partners. Users typically create a profile with photos and a bio, then browse or match with others

based on shared interests, location, or preferences. The design encourages mass matches, allowing users to create reusable engagement methods, such as pick-up lines, and simultaneously ask out dozens of partners, making it no surprise it has risen massively in popularity. In a survey conducted by Stanford University called "How Couples Meet and Stay Together," researchers compared how heterosexual U.S. couples met from 1995 to 2017. While methods such as college, work, and through friends fell drastically over the years, couples meeting online increased from 2% to 39% from 1995 to 2017, becoming the dominant method. It is plausible that online dating has risen while others have fallen due to it being the only method Gen Z has to date while still being safe in McDonaldized systems. Yet even under said controllable conditions, the relationships can never be efficient or predictable if they are simultaneously committed and personal.

Thus, preferences shift to uncommitted relationships, such as short-term relationships, one-night stands, situationships, and friends with benefits. According to bodies of research, the shift between Millennial and Gen Z dating has been characterized by a move "into alternative dating and relationship structures." While relationship preferences are often personal and typically inconsequential to a cohort, the rise of alternative relationships and dating apps "do have characteristic traits that will have a negative effect." Such romantic relationships allow for the brief fulfillment of connection without the stress of upholding and maintaining a dynamic and substantial relationship. Yet such relationships have negative consequences, with university teachers offering their input in reports stating, "The current university student is extremely bad at dating." An observation supported by data, with a survey finding only "56% of Gen Z adults had been in a committed romantic relationship at any point during their teenage years." Without the practice of committed relationships, the ability to create them suffers, and due to an addiction to comfort, Gen Z cannot obtain practice.

While a link between digital McDonaldization and decreased relationships within Gen Z may be simple to establish, a solution is not. Without the ability to turn the technological clock back, engaging in uncomfortable behavior is individual and is up to the generation. However, suggested solutions to the discovered problems have emerged. In a 2024 report, the popular dating app Hinge released a new "D.A.T.E.," or Data, Advice, Trends, and Expertise. The report explains how Gen Z engages with their platform and suggests ways to better utilize it. The company's behavioral scientists found "a majority of Gen Z Hinge daters (90%) want to find love." However, as hypothesized, they report collective anxieties and worries about rejection significantly hinder users' success. Researchers uncovered that 56% of Gen Z Hinge daters have not pursued a relationship due to anxiety; the company has adopted a strategy to aid its

younger user base. The company calls this entering "Cringe Mode" and adopts the cohort's slang. Hinge describes the strategy as "a bold mindset to get out of your comfort zone and lay it all out there" by encouraging users to build "rejection resilience" by openly communicating immediately and being authentic. By actively encouraging users to engage vulnerably, it allows users to grow accustomed to uncomfortable interactions they have been lacking, and that will give them the experience to overcome anxiety and pursue relationships. Without the environment forcing them to leave their comfort zone, the platform believes users should force themselves to.

However, more extreme measures targeting social media have also begun to be implemented. Social media has had a well-documented negative impact on the mental health of young users. In their research study, Anjali Popat and Carolyn Tarrant explain social media as "online platforms that enable interactions through the sharing of pictures, comments, and reactions to content," such as Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook. While acknowledging the benefits of social media, such as social connection, their study finds it can lead to "damaging self-esteem through experience of judgment, attention to markers of popularity, and appearance comparison." Such damage to self-esteem further increases the anxiety of rejection alongside digital McDonaldization, which these apps promote through less personalized communication. Due to the documented harmful effects, governments across the world have begun to enact restrictions to limit minors' ability to engage with social media. Most recently, in November of 2024, Australia passed a national law prohibiting citizens under 16 from using social media, with specific sites such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram already being named to be involved in the ban. Australia's communications minister, Michelle Rowland, has stated, "This is about protecting young people." While the government has not specified prioritizing relationship building and development as key to the bill, advocates have, with Julie Scelfo, Mothers Against Media Addiction founder, stating, "What's most important for kids, just like adults, is real human connection. Less time alone on the screen means more time to connect, not less." However, the effectiveness of this law has yet to be demonstrated, with critics concerned it may further isolate youths, especially those of marginalized communities.

A solution has yet to be found as the issue remains an emerging concern, with the dominance of data being discussed and recorded within the last five years. With solutions such as Hinge's proposed "Cringe Mode" solution addressing the symptoms of digital McDonaldization and Australia's social media ban attempting to address the source, neither have had sufficient data to properly praise or criticize. A potential solution may not be to aim to regain previous generations' abilities to push past McDonaldized limitations; it could be to accept platforms that cater to the new tolerance of the young cohorts. While

methods such as dating apps are a part of the McDonaldized system, which reduces Gen Z's ability to engage naturally with others, they are still effective for those who choose to use them. As mentioned above, online engagement has become the number one way to find a long-term partner, partly due to its ability to operate within Gen Z's reduced tolerance for unpredictability. As the growing demand for McDonaldized solutions for anxious but mandatory tasks grows, the market will accommodate. For instance, take the rise in work-for-home or ride-share, allowing those to operate within society at a comfortable level. However, with the growing unhappiness of the cohort and the distinct mental health trends, a combination of limited use of social media early on bundled with an authentic "cringe mode" approach may, in time, prove to be the best method.

Yet the effects of the "slow life factor" should not be ignored. There is clear evidence of an objective shift in Gen Z's willingness to engage in notable tasks, including obtaining a driver's license, going to college, moving out, and, most of the concern for this paper, dating. While technology may eventually make specific actions, such as getting a driver's license, obsolete, there will be ongoing adverse and societal effects if new generations cannot form meaningful and fulfilling bonds. It remains to be seen how the U.S. will implement and learn from global experiments such as Australia and if the counterculture of youth may solve the issue independently through technological rejection. Regardless, it is essential to acknowledge and understand how the McDonaldized nature of modern society through digital platforms has conditioned Gen Z to be less likely to engage in activities that are not efficient, predictable, calculable, or controllable. While a direct solution is far off, educational programs emphasizing emotional resilience and face-to-face communication skills could help Gen Z navigate the challenges of McDonaldized dating environments. Similarly, understanding that the root of the issues lies beyond the young cohort allows for a more empathetic and nuanced approach.

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CHARLOTTE SAUNDERS

My name is Charlotte Saunders and I'm a senior with a major in sociology and a minor in peace and justice studies at LMU. I'm passionate about understanding human connection and the structural processes that instill difference in all of us. Throughout this research paper, I was able to explore gender programming and the ways intimacy differs between male and female same-sex friendships. Ultimately, this paper highlights the importance of intimacy and the potential dangers of gender programming. I hope to expand our collective understanding of group organization and how human connection shapes who we become.

The Effects of Gender Roles on Intimacy in Same-Sex Friendships: How Men and Women Bond

Introduction

Our friends are some of the first people, outside of our parents, who we truly love and care for. At least that is the predominant female understanding of friendship. How men feel about friendship is a bit more complicated to decipher. Due to a myriad of intersecting gender roles, men are often pushed away from traditional forms of intimacy in the mainstream media. How this social campaign against male-on-male intimacy has truly affected the psyche of American men remains up for debate. While the American gender binary privileges men through the societal norms it produces, masculinity can often act as a crushing weight to those who can't live up to the standard. Intimacy is usually categorized as feminine and avoided by those subject to masculine expectations (Kaufman). As children are socialized, boys are seemingly taught to adopt a more isolationist approach to friendship that limits their interactions and displays of affection. Boys are seemingly policed on how to love their friends more heavily than girls, which creates the notion that men are not meant to be intimate or vulnerable. The scope of this research covers all men and women subject to American gender norms, though it bares particular significance to heterosexual men who are expected to champion the male standard. This study intends to assess the impact intimacy has on the individual sexes by addressing the following question: how does intimacy

differ in male and female same-sex friendships?

This study is sociologically significant as it focuses on how prescribed gender identity can dictate people's lives, including their choices, mental fortitude, and physical health. It addresses how social structures, such as masculinity, create patterns that affect the ways different groups, in this instance men, act. Subsequently, this research question may address and explain gendered trends correlated with the sexes, such as higher rates of aggression and suicide associated with men (Staniloiu, et al). This study's research question aims to dissect gender norms and how they interact with intimacy, with the hope of understanding how male friendships are conducted differently than female friendships and how the value provided to those involved deviates or aligns.

Literature Review

The gender binary and its effects on the modern world are routinely studied to understand the different experiences, portrayals, and consequences of adapting gender roles. This area of research is constantly expanding our understanding of how, who, and why as it relates to the effects of gender on one's identity. Intimacy and how it differs amongst same-sex male and female friendships is a vital phenomenon that speaks to the influence and uniformity of the gender binary. Understanding the different dynamics of intimacy as it relates to men and women conversely, provides a deeper understanding of human motivation and organization.

In recent years, the exploration of same-sex friendships has garnered increasing attention within fields such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology, particularly regarding the varying dynamics of intimacy in same-sex male and female friendships. This literature review seeks to depict the nuances of intimacy in same-sex male and female friendships, emphasizing how societal norms and varying expectations of intimacy shape these bonds. By analyzing various theoretical frameworks, current research aims to uncover the pervasive, symbiotic relationships of male and female gender roles, their correlation to levels of intimacy, and how intimacy is challenged or conformed to based on gender.

The Importance of Intimacy

Intimacy is not only pivotal in the early development of human beings; it is also largely considered the cornerstone of friendship (Hook et al., 2003; Fehr, 2004). Poor mental and physical health and intimacy issues have been closely associated over the years (Hook et al., 2003). One is more likely to fall ill and stay ill interestingly enough if they struggle to be intimate in their daily lives. Intimacy also affects the less corporeal aspects of human life, as it has been documented to encourage "creativity, productivity, and emotional integration" (Hook et al., 2003). Intimacy is created in the context of the identity one establishes (Hook et al., 2003). This intense correlation provides insight into how intimacy can produce

different outcomes depending on the identity group to which it is applied.

How Intimacy is Defined by Gender

Intimacy is highly regarded in society yet is often portrayed as a side-effect of femininity. It is, therefore, avoided by men held prisoner by the gender binary, as they feel intimacy is an inferior trait (Strikwerda & May, 1992). Conversely, men tend to have different expectations of intimacy than women, which shapes how their friendships are forged, their longevity, and the level of perceived closeness, among other factors. Barring extreme deviations from the norm, intimacy is typically identified in research by factors such as: disclosing personal information including negative events, trust, validation, and affection (Roy et al., 2000; Hook et al., 2003). Female friendships tend to adhere to the mainstream definition of intimacy frequently used in research. They are often found to expect and possess higher levels of intimacy by the standards of this definition. (Johnson, 2004; Heller & Wood, 1998; Hook et al., 2003; J. A. Hall, 2010; Beverley Fehr, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007). While men typically acknowledge many of the same factors listed above as the building blocks of intimacy, they often don't participate in complementary actions such as self-disclosure in their own friendships (Beverley Fehr, 2004).

In comparison, women are more likely to disclose personal information, have friends they feel they can rely on in hard times, mourn bad news with a friend, and express deeper levels of sadness at the prospect of a terminated friendship than their male counterparts (Roy et al., 2000; Benenson & Christakos, 2003; Johnson et al., 2007). Such research suggests that men aren't as intimate as women; however, supplementary research proposes that men seek different forms of intimacy that aren't recognized by the traditional definition. Men reportedly seek intimacy in the form of loyalty, "fellow feeling", and group organization (Benenson & Christakos, 2003). Many male friendships are curated around a group activity such as a sport, which produces a level of comradery and bonding that seemingly substitutes the emotional intimacy that many female friendships practice (Strikwerda & May, 1992); however, despite this substitution, some American research suggests that men are less satisfied in their friendships than women (Strikwerda & May, 1992). While some in the research field identify female relationships as more intimate, the general consensus stands that friendship is equally important yet structurally different for both men and women (Roy et al., 2000; Hall, 2016).

Gender Roles and Intimacy

It is clear there are discrepancies in the intimacy practiced in male same-sex friendships and female same-sex friendships. Many researchers have pointed to the influential nature of gender roles when it comes to the perception and performance of intimacy. Women have historically been socialized to place a larger emphasis on the "formation and maintenance of friendships". As a byproduct, adolescent girls are

more likely to exhibit emotional closeness than their male counterparts (Johnson, 2004). Similarly, women are reported to practice self-disclosure, particularly regarding negative or traumatic events, more so than men. It's been theorized that women are more likely to engage in such discourse due to the subordinate positions they hold in society, which offer intense hardship and little solace outside of commiseration (Roy et al., 2000). Both men and women are affected by the gender binary when it comes to the development of intimacy. Men have proven less likely to share personal negative information the more they adhere to masculine gender roles, whereas women have proven to engage in the practice more when conforming to their portion of the gender binary (Bowman, 2008). Interestingly, when operating with individuals who are comfortable with disclosing personal information, gender does not seem to influence the extent of information shared (Bowman, 2008).

Traditional, and often toxic, masculinity interferes with the mainstream approach to intimacy as it ostracizes all aspects that fall outside the perceived social norm. Both femininity and homosexuality are sought out and punished among men who are terrified of having their manhood questioned (Pascoe, 2011; Hall, 2016). Men are expected to conform to “compulsive heterosexuality”, which encourages men to assert and defend their masculinity through violence and with the intent of domination (Pascoe, 2011; AkhaviZadegan, n.d.). Such aspects of masculinity act as obstacles for men when it comes to practicing what they would consider a more “feminine” form of intimacy. They are often forcibly steered away from self-disclosure and providing emotional support as the large groups they're socialized into negate those forms of intimacy as inferior (Strikwerda & May, 1992; Pascoe, 2011; Benenson & Christakos, 2003). Subsequently, physical touch is far less acceptable in male friendships as men are more likely to see it as a larger violation of the societal norm than women are (Felmlee et al., 2012). There is some research to suggest that as American society becomes more progressive, the homosocial boundaries that police men into performing their gender “appropriately” have become less prevalent (Robinson et al., 2018). Despite this theory, gender roles continue to prove influential in the interactions and performances of intimacy displayed by both men and women.

Research Proposal

There is a popular yet largely uninvestigated notion in the United States that women have more intimate same-sex friendships than men. Social belief is often converted into social expectation; therefore, it is important to investigate the validity of such public sentiment, as it can inadvertently transform from an assumption into a social rule, demanding higher or lower levels of intimacy depending on gender. Intimacy in close friendships has been tied to both physical and mental health benefits that improve the quality and length of human life (Abrams, 2023). It is a critical area of study, yet culturally, intimacy

is often associated with sexual chemistry and subsequently neglected in friendships, particularly male friendships (Hoopes, 1987; Strikwerda & May, 1992). The variations in perception and participation of intimacy across American society suggest pervasive societal norms may play a hand in the formation and content of same-sex friendships.

The research question structuring the content of this project is as follows: How does intimacy differ in male and female same-sex friendships? The definition of intimacy varies across different bodies of research. Some research quantifies intimacy as the sharing of negative events and personal information (Roy et al., 2000). While the general consensus regarding the definition of intimacy is that it involves expressing emotions, sharing personal details, and communicating experiences both good and bad, there is evidence to suggest that men seek intimacy in different forms, often through the comradery and “fellow feeling” established in group activities, like sports (Fehr, 2004; Roy et al., 2000; Strikwerda & May, 1992). For the purpose of this study, intimacy will be defined by the following characteristics: comfort, expressions of love or gratitude, the expression of personal information, physical touch, and the willingness one has to celebrate or comfort a friend. Given the fact that gender operates as a potential influence over intimacy, this study will utilize the following definition of gender roles when contextualizing data: “[A] culturally and socially determined set of expected behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics based on concepts of masculinity and femininity” (Payne, 2024).

This research question is inherently sociological as it attempts to discover how social structures such as gender roles may influence how intimacy is perceived, defined, and participated in by male and female same-sex friendships. The implications of this research are vast as they highlight the intersection between the emotional, cultural, and physical health of the sexes and point to the influence gender programming has on the well-being of the individual and their ability to develop meaningful social connections. As briefly mentioned earlier, intimacy can play a critical role in both physical and mental health. Research spanning different scholarly platforms attests to the myriad of health benefits associated with intimacy. Those with less intimate friendships tend to suffer from depression and “stress-related symptoms”, be more susceptible to premature death, recover from illness slower, and relapse at higher rates (Abrams, 2023; Hook et al., 2003). Alternatively, those who engage in more intimate friendships are less likely to suffer from depression or a chronic disease (Abrams, 2023). There is also evidence to suggest intimacy is a significant factor in the development of young adults as they are tasked with developing intimate attachments to avoid isolation (Hook et al., 2003).

In addition to the importance of intimacy within friendships, previous research on the subject suggests gender roles are a significant factor in the perception and participation of intimacy across male and

female same-sex friendships. Men have historically structured their friendships around loyalty, fellow feeling, and group activity, as a means of distancing themselves from what they deem a more feminine portrayal of intimacy, often involving self-disclosure and emotional support (Hall, 2010; Strikwerda & May, 1992). Masculinity works to reject intimacy as it is widely understood, in an effort to substantiate its superiority within the gender binary (Strikwerda & May, 1992). Masculine stereotypes often restrict men from engaging in anything thought to be feminine or gay and ostracize those who attempt to engage in emotional intimacy (Pascoe, 2011). As a result, men develop different expectations of friendship than women. While women have reported higher expectations of commitment, loyalty, genuineness, acceptance, and trust, men have reported higher expectations of agency (Hall, 2010). Given the seemingly unending interest in why people do the things they do, the study of gender roles and their influence on intimacy in same-sex friendships remains an essential field in need of exploration.

Methods Section

This research study built upon 16 in-depth interviews with individuals from the Loyola Marymount University student body. The subjects of these interviews consisted of 8 men and women respectively. These subjects were aged 18-24. This study's inclusionary and exclusionary material is limited yet important. In terms of exclusionary data, those over the age of 24 or under the age of 18 were excluded from this study as I specifically wanted to assess the intimacy of same-sex friendships in young adults in college. Additionally, those who spent the majority of their adolescence outside of American culture were excluded from this study, as my intension was to specifically assess the effects of American gender roles on same-sex friendships. Regarding inclusionary criteria, this study interviewed those who have self-reported that they have 3 close same-sex friends they are prepared to think of when answering interview questions. The ability to relate experiences discussed and questions asked to their real relationships proved beneficial in extracting accurate information. Subsequently, participants had to identify within the gender binary as either male or female, as this project aimed to directly address the effects of gender roles on those who adhere to them the most. Subjects who had been raised by parents who don't mirror the gender binary or stereotypical nuclear family were taken note of yet questioned the same as those with parents who fit the societal norm. Subjects within this study were identified through convenience and snowball sampling, as many people within my network fit the necessary criteria.

Throughout these interviews, I found several concepts to be points of commonality among the subjects. Varying degrees of physical touch, disclosure, emotional support, and platonic love were all expected to structure themselves along gendered lines. These themes are all indicators of intimacy and present differently depending on how intimacy is perceived and valued by the individual. The goal of this study

was to understand why intimacy varies among men and women and how that variation affects men suffering from a deficit. Therefore, the aforementioned themes were crucial to identifying and coding intimacy within this context. My interview questions aimed to assess levels of closeness, how friends are made, the significance of friendships, and how intimacy is expressed in male and female same-sex friendships. Results were subsequently coded and comprehended.

All interviews were conducted in person or via Zoom to accommodate the participants availability. Interviews were recorded, with the permission of the subject, using the Apple Voice Memos app, then subsequently transcribed into a Word document for analysis. Any non-verbal symbols, transitions, or other important forms of communication regarding this study's subject matter were transcribed either during or after each interview. This research project used both thematic and In Vivo coding in the analytical process. After each interview was transcribed, I read through my notes and highlighted common phrases, as well as general themes, across interviews. Furthermore, I analyzed the body language, tone, and willingness of each participant to search for patterns among subjects. This comprehensive approach produced incredibly fruitful results.

Interview Questions

Subjects will be instructed to think of 3 close friends when answering the following questions

1. What's your definition of friendship?
2. What are some of your most important memories of your friendships?
3. Describe the importance of friendship in your life?
4. How have you met/made the friends you have?
5. How comfortable do you feel with expressing affection/physical affection in your friendships?
6. How often is physical touch involved in your friendships? (What kind of physical touch) (does this physical touch come as an expression of support? /What is the purpose of physical touch in your friendship?) (Provide examples for clarity)
7. How likely are you to share bad or traumatic news with a friend?
8. How likely are you to reach out to a friend you haven't heard from in a while?
9. How do you and your friends provide emotional support?
10. How upset would you be if the friendship ended? How would you cope with that lost?
11. How likely are you to discuss issues in the friendship with your friend?
12. How likely are you to discuss the friendship/potential issues with outside parties?
13. 13. Do you tell your friends you love them? If so, how often? Under what circumstances?

14. Do you remember your friend's birthday? Other important events... Do you remember significant moments from your friends' lives well?

15. Describe your friends.

Results

Loyalty

Loyalty frequently appeared as a theme around which both the female and male participants centered their friendships. Though loyalty and comradery have long since been viewed as products of male bonding, I've found that women also rely on comradery, perhaps in less traditionally masculine ways, to create friendships (Strikwerda & May, 1992). According to my subjects, both men and women structure friendships based on who they feel they relate to most, relying on feelings of comradery to strengthen trust, but the comradery shaping female friendships is often based on shared empathy or emotional experience as opposed to group activity. These differences are highlighted by the different ways men and women find and form their friendships. Interestingly, when asked how they've formed a majority of their friendships, the male and female participants gave similar yet nonidentical answers. The male participants largely reported meeting their friends through sports or other extracurricular activities. Subject J stated he "met most of his friends through basketball or the afterschool program" and that "these programs were nice because it was like having built in friends who were going through the same as you and had the same interests." The female participants shared they mostly made friends through being in class together; however, female subject M stated that while being in class together provides ease in friendships, it doesn't always assure you've met people you click with so "your real friends are the ones who last long after your class together ends and who you feel you can tell anything to." Additionally, 5 out of the 8 male participants stated they made friends out of larger groups, like their sports teams, while 6 out of the 8 female participants reported meeting their friends individually and then creating a larger group as the friendships developed. These differences have potential implications when it comes to how loyalty is created and nurtured in male and female same-sex friendships.

Affection

Physical and emotional affection is an important component of intimacy and is often practiced in varying forms. Several of the male participants reported having felt far more uncomfortable expressing both physical and emotional affection in the past than they do now. While 5 out of the 8 male subjects expressed feeling relatively comfortable with emotional and physical affection, when asked to describe how this looks, several gave funny, slightly unserious answers, almost as if to downplay the intimacy of the conversation. Male Subject T replied to my question by stating he "hugs the homies," a response that had

been a clear departure from his more formal serious answers previously. Additionally, male subjects T, S, and J all began to slightly fidget and avoid eye contact when discussing emotional and physical affection. When asked why they think they've grown more comfortable expressing intimacy in their friendships, 4 male participants pointed to social media and the insurgence of men's mental health and anti-toxic masculinity campaigns that have helped restructure the social narrative to allow men to engage in platonic affection.

Interestingly, when discussing the matter of affection with male and female participants, I discovered that men and women typically define and practice emotional and physical affection differently. For instance, 5 out of 8 male participants shared that performing tough love was a way in which they demonstrated their affection for their friends. When describing this phenomenon, male subject T stated, "there's a level of care that says I love you and therefore I don't want you to make mistakes or get hurt." Conversely, while the female friendships I gained insight into also spoke about loving and caring for their friends, they demonstrated affection with words of affirmation and more traditional forms of physical affection. According to 7 out of the 8 female subjects, hugging, casually holding hands, or even sleeping in each other's beds during sleepovers are all frequent ways women display intimacy in friendships. When asked why hugging is a common expression of affection, female subject G responded by saying "We're a very touched starved generation because we're so attached to our screens. I think it's important to hug your friends and bring them close and tell them you care about them." Physical affection for the female participants is an extension of reassurance and love and is used to satiate those needs as they're perceived. According to the male participants, while physical affection is used in moderation, it typically comes in the form of a handshake or casual arm slap because as male subject S reported "guys don't get a lot of physical attention so touch can throw a guy off." This statement came after a larger conversation in which male subject S explained that men aren't touched as much after they reach adolescence and therefore, don't know how to react to physical touch outside of a sexual context. Male subject J believes that the different kinds of physical affection practiced by men and women are reflective of their gender roles: "growing up, you see men as protectors, as hard, strong people that are meant to lead the family, which doesn't give them much room to express emotions other than anger. Women are expected to express all emotions and when they do, they are often comforted and this correlation between emotional expression, physical intimacy, and femininity dissuades men from engaging." Overall, the male participants expressed a gender policed fear of stepping outside the masculine norm. This fear has led these male participants to seek distinct expressions of affection that diverge from more "feminine" and traditional forms of intimacy.

Emotional Disclosure

Emotional disclosure is acutely associated with intimacy in both empirical and anecdotal research; however, the practice of emotional intimacy varies across friendships and according to gendered identities. When asked whether they are likely to share traumatic or difficult events with friends, 5 out of the 8 male subjects answered they are not very likely to reach out to a friend for emotional support, whereas 7 out of the 8 female participants answered they would be very likely to reach out to a friend for emotional support. Female Subject M stated she “always goes to her friends before she goes to her family [with difficult or traumatic experiences]” while male subject S stated he feels “there's an instinct not to talk about [bad news] ... partly to avoid burdening them but also because it can be really hard to talk about bad things in general.” Subsequently, the female participants also proved more likely to talk about issues in a friendship with an outside party, with 8 out of 8 female participants reporting they would go to another friend for a second opinion on the issue. The male participants proved more reluctant with only 3 out of 8 male subjects willing to go to an outside party about friendship issues; however, when asked how likely they would be to confront a friend about issues in a friendship, 4 out of 8 female participants said they'd be likely to, whereas 7 out of 8 male participants held the same position. Men and women provide emotional support differently when faced with emotional disclosure. The female participants overwhelmingly reported offering validation and mirrored emotions to their upset friends to comfort them. Conversely, 5 out of the 8 male participants shared they would be more likely to try to distract their friends and provide them with a fun experience to outweigh the pain.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research study evaluated the following research question: How does intimacy differ between male and female same-sex friendships? The results concluded that the female participants tended to positively favor more traditional expressions of intimacy while the male subjects reported either neutral or negative feelings towards traditional forms of intimacy.

As previously mentioned, men often substitute traditional elements of intimacy with feelings of loyalty and comradery (Benenson & Christakos, 2003; Strikwerda & May, 1992). This phenomenon was acutely demonstrated in this study as 6 out of the 8 male subjects reported meeting their friends through sports or other forms of group activity and that having those shared experiences made it easier to bond. While the female participants also made friends through comradery and fellow feeling, emotional connection was a requirement in female friendships that was not as emphasized in the male subjects' answers. The difference between male and female bonding rituals suggests a difference in socialization that teaches women to seek emotional commitments and men to seek commonality. Interestingly, all 8 female participants reported they would be incredibly distraught if a friendship were to end and would find it

difficult to cope with the loss, whereas 5 out of 8 male participants stated they would be upset if a friendship were to end but would likely get over it relatively quickly. This divergence suggests that the elements men and women form their friendships around may dictate their closeness or how they would feel post-friendship. While men do possess close same-sex friendships and do practice intimacy in their own ways, the data suggests the end of a friendship would be more devastating for female participants than it would for male subjects. These results mirror Strikwerda & May's findings which ascertain that men are less satisfied in their friendships than women.

Both men and women are subject to gendered behavior that affects the creation and maintenance of their friendships. When it comes to physical and emotional affection, men and women perform intimacy differently. Nearly all the female participants except 1 relayed that they are incredibly comfortable with affection and that it's a cornerstone of friendship. Conversely, only 5 out of 8 male participants said they were comfortable with emotional and physical affection, and the ones who did were visibly uncomfortable when talking about hugging their friends or telling their friends they love them. Unfortunately, affection is often associated with femininity and is therefore subconsciously considered inferior and avoided by many men who don't want to become social pariahs (Pascoe, 2011; Hall, 2016). Interestingly, several male participants reported using tough love as a form of intimacy in their friendships. The use of tough love could be their way of expressing love to their friends while still aligning with masculine behaviors, seeing as men are expected to avoid emotional disclosure in favor of a more dominating or aggressive conversational attitude (Strikwerda & May, 1992; Pascoe, 2011). In this study and in supplementary research, traditional physical and emotional affection is seemingly less common in male friendships than female friendships. As was stated by male subject J and corroborated by Felmlee et al., 2012, Pascoe, 2011, Hall, 2016 & Strikwerda & May, 1992, men are not socialized to accept physical touch whereas women are: this difference leads men to be confused, and ultimately reject platonic physical touch as it's foreign and socially unacceptable.

Men and women are also socialized to view emotional disclosure differently. While emotional disclosure is often a necessary aspect of female friendship, it is under-practiced by same-sex male friendships as it's considered feminine and therefore inferior (Strikwerda & May, 1992; Pascoe, 2011, Roy et al., 2000). Research conducted by Strikwerda & May, as well as, Pascoe and Christakos, suggests that men forgo emotional disclosure in favor of large friend groups that bond over enjoyment and fellow feeling. Reflecting on my interviews, 5 out of 8 male participants reported preferring a fun distraction with friends over personal disclosure when going through a tough time. These findings suggest that emotional disclosure is either not as important in male friendships or that emotional disclosure isn't fostered

properly, possibly out of fear or embarrassment. Male participants were only found likely to engage in emotional disclosure if it came in the form of confronting a friend directly about an issue. Confrontation as a means of emotional disclosure satisfies the social requirements that demand men to be aggressive and dominating, which explains why 7 out of the 8 male participants said they were primarily comfortable with this form of emotional disclosure. Due to the inferior position women have often held in society, they are more likely to utilize emotional disclosure as a means of commiseration yet less likely to confront the wrongful party (Roy et al., 2000). This study's results mirror Roy's conclusion, as only 4 out of the 8 female participants said they felt comfortable confronting their friend directly but 8 out of 8 female participants felt comfortable going to a secondary friend about an issue in the friendship.

The findings of this study imply that gender roles directly impact the ways people form and maintain friendships as men and women. While more research is needed to effectively determine if the way one gender practices intimacy is more beneficial than the other, the differences reflected in this study shed light on why certain stereotypes about men and women exist. For example, women have historically been thought of as gossips which has a negative connotation; however, according to evidence provided by this study and supplementary research, women often rally around emotional disclosure as a way to commiserate, validate one another, and keep each other sane (Roy et al., 2000). As emotional disclosure or gossip was categorized as feminine, it was viewed as inferior and rejected by men (Strikwerda & May, 1992). Additionally, while definitive conclusions can't be made, this study suggest that gender roles foster intimacy for women while obstructing it for men. Intimacy is strictly monitored to ensure it is appropriately practiced in modern society; however, many male participants of this study feel things have slowly begun to change, making it slightly easier for them to practice traditional intimacy. While society has progressed, black and white notions of the gender binary continue to control the social freedom of men and women alike.

Future research into intimacy and gender roles should target whether there is one correct or effective way to practice intimacy or if the deviations between genders simply highlight benign differences in the sexes. Research on how intimacy is taught to the sexes should also be explored. Additionally, this study wasn't able to tackle how mental health is affected by intimacy and gender roles; however, this area of interest is crucial as research suggests restrictive social norms that prohibit intimacy can negatively impact men's mental health and possibly lead to violent gendered trends (Staniloiu, et al.).

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My name is Cheyenne Wahlheim and I am a current junior at LMU with a major in Sociology and a double minor in Psychology and Asian and Pacific Studies. Through my coursework at LMU, coupled with lived experience of family addiction, I have developed a deep and personal passion for inmate advocacy, addiction support services, and criminal justice system reform. I am currently studying for the LSAT and hope to attend law school after graduation to pursue a career as a public criminal defense attorney.

The Lifeboat Project: A Critical Analysis of the Human Trafficking NGO

The Lifeboat Project is a Florida based non-profit that aims to support victims of human trafficking through public education and provide victims with comprehensive and supportive services and care. The organization prides itself on giving hope to victims of human trafficking and acting as the catalyst to bring the central Florida community together to end human trafficking. According to the organization's mission statement, their main aims include raising public awareness and supporting victims through “long-term aftercare, residential programs, trauma counseling, housing, personal development, and educational resources” (The Lifeboat Project). These services, in theory at least, offer lifelong support for victims. The Lifeboat Project aims to serve the community of the five Central Florida Counties: Lake, Volusia, Seminole, Orange, and Osceola. Notably, through serving only the Central Florida area, this non-profit can be classified as working to address human trafficking within a major destination country, the United States. Logistically, the Lifeboat Project is itself a member of three external organizations that intersect with the issue of human trafficking: Central Florida Continuum of Care/Homeless Services Network, Greater Orlando Human Trafficking Task Force, and Seminole County Human Trafficking Task Force.

The victim support policy outlined by the organization is incredibly loosely worded and vague. The Lifeboat Project's Support services is a three-stage program titled “The Compass Program.” The

program is described as a “comprehensive, trauma-informed, survivor-centered approach to long term care” (The Lifeboat Project). Upon beginning this program, prior to gaining access to support services, survivors are connected with the “Navigation Team,” consisting of 5 members (including the organization's founder and CEO Jill Cohen). The Navigation Team plays a key role in the organization's support policy, designed to assess the resources needed by the specific victim and acts to connect the victim with needed services. Other than Jill Cohen (CEO), no other member of this team has a profile, or any sort of qualifications included. In fact, three of the members of this team do not have last names listed on the official nonprofit website. Only one member of the team is listed as a caseworker. Meeting with the “Navigation Team” is only mandatory if a victim wishes to enter a residential program. Alternatively, a victim could obtain “community client status,” living in a housing situation independently but still using mental health or personal development resources provided by the nonprofit.

The first step of the process, “SAFE,” involves securing physical and mental resources and immediate housing. The second step, “HEAL,” focuses on identifying and pursuing future vocations, as well as providing continued support services received during the “SAFE” phase. The final stage, “GROW,” is defined by moving toward survivors' self-sufficiency and life skills in their personal healing journey. These three stages are incredibly vague, and it is important to note that leaders within Lifeboat are aware of this lack of procedure. My external research on the organization revealed serious issues with the lack of oversight and policy implementation by the Lifeboat Project. According to the organization's very own CEO and Founder, there is no official structure to the support program (Ray, 2023).

A key component of the organizations support network for victims of human trafficking involves residential safe houses for victims: the Lifeboat Project offers either transitional housing for survivors who have successfully been through all three stages of The Compass Program, or “Haven Home” residence, which functions similar to a foster family for an adult victim. In Addition to the housing and post-victimization resources provided by the organization, The Lifeboat Project engages in many awareness campaigns and prevention initiatives. Similar to the apps discussed in class and in Limoncelli's article *There's an App for That? Ethical Consumption in the fight against trafficking for Labour Exploitation*, The Lifeboat Project designed their own mobile app to educate middle and high school students in Florida to recognize the signs of Human Trafficking (notably, the link to download the app does not work).

In terms of size and scope of the organization, the Lifeboat Project does not list the number of volunteers on their official website; the only affiliated individuals listed are the Board of Directors (9 total members) and the Navigation Team (5 total members). The website lists links to donate to the

organization. Through external investigation of the Lifeboat Project's 2018 Public Tax Returns, I discovered that the organization collected over \$2 million from contributions and grants, while total program services totaled a cost of around \$95,000. Interestingly, the Lifeboat Project has a number of corporate sponsors listed on their website, including Audi, Home Depot, iHeartMedia Radio, the City of Orlando, Visit Orlando, Fifth Third Bank, and many others. The organization hosts numerous fundraising and gala-style events highlighted on their website. These specific events also include numerous corporate sponsorships. For example, the nonprofit's "Yacht Rock Gala," held in November of this year, featured such corporate sponsors as Delta Airlines, Walt Disney World Resort, and the Orange County Sheriff's Office.

After taking this course, I firmly believe that The Lifeboat Project fails to address the underlying causes of human trafficking, while perpetuating harmful hyper-simplified "solutions" to the problem. The Lifeboat Project aims to combat both labor and sex trafficking: on the website's "Be Informed" page, the organization displays statistics regarding both sex and labor trafficking. These figures state statistics as unquestionable fact; many issues are present with the way The Lifeboat Project presents these statistics. First, there is no indication whatsoever as to the origin of the statistics or how they were researched. Studying Human Trafficking is a complex and inherently difficult task, in part due to the challenges of clear study population identification (Tyldum, 3). Further, the statistics represent only general information, such as profit generated by human trafficking and the percentage of labor trafficking victims in various industries. What is lacking in these statistics is discussion of why people become vulnerable to trafficking. This perspective individualizes the issue of human trafficking, overlooking and ignoring the broader societal inequalities and systems that lead to systemic exploitation of vulnerable populations. Looking specifically at Labor Trafficking, global and local economic inequality and lack of living wages is a driving factor of worker vulnerability to trafficking. Strikingly, the organization partners with numerous corporations that are for-profit and infamous for worker exploitation and human trafficking globally within their supply chains. The organization takes a very apolitical approach to trafficking, ignoring the role of neoliberalism and capitalist economic practices that perpetuate human trafficking. This hyper focus on local trafficking, while partnering with massive corporations that exploit workers globally, is at the best completely ignorant of the scope and reality of human trafficking as an issue, and at the worst a complete lack of empathy and concern for exploitation beyond U.S. borders.

Further, one of the initiatives that The Lifeboat Project champions as "ingenious" and "monumental" in the fight against human trafficking is "The Silent Signal." The organization believes that through

public education of the Sign Language signal letters of “H” and “T,” victims can be identified and rescued safely. While this solution is helpful in theory, in practice it is incredibly unrealistic. As Cottingham et. al. explains, “While situations involving traffickers and victims may be viewed by an outsider as manipulative, deceptive, and criminal, some individuals with the situation may define the same behaviors differently and therefore may act in ways that an outsider would not anticipate” (Cottingham et. Al., 8). Although The Lifeboat Project may take for granted that victims being exploited will define themselves as such and want to be rescued, the way that victims themselves define their own situation is far more nuanced and complex. Further, this emphasis on individuals recognizing and rescuing victims ignores broader government and corporation accountability and further perpetuates the neoliberal ideologies of little government accountability and no corporation regulation. Overall, The Lifeboat Project portrays a hyper-simplistic depiction of human trafficking as a concept. The description of human trafficking given by the organization falls into common pitfalls of media representation of the issue, namely a vast oversimplified depiction of the problem that the organization can fix with donations, and the perpetuation of the idea that human trafficking is an issue of individuals and can be solved by addressing individual victimization and ignoring systemic causes.

Missing from the organization's discussion of Human Trafficking is any mention or discussion of migrant vulnerability or migration as a major issue that intersects with Human Trafficking. Migration, both legal and illegal, is a key issue that intersects with human trafficking. Specifically, when discussing labor trafficking in Florida, it is ignorant to ignore the widespread exploitation of migrant workers within Florida's agriculture industry. The town of Immokalee, the unincorporated community of migrant workers routinely exploited in Florida's tomato industry (Bales, 44), is less than an hour drive from the boundary of The Lifeboat Project's area of services. It is striking that a non-profit aimed at ending human trafficking within Florida would so blatantly ignore the pervasiveness of migrant trafficking within its own community. My speculation is that The Lifeboat Project, in an aim to gain donor funding, focuses on victims that they can define as “perfect victims,” ignoring victims who may have entered Florida illegally (even though it is these very workers most vulnerable to trafficking) (Altan, D. & Cediell, A). Further, there exist monetary incentives for the Lifeboat Project to not address migrant worker exploitation in agriculture. Two of the biggest corporate sponsors of The Lifeboat Project are Cindy and Rick Traenkner, who own 22 Domino's Pizza locations, a corporation whose product requires by nature the products of mega-grower tomato farms. The Lifeboat Project, financially gaining from the Domino's corporation, turns a blind eye to the business practices of donor companies. Along with the “Silent Signal” and

speaker educational initiatives, The Lifeboat Project produced its own mobile app to educate young people about human trafficking. Mobile apps as an anti-trafficking solution are ineffective and problematic. Although the specific application developed by The Lifeboat Project does not focus on consumption, and instead focuses on prevention and education, this solution still perpetuates neoliberal ideology of individual responsibilities to *not be trafficked*, failing to address the larger societal and economic factors that play into victim vulnerability (Limoncelli, 41).

Overall, I believe that The Lifeboat Project, although perhaps good intentioned, completely lacks awareness of the causes of Trafficking within Florida. Furthermore, and most concerning, the collaboration with corporate sponsors such as Dominos creates a system in which businesses are not held accountable for their own role in the perpetuation of worker exploitation and forced labor, and instead are given the chance to promote a PR image of their company as caring about human trafficking without ever addressing it within their own supply chains. If I were to sit down with the CEO and founder of The Lifeboat Project, I would first tell her that I think the organization has far too many vague initiatives (from apps to educational seminars to residential housing programs) to do any one of these effectively. I would recommend that the organization switch its focus to developing policy and procedure for the rehabilitation efforts of victims. All rehabilitation efforts need to be clearly outlined, and the organization needs to stop using money for galas and events, and instead use donations to hire a full-time team of social workers and psychologists to ensure that victims are receiving full and comprehensive care. Further, initiatives such as the “The Silent Signal” need to be reframed with an awareness that many victims may not define themselves as such, and therefore educational initiatives need to be aimed not at the general population, but specifically at communities within Florida that are most vulnerable to exploitation, such as migrant workers from Mexico and South America. These initiatives could be far more effective if they focused on more grassroots media interventions that are created in the language and most popular media consumption form of vulnerable populations (Downman, 2014).

I would then recommend that, in the long term, the organization shift to aiding its corporate sponsors in ensuring ethical practices within their own supply chains. My personal recommendations for the organization to effect real and meaningful change would be to address even one corporation that they are partnered with. Work alongside Cindy and Rick Traenkner to ensure that all supply chains that operate within their 22 Dominos locations are free from human trafficking. Develop a program to provide corporate sponsors with labor inspection and push sponsors to increase worker wages within their own supply chains. Work alongside these companies to educate corporations, instead of targeting

Individual high school and middle school students, or migrant worker vulnerability and migrant worker exploitation. Ensure accountability within corporations by pushing companies to hire HR staff that conduct regular labor inspections. Support local and global government initiatives to increase the number of government labor inspectors in Florida, and direct funding to these initiatives from the 2 million raised. This kind of targeted solution will not be popular, and will most likely cause the organization to receive backlash and lose corporate sponsorships. However, I believe that because of its position as a donor funded Human Trafficking NGO with corporation partnerships, the organization has the opportunity to hold corporations accountable for their role in the issue.

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ELLA JACKSON

Hello! My name is Ella Jackson, and I am a sophomore sociology major. From a young age, I have been passionate about law enforcement in the context of community relations and American history. I hope to continue analyzing these topics from a sociological lens through my study at LMU.

Government Sanctioned Tension: Racism and Policing

Introduction

The relationship between race and law enforcement is an extensively debated topic in the United States. Historical initiatives, such as the War on Drugs, have placed immense strain on the dynamic between local communities and law enforcement. Over time, similar events and infamous incidents continue to fuel public concerns about whether systemic racism is ingrained in the institution of policing. Conversely, law enforcement personnel face depleted morale while attempting to defend the integrity of their career. While determining the “right side” is challenging, current racial tensions have undermined confidence in law enforcement from all perspectives. For this reason, this analysis aims to explore and provide an answer to the question: How has the government fostered an environment that harms the relationship between African Americans and law enforcement? Numerous factors must be deliberated to properly address the posed question, such as historical context, governmental legislation, and the current structure of policing.

Based on the United States Department of Justice, around 20 percent of Americans (16 years and older) will experience contact with the police in any capacity per year (Harrell and Davis 2020). This fact, along with the primary function of law enforcement to preserve public order, promotes this topic to the utmost importance in American society.

Law Enforcement Background and Structure

The history of law enforcement in the United States is a source of controversy due to its ties to slavery patrols. As early as 1704, the Carolinas organized patrols using “paddy rollers,” generally consisting of

white men of any socioeconomic status, to track and discipline enslaved individuals (Potter 2013). While these patrols expanded to exert authority over white indentured servants, the primary focus was to quell any chances of slave rebellion and assert a white superiority. Due to this given purpose, many consider these publicly-funded enforcement groups to be the first example of American policing, though contested. The structure of these patrols faced moderate adjustments following the American Civil War of 1861-1865 (History 2018). Militia groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, continued functioning with a vigilante-esque style, while other slave patrol groups transitioned into the South's first police departments. These departments continued acting under racist government policies, predominantly enforcing the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws that began in the 1890s (Hasset-Walker 2021).

Despite the Southern police departments' origins, it is inaccurate to generalize that all police institutions are rooted in racism. The earliest police departments in the North were established throughout the 1800s and sought inspiration from the London Metropolitan Police Department created by Sir Robert Peel (NYT 2014). The purpose of his force was to deter crime, as the previous community watch groups were ineffective at preventing criminal activity. To accomplish a cohesive law enforcement agency, the Peelian Principles emerged: emphasizing government control, a military-like structure, character standards, centralized stations, public cooperation, uniforms and badge numbers, and a minimum use of force. Many of the above principles would become crucial in founding police departments in the North, as industrialized cities and immigration led to elevated crime and labor unrest (Lane 1974). Thus, the first legitimate American law enforcement agency was formed in Boston in 1838. Soon after, New York created their own in 1845 and Chicago in 1855, along with multiple other major cities (Britannica 2023). The law enforcement agencies in Boston and New York are considered the earliest "modern" police departments, as they maintain traits that remain today. Specifically, officers were full-time employees, possessed powers defined by the government and law, belonged to a distinct agency, and followed their respective set procedures (Miller 2012).

Ultimately, the foundational differences between Northern and Southern antebellum police agencies prove that the early relationship between African Americans and law enforcement is nuanced. In other words, regional contrast is a major factor to consider in discussing how historical context affects the modern perception of policing. Connie Hasset-Walker, a researcher with a doctorate in Criminal Justice, framed her concerns about this perception by asking: "When a relationship begins like this, can citizen mistrust of police ever fully be overcome? Has policing as an institution evolved far enough away from its origins to warrant Black communities' trust" (Hasset-Walker, 2021)? Some origins of policing cannot be erased, but as proven throughout US history, the goals of police departments evolve as governmental

outlooks change.

Role of the Government

As previously mentioned, the role of law enforcement agencies has fluctuated throughout history based on government policy. As a consequence, governmental action bred the tensions between policing and racial minorities. Specifically, the goals of the government likely influenced racist individuals to join the police force because it gave them a legal opportunity to exert power per their discriminatory beliefs. In the South where racist post-Reconstruction laws were most impactful, the above is a generally accurate assumption. From the 1890s until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Jim Crow laws reinforced unjust practices. Some examples of such laws include the “Separate but Equal” doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 which allowed for segregation, prohibition of intermarriage, poll taxes, and literacy tests to prevent the black vote (McDuffie 2021). As states were federally allowed to continue creating these laws, any honorable intent of police agencies was tainted. Unjust legislation had opened the doors for what would be considered undesirable and unhirable individuals by modern standards to carry massive authority. Ultimately, the police’s role in enforcing racism in society became unforgettable to affected demographics, but this does not accurately apply accountability to the government or society. While it is easy to pin blame on police officers at the time for being complacent (or taking total advantage) of the circumstances, American society served to be equally, if not more, responsible. Democratically elected officials passed oppressive legislation following the wants of (white) society. As such, it is not historically accurate or fair to argue that law enforcement was the sole institution oppressing African Americans. Rather, an oppressive society chose to use the government to implement and enforce discriminatory practices. To act as though all modern law enforcement officers hold the same sentiment that many of them did in the 1800s-1900s, would also require recognizing that the same applies to government and society.

While some people joined law enforcement with mal-intentions, others joined to gain acceptance into early American society. For example, the NYPD was composed of up to 50 percent Irish Americans by the end of the 1800s because they were often denied jobs in the private sector or were confined to the undesirable trades of hard labor (Markey 2012). This isn’t to say that the cities’ departments took to hiring Irish immigrants quickly. Ironically, Irish immigrants were responsible for a majority of crime in early industrial hubs, so many of the first modern police departments (notably Boston and New York) were made as a response to Irish-perpetuated crime (Gershon 2017). By 1851, the Boston Police Department hired its first Irish police officer, Barney McGinniskin. After three years of service, McGinniskin was fired

on the account that the Irish people were too intertwined with Boston's crime for him to be fit to serve. It was only after Democratic candidates realized that the Irish vote could be of value that the Irish gained a political voice and began being accepted into policing. As law enforcement became the most viable job for these populations, they assimilated into American society, and criminal activity became confined to organized mob activity. In this case, the demographic of policing was shaped by the political agenda of the Democratic Party— which at the time, fervently opposed civil rights in the South and appealed to white immigrant groups by providing security such as food and a job (Politics in the Gilded Age). As a result of the political pandering, racist sentiments were instilled in the immigrant populations. For example, a Democratic senator from Illinois, Stephan A. Douglas, echoed that the freeing of slaves would create job competition and displace the white working class. As long as the slaves remained slaves, white immigrants did not have to worry about being at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Young 2019). Due to the constant reinforcement of social hierarchies, Irish immigrants who previously did not harbor prejudice against black Americans were likely to acquire a preference for discriminatory policies. The aforementioned political manipulation is relevant because of its direction towards the populaces that most commonly served in law enforcement. Early examples can be traced to highlight how government agendas could alter the relationship between African Americans and police officers.

Case Study: The War on Drugs

Aside from the government influencing the function of policing throughout history, multiple governmental initiatives dispositioned black Americans and contributed to the rift between their communities and the local police. Notably, on June 18, 1971, Richard Nixon declared a War on Drugs due to the previous decade's increased crime rates and documented drug usage. With this declaration, drugs were to be considered “public enemy number one” of American society. This strong sentiment was dampened throughout the presidencies of Ford and Carter but became a focal point of Reagan's presidency, especially as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 was passed (NPR 2007). Through the act, 1.7 billion dollars was allocated to law enforcement to combat drugs in society (Stephans 2021). In addition, the act established minimum sentencing for drug-related offenses— many of which disproportionately impacted poorer, non-white communities. The sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine is the most prominent example, as possessing five grams of crack cocaine warranted the same five-year sentence as possessing 500 grams of powder cocaine. Although on a 1-to-1 ratio, powder cocaine was equally priced or cheaper than crack cocaine, crack cocaine was able to be purchased in more condensed and less expensive quantities. Furthermore, crack cocaine transactions were often on the radar of

authorities due to the nature of its distribution. As explained by the US Department of Defense in a study analyzing the disparities between crack and powder cocaine's presence in society,

“Several studies have noted that crack sales may be more violent because crack is sold in smaller units and involves a higher volume of transactions. The crack market is highly decentralized with many small, independent groups competing for territory and profits; this may lead to a greater reliance on violence as a means of ‘regulating’ the crack market” (US Department of Justice 2002).

Consequently, the federal government was able to justify applying harsher (yet disproportionately unfair) sentences to crack cocaine users. The government and society's emphasis on preventing drug infiltration and violence shifted the focus of law enforcement to more proactive, or abrasive, policing techniques.

In “Theorizing the Role of the ‘War on Drugs’ in US Punishment,” Mona Lynch (2012) explains how during 1992-2008, non-drug related arrests fell despite the police force growing by 26 percent. Moreover, the annual per capita cost for local law enforcement grew from 131 dollars to 260 in the same time frame (Lynch 2012:189). The above facts point to how the federal government pushed law enforcement into aggressive policing strategies: increased stops, frisks, profiling, and paramilitary procedures. She argues that the escalation in the role of policing was just as, if not more, fundamental to perpetuating discrimination during the War on Drugs as harsh sentencing. Ultimately, Lynch recognizes that most departments were willing to adjust their priorities if it allowed them to prosper; “police agencies across the country have thus complied so as to obtain directed grants, training, equipment, and other tangible resources” (Lynch 2012, 181). Unfortunately, the aforementioned strategies to accomplish this task resulted in significantly higher rates of African American incarceration on the basis of drug offenses. By 1992, black Americans comprised 40 percent of drug-related arrests. This is nearly double the percentage from 1976, which stood at 22 percent. Nonetheless, both of these figures were disproportionate to the African American population at the time, which was around 12 percent (Cooper 2015).

Evidently, the War on Drugs adversely impacted African American communities. But, it was not the isolated goal of law enforcement to ensure the imprisonment of as many black Americans as they could. It was the concerns of society that allowed the government to get away with practices embedded with discriminatory intent. These concerns were statistically confirmed by the first illicit-drug poll conducted by Gallup. In 1969, 48 percent of Americans categorized drug use as a serious concern in their community. Moreover, in 1986, 56 percent of Americans believed that the government was not pushing enough money into the War on Drugs. This particular sentiment continued into 1995, as 63 percent of Americans were concerned for the United States as a whole due to the implications of drugs on society (Robison 2002).

The aforementioned attitudes that launched a governmental and societal campaign against drugs can be summarized by a sociological phenomenon: the Broken Windows Theory. This theory was fronted by sociologists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in a 1982 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. The two hypothesized that visible crime is likely to induce and exacerbate more serious crimes and disorder. Wilson and Kelling claimed (with alleged agreement from police officers) that if one or a few windows of a building are broken and are left unrepaired, the rest of the windows would soon be broken. Essentially, any evidence of crime in society would convey the message of vulnerability and that crime will go unnoticed or unpunished. Mike King explores how this concept applies to the War on Drugs in his article, “‘Broken Windows,’ Urban Policing, and the Social Contexts of Race and Neighborhood (Dis-)Empowerment.” As the government became more invested in the role of drugs in society, King pointed out, “those targeted by the state [were] labeled internal enemies with very little oversight or protections for the public. They also [ended] up widening the net of police surveillance and pursuit, and [relied] heavily on profiling and often selective geographic enforcement” (King 2013, 537). By proxy, the legislation that encouraged stringent policing also eroded community-police relations. Mass incarceration over what many consider a ‘victimless crime’ caused law enforcement to appear authoritarian and abusive. Because the War on Drugs focused on punishment rather than rehabilitation, the issue appeared as community versus police instead of community and police versus drugs.

The policing issues related to the War on Drugs did not end with the modern legalization and decriminalization movements. The criminal justice system continued to incarcerate African Americans at disproportionate levels, creating the burden of a criminal record that restricted social and economic opportunities (Morrison 2021). Furthermore, opposing federal and state legislation muddies the mission of law enforcement, as some police officers remain stuck in the War on Drugs mindset. Modern policing continues to reflect prior federal policies and initiatives that conditioned law enforcement to practice aggressive tactics. The quick turnaround between harsh drug prosecution and progressive movements is a source of confusion for officers. Such confusion is problematic because law enforcement personnel who still practice recently phased-out techniques cast a negative light on their departments and strain community relations. Although a receptive government tends to be beneficial, the inherently discriminatory War on Drugs and subsequent undoing of policy did no favors for the relationship between communities and their law enforcement.

Modern Structure of Policing

As exemplified by the existence of thousands of distinct police departments today, not every agency is created equal. As a baseline, all police agencies maintain minimum standards. Standards are often set

by a state's Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training or a similar agency. Police recruits must meet basic eligibility requirements (including background checks, psychological tests, age limits, and educational requisites), complete 700 training hours through the academy, and fulfill a probationary period spanning around 12-18 months. Most agencies require some form of diversity, racial sensitivity, or implicit bias training, but so far, a federal standard has not been created. Accordingly, federal oversight takes place in the form of three major programs: the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Divisions, Community Relations Service, and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (US Department of Justice 2015). These departments work to ensure that local police agencies have the proper tools if they decide to implement racially conscious training. They also serve the people by investigating departments with civil rights grievances.

These aforementioned standards represent how law enforcement agencies are attempting to make amends with history despite being a difficult feat. Since policing allowed the government to enforce oppressive policies against marginalized groups, tensions remain fresh in the minds of the communities oppressed by law enforcement. Nonetheless, it is important to note that modern motivations to join police departments differ significantly from the less honorable historical motivations. As studied by Samantha S. Clinkinbeard, Starr J. Solomon, and Rachael M. Rief in their publication, "How Did You Become a Police Officer? Entry-Related Motives and Concerns of Women and Men in Policing," most officers were motivated to join law enforcement due to the pretense of service, helping the community, and leaving a legacy (2021). Interestingly, these motivations are not enough on their own to maintain adequate recruiting levels for many police departments. As such, a 2021 survey from the International Association of Chiefs of Police which found that 78 percent of police departments faced difficulty in recruiting qualified candidates. In turn, this has led to the downsizing of police departments and an increase in crime.

Simply put, law enforcement is not as lucrative of an occupation as it has been at any other point in history. Modern agencies are dealing with the burden and repercussions of outdated policing tactics, which were encouraged by the federal government. The government successfully drove a wedge between law enforcement and their communities— particularly African American communities— by passing legislation that would forever taint their function and solidify their role as the face of discrimination (O'Connell 2023). High-profile incidents of racism in law enforcement continue to hinder progress towards a reformed police force. For instance, the George Floyd killing and subsequent 2020 civil unrest proved that law enforcement agencies are far from accomplishing a perfect relationship with their communities.

Conclusion

Arguably, the most important sociological relationship takes place between law enforcement and those they serve. Unfortunately, governmental practices throughout the history of the United States have threatened the sanctity of this relationship. By isolating the accountability of law enforcement from the accountability of the government, it is difficult to notice how the function of law enforcement was tainted by the government more than individual police officers. Though not to excuse the unjust actions of modern police officers, this analysis seeks to explain how government-influenced foundations and behaviors of law enforcement set a difficult precedent to rectify. This is abundantly clear through the historical contexts of policing in the United States and the case study of the War on Drugs.

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CHAIYA JEFFRIES

My name is Chaiya Jeffries and I'm a class of 2025 Sociology major from Los Angeles.

During my time as a Lion I have studied abroad in both Italy and Greece. I am also a part of a sorority, Alpha Phi. After graduation, I am on track to get my Masters in a field related to Criminal Justice and Social Work. I am passionate about working abroad to help vulnerable populations one day.

The Educational System: Private and Public Schools

While there are many differences between private and public K-12 schools in the United States, there are also many similarities. Although there is a common understanding that private schools are better than public schools, this is not the case. They are just different. Various factors determine a parent's decision to send their child to a private or public school. Selecting a public or private school is primarily determined by the type of educational experience parents want for their children. Although it can be due to financial reasons, the school's resources and the parent's goals for their child also impact this selection. Public and private schools also differ in the variety of teachers available. All these factors play a large role in the student's experience. Both public and private schools offer different resources that may be beneficial to one student but not another. The difference in the educational experience offered in public schools compared to private schools varies based on the types of teachers, parents, students, and systems in place. However, regardless of the school, it is important to prioritize the student's material needs, both physical and mental, and select the school best equipped to fulfill them.

The type of teacher that a student has, affects that student's ability to succeed. Jeff Duncan-Andrade's *"Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas: defining, developing, and supporting effective teachers in urban schools,"* does an amazing job of analyzing the different types of teachers and the effects of different teaching. An important feature of his research is his distinction between 'equitable education and 'equal education.' An equal education focuses on all students receiving the same things or being fair. An equitable education prioritizes the individual needs of each student and the 'specific needs of a

community,' and works to provide each student with what they need, even if it is not "equal" between students. Hence, they make it their priority to provide those students with the best experience possible. They are the 'Ridas' and want to see a more equitable education for all students. Typically, we see more "Rida" teachers at private schools because there are more systems in place to monitor the teachers. Private schools also tend to give their teachers more autonomy in their curriculum. Private school teachers have the privilege to teach relevant subject matter, instead of simply teaching concepts. The teacher can curate a curriculum that fairly recognizes all students and their complexities. In other words, at public schools, teachers are allowed to get away with poor behavior whereas, at private schools, there is more of a standard they are being held to.

The types of students in public and private schools also contribute to the differences between public and private educational experiences. Duncan-Andrade briefly mentions the types of students at public and private schools which would impact those learning environments. Private school students tend to be 'more prepared' for difficult classes and held to a higher academic standard. Public schools often have more students involved with gangs and facing poverty than private schools. Students are more likely to face bullying and discrimination at public schools. Microaggressions also tend to be ignored because their curriculum is insufficient and there is a lack of discipline for their actions. (Andrade 2007) Students at public schools may also think less of themselves because they are attending a public school and this low self-esteem might decrease their drive; however, this is not a guarantee. Some students may be more resilient and may work harder because they want to create a better future for themselves.

Whether in a public or private school, for a student to grow, their identity must be recognized and nourished. They must be supported and embraced for being their unique selves. Paula M. L. Moya's "What's Identity Got To Do With It? Mobilizing Identities in the Multicultural Classroom," stresses the importance of recognizing students' complex identities in educational environments. When a teacher or parent fails to recognize a student's identity, they limit the child's potential for growth. Beverly Daniel Tatum's "The Complexity of Identity: "Who Am I?" addresses the many complex components of identity and the importance of each, all of which impact a child's academic experience. Tatum defines identity as, "a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts." (Tatum 2000) It is not just one factor that makes up a student. If a school has a student that is an Asian and Black female, it's important for her to feel seen as not only a girl but an Asian individual and a Black individual. She must feel safe in her community and not as if her differences are going to hold her back or that she is less because of them. In addition to the cost and financial burdens of

private schools, private schools usually fail to accurately reflect the diverse demographics of the child's community. This could deflect parents with the desire for a more diverse experience for their children. Parents also play a large role in the educational experience and the differing experiences between public and private schools. Typically, at public schools, parents can be less apprehensive when communicating with the teachers. Building a relationship with a child's teacher is important because teachers and parents need to be on the same page as they both are significant role models, advocates, and figures of authority for the students. Strong communication and transparency with the teachers are vital for the student's success. While public school parents are more likely to speak with teachers, they are less likely to be greatly involved in their child's school life. This is not intentional. It is usually due to other life circumstances out of their control. Bernice Lott's "*Low-Income Parents and the Public Schools*," covers how a parent's income impacts their ability to help their child succeed. Some parents may not be able to afford to send their child to a private school, which averages \$20,000 annually. Typically at private schools, the majority of the parents are receptive to help because they are passionate about their children's learning and are paying a large amount of money to get that education. If education was not important to them, they would not spend that much money on tuition and school fees.

Another parental factor that impacts a child's academic experience and whether they'll go to a public or private school is the parent's education level and educational experience. (Beavis 2004) In 2016, The National Center for Educational Studies found:

"Higher percentages of assigned and chosen public school students than of private school students in grades 1 through 12 had parents whose highest education level was less than a high school diploma, a high school diploma or GED, or some college" (National Center for Educational Studies 2019).

If a parent does not have a positive and enriching school experience, it may be more difficult to set high standards for their kid and push them to excel academically. However, parents not completing high school is not only the result of attending a public school. It's possible a parent did not get a high school diploma because private school did not meet their needs well. Parent's negative private school experience could cause them to choose to send their kid to a public school. Flexibility is also an important factor because every student is different and has different material needs. Parents must be flexible with their kids and their material needs regardless of their own experience in the education system. If the student's needs are met and respected, they will be successful and have a positive experience at either a public or private institution.

There are many reasons a parent would send their kid to a private school rather than a public school.

It is not only about the financial status and the community. Children who need discipline and structure often thrive in a private school setting. Dr. Adrian Beavis, a research fellow, noted in his study that:

“The most common reasons given for changing from a Government school included the view that there is better discipline in private schools, the view that there is better education or better teachers (paid more or properly screened) in private schools, the view that there are smaller classes or there is the more individual attention given to students in private schools.” (Beavis 2004)

For some parents, the conditions of a private school are an ideal environment. Smaller classes are beneficial if your student needs more attention. The teacher-to-student ratio makes it so that the teacher can have more time to address a student's material needs. Parents also want well-equipped and trained teachers working with their kids. Additionally, religion is an important component in most lives so it makes sense that parents want their child's educational experience to include a religious aspect. Beavis even noted, “There was also some evidence of religious views influencing these opinions with 8.5 percent of parents mentioning the religious or value systems of private schools.” (Beavis 2004) Since religion controls many parts of one's life, incorporating it into education seems right.

However, there are still various reasons why a parent would choose a public school for their student. Although for some families public school is the only option, for others it is an intentional choice.

Public schools are also required to provide the necessary resources to educate all children which impacts some parents' decisions heavily. The National Center for Educational Statistics gathers statistics regarding education in public and private schools in the United States. During the 2017 - 2018 school year, they found public schools have more developed resources for neurodivergent students. Neurodivergent students require more resources and support to succeed and schools need to do more to be equitable. The NCES reports:

“99 percent of public schools reported having at least one student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) because of special needs. Public schools reported that 13 percent of K–12 students had an IEP. Among private schools, 59 percent reported having at least one student with a formally identified disability. Private schools reported that 8 percent of K–12 students had a formally identified disability”.

Public schools also tend to have more school lunch programs in place — “78 percent of all schools reported that they participated in the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, with 96 percent of

public schools reporting participation and 19 percent of private schools” (NCES 2019). If a parent is struggling to provide food for their child, this would be extremely helpful. Food is one of the students' material needs and should be prioritized.

Therefore, private schools and public schools are very different, but that does not make one inherently better than the other. It all depends on the needs of the child and their parents, and which school is best equipped to meet those needs. What matters most is which resources are available at the schools for students. If the school and parent can work together to raise the child in an environment that embraces the child's identity and material needs, regardless if the school is private or public, the student should succeed. Schools have to have programs in place such as restorative justice that offer students the opportunity to recognize the impact of their mistakes and grow from them. Parents need to be willing to work with their student's teachers to create a space that is ideal for the student to succeed. Students must also respect each other and be receptive and excited to learn. Whether your child needs smaller classes at a private school, or special needs classes at a public school, with equitable opportunities they have the potential to excel.

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MORGAN KEATING

My name is Morgan Keating, and I am a sophomore from Redwood City, California, majoring in psychology and minoring in sociology with hopes of pursuing a PhD in clinical psych. As being both a transgender male and neurodivergent, my goal is to help marginalized demographics such as the LGBTQ community and people with Autism Spectrum Disorder through research, mental health support, and social justice efforts.

Influencing Autistic Queer Experiences

Abstract

This paper discusses the effect of identity building on queer people with autism and the consequences that arise from it through conformity, masking, and social influence. Identity building occurs when society influences an individual based off the stereotypes or behaviors associated with the person's disability and therefore, this identity is viewed as the sole prominent characteristic they have. The common misconception that people with autism fall on the LGBTQ spectrum because they are autistic is a manifestation of identity building: we are only viewing these persons as their disability. Moreover, an autism diagnosis should not paint a person as confused or unable to be queer or gender-queer. This belief may constrain people with autism from discovering their gender identities and sexualities, which may go against the social normative. Crucially, the pressure to mask can impact expressions of sexuality or gender identity. Abolishing identity building can allow individuals with autism to use their disabled identity in a positive manner to explore their gender and sexuality. To do so, our society must discuss how harmful identity building is to queer people with autism and how to push positive light on these labels, moving away from influencing and building their identities and understanding how autistic symptoms impact ones LGBTQ identities.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder; LGBTQ; identity building; social conformity; masking, transgender; social normative; gender binary.

Influencing Autistic Queer Experiences

Background

Identity is what shapes our social roles and behaviors, holding us responsible for how one is supposed to act or supposed to think. Those who are disabled, especially those with autism spectrum disorder, may be more prone to having their social roles and behaviors shaped for them. For this reason, the discussion around how those with autism are influenced by social dynamics and how they may adjust to deal with stigma is important (Rivera & Bennetto, 2023). An example of one way that those with autism deal with stigma includes resorting to masking or camouflage as an avoidance strategy, which involves suppressing their authentic traits to be less socially excluded due to this disability (Cleary et al., 2023). Masking is a term used to describe the act of people with autism concealing aspects of their identity and true self to both appear normal and hide their disability from others (Miller et al., 2021). Though masking can take form consciously from mimicking and modeling behaviors, it can also occur unconsciously, and in turn drastically shape a person with autism's self-image and presentation unwillingly. In some circumstances, this could be used as a trauma response for protection as they are predisposed to bullying from peers (Rai et al., 2018).

As suggested, people with autism experience stigma, though so do other marginalized and oppressed people who are also socially excluded (Rai et al., 2018). This includes minority sexual orientations and gender identities; the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ people also mask and camouflage in response to social norms and stigma, which LGBTQ identities are traditionally out of line with (Rivera & Bennetto, 2023). Among gender non-normative people with autism, masking and the need to socially conform can result in both concealing one's autistic traits and passing as cisgender: a term used to describe a person whose current gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth with (Moseson et al., 2020). When a person with autism actively takes part in this camouflage behavior, they are constraining themselves from freely expressing their LGBTQ identity and specifically their true gender identity or sexuality by conforming to gendered norms. As disability and trans activist, Lydia Brown stated, “gender holds little intrinsic meaning for many autistic people and primarily impacts them when projected onto them” (Pyne, 2021). Brown’s statement expresses the role that gendered norms play in an person with autism who’s masked: the rigidity of gender can make one hyper aware of gender and social norms, leading them to feel pressured to conform with gendered roles and disregard the thought of queerness (Cain & Velasco, 2020). In our society, women are expected to act feminine and be attracted to males, while males are expected to act masculine and be attracted to women. Importantly, you are expected to physically portray the gender you are, leading to the possibility that cisgender ideologies can be forced upon the transgender person

with autism through the act of masking.

Evidently, research to this date has found that transgender adults are 3.03-6.36 times more likely to be autistic than cisgender people (Cooper et al., 2021), but between masking and the stigma those with autism face, autistic people are given the lower hand in terms of witnessing acceptance. Thus, autistic symptoms are sometimes used to discredit gender identities and sexual orientation (Moore et al., 2022). This act is called identity building, which happens frequently to those with disabilities: society constructs identities for them, pushing them to fall into deviant labels and disregarding their full identity. This results in forcing one to behave in a way that aligns with the behaviors or expectations of their disabled or gendered identity (Anderson- Chavarria, 2021). With autism being the prominent label held above these individuals' heads, other identities, like queerness and transness, are disregarded by either the person with autism or their peers. For example, transgender youth who are autistic have reported barriers in accessing gender care due to assumptions by family members, clinicians, or professionals that their gender expression may be inauthentic and the result of their neurodivergence (Rea et al., 2024). Literature on disability justice concludes that identity and developing an identity is important for people with autism (Smith & Mueller, 2021), but this disabled identity seems to negatively impact the acceptance of their other identities because of identity building.

When analyzing the effect that autism symptoms have on the individual (through masking) and the role it plays in how others perceive them (through lack of acceptance and identity building), one observation that stands out is how the presentation of identity constrains people with autism and can be harmful. In sum, the identity of autism can be an excuse to disprove or disbelieve one's sexuality and gender identity (McAuliffe et al., 2023). Simultaneously, the identity of autism can further make one conceal their socially frowned upon traits and conform to social expectations. The disabled identity for those on the autism spectrum is valuable, but if this identity building continues, it will lead the individual to only label themselves as disabled and be blind to other possibilities that make them extraordinary: being queer. However, people with autism are more likely to fall on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual spectrum (McAuliffe et al., 2023). With failing to understand the queer autistic experience, we fail to (1) support them in both identities and (2) allow them to comfortably explore the possibility of being queer, transgender, and embrace their sexuality. Through considering the impact that identities have on autistic people, it can help uncover a way that both queer and disabled identities can be used as comfort and security rather than a constraint or a symptom.

Identity: Conformity and Masking

Conformity. It is crucial to understand the role labels and social acceptance have on people with

autism to consider ways our society can address the issue of identity for those who are queer. A common misconception about autism is that people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) don't understand social rules or commonalities. People with autism, however, can fall into two categories of conformity: public conformity and private conformity. Public conformity involves overly conforming for social gain and approval but still maintaining their original beliefs (Lazzaro et al., 2018). In this instance, a person with autism may decide to wear feminine clothing and participate in feminine roles due to being biologically female when they feel that they would rather wear masculine clothing and hold masculine roles (i.e. having a female partner). In regard to private conformity, this may manifest as internalizing the judgements and status rankings of their peers, which changes their original beliefs (Lazzaro et al., 2018). While a biologically female person with autism may rather wear masculine clothing and hold masculine roles, the internalized opinion of their peers and the need to conform will lead the person to push this desire out of their mind. Unfortunately, this can even lead them to disregard the thought of being queer altogether. In both types of conformity, the person with autism in this scenario feels pressured or is forced to hold the identity of female and feminine when they don't truly feel feminine or specifically feel they relate to the social normative female expectations. In a reflection made by a woman named Adele, a 47-year-old bisexual with autism, she stated that she "focused on just fitting in...and conforming to what was needed of me" (McAuliffe et al., 2023) rather than exploring the reality that her sexuality did not align with the social normative female expectations. Broadly, conformity occurs for a queer person with autism because those with autism may find themselves unable to identify with the typical gender expectations within their environments as gender identity is perceived in terms of the binary categories of male or female (Kourti & MacLeod, 2019). In other words, conformity stems from the cisgender and heteronormative expectations that are embedded in our culture. This results in pressuring a person with autism to conform to the binary categories like Adele did with her sexual orientation. Therefore, when gendered roles are forced from the need for social approval, it is used as a constraint on the true gender identity or sexuality one may align with.

Masking. Conformity can also be connected to masking: people with autism may unconsciously identify and uphold gender roles in which they don't feel truly fit because it is socially acceptable behavior. Mercury, a 26-year-old nonbinary person with autism reflected that "When I was younger- [I] really worked to hide both my queerness and being autistic" and that they expressed, "being worried about what people would think if I presented myself [as nonbinary] or knowing very clearly [that they were nonbinary]" (Voltaire et al., 2024). Mercury was actively masking their autistic traits and queer traits by going along with the binary to appear normal. Along with Mercury, in many other cases of LGBTQ

persons with autism, how one masks can be ruled by one's gender identity, such as what they wear, how they wish to identify, and who they are attracted to. Moreover, the social learning of gender performance was framed as actively learning how to 'mask,' and this can be threatening (Moore et al., 2022). For instance, the identity of a biological female is the expected role the person with autism thinks should be portrayed as AFAB (a female assigned at birth). The person with autism may see other females in their life behaving a certain way or embodying certain characteristics, leading them to mask themselves with the same traits. The AFAB person with autism may see other female presenting people in their life wearing feminine clothes, dating men, or liking feminine activities such as makeup or painting their nails. In turn, the AFAB person with autism may mask with the same traits and interests of femininity to fit in: the masks portrayed by people with autism have aimed to reproduce stereotypical constructions of femininity or masculinity (Moore et al., 2022).

Identity Building

A prominent issue on this topic is that gender and sexuality in people that are disabled have been ignored. People with disabilities are often thought to be asexual or not desiring a romantic relationship (Womack et al., 2022). Horrifically, gender identity and transness are also reduced to the assumption that it is just a symptom of their autism and may close off resources normally offered to transgender people to the disabled community (Jackson-Perry, 2020). The socially constructed idea of autism and the behaviors expected from people with autism have constrained them from having support in embracing and exploring their sexuality and gender identity. Moreover, they have constrained themselves to do so as well. When society has a stereotypical outlook on people with autism and how their traits manifest, they can unknowingly aid the act of identity building.

Phases. An example of identity building is when someone links every characteristic back to someone's oppressed identity. For instance, there is a tendency to disregard LGBTQ identities by linking them to one's disability or autism (Toft, 2023b). By doing so, identity building is taking place. One manifestation of this presentation of identity building for those on the autism spectrum is the misconception of phases for LGBTQ identities. This appears when queer identities aren't taken seriously and are often dismissed because of others perceiving this newfound identity as a misunderstanding and that the desire to label themselves as queer will pass eventually (Toft, 2023b). The misconception also stems from the view of disabled people being immature or infant-like due to their intellectual disabilities (Toft et al., 2019). Abigil, a pansexual 18-year-old, shared that " ...because of my learning difficulties, people think that I am disabled and don't understand it, and it is just a phase," and confessed that due to her queer identity being

dismissed as a phase, her mental health symptoms worsened (Toft et al., 2019). Being neurodiverse and/or intellectually disabled is not equivalent to being immature or naive. While there are three severities for ASD (mild, mod, severe) there may be times when people discredit the experiences of people on the spectrum that fall within mild and moderate ranges. Associating every person with autism as severely disabled or as intellectually disabled is what occurs when we label a person with autism's queer identity as a phase or perceive them as too naive to understand this side of themselves.

Outcast. Identity building also affects people with disabilities when trying to find comfort within the LGBTQ community: the LGBTQ community may accept the person with disabilities but, because of their neurodivergence they don't understand them. This disabled label can lead to one being invalidated when identities, such as their LGBT one, seemingly diverge from typical stereotypes of autism (McAuliffe et al., 2023). Therefore, using identity building for one's disability may make the queer person with autism hesitant to inform their disabled identity to other queer people, restricting them from forming a sense of community. Forming relationships and community is an important factor in a person with autism's life and promotes improved well-being, but access to community is negatively impacted when the person has intersecting minority and marginalized identities (McAuliffe et al., 2023). Some queer people with autism have noted that they felt that they didn't fit into either the disabled or the queer community, increasing the notion of isolation (Hillier et al., 2019). Rowan, a 24-year-old nonbinary person with autism pointed out their struggle of accepting their queer and disabled identity together: "Lack of representation definitely made it more difficult...queer people tend to be represented in specific ways, which may not align with who I am, so I just didn't think it was a possibility" (Kourti & MacLeod, 2019). Research has also found that the disabled LGBTQ population has been marginalized by health and social services, special education, and the disability rights movement (Hillier et al., 2019). This illustrates that the disabled queer community experiences outcast from both their LGBTQ community and their disabled community. One participant in a study done by psychologists at University of Massachusetts Lowell expressed that "if you have multiple identities, then it's very difficult to find people who understand and accept you" (Hillier et al., 2019). Those with autism and those who are queer both face the same struggles when it comes to finding people that understand their injustices and experiences. When someone identifies with both of these oppressed identities that value community, it can be hurtful when they fail to connect to the community due to their intersectionality, especially when it comes to mental health. 20% of teens and children with ASD reported having suicidal ideations in the past year (Conner & Mazefsky, 2023), and almost half of the LGBTQ teens (which make up 10% of the US population) considered suicide in the past year (Ramos et al., 2024). These two demographics are at risk of severe mental distress, and

because queer people with autism are prone to experiencing a lack of sense of community and belonging, the fear of their well-being declining increases. To avoid this, we must understand that those who are autistic are not solely confined to their disabled identity. To build a person with autism around this defining characteristic can wedge a barrier between them and the community they can find within their queer identity.

Stripped From Resources. The identity building of people with disabilities also results in dehumanizing stereotypes, viewing people with autism as unable to form relationships, feel sexual desires, and fully understand social rules (McAuliffe et al., 2023). This can create challenges in the coming out process for queer people with autism due to the resources and knowledge available to them on this topic and lead to invalidation in the early stages of finding their identity (McAuliffe et al., 2023). Studies done on LGBTQ people with autism revealed that they commonly experience difficulties with their dual identities, such as lack of services, inappropriate care, refusal by providers, and difficulty communicating sexual needs (Wallisch et al., 2023). With limited guidance on sexuality and gender topics, they lack the exposure of diversity and possibly few to no LGBTQ role models (Hillier et al., 2019). Specifically, there are commonly held misconceptions about people with disabilities not needing Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). Youth who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual are more likely than their heterosexual peers to engage in sexual intercourse, but this education rarely considers LGBTQ youth with disabilities (Patlamazoglou & Pentaris, 2022). If youth with disabilities are withdrawn or disregarded from RSE, it means that they don't have the adequate and supportive environment to learn about sexual orientations and romantic attraction, nonetheless learn how to explore this curiosity safely (Toft, 2023b). Stripping these youth with autism from Relationship and Sexuality Education also strips them from the exposure of vocabulary for how they may want to identify as, either sexuality or gender related. Building people with autism's identities to be about their disability means viewing them as unable to recognize social constructions; viewing them as undesiring of relationships; and believing that sexuality is a fragile concept to introduce (Toft, 2023a).

Discussion

We should move away from examining autism in queer people only as a variable that makes them queer: autism is not a causation of one's sexual orientation or gender identity (Toft, 2023b). Additionally, by believing these misconceptions about people with autism and their relationship capabilities, we are disregarding the thought that people with autism can have sexuality as a whole (Toft, 2023b). With our society not being open to the idea that people with disabilities can have relationships and can have a sense of themselves, we close off resources that are commonly available to all other people.

If those on the autism spectrum are more likely to be queer, why should we restrict this knowledge and acceptance from them? LGBTQ justice has drastically improved this last decade, but this should create a positive correlation with disability justice: these two marginalized identities go hand in hand, and it is unfair to place one morally above the other. If we can work to understand the way we unintentionally influence those with ASD, both through conformity and identity building, there could one day be a possibility that transgender people with autism and queer people with autism aren't (1) pressured to mask to fit in with gender roles and (2) educate them on sexuality and accept their queerness as not a symptom of autism but as a separate identity from autism.

While this paper focused on the negatives of identity, identities have the possibility to comfort people with autism; being neurodivergent may give them an answer to this socially normative different sexuality or gender identity and allow them to experience community with others alike (Kourti & MacLeod, 2019). One AFAB reflected on this benefit of intersectionality when discussing their gender identity journey: "Finding out that I am an individual with autism has helped me understand myself a lot better. It explains why I've been so different and why I struggle with male [and] female roles and identity" (Kourti & Macleod, 2019). The difference between how to make the autistic identity a positive factor in one's LGBTQ identity compared to a negative one comes down to whether society continues to draw from stereotypes to judge those with ASD. Believing that those with autism are emotionally underdeveloped, socially blind, and incapable of experiencing independence is what leads to the act of identity building and neglecting of LGBTQ identities. A bigger topic of discussion includes how we may one day create an environment where those with autism feel that they don't have to mask and conform to gender binaries. But while we work towards a genderless world, society should focus on embracing autistic and disabled identities as a positive thing and not use them as a weapon against them in this age of exploration.

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PAULINA FISCHBACH

Hello! My name is Paulina Fischbach and I am a third-year student majoring in Urban Studies with minors in Business Administration and Sociology. I

added the Sociology minor to enhance my understanding of how social dynamics influence urban planning in real life. Throughout my studies, I am building a strong foundation to address the practical challenges of designing and managing efficient, well-structured communities around me.

Social Media and Consumerism

Social media has revolutionized how individuals engage with the digital atmosphere, acting as a powerful agent for platforms of capitalism and communication. These systems have been meticulously designed to optimize user involvement through features like algorithmic content selection, unlimited browsing, and notification alerts, resulting in an endless cycle of engagement from users. Constant checkers, known as people who utilize social media on a day-to-day basis, unaware of their contributions to sustaining large capitalist institutions, are the ones who express this behavior the most. Social media platforms specialize in monetizing user attention by promoting consumerism as a need creating value for materialized things by aligning individuals with the same behaviors, being a service to systemic economic goals for corporations. The design of social media promotes capitalist economies, influencing individuals to overly consume and develop the behavior of constant checkers on platforms that large businesses profit from. These variables are significantly impacted by social media agencies that have become the driving force in society, benefiting from the new surge of technology use.

Although there is no denying that technology (or the use of social media platforms) is a useful gadget for communicating and building relationships, many users fail to recognize the detrimental effects it may have on their well-being and society. The standard tendency many individuals exhibit today of constantly checking social media platforms highlights the ingrained challenge technology has brought upon society. According to a quantitative report called, “Stress in America 2017: Technology and Social Media”, 86% of Americans consistently check their emails, texts, and social media accounts. Adults using technology

indicated that 79% report utilizing Facebook and 32% spend their time on Instagram (American Psychological Association 2017). The attachment to digital forms of fake dopamine reveals how social media poses as a norm embedded into most people's daily routines. The consequences prompted by constant engagement on devices play a negative role in the lives of many. Social media's design has an inverse relationship with the wellbeing of life and the profit margins of businesses. Essential components of well-being such as psychological and financial aspects of life decrease as scrolling on social apps and consumer websites increases. Regularly monitoring social media has been shown to raise stress levels and decrease self-esteem in the context of not having products or materials that others have. This indicates that consumerism deprives the human body's natural requirement of mental stability to live a prosperous life. Fostering an environment where obsessing over what others own has become more significant than other imperative life accomplishments people achieve, in turn prioritizing the need for public validation. The constant exposure to content that is intentionally put on everyone's individual device encourages comparison to unrealistic realities posed by pictures and videos online.

Media platforms are fueled by user involvement that turn personal opinions, connections, and preferences into a profitable source of income for businesses in a capitalist world. This system of capitalism is substantially maintained by constant checkers who forget what they are actively doing on their device after hours of scrolling. All sorts of media such as broadcasting, newspapers, and entertainment are tailored to be generally relatable to the mass public except for social media. Social media is built to maximize user activity because it generates a consistent stream of revenue data that businesses can apply to their marketing strategies. Media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and now TikTok do not solely collect information passively, but evaluate data to influence the next click on someone's device. "The data that platforms extract is valued on the basis of how useful it is to predict and shape user behavior and consumption, which implies particular value on data about who their users are" (Tornberg and Uitermark, 2021). This demonstrates that the goals of social media are not to merely connect people, build relationships, and entertain, but rather to strip data from everyone's active account to generate revenue. Every click, like, or share an individual makes, offers distinguishable information about the demographics and preferences of the user. Advertising companies negotiate to purchase this data which allows them to gain access to more accurate targets of individuals who use social media that might increase their likelihood of purchasing a product. This aids the opportunity to promote goods to consumers who agencies know have an interest in the service or product because the individual has been liking, commenting, or sharing on social media, leaving behind great data businesses thrive using.

Businesses and social media platforms both benefit from this cycle because businesses will continue to see higher sales through specified engagement and platforms will make more money through specialized advertising.

In addition to social media's algorithm tactics to keep users engaged, platforms boost cultural trends and lifestyles that produce a false demand of wants. The algorithms categorize content through a manner of knowing the time and place of when to send out notifications, hoping it will lure users into consuming. An example furthering this intense lifestyle is the COVID-19 pandemic opening doors for influencer culture. For example, social media influencers in 2024 feature products through their platform to generate an artificial sense of need to purchase an item using their discount code. In many instances, the working class may not have the financial means to buy the product but feel compelled to, due to their favorite influencer partnering up with a large company and creating a discount code that incentivizes people to consume the brand deal. "According to these theorists [Ritzer and Stepnisky], it is not capitalism but culture industry that holds fast control over the mass" (Gabul, 2024), which shows that a large chunk of consumerism today, emerged from the surge of the pandemic. Studies show that screen time skyrocketed during the pandemic due to everything from social interactions, school, work, and consumption (even basic needs such as groceries) transferred online for a year and a half. Since the lockdown put a halt to normal living, many individuals took advantage and built their platforms by promoting anything a company would pay them for. As consumers spent more time online for whatever reason, these influencer endorsements and partnerships captivated larger audiences. In turn, companies and influencers made a lot of money by making deals to promote and sell products to people who had nothing better to do during the pandemic. However, this fostered the movement of influencer culture where the practice of consumerism by guiding capitalist success is deemed as a norm in 2024.

Furthermore, sociologist George Ritzer developed the concept of McDonaldization, where businesses specialize in principles such as efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control to dominate over society. Social media supports these essential principles in a capitalist economy by transforming the thought processes people undergo when buying products and services. This idea does not only apply to McDonald's, but to corporations such as Amazon and Walmart that play a more prevalent role in the digital age. Online technology has shown that businesses like Amazon control and guide the way people buy products online. Ritzer and Steven Miles state, "Shopping on Amazon is tightly controlled by the nature of the site and its reliance on non-human technologies. Consumers can only order what is on the site and cannot ask (there is no one to ask) for products to be modified" (2018). This illustrates the

intensity of Amazon's power in the e-commerce marketplace by eliminating the human aspect of daily actions such as buying items at a store and replacing it with automated systems. Like social media, a regulated atmosphere that is insensible to human interaction is generated by algorithms that make it convenient for people avoid basic routine interactions due to an ad or promotion saying they can get the product delivered to their house. Unfortunately, because efficiency and profitability are what businesses value most, relying on robots and technology lacks a sense of concern for people who are continuously buying product after product. Ensuring that social media and businesses have complete control over the consumer experience by using strategic marketing and behavior data not only increases their profits, but decreases the social, mental and financial wellbeing of the market.

While there have been attempts to address the social media effects on mass consumption in a capitalist economy, its success and effectiveness on most of the United States has not reached a consistent margin. Since corporations will continue to control and dominate society, the next step individuals should take is having a better understanding of consumerism and its luring process. Being aware of social media algorithms trying to manipulate engagement from user activity is key to move away from excessive consumption. Individuals should take initiatives to read about the dark side of corporations by recognizing that any slight interest in a product is evaluated through data analytics to tailor an ad to the person's device. Additionally, out of the hands of personal consumption, governments and agencies should create stricter guidelines for data privacy on a device rather than force a user to accept "cookies" in order to use a website. Using the combination of individual and societal policies on platform usage, people can reduce social media effects on mass consumerism in a capitalist driven country.

Throughout the years of technology, social media has grown to be an essential part of modern society that has incorporated capitalist consumerism. Platforms encourage overconsumption behaviors by analyzing data that captures the components and preferences one would like to see on their feed. This alludes to a fake demand for products people purchase, curating a profit margin for businesses. The emergence of constant checkers has impacted the marketing strategies companies apply to their advertising at the expense of society's wellbeing. As a collective effort to stop the influence social media poses on mass consumption, platforms must live up to ethical behavior that will be conscious of the negative effects of user engagement by implementing regulations on data usage for advertising purposes. By employing these methods, society can refrain from caving into the consumer world due to social media pressures and instead transition towards a more positive and creative space using social media.

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