

# California Sociology Forum

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## Student Journal of Sociology

### Volume 6

Fall 2023 - Spring 2024

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***Special thanks to*** Victor Mojica (Communications Specialist with the College of Natural and Social Sciences) and Milo Valentine (M.A. student with the Department of Sociology's Graduate Program) at California State University, Los Angeles for their image expertise.

*Land, Resistance, and Radical Care* | Design by Milo Valentine. Cover Image Description: Pastel teal solid foundation with a graphic design depicting ... The primary object of *Land, Resistance, and Radical Care* is an illustration of two hands side-by-side, palms up, with fingers slightly rounded. In the palm of the hands rests an object that might resemble Earth or a flower in bloom. A warm pink backlight surrounds the hands, symbolizing the interconnection of care and resistance. This piece is set against the backdrop of the Los Angeles County map from the 1800s, which includes topographic symbols and borders marked by colorful patches overseeing miles of land. Additionally, the phrases "Stolen Land" and "LandBack" are inscribed across the wrists of the hands holding our world, symbolizing the necessity of our pursuits to stem from this foundational historic understanding.

## **ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA SOCIOLOGY FORUM**

### **THE HISTORY**

CSF was initially published in 2007-2008 by Professor Hyojoung Kim. It was re-launched in 2022-2023 by a group of faculty members in the Department of Sociology. CSF expresses its immense appreciation to all editors—both faculty and student—who have served on the editorial board through all its iterations.

### **THE MISSION**

The California Sociology Forum (CSF) is a student-run online journal that publishes scholarly and creative works of students enrolled in the Sociology program or taking Sociology classes at Cal State LA at both the undergraduate and graduate level. It is committed to cultivating student research, supporting intellectual exchange, and featuring diverse perspectives on various issues of our society and world. Students are strongly encouraged to submit not only original research papers, but creative works such as poems, cartoons, music, pictorial essays, personal essays, and fieldwork notes that use the sociological imagination, as well as sociologically relevant book and film reviews. As we continue to grow, we welcome new additions to our editorial board. Please feel free to reach out to us!

### **CONTACT US**



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## **CSF 2023-2024 Editorial Board**

*Volume 6 was reviewed, promoted, edited, uploaded, and published by the following editorial board. Their innovations have continued the endeavors of CSF for sociological relevance. For this publication, previously established sections were expanded even further, to Research subsections for Articles, Essays, Theoretical Framework, & Theses; Creative Works subsections for Cover Image Art, Multimedia Poems, & Zines; and Reviews subsections for not only Books & Films but also Video Games Adapted into Film & Music! The pieces in the Reviews were mainly contributions from the ever-evolving editorial student board sub-team of Media Reviews and Original Content Creations.*

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CALIFORNIA SOCIOLOGY FORUM

Student Journal

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**Letter from the Editors**

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Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present the latest publication of the student-run CSF journal, featuring a range of works created by Cal State LA's Department of Sociology students (and even a few of their peers from other departments as co-authors). Volume 6 continues our goal to expand beyond traditional texts and provide students the opportunity to exhibit creative pieces. Several discussions and panels were held with the goal of encouraging student contributions to the journal. The formal structure of these lectures served to illustrate the advantages of being a peer-reviewed author as well as the process of becoming published.

Similarly to CSF's last volume, CSF's founder Dr. Hyojoung Kim (and Director of the Center for Korean American and Korean Studies) presented CSF with Korean Barbecue in three stages. Stage 1 was composed of typical cuts of KBBQ meats, Stage 2 was a Korean Bulgogi specialty not commonly offered in Southern California. Dr. Kim expressed the significance of the bulgogi's unique preparation on a special grill allowing it to cook in a soup typically eaten over steamed rice; something he grew up eating on special occasions as a child. Stage 3 was a serving of cold noodles meant to cleanse the palate of all the protein digested.



*A collage of photos showcasing the multiple stages of KBBQ*

Experiencing this food and learning the meaning behind the preparations together contributed to the fostering of community, in this moment we were family. This sense of community felt symbolically relevant to the experiences CSF members were having outside of the journal.

The Fall 2023 semester was filled with calls to justice. The first movement was from students against tuition hikes organizing a walkout across all the CSU's. Then the genocide in Gaza demanded attention, with students and faculty alike rallying to offer programs and protests in support of solidarity to #FreePalestine. The transition into the start of the Spring 2024 semester was eventful, as classes were delayed due to multiple unions striking for contract negotiations. Students and faculty alike were utilizing their agency as community members in the CSU, bargaining for better conditions for all. Such organizing and acts of resistance against greed and the corporatized university set the tone not only for the semester but for the CSF board as a whole.

Consistent with the spirit of solidarity, the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Social Theory Conference, hosted by the Department of Sociology, picked the theme of "Conflict, Ideology, and Critical Humanitarianism." Half a day was devoted to "Social Justice" – allowing labor and union organizers to sit on a panel followed by a mixer enacted to teach the students agency and how to advocate for themselves.

**UNION** *'yün-yen:*

An act or instance of uniting or joining two or more things into one. Something that is made one: something formed by a combining or coalition of parts or members. A confederation of independent individuals for some common purpose.

*Description of "UNION" as seen on the 3rd Floor of the CSULA U-SU*

As volume 6's completion progressed, themes of resistance began to emerge organically from the submissions. We as a board followed our authors' lead with fluidity, reinforcing the decision to not produce a normative sociology journal. We encouraged the spirit of imagination to roam free in our journal and pivoted away from the standard formatted journals common to academia. The work in this journal, although untraditional, is impactful and depicts how knowledge can be produced through art and community. The varied expressions of the sociological imagination reflect CSF's platform to assist in the decolonization of students' minds and challenge the heteronormative, patriarchal, ableist, white supremacist institution. We are thrilled with this volume and look forward to what CSF has ahead of it.

In Solidarity,

The CSF Editorial Board



## About the Student Editors

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**Jesse Arceo** (He/Him) is in his second year of the M.A. program for Sociology program here at California State University of Los Angeles. His expected graduation date is Spring of the following academic year for 2024-2025. Jesse's research interests are anything involving behavior, more specifically individuals' well-being and happiness in our society. His position as part of the CSF Student Editorial Board included serving as a peer reviewer for the works and articles being submitted for publication to CSF.



**Taryn Bates** (She/Her) is in her senior year as an undergraduate at Cal State LA and will graduate *summa cum laude* in May 2024 as an Honors College Thesis participant, achieving her B.A. in Sociology: Inequalities and Diversity. She is excited to gain this next level of degree through transferring from Irvine Valley College in 2022, having obtained three simultaneous A.A. degrees *summa cum laude* with Honors for Sociology, Emphasis in Liberal Studies, and Emphasis in Social and Behavioral Sciences. In 2023-2024, she became a member of the Abolition Study Action People's (ASAP) Collective, holds the positions of Sociology Club President & Social Media Manager, and rose to the challenge of Publication Co-Managing Editor role for CSF. She is passionate about pursuing research on cross-cultural intersections of social partner dance.



**Andrea Dominguez** (She/They) is currently a graduate student who is pursuing her M.A. in Sociology. Andrea is the Public Relations leader for CSF. Additionally, she works as a Student Assistant Engagement Coordinator for the Center for Student Involvement at Cal State LA, along with serving as one of the Board of Directors for the University Student Union. Her interests in academia include studying phenomena occurring in the world of Urban Sociology and different sociological pedagogies. Andrea hopes that CSF will continue encouraging students to submit their work and show their creativity to the academic world.

## California Sociology Forum x



**Katherine Eason** (She/Her) is a Graduate student who's excited about excelling in her academia journey. Being a first-generation college student and the first to receive her bachelors, she strives to go farther than anyone in her family was ever able to. Being an African American woman has driven her to the major of Sociology. Being involved within her community and fighting against oppression and obstacles that have been placed for women and people of color has fueled her academic journey and the main interest in her academic studies. As part of the CSF 2023 board, it has been her privilege to review academic work driven and created with Sociological relevance in mind. She encourages all sociology students to get involved in CSF, as it is a great way to get to know your classmates and to get to know your school. CSF is the heartbeat of the campus.



**Sammy Garcia III** (He/Him) is a Sociology, M.A. graduate student at Cal State LA. He graduated with his B.A. in Sociology and Minor in CLS Spring 2023. He made the dean's list for Sociology twice (Fall 2021, Spring 2022) and received a Sociology award for being part of CSF Student Journal in Spring 2023. His research interests are in music and film, and he is proud to have an op-ed on music published in the Spring '23 CSF Volume 5. He was part of the editorial team for Spring Semester 2023 and returned again in the Fall '24, he enjoyed the process of working with his fellow students and new editorial team this semester.



**Emely Gavini Mendez** (She/Her/Ella) is a Sociology, M.A. Graduate student at Cal State LA. She attended San Bernardino Valley College and received four Associate's degrees: Administration of Justice, Humanities and Fine Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences and Sociology. She proudly transferred over to Cal State LA and pursued her B.A. degree in Sociology and graduated in less than two years. Emely's final thesis project focuses on family dynamics and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected those dynamics. Emely will be graduating with her Master's degree in Sociology May 2024 as a proud Published student on the CSF editorial Board, in hopes to continue her passion for writing.



**Jasmine Gaytan** (She/Her) has an Associate's Degree in Administration of Justice from Pasadena City College and a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology with an emphasis in Law and Society from California State University- Los Angeles. She is in her last semester for the Master's Degree in Sociology here at California State University- Los Angeles. Her research interests include education, pedagogical practices, race and ethnic inequalities.

She is currently in the submission process of her research on the topic "What role does Whiteness have in the opposition of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Florida's K-12 public education?" which she hopes will be published in an academic article. It is her intention to promote awareness of the social phenomenon of anti-CRT legislation by understanding the role "Whiteness" has in opposition to CRT.



**April D. Laird** (She/Her) will complete a B.A. in Sociology, in Spring 2024. Her research and action interests include climate justice, labor rights, anti-racism, abolition, and sustainable urban planning, and her professional ambitions in advocacy coalesce around these topics. She is an active honors society member, has been featured on the Dean's list 6 times, and is recognized for her contributions to the community in ecology and anti-racism, as well as for her on campus

participation in CalStateLA's Students with Dependents student organization as committee chair and president. Her experience collaborating with CSF as an editor and team leader has been a true delight, enjoying participating in the peer review process and the exciting heterogeneity of student sociological work at CalStateLA. Currently, April assists part time as a community messaging and engagement intern and student employee alongside the policy and research team at TreePeople.org, for county scale climate resilience initiatives.



**Anthony Jonathan Morales** (He/Him) is a Sociologist student at CSULA. His area of study and expertise is in Sociology and Education. He is also set to graduate with a Bachelor's in Sociology Spring of 2024 and is also set to pursue a Master's degree after. He is grateful and enjoyed working on the student journals.



**Joram N. Mugerwa** (He/Him) is an undergraduate transfer student at California State University, Los Angeles. He will be graduating in December 2023, receiving a B.A in Sociology with an option in Gerontology. He is part of various campus organizations dedicated to advancing people of color (BSU, EOP, The Network, etc.) and a peer mentor at the Veterans Resource Center. Joram hopes to use his gained intellect to advance the mobility of the aged population, specifically those with low-income statuses. Joram has also made it his mission to understand the structural foundations of society that promote well-being, hoping to one day apply his knowledge to his home country of Uganda. Joining CSF and working with its members has been illuminating for Joram because it has made him more aware of inequalities and perspectives. He played the role of Team Lead within CSF Public Relations and will continue to advocate for this program's success.



**Rachel Natland** (Her/They) is a Sociology major in her senior year at CSULA. Her area of expertise is in the application of regenerative studies to social system design with a focus on K-12 education models. She will earn her B.A. in Sociology in the Fall of 2023 and intends to pursue a Master's Degree in Regenerative Studies through Cal Poly Pomona in Fall 2024.



**Luis Ortiz** (He/Him) is a B.A. Sociology student at California State University Los Angeles. He is interested in intersectionality of identities on social interaction and quality of life. Luis spends much of his time on campus interacting with students in the Cross Cultural Centers (CCC) in the Student Union (U-SU), especially in the Genders and Sexualities Resource Center (GSRC). Since 2021, he organizes a social justice-oriented sports recreation community every Saturday called Rainbow Beach Ultimate in Venice, California, as a response to a growing number of nationwide anti-trans legislation. Through RBU, Luis promotes an inclusive environment that focuses on building the representation of women, BIPOC, and LGBT+ identifying players in the Ultimate Frisbee community through playing and teaching Beach Ultimate. Luis looks forward to furthering his education in Jotería Studies in a future Master's program at CSULA.



**Christina Mary Ramirez** (She/Her) is a sociology M.A. student at Cal State University, Los Angeles and will be graduating in the spring of 2024. Her interest is in intergenerational solidarity, children's psychological well-being, and family dynamics. She believes exploring these topics is vital for society because the family may be the first to serve as a foundational source of love, companionship, and understanding. She is in the process of completing her thesis, studying the effects parent-child conflict has on children's depression, especially while enduring a traumatic experience like divorce. Christina is grateful for the opportunity she has been given to explore her writing in sociological areas and to be able to work alongside brilliant, goal-orientated students and faculty.



**Jessica Rivera** (She/Her/Ella) is a first-generation graduate student at Cal State LA. Jessica will be graduating with her M.A. in Sociology in May 2024. Her research interests consist of deviant behaviors, gender, and mental health. She is currently working on her portfolio project on the topic of social media specifically Instagram affecting college students' self-perception. She is grateful for the opportunity she has been given to explore, grow in her writing and learn from her CSF team. Jessica had the opportunity to be a part of the book/film review team. She is a proud member of the editorial board and hopes to continue her passion in writing.



**Marie Rivera** (She/Her/Ella) is a graduate student pursuing her M.A. in Sociology. Her research interests consist of intersectionality, gender & sexuality studies, race & ethnicity, abolition, and climate justice. Marie currently holds the position of Vice President of the SOC Club. She is also a Research Assistant to several faculty members in the Department of Sociology. She is passionate about organizing with Abolition Study Action People's (ASAP) Collective and educating students on abolition as a teaching assistant. She has a strong enthusiasm for the written word and its capacity to convey the distinctive thoughts of others. She is grateful for the opportunity to work on such an amazing, dedicated editorial team and admires the journal's ability to display the work of students. Marie acted as Graduate Managing Editor for CSF in the Spring of 2023 and Publication Co-Managing Editor for the Fall 2023-Spring 2024.





**Leticia Romero** (She/Her/Ella) is a Sociology graduate student working on her Master's at Cal State University, Los Angeles. She has a unique and diverse perspective on under resourced communities and people of color and believes systematic change is needed to improve the quality of life for people not born into wealth. Her research interest is on critical gang studies and why young men join gang. She is focused on the Chicano community of East Los Angeles where she is conducting qualitative interviews to exhibit the resilience of Chicano street gangs and analyzing conflict issues based on allocated resources, identity issues based on hypermasculinity. She is member of the international Sociology honor society, Alpha Kappa Delta as well as the international interdisciplinary honor society, Phi Kappa Phi and is currently a student editor for the California Sociology Forum.



**Esai Santana** (He/Him) is an undergraduate senior at California State University, Los Angeles who transferred from East Los Angeles with an Associate in Arts Degree: Sociology for Transfer and an Associate in Arts General Studies: Social and Behavioral Sciences. With an estimated graduation in Spring 2024 with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology, he joined CSF as an opportunity to connect more with his peers in Sociology, step out of his comfort zone, and take an interest in publishing a journal. His main research interests when it comes to Sociology are topics that include inequalities, sexuality, and gender. He also has a passion for playing video games, enjoying the stories they tell through a player and sociological perspective.



**Marlonzo Smith** (He/Him) is a Sociologist M.A., student at CSULA. Marlonzo's interest is in criminology and political sociology, with a focus on deviant behavior and the effects of deviant labels. For his thesis, he hopes to study negative social factors among young men that influence their decision toward deviant behaviors. Marlonzo is a case manager at a nonprofit on SkidRow which helps homeless individuals find affordable housing units within Los Angeles. Participating as CSF's website specialist has allowed him to present the research that his fellow students have worked so hard to research so their passions can be shown to others.

## California Sociology Forum xv



**Andrea Cesar Urbach** (She/Her) is a Sociology Graduate student. She received her B.A. in sociology from California State University Los Angeles. She is writing her M.A. thesis about the Sociological Perception of Warfare. Her research focus is climate change and warfare as a social conflict based on how we understand it as a part of societal group interests. In her first year as a student, she helped start a student organization that addressed global warming and was the secretary.

She likes talking and reading about sociology and joined CSF as an editor in the Fall of 2023. Academic editing allowed her to work with other authors and enhance her academic life.



**Kandice Vass** (She/Her), a junior at Cal State LA, transitioned from Los Angeles Valley College in Fall 2023. Having proudly earned her Associates Degree in Sociology in June 2023, she is now driven to further her academic and professional journey. With a focused goal of attaining a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology, specializing in Law and Society, Kandice is thrilled to immerse herself in learning, forge meaningful connections, and undergo personal growth during her time at Cal State LA. Serving as the Book and Film Team Lead

for CSF, she looks forward to contributing to the academic community and continuing her enriching journey with CSF throughout her enrollment.



**Lauren Whiting** (She/They) is a Sociology, M.A. student at CSULA, but attended AVC for their ADT in Sociology and CSUB-AV for their B.A. in Sociology: Human Services. Lauren's sociological areas of interest cover topics such as US interactions with and perceptions of the justice system and the parent-child relationship when parenting with disabilities. For her thesis, she hopes to explore the influence of parental religiosity on the relationship between disabled parents and their children. Their passion for these

topics offered them opportunities to tutor Sociology, present at six conferences, and receive various accolades. While working toward their Master's, Lauren is a case manager at a reentry nonprofit in the Antelope Valley. With a passion for supporting others, participating in CSF as a peer reviewer and media team member has offered Lauren the joy of aiding fellow students in their journey of sharing their passions with others.



**Michael Young** (He/Him) is a dual major at Cal State LA who has utilized his upper education path to explore his special interest regarding students with disabilities within the education system. He expects to graduate magna cum laude in Spring 2024 with both a B.A. in Sociology and a B.A. in Psychology, while additionally being recognized for participation in the Cal State LA Honors College. His achievements include advocacy for students with disabilities within government support systems, presenting at multiple conferences, and being a co-investigator on a research study conducted as an undergraduate thesis under the Honors College which focuses on the experiences of accommodations students with disabilities receive while attending Cal State LA.

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## About the Faculty Editors

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**Luoman Bao** is an Associate Professor in Sociology whose primary research interests include family dynamics, population aging and health, and quantitative methods. Her work has been published in various venues, including *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, and *Research on Aging*. Dr. Bao served as the Editor-in-Chief of CSF in Fall 2022 and Fall 2023. She loves working with students in classrooms and on projects. She is passionate about facilitating students to grow and achieve their full potential.



**Katie Dingeman** is an Associate Professor in Sociology with research interests around migrant rights, reproductive justice, political ecology, and qualitative methods. She has published in a variety of venues, including *Social Problems*, *Feminist Criminology*, and the *Journal on Migration and Human Security*. She loves facilitating student-led projects and enjoys growing as a teacher, scholar, and advocate alongside her students. Dr. Dingeman was Editor-in-Chief of CSF in Spring 2023 and Spring 2024.





**Gilbert Garcia** is a lecturer in Sociology at California State University, Los Angeles and Associate Faculty at Riverside City College in Riverside, California. He is also on the board of the Social Science Research Instructional Council for the California State University System. His research and teaching interests are in race and ethnic relations with an emphasis on exploring systemic racism in the U.S. He also explores the connection of Media and Technology as

Socializing Forces in the development of individuals. He serves as the IT Liaison for CSF.



**Roseann Giarrusso** is Chair and Professor of Sociology with research interests in aging and the life-course, family and intergenerational relations, and quantitative research methods. She has over 50 publications including two co-authored books, many peer-reviewed journal articles (e.g., *Journal of Marriage and Family*; *Journals of Gerontology: Social Science*; *Journal of Family Issues*; and *Generations*), and numerous chapters in books. She enjoys helping students to realize their academic potential. Every year, Dr. Giarrusso co-

authors grant proposals to solicit funds to print copies of CSF and provide stipends to student managing editors.



**Hyojoung Kim** is a Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Korean American and Korean Studies in Cal State L.A. His main research and teaching areas include political sociology and race and ethnic studies with special emphasis in Korean and Korean American studies, Quantitative Research Methods and Statistics, Rational Choice, Social Network Analysis and Social Movements. His research has been published in various internationally acclaimed academic journals, including *American Sociological Review*,

*American Journal of Sociology*, and *European Sociological Review*. Dr. Kim has edited a few books on Korean Americans and Korea. He founded *California Sociology Forum—Student Online Journal of Sociology* and served as Editor-in-Chief during 2007~2013.

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## **Technology and Culture: How Predictive Policing Harmfully Profiles Marginalized People Groups**

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*Taryn Bates*

*Department of Sociology*

*California State University, Los Angeles*

### INTRODUCTION

American law enforcement departments use predictive policing technology to predetermine crime zones within assigned jurisdictions. Predictive police technology is susceptible to human error, due to both the directives from algorithm programmers and the lack of vetting for bias in data collection processes. A study by Selbst (2017) on potential applications of predictive policing found police data excessively links crime to neighborhoods with high percentages of demographics and up of primarily non-white residents living below poverty income thresholds. Data mining systems work by gathering information from records of human decisions without considering the intent behind the actions; this creates the possibility of generating or worsening discriminatory outcomes. For programs based off of flawed data (2017), erroneous predictions reinforce existing prejudices held by law enforcement. Since past crime data is integrated into predictive policing systems, it is inevitable results will include historic biases within recorded enforcements. This correlation maintains discriminatory policing instead of creating a future of equality to all humankind. If predictive policing technology disproportionately profiles marginalized people groups, then the algorithms are inherently discriminatory while reinforcing implicit bias held by operators or enforcers of results generated by the program. Therefore, predictive police technology algorithms need to be correctly updated to avoid perpetuating harm through biased association of crime with minority cultures.

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTEXT

#### *Implicit Bias*

In the article *Bias in, Bias Out*, Sandra G. Mayson (2019: 2218) relays that “ample and mounting evidence has documented otherwise inexplicable racial disparities in policing, charging, pretrial detention, and sentencing.” Mayson (2019:2278-2279)

additionally notes, “two recent studies of risk assessment in action have argued that it was the exercise of human discretion in responding to risk-assessment scores that injected racial disparity in outcomes, rather than the risk-assessment scores themselves.” Mayson is supported by the data from previous iterations of racially stratified inequities in American history – such as the criminal justice practice of subjective prediction – distorting calculations made by predictive technology meant to advance objective enforcement. Records note that elevated percentages of minority groups in the criminal justice system is a causation of human prejudice provoking action when presented with neutral situations. Predictive policing technology decoding data from these conflicts could misidentify discriminatory practices of officers as correlations to inherent behavior within ethnicities subjected to high detention rates. Racial stratification through implicit bias is pervasive in police officers, due to the unconscious acceptance of societal stereotypes. Spencer et al. (2016:50) found that implicit bias maintains stereotypes associating people with darker skin tones to aggressive personality traits or criminal activity. This association shapes the standards of probable cause. As noted by Glenn (2023:60), “a CBS news publication identified that police have killed at least one Black man or woman every week in 2020, as of August 31, 2020.” It feels noteworthy that 24 of those weeks took place during COVID-19 pandemic, which instigated a global lockdown mid-March 2020; even under quarantine, Black Americans were not able to peacefully navigate the U.S.A. without threat to their life at the hands of law enforcement. This implicit bias by human police seems to place more support towards upgrading law enforcement with technological algorithms. However, those algorithms are typically fed data taken from the instances that were informed by implicit bias.

### *Peacekeeping Robots*

Law enforcement agencies that have invested in peacekeeping robots can experience issues with the artificial intelligence programming. Artificial intelligence applications utilized by police agencies are susceptible to biased algorithms seen in predictive policing technology. Howard and Borenstein

(2018) clarify that robots can acquire biases through machine learning, despite theories that robots should be able to avoid prejudice. In facial recognition, choices for photo databases are often influenced by programmers setting outcomes to match unconscious beliefs or showing favoritism toward alleged experts without verifying credentials. This shows how AI is confined within parameters set by developers, causing the understanding of robots to mirror their creators. The model of systematic analysis is crucial to determining ways to diminish how bias impacts the implementation of peacekeeping. The use of robots by police is already causing harm to vulnerable people groups. Howard and Borenstein disclose an incident in Dallas from 2016 where a police robot took the life of a Black man. The researchers emphasize this tragedy by noting it increases pressure in strain from the extreme death rates of Black Americans at the hands of human police officers. The artificial emulation of police brutality creates a situation where “it is disconcerting that robot peacekeepers, including police and military robots, will, at some point, be given increased freedom to decide whether to take a human life, especially if problems related to bias have not been resolved” (2018:1527-1528). Additional mechanisms need to be implemented in robots tasked with keeping the peace, to eliminate the ability to kill humans. Robot patrols process massive amounts of data when patrolling urban areas; programmers trying to maximize protection of civilians could unintentionally facilitate racism in predictive policing by creating shortcuts with algorithms that mimic the group profiling practices of human officers. Police agencies considering AI as a path to unbiased patrolling should acknowledge precedents set by human officers can influence the learning processes of autonomous peacekeeping robots.

### *Surveillance State*

Institutionalized racism in law enforcement has led to harmful operation of technologies in ways that reinforce implicit bias. Surveillance technology is unduly used by American state agents against marginalized people groups. Black Americans have specifically endured oppression by an array of military and policing surveillance technologies gathering information on their activities (Hatch 2017:125). This over regulation leads to the

constant harassment of Black citizens. In addition to infrared cameras used aerially by the FBI, social media has become a way for security organizations to persecute protest movements led by Black activists (2017:130). In a 1988 study, G.T. Marx details that this ‘new surveillance’ does not require the execution of a crime; uses covert practices, has redrawn the relationship between the individual and the state vis-à-vis the state’s and individuals’ rights, incorporates new technological developments in size and type of audio and video equipment available, incorporates preventive operations, allows for disruption and infiltration, can operate without a specific target/subject, and allows for the sharing intelligence between agencies. (Byfield 2019:99)

Over the last three decades, advancements in smart technology through ubiquitous computing have made the use of reconnaissance devices even harder for average citizens to detect.

### *Armed Drones*

Police have a history of deadly force against marginalized people groups through the use of drones and bombs. The article *New Technologies of Resistance* by Anthony Hatch (2017) records an incident where a two-pound bomb was launched by officers over a house in Philadelphia on May 13, 1985. Hatch (2017:129) describes that the “assault, which killed eleven civilians, including five children, and the ensuing fire that displaced hundreds of local residents, marked another horrific moment when state-sanctioned police violence against Black people and Black communities was represented on live television.” The bombing was a tactical decision to destroy the Black alliance named MOVE which was home-based in the area. The leader was a Black man named John Africa who advocated for a revolution to end capitalism and oppressive politics. The eventual drone assault was predicated by a police raid in August 1978, which included the demise of a Philadelphia officer. The subsequent seven years included constant persecution by the local police against the MOVE organization. The incidence in a supposed post-Civil Rights America emphasizes the systemic nature of institutionalized

racism persistence in subjugating Black citizens. Thirty years later, in 2015, North Dakota passed a law allowing police to use armed drone technology (Howard and Borenstein 2018:1528). The legality of deadly force in modern society permits threat of assault against citizens. This form of intimidation specifically reinforces attempts to subdue people of color.

### *Broken Window “Community” Policing*

Predictive policing technology can be used to enforce policies of racially biased community policing. Implicit bias is inherent when enforcing community policing strategies, such as broken window policing which disproportionately targets minority groups, since it originated from racist theories. Broken window policies and over-maintenance policing focus on minor instances; a broken window is linked to the hypothesis that cultural atmosphere encourages misconduct (Seigel 2017:481). These policies create busy work by curbing trivial activities and consequently increase rates of racial profiling. Phillip J. Thompson’s article, *Broken Policing: The Origins of the ‘Broken Windows’ Policy* (2015), identifies the source for broken window policy in conservative theories made by Edward Banfield during the post-Civil Rights era. Banfield’s policy prescriptions for racial imbalances (2015:44) ignored societal constructions and claimed irresponsible behaviors were hereditary within cultural or biological people groups. These assertions mirror principles of eugenics, focusing on biology and breeding to explain perceived behaviors that differ from social expectations of desirable traits. The term community policing is a misnomer that creates division, due to a lack of consideration of the humanity for the marginalized people groups. In New York City (Byfield 2019:99), crime rates increased on every level and police shootings of Black men also became frequent instances upon implementing community policing.

### *Stop and Frisk*

Racially biased policies, like stop and frisk, reinforce prejudiced data being presented to predictive policing technology by establishing past practices. The societal construct of white dominance in America leads to concepts of

racialized surveillance as an organic function of the racial state that is deployed via legislation, social practices, and technologies that use the ‘white gaze’ to maintain the state as a ‘white racial space’ that constructs and reproduces racial categories and hierarchies. These laws, practices, and technologies create existential norms, thus violations of these norms represent existential crimes in a white racial state. (Byfield 2019:96)

The sole championing of white perspective sullies the ability for law enforcement officers to grow cultural understanding when interacting with diversity among citizens. This paradigm was heightened after the 2001 events of 9/11 increasing attention on national security from terrorism. The foundation for advanced technologies of predictive policing lies in NYPD’s new surveillance implementation of stop and frisk. Even when not charged with a crime, the identification information obtained in these interactions is stored in the police databases. Black and Latinx young men are the largest demographic of victims stopped and frisked in NYC (2019:100), with almost 90 percent proven innocent of police allegations. The precedent for the officers targeting young men of color in stop and frisk endeavors creates a pattern in recorded data that will be integrated into predictive technology.

#### *Advocates for A.I.*

The opposite side of this issues argues that predictive police technology is a neutral method to avoid unconscious bias in humans; however, this is incorrect because technology is not inherently neutral, since programs for predictive policing mine human data throughout internet platforms without regard for accuracy. Police departments looking to avoid bias in crime identification can purchase predictive policing technology to extrapolate neutral data to improve patrolling techniques. The ability of predictive technology to mine data is promoted as an option to diminish inequality (Selbst 2017:148) because “unconscious bias is well enough understood that the use of seemingly neutral technology to take the decisions out of human hands is seen as a good thing.” Acknowledgement over the need

for better implementation of justice has led to a rise in contemporary smart technology focused on predictive policing. Northpointe, the owner of algorithmic predictive policing tool COMPAS, focuses on metrics of equivalence (Mayson 2018:2233) by demonstrating both Black and white perpetrators who are classified as high risk by the algorithm held equal rates of being rearrested. These ratios imply that the algorithm is free of racial bias. CompStat, a mapping system that tracks data from large police jurisdictions (Byfield 2019:101), is the base program for policing maintenance which makes resource deployment determinations. Technological developments bolster the theory in law enforcement bureaus that human bias can be eliminated by using established criminality calculations to prevent delinquency. The emphasis on scientific processes contrasts the emotional inclination of humanity that can obscure judgements elicited from intense situations in American policing.

### *A.I. Algorithms*

Predictive policing algorithms are derived from data mining which collects human interactions on internet platforms, without double-checking the accuracy of the trends. Interactions on the internet, especially the phenomenon of trending, operate out of sensationalism instead of vetted information. Impartial predictive policing is a marketing ploy rather than an accurate designation. This is noted in the article *Disparate Impact in Big Data Policing*:

Predictive policing promises both to provide auditable methods that will prevent invidious intentional discrimination and to mitigate the unconscious biases attending police officers' daily choices. But at the moment, such a promise amounts to little more than a useful sales tactic. Data mining is likely to introduce new discrimination or to reproduce and exacerbate the existing discrimination in society due to various design choices that are necessary to any data mining system. Risk assessment scores used in criminal sentencing overestimate black



recidivism and underestimate white recidivism.  
Selbst (2017:120)

The imbalance of the current man-made model for risk assessment determination will cause the data history to skew the conclusions of predictive policing algorithms. Results (2017:147) from unconscious bias tests have proven that officers are unable to distinguish personal beliefs on race, culture, identity, and delinquency from probable cause. Even if the predictive technology is more neutral in data translation than of conclusion drawn human research, the chances are high that officers can misapply the results of the predictive technology due to human predisposition of implicit bias. To the other extreme, the application of CompStat changed the performance evaluation of officers to total crime bookings, while lowering the ability to implement personal discretion. Quelling judgement to standardize the execution of the law can easily be used to ignore grievances over biases affecting individuals (Byfield 2019:101). Homogeneity undermines the ability of officials to offer understanding or make exceptions when situations involve vulnerable individuals.

## DISCUSSION

Predictive technology needs double-blind vetting in early stages of development to test accuracy before police implementation. Selbst has created the idea of “algorithmic impact statements” for such programs (2017:110). The statements would clarify the actual purpose and application of such technologies. He proposes (2017:119) the “regulation would mandate that, before adopting the new technology, police consider and publicly detail the predicted efficacy of and disparate impact resulting from their choice of technology and all reasonable alternatives.” The lack of field expertise to determine long-term consequences of using predictive police technology is a persistent dilemma. A metered implementation of the programs would allow time to catch concerns that arise. The article *Black Spaces/White Spaces: Black Lives, Leisure, and Life Politics* (Pinckney, et al. 2018:283) gives examples of racial profiling, such as local police departments in New York City using the stop and frisk program to target Black men or Arizona’s strict immigration policy impacting

Latin Americans. The article goes on to detail the symbiotic relationship between technology and racial prejudices, where each entity significantly informs the rate of recurrence in cultural acceptance. The growth of mobile video streaming devices has increased the intrusions Black Americans endure through publicly filmed violence and killings against their ethnic group by officers. The perpetuation of harm is aggravated further by the reality that such culprits are rarely prosecuted. Media coverage raises awareness of homicides by persistent racism but has not seemed to deter recurrence. Unfortunately, since the murder of teenaged Emmet Till in the mid-twentieth century, the list of innocent victims has grown. A movement called “Say Their Names” seeks to humanize lives taken suddenly by actions of over policing due to the unfair association of Blackness to criminal behavior. This underscores the seriousness of challenging unconscious biases hidden within districts disproportionately enforcing corporal punishment upon minority groups.

## CONCLUSION

Algorithms in predictive policing technology are based off of patterns; institutionalized racism in law enforcement reproduces problems of racial stratification. If implicit bias in officers continues to go unaddressed, the examples from enforcement of probable cause based in prejudiced beliefs will then continue to influence the programming and use of police technology. Therefore, completely reforming policing practices and technologies will ensure proper implementation of equity within law enforcement. Law enforcement resources should invest in developing programs to identify implicit bias in patrolling practices to eliminate all forms of targeted persecution against marginalized people groups. As noted by Bates and Glenn (2023:123), cultural understanding is crucial to tearing down systemic institutions that keep humanity subjugated under an “us vs. them” perception. Police brutality will continue to occur, even with predictive technology, as long as the root informing implicit bias maintains an inhumane framing of historically marginalized identities.

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**Taryn Bates** (She/Her) graduates with her Sociology B.A. in May 2024 from Cal State LA. Taryn is an avid writer exploring convergence of her personal interests with research projects on systemic racism, abolitionist and anarchist modalities for a changed community-focused future, cultural appreciation vs. cultural appropriation, cross-cultural intersections of social partner dances, and societal constructions of purity culture conflating sensuality to sexuality. She is honored to have had publications for poetry and reviews in CSF Volume 5 and is grateful for the inclusion in Volume 6 with a research article, theoretical framework, and collection of poetry.

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## **Colorism and Its Effects on Self Perception**

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*“Who taught you, please, who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the color of your skin? To such extent you bleach, to get like the white man. Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to so much so that you don’t want to be around each other? No. Before you come asking Mr. Muhammad does he teach hate, you should ask yourself who taught you to hate being what God made you.” - Malcolm X*

### **INTRODUCTION**

I was born with brown skin. Throughout my life, I have experienced people both inside and outside my community perceive me differently because of my skin tone. Within my community, nicknames such as “India,” “Morenita,” or “Negrita” were shared. I was always advised not to be in the sun for long periods, and I would often see lightning and bleaching lotions in my local markets in case we got “too” dark. Outside of my community, I often felt ostracized because of my skin, especially in my early years in school. From getting picked last for group projects, getting called derogatory names, and constantly getting confronted by others with lighter skin and by some with similar skin tones as me as a way of obtaining validation or compensating for similar issues I was enduring. When trying to find comfort in my favorite movies or TV shows, I did not see myself in the characters I enjoyed watching. Instead, I longed to become them because I wished my skin looked lighter like theirs so I could feel seen, appreciated, and respected by those around me. If I ever did see a character with similar or darker skin tones as me, they were often depicted stereotypically or unfavorably, which usually resulted in further comments or comparisons from others. As a result of these experiences, my self-esteem began to decline over the years, and I developed severe anxieties regarding my

appearance and, precisely, my skin tone. I went through phases of attempting to change my appearance to look a certain way that might lessen the anxiety and insecurity. Straightening my thick, wavy hair every morning, using makeup that was shades lighter than my actual skin tone, using lighting lotions on my elbows and shoulders, attempting to wear colored contacts, and depriving myself of basking in the sun that would always bring me comfort and reassurance. As time passed, I attempted to overcome these insecurities, but they soon resurfaced as I began my higher education journey. Despite attending a community college and university with students from various backgrounds, many of whom were first-generation college students like myself, I quickly realized how much the university relied on students of color to promote diversity to avoid assumptions of not being an inclusive institution and to retain high enrollment rates. In theory, this is an attempt to encourage change and inclusivity. In reality, campus life as a student of color consisted of many obstacles such as heavy police presence, little access to student resources, and microaggressions from campus administration. Those further from that image are seen as infiltrators or tokenized students who are questioned about how they were accepted into the institution or if they have the potential to obtain a higher education. In many cases like mine, you were asked both of those things. Constantly.

I've come to understand that all these years, I was experiencing acts of *colorism*. Colorism is a subcategory of social concepts such as race, racism, and colonization (Dixon and Telles 2017). These concepts brought decades of violence and oppression amongst Indigenous and enslaved peoples, which ultimately, developed a complex form of social stratification based on one's proximity to those with Euro-centric features, specifically, lighter skin tones. This was established to ensure those within that proximity remain on top of the social ladder and reinforce oppressive concepts they uphold at macro and micro levels amongst people of color. It is crucial to recognize that colorism goes beyond influencing the individual's perceptions of those with darker skin tones and how they may internalize these perceptions. Colorism is embedded in various facets of social institutions that contribute to many systemic inequities, particularly in areas such as popular media, education,

employment, and the criminal justice system.

In this article, I discuss the relationship between colorism and the self-perception of people of color. Through an extensive literature review of interdisciplinary scholarship and semi-structured interviews, findings suggest that colorism holds a strong societal influence that can affect the self-perception of people of color in harmful and distorted forms that often intersect with other identity factors. Distorted self-perceptions can foster a range of negative views of oneself as well as receiving harmful attitudes and stigma from those inside and outside their community while simultaneously enduring larger systemic oppressions. Analysis of interviews with participants who identified as people of color reveals different perspectives of colorism, shows how media and popular culture influence colorist ideals, and calls for more awareness of the effects of colorism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Concepts of Colorism*

To fully understand the goals and effects of colorism, it is essential to distinguish it from related social constructs such as race and racism and understand how these constructs work simultaneously to sustain the preference for lighter skin tones within societies. Race is a social construct that categorizes people into groups based on physical appearance, such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. These categories are often associated with specific geographic regions or populations. Race is not a biological or genetic distinction but a product of social and historical factors. Consequently, racism is a belief system constructed to uphold the ideology of race by asserting the superiority of one racial group over others. This creates discriminatory behaviors, policies, and practices based on these beliefs and can be implemented at individual, institutional, and systemic levels that eventually lead to the development of colorism, which helps maintain racialized power and inequality. Although racism and colorism create structures of stratification (Keister and Southgate 2022), concepts of race vary within other regions—and what is considered a distinct race—can differ based on historical and cultural contexts. In the West, non-white persons tend to be ranked depending on their skin tone to justify if they

have the right to certain privileges or constant disadvantages.

Dixon and Telles (2017:406) state that in the U.S., colonialism permitted one's proximity to whiteness in terms of ideology, culture, ancestry, and phenotype to determine who has access to social and economic privileges and opportunities. Slavery was a phenomenon justified by a colonial system that claimed whiteness to be superior, and anything other than it was deemed immoral and inferior. According to Mathews and Johnson (2015), skin tone plays a vital role in history and how it influences race relations in America. The legacy of slavery continues to have detrimental effects, and its harmful ideals are embedded in African American and Afro-Latine communities. Specifically, it hindered mental health, beauty standards, social and economic status, and the way relationships are formed within communities, especially for Black women. Inhumane levels of sexual abuse, advancements, and forced relations made by white slave owners with Black women led to generations of people with lighter skin tones known as "mulattos" who were often granted certain privileges due to their lighter complexions (Mathews and Johnson 2015:252), such as working in the homes of slave owners, being able to obtain an education, and possessing certain rights and materials. These privileges created the notion that having a lighter complexion made one desirable, seen as pure, attractive, gentle, and worthy of privilege, while people with darker complexions remained at a constant disadvantage as they were stereotyped as primitive, unintelligent, violent, and overall, less than.

This influence is embedded throughout American society in the form of colorism; its legacy is still seen throughout various social issues that impact minority groups, from employment, education, media representation, health care, gentrification, immigration, police brutality, and incarceration rates. Dixon and Telles (2017) show how views on skin tone in other regions hold an emphasis on ideals that trace back to concepts of colorism that are more than racial categories as seen within the U.S. These different views nonetheless create a globalized preference for lighter skin tones, making it a status symbol in many societies. East Asia is an example of another region's skin color preference, where whiteness is heavily associated with status and positive aesthetics. These preferences began with those with higher

nobility flaunting their fair complexions from being indoors while lower-class people worked in the sun for long hours in which their tanned skin reflected their status. This led to fair skin as a high-status indicator (2017:412) and lighter-skinned women being seen as more feminine and pure.

The association with lighter skin and positive attributes led to the skin-bleaching industry, a globalized phenomenon in recent decades that further encourages lightening one's skin. Due to globalization and better access to media outlets, it is widely accepted and accessible for those seeking a lighter complexion with the commodification of skin bleaching (2017:411). There has become a multi-billion-dollar industry that preys on those seeking ways to lighten their skin through makeup, soaps, lotions, and even cosmetic procedures. The need for one to lighten their skin is rooted in the desire to assimilate to the social norms of those in power and to appear by their standards of beauty, which are constantly promoted and advertised in popular media. These standards and norms center proximity to whiteness and ideologies of white supremacy (2017:412) since consumers of the skin-bleaching industry primarily consist of women from colonized regions, and the majority of them have relatively darker skin tones.

Latin America shares historical similarities with the U.S. (2017:409), given that European colonizers invaded and forced their ideologies on Indigenous communities within the Americas. This was accomplished through the implementation of veritable caste systems; or skin tone hierarchies that put Black and indigenous peoples at the bottom and white colonizers and their mixed counterparts at the top with more power and privilege (Telles and Dixon 2017). However, most of Latin America did not have direct or defined concepts of race, unlike the U.S. Along with Black, Indigenous, and white people reproducing within their different racial categories, it blurred racial boundaries. It promoted those to mix with others (2017:409) as a way to "embrace their race mixture (*mestizaje*) as a way to distinguish themselves from the United States and other explicitly racist societies and proclaim they were united and color-blind societies." Although most of Latin America claims not to hold racist ideologies within their regions (2017:409), colorism is central to



distinguishing people based on their skin tone and varies within national and class contexts.

### EFFECTS ON SELF-PERCEPTION

Jenneil Charles (2021) investigates how colorism affects Afro-Latinx persons within Latin America, specifically Brazil, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Charles uses Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social-ecological model as a framework to conduct their literature review and explore how colorism affects Afro-Latinx persons in various aspects of life, such as their family, professional, and academic lives and how they are perceived within their communities. As mentioned earlier, the concepts of colorism vary within different regions. Within Latin America, specific historical periods contribute to how colorism is implemented in society today. From the European conquest and colonization to the postcolonial era, post-emancipation era, and post-independence era, all these historical periods, along with the development of racial bias, have created the mechanism of colorism but in a region that is one of the most ethnically diverse in the world due to the inter-mixing of various groups of people. This mixing led to the "browning" of Latin America, consisting of the majority skin tone within most regions. This created a norm of people having pride in their diverse ethnicities. However, Charles (2021:9) states that due to this racial fluidity, racial identification is usually attributed to phenotype versus the individual's actual ethnic and racial heritage within Latin America.

Charles' findings (2021:17) show that societal factors or "macrosystem factors" such as laws, cultural beliefs, and societal values, along with historical periods, allowed for colorism to be embedded within Latin American society and deeply ingrained within its peoples' mindsets. Surveys conducted on Afro-Latinx individuals show low levels of educational attainment that can affect their occupational choices, as well as their socioeconomic status, and finally, colorism can impact how those with darker complexions are raised and thought to navigate within their societies. Through a protective measure called "racial socialization," (2021:28) people of color teach each other how to deal with encounters with racism and other forms of discrimination, such as colorism; however, those who are not

trained in these protective measures have higher chances of enduring poor mental health issues as well as have less attachment with their community.

Researchers have also studied how skin tone discrimination impacts the psychological well-being of African American women (Wilson, Massey, Smith, and Soloman 2021:1). By explaining the interconnected set of propositions that contribute to the occurrence of colorism and where these theories originate from, as well as reviewing the findings of previous research studies, researchers (2021:2) hypothesize that aspects of colorism may or may not affect the self of esteem and self-perception of African American women. Analysis of 25 interviews with non-white women between the ages of 18-50 found low scores regarding self-esteem. Several participants expressed negative experiences with colorism and claimed the need to address the issue. When asked about their personal experiences with colorism, one person stated, "I think colorism affects brown and dark skin women the most because we've been trained for many years to think that darker skin is not beautiful." Another added, "I think colorism affects African/black American women the most. We quickly judge each other instead of lifting each other up." Most participants agreed that media outlets lack representation of darker skin tones, which reinforces colorism. Wilson et al. (2015:5) also found similar themes between skin tone bias within social settings such as school and work.

Kiang, Espino-Pérez, and Stein (2020) address how skin tone bias relates to racial prejudice and how Latinx youth and other minority groups are more likely to experience this form of discrimination. The authors extensively study how the effects of colorism continue to impact Latinx youth while adjusting to US society in times where xenophobia and racism are more prevalent due to high immigration rates within the US. These experiences may result in adverse outcomes regarding the development of Latinx youth that are directly associated with skin tone discrimination (2020:2047). After creating a questionnaire for a sample of 175 adolescents, results showed high depressive issues and participants showing little importance in their academic studies. Researchers describe it as "foreigner objectification," (2020:2055) which coincides with lower self-esteem levels.

## METHODS

Qualitative interviews are well-suited for exploring subjective experiences and gathering in-depth insights into the impact of colorism on self-perception. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed participants to share their perspectives and personal experiences. The target population for this research was individuals who self-identified as people of color. The sampling strategy involved purposeful sampling, aiming to select individuals who could provide diverse perspectives on colorism and self-perception. Although only five interviews were conducted, the participant demographics comprised three women, one man, and one non-binary individual. Two participants identified as Latina/x, two participants identified as bi-racial with one being Asian and Black and the other Indigenous and White while the fifth participant preferred not to state their race. All five participants were asked several in-depth questions to capture various experiences and opinions regarding colorism within the population of interest.

Data was collected through face-to-face or virtual interviews, depending on the availability and preferences of the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) to ensure accurate documentation of participants' responses. The data analysis process involved several steps. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and then subjected to thematic analysis, where common themes, patterns, and codes were identified. The codes that emerged during the coding process included "colorist experiences," "beauty standards," "social interactions," "media influence," and "intersectionality."

In terms of strengths and limitations, the qualitative interview method allowed for nuanced insights into participants' experiences with colorism and self-perception. It provided an opportunity to explore personal narratives and emotions. However, the findings are subjective and specific to the participants interviewed, limiting the generalizability of the results. Additionally, relying on self-reporting may introduce multiple biases. Compared to other methods, qualitative interviews offer a deep understanding of individuals' experiences and perspectives, providing rich qualitative data. In contrast, other methods such as surveys may provide broader quantitative data

but may need more depth and contextual understanding than what qualitative interviews offer.

My positionality as a researcher, including my background, experiences, and biases, could have influenced the research process and interpretation of data. However, my reflexivity and self-awareness of positionality were crucial in acknowledging and managing potential biases. This helped ensure that participants' voices were prioritized and their experiences were represented authentically in the analysis and reporting of the findings.

Lastly, ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood their participation's purpose, risks, and benefits. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and securely storing the data. Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Pseudonyms are used throughout this text.

## FINDINGS

### *Personal Experiences and Self-Perception*

Many of the participants shared personal experiences of encountering colorism, whether by people in their families or by others inside and outside of their community. Participants highlighted instances where they were subjected to biases and negative associations with their skin color or those who were deemed darker. One example of these instances is a participant recalling a family member comparing them to their sibling:

They would always compliment my sister for being so fair-skinned but proceed to tell me “if you weren't in the sun too much, maybe you'll look just as pretty as your sister” and that only made me feel worse about my looks.

This participant along with the other four expressed to some degree that specific comments, remarks, and experiences regarding their skin tone had distorted how they perceived themselves, with participants reporting feelings of self-doubt and lowered self-esteem because of colorist attitudes and standards. Another participant recalled their experience,

Compared to my family members, I have the darkest skin. I got it from my dad, who's Indigenous, but I grew up around a family who was lighter-skinned, which was hard. I would get called names like *India* a lot, which wasn't seen as a good thing. It made me hate my skin over time. I think I barely started to love myself again only a few years ago, so it's been a journey.

Although many of the participants expressed colorist remarks from family members and those within their community, they also recalled instances where those outside their community expressed colorist views as well. One interviewee shared how their white teacher would project stereotypes onto them frequently:

I had this teacher and she said that if we didn't do well in that class we would end up like a vendor, illegally selling oranges and flowers. She would only say this to kids who were Latino and in front of the whole class and it would lead the other kids to call me names like "Beaner vendor" And it was all because of the nasty remarks that she just had to say.

Racial stereotypes such as associating Latinos with "unskilled" labor along with other racialized stereotypes allow for colorist attitudes to continue amongst people of color until it is normalized and seen as harmless to comment, even amongst students such as the participant at the time.

With participants experiencing negative emotions from the comments and associations from others, they also expressed feeling an immense pressure to change their appearance to conform to beauty standards and avoid further ridicule. One participant recalled multiple encounters with their Filipino grandmother, who would encourage them to use skin-bleaching products: "Sometimes they'll suggest to me, 'Oh, do you want stuff for your skin? It'll brighten and help your skin.' Even though it wouldn't necessarily treat my skin issues, it just bleaches my skin; it didn't make me feel better about myself either." The instance of an individual feeling pressured to use bleaching products reflects the ingrained association of whiteness with

goodness that many people of color continue to uphold for generations despite the negative effects it can inflict on those with darker skin tones. Another participant mentioned,

Those comments about my skin affected me and led me to feel ugly and self-conscious over time. I remember when I was in middle school, I was told that I was too dark to be pretty. After that, I wore hoodies every day to avoid getting darker in the sun, and I would try to straighten my hair because I have curly hair...I remember feeling like I was brought down upon because I looked a certain way, And it made me feel like I “looked too Latina,” and it made me feel like really disgusted with myself and even with my culture.

Although the participant mentioned wanting to change their hair along with avoiding the sun, it is common for people of color to feel additional pressure to adjust other aspects of their physical appearance such as hair texture, facial structure, and even body type to further conform to beauty standards. This further demonstrates how colorism is considered a subcategory of racism, which categorizes people into groups based on physical appearance. In sum, all five participants expressed at different levels that colorism has contributed to how they perceive themselves in often negative forms that can lead to feeling pressured to change their appearance. Many shared that it is still an ongoing process to overcome these emotions.

### *Intersectionality with Other Identities*

Interviews highlighted the intersectional nature of colorism, which consisted of analyzing the social and political aspects that contribute to a person’s identity and can determine one’s inequalities and privileges such as gender, socioeconomic status, and culture. Participants noted that the impact of colorism can vary across different ethnic groups and communities and is emphasized when combined with other forms of discrimination, leading to additional insecurities and inequalities. One participant mentions that one’s socioeconomic status can merge with colorism:

I think [colorism] can intersect because when it comes down to the way people are treated in this

country, it's usually governed by money... It's not an accident that people with the lowest socio-economic status have darker skin complexions. It doesn't matter if you are of low income; they'll still try to go buy bleaching whitening creams.

This participant emphasizes that in their experience, they notice women often face the most pressures to abide by beauty standards, thus making them susceptible to skin tone insecurities and becoming the biggest consumers of bleaching products. It is also important to note what the participant stated regarding those who fall below the poverty line tend to be people of color. This statement reflects how people of color have historically endured not only poverty but also environmental racism, systematic racism, imperialism, colonialism, and countless acts of violence and genocide that often go unrecognized to continue these cruel acts amongst communities of color in the name of white supremacy.

Another participant discussed the intersectionality between colorism and a person's sexual and gender identity. They expressed their experiences as a non-binary individual that although queerness is slowly being represented and becoming acceptable in many societies, queer people of color continue to struggle with being represented along with facing continuous acts of discrimination, stigmas, and violence. "You already get looked at differently if you're brown or black or are just not white presenting, but if you're also queer, you also deal with things like homophobia and transphobia." They proceed by mentioning,

You don't really see that much queer or trans representation from people of color in the media; it usually focuses on white, cis-gendered forms of queerness. That can make you feel like an outcast within outcasts or like you still need to hide your identity even though you see more representation.

Having a non-binary participant highlight the intersections of being a person of color and identifying with the LGBTQ+ community was an informative and insightful experience given that the unique experiences of those within this community are often disregarded and erased. Analyzing the multifaceted aspects that create the unique identities of people of color demonstrates

the importance of including intersectionality in research regarding colorism. Intersectionality is a crucial sociological framework that allows one to form an understanding of what contributes to the forms of oppression one may endure while simultaneously observing the levels of privileges one may obtain from one's identity.

### *Media and Widespread Cultural Influence*

Participants recognized the role of media and popular culture in emphasizing colorist attitudes and beauty standards. They pointed out examples where the press portrayed lighter skin tones as the epitome of beauty, reinforcing societal biases. When discussing the music industry, a participant gave one example:

I noticed that even though mostly Black artists pioneered a lot of music genres, it is usually stolen or copied by other artists like Elvis. And if an artist of color does get fame or recognition, they are or are encouraged to have a lighter complexion. Artists with lighter skin usually skyrocket into fame when they come out with hits. But then you have just as equally talented Black artists with darker complexions; they don't get the same praise or fame.

Artists of color often have talent undermined while simultaneously having their creative ideas stolen and rebranded by white artists to be more palatable to societal norms that essentially abide by standards of white supremacy. Such as the example they gave of Elvis Presley, who sought out the talent of Black artists who pioneered the rock and roll genre and essentially imitated their work to gain fame and wealth while becoming the face of the genre he appropriated like many artists to come.

When discussing other forms of popular media, participants would recall many instances where "I remember wanting to look a certain way other than how I looked because all I saw in magazines and TV were skinny white women. I wanted to be like Hannah Montana and be able to switch up my appearance." Another participant also recalled, "In Hispanic or Latino Media, like soap operas, the protagonists were always white-passing Latinos. But characters who look like me? They



were always servants, farmers, or villains. Anyone with dark skin like mine was always shown negatively.” One participant emphasized the need for better representation and diversity to challenge colorism and promote a more inclusive perception of beauty:

When you start bringing on actors or actresses of color and stuff and putting them in these positions, these beautified positions...I think that is going to help combat colorism because people will start to see that they’re represented and that having a darker complexion is okay.

An example a different participant gave was when they discussed the impact of the remake of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) on children. They state,

I think it’s great because you have representation for children of color who don’t see themselves in media; they see themselves in this person, and then they don’t have to think of the notion of “oh, I wish I can be them or I don’t see myself in Disney princesses” you know?

A second participant also mentioned the impact of the remake of the Disney film; they stated,

We saw a lot of people mad about Ariel being a Black woman. But I’m sure a lot of little Black girls finally saw themselves in this new version of Ariel, and it challenged the status quo. It allowed girlies to be seen.

### *Call for Education and Awareness*

The various themes that emerged from interviewing these five participants emphasized the need for education and awareness to address colorism effectively to eliminate colorist ideals within communities of color. Although participants expressed that the representation of different skin tones is important, it does not fully combat colorist ideologies that continue to affect people of color. They highlighted the importance of teaching about colorism and its impact from an early age, both within families and educational institutions. They also expressed the importance of creating platforms for open discussions and promoting positive role

models of different skin tones to challenge colorist norms.

In an article written by Marilyn Grell-Brisk (2022:242), the debate arises surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement becoming a phenomenon that allows for discussion and actions against acts of police brutality and the systems of racial capitalism to reject the systems and concepts that promote anti-Blackness which negatively affects African American communities and other communities of color. To be able to define important definitions such as anti-Blackness allows us to adequately address the social systems that directly promote racist concepts onto social institutions and norms that directly affect those in Black communities. To support this compelling argument, Grell-Brisk (2022:244) created an analytical framework to discuss levels of world systems that produce three forms of inequality within societies: world system analysis, anti-Blackness, and coloniality. As the author (2022:252) further implies,

The structural location of antiblackness informs the disposability that is levied against black people across the globe. This coloniality embedded within the world-system structures means that disposability is at the structural level too, thinking in terms of disposability provides a way to organize and resist antiblackness across borders and through new logics of solidarity.

Forms of resistance towards oppressive racial ideologies are necessary to counter this coloniality and may offer insight into the societal structures that are rooted in racist ideologies and cause different levels of inequality, such as police brutality, which the Black Lives Matter movement highlights. These movements can be a starting point for many to hold meaningful discussions surrounding the roots of these oppressive systems including aspects of colorism such as anti-Blackness, which can begin restorative transformations.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Although the five participants do not encompass the experiences of all people of color, their specific findings demonstrate how detrimental the effects of colorism can be on a person of color's self-perception including how it intersects with

other factors of one's identity, and how colorist views hold widespread influence around various cultures. The key findings of this research provide compelling evidence that colorism can significantly impact self-perception among people of color, revealing the pervasive influence of colorist attitudes and standards on beauty. This influence can lead to distorted self-perception, and lowered self-esteem, ultimately affecting social interactions, access to opportunities, and higher levels of discrimination within people of color and in their communities. The intersectionality of colorism with other aspects of identity further adds to its impact, highlighting the need for further education, awareness, and media representation to challenge colorist norms and promote inclusive environments that celebrate the diversity of skin tones and foster self-acceptance. In addition to psychological consequences, colorism can manifest in systemic inequalities, perpetuating disparities in areas such as education, popular media, employment, incarceration rates, and healthcare among people of color. These structural imbalances create a cycle of disadvantage, where individuals facing colorist biases endure not only internal struggles but also external challenges that limit their opportunities and overall well-being. Consequently, addressing colorism requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes the voices of those impacted, while combining individual empowerment with broader societal changes to dismantle this internal form of oppression among people of color.

By examining previous literature and personal experiences, beauty standards, social interactions, and the intersectionality of colorism, this study reveals the urgent need for reform. Future research can expand our understanding of the longitudinal effects of colorism, its cross-cultural variations, and the efficacy of interventions. Addressing colorism requires broad societal changes, including exploring educational programs' effectiveness at challenging colorism, promoting self-acceptance, community-driven initiatives, and giving those facing this issue first-hand a platform to challenge oppressive norms and foster inclusivity. By taking these steps, we can strive toward a society that values and celebrates the diverse beauty of every individual.

To conclude, I want to share a poem I found during my extensive literature review. Although this research resurfaced

many negative and painful emotions that so many others like myself have endured, I've discovered to reclaim my power through this research and wish to share this knowledge with others so that they too can reclaim their power. I want to emphasize what great resilience and beauty we each carry that is skin deep, that our ancestors passed down to us for generations. Know that you have legacies behind you to help navigate the world with your unique presence, and never forget that it is no one's right to diminish that power you hold that is skin deep.

***Ode to Dark (Skinned) Girls by Robin M. Boylorn (2012)***

*She waited Patiently  
 And in silence  
 Never admitting Out loud  
 That she secretly wanted to be  
 Light skinned  
 Brown but in a lighter shade  
 She would say it out loud  
 But in whispered tones  
 "Make me white-like  
 Damn near transparent  
 So that these people can see through me  
 Instead of just past me...  
 Make me Beautiful!"  
 Like the color of the earth I already was  
 But this skin  
 This house to my soul  
 Is only almost pretty, they say  
 And if I weren't so dark  
 I might be worth  
 Lovingwantingfuckingstayingbeing  
 But instead I am just tolerated  
 In the dark or in secret  
 Or worn on your shoulder  
 Like an unnecessary accessory  
 Creating your celebrity  
 Because  
 I Am Darker Than You  
 Teach me how to love myself  
 The color of fire  
 In the middle of its escape  
 Skin and eyes round*

*And regal at once  
 You are beautiful  
 The color of coffee with no cream  
 Dark like the bittersweet chocolate of my dreams Caramel-coated  
 coquette, Honey dipped and full of vigor Full lipped and full bodied  
 Full  
 Dark-skinned and exquisite  
 Majestic even  
 With my brown-black self!*

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## **Ethiopian Jewish Migrants into Israel**

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### CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

With the influx of Jewish migrants into Israel from all over the world, Israel has become a settler society for persons of Jewish origin. According to the PEW Research Center, as of 2010, 3 million Jewish migrants have ended up in Israel. Additionally, in 2021, The Jewish Agency for Israel helped 28,601 Jewish immigrants enter Israel, marking a 31% increase compared to 2020. Through a sociological perspective on religious migration and identity, this paper intends to discuss the Ethiopian Jewish migration processes into Israel. According to the Migration Data Portal, Israel is a top country for Ethiopian migrant destinations, with 78,000 Ethiopian immigrants in 2020. By analyzing how religion and identity can motivate migration, this paper intends to discuss the structures that facilitate Ethiopian Jewish migration into Israel. Previous research has shown that heterogeneity within the country of origin has influenced Ethiopian migration. Also, with limited microdata analysis involving individual Ethiopian demographic characteristics, large-scale data shows migration trends for Ethiopian migrants. More so, research has shown there is growing religious intolerance that Ethiopian Jewish migrants have endured in their country of origin and how cultural differences have created challenges for Ethiopian Jewish migrants in Israel. Lastly, the population in the movement defines themselves both in the sending and receiving country as Ethiopian Jewish migrants. The Ethiopian Jewish identity is shaped by religious and racial intolerance both in the sending and receiving countries. Finally, this paper aims to explore the motivations and challenges of Ethiopian Jewish migration to Israel as it is essential to understand historical and contemporary issues surrounding departure, transit, and arrival conditions for Ethiopian Jewish migration into Israel. Recommendations to improve conditions and human rights can be inferred.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT

As the country of origin, Ethiopia is in the Horn of Africa, which is a large peninsula in the East Africa region between Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya. The demographic population of Ethiopia has been shaped by Western influence, both critical political as well as rural upheaval, and natural disasters like drought and famine. The historical complexities of Ethiopia have shaped the population to be highly heterogeneous regarding ethnicity, education, and religious beliefs. For instance, Ethiopia's society is ethnically stratified, whereas "one group dominates the others" (Tuso 1982:270). Ethiopia is ethnically heterogeneous, whereas ethnicity plays a crucial feature in "governance, power and resources, development, and management of public affairs (Mberu 2006:512).

Similarly, Ethiopia's educational system is disproportionate to that of pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, as those who were more socially and economically advantageous could benefit from the opportunity of modern education. Tuso (1982:280) states, "Government schools were built to educate the children of these groups and not the rural masses, who are usually non-Amhara." More importantly, Ethiopia's religious beliefs have a long cultural and historical relationship to the practice of Christianity and Islam. For instance, Ethiopian Jewish migrants faced religious persecution for practicing Jewish and Zionist activities (Terrazas 2007), such as when "The Derg made emigration illegal, closed Ethiopia's borders, and banned religious practices." Moreover, a brief description of migration processes based on large-scale data will give insight into the overall demographic characteristics of Ethiopian migrants.

Macro-level data analysis has provided insight into the dynamics of Ethiopian migration. There are limited microdata involving individual Ethiopian migrant characteristics. The majority of Ethiopian migration data is based on large-scale processes. An example of macro-level research regarding migration trends amongst Ethiopians is conducted by authors Kuschminder, Anderson, and Siegel (2012:31). In contrast, the study examines the primary motivation for Ethiopian migrants emigrating to the Middle East, including work, and the primary reason for choosing the destination country is due to network

effects like “having family or friends in the country of destination (26 percent).” Authors Kuschminder, Anderson, and Siegel (2012) also state that the feminization of migration is a growing trend for Ethiopian migrants, as 68 percent of Ethiopian migration to the Middle East is comprised of females. In the East and Horn of Africa, which includes Ethiopia (World Migration Report 2022:264), “females account for the largest share of refugees and asylum seekers.” Ethiopian women tend to use the Eastern Route through the Horn of Africa for migration. Most female Ethiopian migrants use irregular channels through the Eastern Route to reach Middle Eastern countries for domestic work. Ethiopian migrants in 2021 were the largest nationality in the East and Horn of Africa to move into and out of the region with the predominant Eastern and Northern routes. The International Organization for Migration in relation to the East and Horn of Africa (2021:73) states that Ethiopian migrants who used the Northern Route consisted of “over half of the population on the move (54%) were between 18 and 29 years old.” Another large-scale analysis of migration trends shows that Ethiopia is a top host country for internally displaced persons, with 9.6 million persons as well as 3.6 million refugees and asylum seekers. The influx of 5.4 million internally displaced persons in Ethiopia is due to “political tensions, terrorist attacks as well as prolonged droughts” (International Organization for Migration 2021:17). Moreover, a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the population in movement is relevant to religious challenges Jewish Ethiopians have endured in Ethiopia.

Historical and contemporary complexities in the practice of Judaism in Ethiopia determine a key feature of Ethiopian Jewish identity. In Ethiopia, Jewish Ethiopians refer to themselves as Beta Israel, whereas their neighbors usually referred to them as Falasha (Kaplan 1988:1), “landless, wanderers, exiles.” In essence, Ethiopian Jewish migrants have historically remained outcasts in their own country. For the Jewish community in Ethiopia, Ethiopians have historically lived in peace with their Muslim and Christian neighbors (Terrazas 2007). However, historical events such as the push for Christian conversion in Ethiopia, as well as The Derg political repression of the late 19th century, have inflicted religious persecution amongst Jewish



Ethiopians. Again, Judaic Ethiopians have primarily concentrated in the northern and northwestern parts of Ethiopia, where the Jewish community became increasingly isolated from the Jewish World until the historical events of World War II. However, the Ethiopian Jewish community did observe traditional practices of Judaism (Britannica 2022) like “the Sabbath, practice [of] circumcision, synagogue services led by priests...dietary laws of Judaism, observance [of] many laws of ritual uncleanness.” The practice of Judaism in Ethiopia has made Judaic Ethiopians a distinct minority in Ethiopia. The practice of Judaism has consistently been a predominant factor in how Judaic Ethiopians identify themselves. As Salamon (2003) illustrates, “The Beta Israel saw themselves as a distinct group, keepers of a faith...their belief was rooted in the Old Testament, whose commandments they meticulously observed.” Ethiopian Jewish identity whilst in Ethiopia has been shaped by Ethiopia’s historical and contemporary complexities.

#### CHALLENGES FOR SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Challenges for safe and sustainable Ethiopian Jewish livelihoods are evident across migration processes and how Judaic Ethiopians are racially and religiously perceived while living in Israel. Again, Ethiopia’s location is a strategic transit region (Adugna 2021) for migrants who aim for Europe and other northern destinations. According to the Migration Policy Institute, Adugna (2021) references migration patterns throughout Ethiopia, stating, “Migration occurs eastward to the Persian Gulf states and the Middle East, crossing the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden; southward to South Africa; and northward across the Sahara, into Sudan and often Europe.” Jewish Ethiopians are mainly concentrated in Beta Israel in northern Gondar, Ethiopia. During the Derg governance of 1974, when Ethiopian Jewish migrants faced religious persecution, Ethiopian Jewish migrants who migrated used two routes: one was out of Sudan and the other Kenya. Author Terrazas (2007) states, “An estimated 4,000 perished during the journey due to the severe conditions” because of illegal emigration. In 1989, Ethiopian Jewish migrants were able to migrate to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, because of the “reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and

Ethiopia” (Terrazas 2007). Ethiopian migrants have traveled to the Middle East at high rates since the 1990s through irregular channels. The International Organization for Migration (2021:6) illustrates the severity of irregular channels that many Ethiopian migrants use, noting, “The irregular journeys remain fraught with peril as migrants use multiple smuggler networks, cross dangerous seas, pass through war-torn countries and continuously face the risk of detention and deportation along the way or at destination.” The usage of irregular channels is an extreme reality Ethiopian migrants face regularly. Meanwhile, Ethiopian Jewish migrants faced significant migration challenges upon arriving in Israel.

According to Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics (2021:1), the population of Ethiopians living in Israel at the end of 2020 consisted of 159,500 residents, of which “88,500 were born in Ethiopia, and 71,000 were Israeli born with fathers born in Ethiopia.” The Ethiopian Jewish population in Israel is defined as those of Ethiopian origin by one or more parents. Moreover, the Ethiopian-origin population in Israel is concentrated in specific communities within Israel. Such as, in Qiryat Moshe, 3,000 Ethiopian-origin residents comprise over 56% of the total number of residents, and in Rishon LeZiyyon, where 2,700 Ethiopian-origin residents comprise 53% of the total number of residents, according to Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics (2021:3). The concentration of Ethiopian Jewish migrants has led to the ghettoization of specific neighborhoods which are based on racial and socioeconomic prejudices. The evident increase in the Ethiopian-origin population in Israel has culminated in racial and religious intolerance, which has reflected the perceived identity of the Ethiopian Jewish-origin population.

For instance, Ethiopian Jewish migrants did not identify as Black. However, in the transition from Ethiopia to Israel, Ethiopians were racially categorized as Black under Israel’s racial construct. Researcher Salamon (2003:9) illustrates the effect of the white-black binary within Israel’s racial system: “Race hierarchies persist to this day within the Ethiopian community in Israel and continue to have deleterious and far-reaching effects on Ethiopian racial identity.” To dig deeper, the categorization of Judaic Ethiopians as Black under Israel’s racial hierarchy fundamentally altered preconceived racial identities within the

Ethiopian community. In other words, researcher Salamon (2003:7) describes Ethiopia's racial categories, which consisted of red (qey), black (t'equr), light brown, and brown skin color (t'eyem). In contrast, Ethiopian Jewish migrants referred to themselves as qey or t'eyem but never black (t'equr). This racial categorization in Beta Israel is based on the historical racial oppression of black (t'equr) enslaved people, where Ethiopian Jewish migrants have historically owned enslaved Black Ethiopians. The transition from Ethiopia to Israel fundamentally changed the preconception of how Ethiopian Jewish migrants viewed themselves.

Equally important, Judaic Ethiopians living in Israel faced religious intolerance by Israeli society. The disparities in religious and cultural practices created difficulties for integration. Integration challenges into Israeli society are because Jewish Ethiopians were isolated from other Jewish communities for many years. As a result, their practice of Judaism differed in many ways from the rest of the world's Jewish population. As author Ben-Eliezer (2008:936) exemplifies the practice of Judaism by Ethiopians, "It is a Judaism that is fraught with elements dating from biblical times, intermixed with elements of Ethiopian Christianity – the milieu in which they lived." In other words, the Ethiopian population in Israel identifies as Jewish, but their Jewishness was questioned because of years of isolation from the rest of the world's Jewish community.

Additionally, the question of Jewishness is relative to Israel's non-Jewish Muslims (Jewish immigrants). Ethiopians who migrated to Israel in 1993 under the Law of Return were converted to Falas Mura. As a result, Falas Muras are not recognized as Jewish under Israel's halakhic law. According to researcher Rajzman (2020), Falas Mura are "the descendants of Beta Israel communities in Ethiopia and Eritrea that converted to Christianity." Israel's halakhic law does not recognize Falas Mura as Jewish because of this ancestral conversion out of Judaism. Again, Falas Muras identifies (Rajzman 2020) as "ethnically belonging to the Beta Israel community, with many practicing Jewish faith rituals." They are considered non-Jewish migrants under Israel's halakhic law. Finally, challenges for sustainable livelihood amongst the Ethiopian Jewish population living in

Israel are shaped by religious and racial intolerance. By understanding the challenges to the sustainable livelihoods of Ethiopian Jewish migrants, recommendations to protect their human rights can be inferred.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED CONDITIONS

Recommendations to protect the human rights of Ethiopian Jewish migrants may be inferred throughout the migration process, as well as Ethiopian Jewish livelihood in both Ethiopia and Israel. The unfortunate reality concerning the migration processes worldwide has led to increased migration governance. The Migration Data Portal discusses the Internal Organization for Migration's (IOM) usage of the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) tool. The MGI is a way to help countries understand and develop migration policies and practices. The MGI uses 90 indicators to help facilitate migration governance with three main objectives (2022:2), "Generate a dialogue on well-managed migration policies. Identify gaps to be addressed to inform the formulation of comprehensive migration strategies. Help establish baselines to track progress on national and international commitments." The MGI (2019) for Ethiopia indicates numerous well-developed areas and the potential need for further development related to six different dimensions of migration governance. For instance, a possible need for further development within MGI's safe, orderly, and regular migration indicator includes Ethiopia's Proclamation No. 909/2015. Ethiopia's Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants is limited. According to MGI (2019:19), "There are no formal cooperation agreements with other countries on the identification and tracking of missing migrants...revision to include...a national referral mechanism meant to assist victims of trafficking and other vulnerable migrants and returnees." Ethiopia's Proclamation for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants needs to be thoroughly addressed to protect the human rights of trafficked persons in and out of Ethiopia.

In addition to the IOM's MGI for further development in Ethiopia's policies and procedures, immigration services in

Ethiopia have helped service Ethiopian Jewish candidates for Israeli approval. The Jewish Agency for Israel has provided services for Aliyah, another term for the immigration of Jewish descent to Israel, in Ethiopia's Addis Ababa and Gondar. In contrast, The Jewish Agency for Israel (2021) has helped with departure, transit, and arrival in Israel; for instance, they have helped Ethiopian immigrants integrate into Israeli society by providing transitional housing that is dedicated to the "unique cultural needs of Ethiopian olim [immigrants on Aliyah to Israel]." Additionally, Israel's 1950s Law of Return has encouraged Jewish migration to Israel, as stated by Palmer and Kraus (2017:3). This policy has significantly influenced Ethiopian Jewish migration, as it policy allows immigration into Israel for anyone who can prove their Jewish ethnicity. For instance, Operation Moses and Operation Solomon were two pivotal movements under Israel's Law of Return for Ethiopian Jewish immigration. Under Operation Moses (Kruger 2005), 8,000 Judaic Ethiopians came to Israel under a "covert removal of Ethiopian Jews who had fled to Sudan," and 14,000 Ethiopian Jews arrived in Israel under Operation Solomon when "Eritrean and Tigrean rebels challenged the Ethiopian Government in 1991." Again, these are only a few policies and procedures that help protect human rights throughout the Ethiopian migration process; innumerable policies and procedures on the macro and micro spectrum can help protect the human rights of Ethiopian migrants during the migration process.

Meanwhile, there are considerable recommendations that protect the human rights of Ethiopian Jewish migrants living in Israel. Growing research shows the everyday cultural racism Ethiopian Jewish migrants experience while living in Israel. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) has helped protect the human rights of Ethiopians living in Israel as there is an emergence of Ethiopians experiencing painful discrimination in many sectors of Israeli society. For instance, the ACRI recently filed a claim against the Israeli Police for racial profiling of a 16-year-old Ethiopian boy. As reported by ACRI (2021), "We argued that the behavior of the officers violated the boy's right to equality and dignity, unjustifiably revoked his freedom, and invaded his privacy." Racial discrimination against Ethiopians persists amongst many different sectors of the Israeli community, and the

ACRI is just one example that helps protect the civil and human rights of Israeli society.

Lastly, recommendations for improved Ethiopian Jewish livelihood can be made based on the religious intolerances Ethiopian Jewish migrants encounter while living in Israel. As previously mentioned, Ethiopian Jewish migrants face integration challenges because of the differences in the practice of Judaism in comparison to their Israeli neighbors. Again, Judaic Ethiopians have been the victims of discrimination while living in Israel. However, specific advocacy groups like the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews have helped the absorption of Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society. The Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews offers programs in the forms of community empowerment, employment, technical training, and law. For example, in an article by World Israel News written by Paul Shindman (2020), “President Reuven Rivlin and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joined [Ethiopian] community leaders to remember the estimated 4,000 Jews from the African Country who perished...trying to reach Israel.” Services to commemorate Ethiopian Jewish migrants have helped bring attention to Ethiopian Jewish integration into Israeli society.

## CONCLUSION

To effectively protect the human rights of Ethiopian Jewish migrants, recommendations for migration processes through migration tools like the Migration Governance Indicator and immigration services like The Jewish Agency for Israel may be utilized to ensure the safety of Ethiopian Jewish migration into Israel. The irregular migration channels and the severity of natural circumstances surrounding the realities of migration processes are inevitable. However, these harsh realities can be significantly decreased by implementing migration governance. Additionally, to effectively provide a sustainable livelihood for Ethiopian Jewish migrants’ advocacies like The Association for Civil Rights in Israel and Israel Association for Ethiopian Jewish migrants are prominent instruments that promote Ethiopian Jewish integration into Israeli society. Recommendations for sustainable livelihood for Ethiopian Jewish migrants living in Israel are comprehensible

if the information is publicized through written text and various media sources.

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**As the Days, Months, Years, and “Leap Years” of Our Lives’ Turn**

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**ABSTRACT**

This analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how the calendar serves not only as a temporal reference but also as a tool that structures and influences societal and sociological dynamics. Beginning with the Roman Catholic Church’s role, I explore the integration and profound early influence of religion into the temporal structure, elucidating how its conceptualization has shaped societal norms and influenced some of humanity’s more important decision-making processes today. The interplay between religious traditions and temporal organization highlights the calendar’s dual function as a practical timekeeping tool and a cultural artifact. *The Four Tetrads* by Marshall McLuhan integrally offers a lens to analyze how changes in media and communication have influenced our perception and utilization of time as well as the effects of the calendar on contemporary societal issues. I then explore the interconnectedness of media evolution and the transformation of the calendar, emphasizing their reciprocal relationship in shaping societal values and priorities. Examining how the calendar dictates the rhythm of our lives, the theme investigates its role in determining the timing of critical events and decision-making processes. To offer a holistic perspective, I also trace the chronological changes in the calendar over the course of time, addressing key historical junctures that contributed to its evolution. From the Julian calendars to the Gregorian calendar’s introduction, the narrative encompasses the various adaptations and reforms that have shaped the calendar into its present form.

*All media exist to invest our lives with artificial perceptions and arbitrary values.” - Marshall McLuhan*

## INTRODUCTION

Today, the calendar undoubtedly influences and dictates every aspect of our lives. The calendar has the sociological abilities to reveal to many of us when we were born, what day(s) of the week we go to work and/or school, what day of the year Easter will be observed, our college graduation date, and other information that we, ourselves, may personalize on the calendar and hold dear to us. Instances such as when my next doctor’s appointment will be, being informed of the day my parking ticket is due, my nephew’s impending court date, and the ten-year anniversary of my mentor passing away, amongst other dates and events that the calendar enables us to keep track of. It is limitless to imagine the various ways and dictation that the calendar has on our lives in society on a daily basis. The communication medium, which in this case is the calendar, is an example of what communication theorist *Marshall McLuhan* (2007:129) theorized when he studied extensively on the communications medium effect on a society’s culture; “The medium is the message”. Culture is generally a derivative of a technological change rather than any independent factor. McLuhan contends that media is an extension of self; meaning that technologies have the ability to change how humans think, feel, act, and even how a person perceives and processes information. McLuhan is famously known for saying, “We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us” (2007:128). This is clearly evident as we look to apply McLuhan’s tetrad to the calendar. The calendar reconfigures thought and knowledge through McLuhan’s four laws of media, leading to the enhancement of time, the obsolescence and retrieval of astronomy and the reversal to chaos. His theory is significant both culturally and religiously as practiced here in the United States today. In applying the “Laws of Media” that McLuhan has developed, we then can commence to explore the sociological relationship between the causes and effects of media, which in itself is an interdisciplinary topic of great extension. To better understand the origins of its history, this has to be researched to be best contextualized. I will then critically examine how the four

effects of enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval, and reversal are utilized in correlation with the calendar. Furthermore, the uses of the effects apply today in numerous sociological ways, including some of the manners in which the calendar can be applied to one's personal life, such the ways as a culture the calendar can specify how we go about our days by celebrating holidays or mourning the death of beloved artists and such. Throughout the phases of the year, we are societally informed by the calendar.

## HISTORY OF CALENDARS

The Gregorian calendar, also known popularly as the western or Christian calendar was first introduced in 1582. However, it took more than 300 years for most countries to switch to the Gregorian calendar. This calendar was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII – and was subsequently named after him. Prior to this becoming the most commonly used calendar, the Julian calendar, named after Julius Caesar, was the calendar of use dating back as far as 45 B.C. Among the causes of concern for adopting a new calendar was, for one, the Julian calendar system miscalculated the length of the solar year by 11 minutes. As a result, this calendar fell out of sync with the seasons. Another reason, and the most important cause for concern with the Julian calendar, was the Roman Catholic Church's issue with the observance of Easter. It was traditionally observed on March 21, but was falling further away from the spring equinox with each passing year (Cohen 2018). In addition, the Julian calendar didn't properly reflect the actual time it takes the earth to orbit once around the sun, known as tropical year. The Julian calendar also produced a leap year every four years, which is by all accounts too many. According to The History Channel,

The Julian calendar included an extra day in February every four years. But Aloysius Lilius, the Italian scientist who developed the system Pope Gregory would unveil in 1582, realized that the addition of so many days made the calendar slightly too long. He devised a variation that adds leap days in years divisible by four, unless the year is also divisible by 100. If the year is also divisible by 400, a leap day is added regardless.

While this formula may sound confusing, it did resolve the lag created by Caesar's earlier scheme—almost. (Cohen 2018)

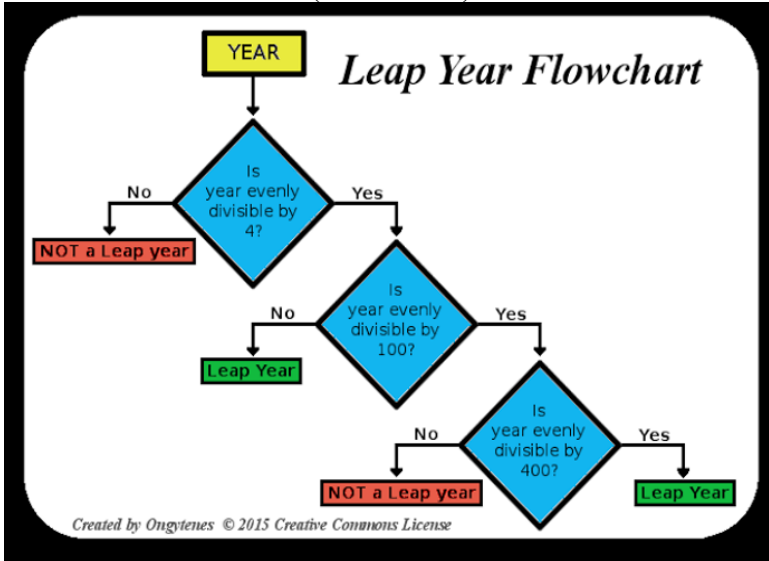


Figure 1 "Leap Year Flowchart" (Ongytenes 2015).

The Gregorian calendar was found to use a much more accurate rule for calculating leap years. In the correction of these inadequacies and in order to get the calendar system back in sync with the astronomical events like that of the vernal equinox or the winter solstice, eleven days would have to be dropped from the calendar. Imagine that – days the people had become accustomed to were instantly eradicated. Meanwhile here in the American colonies in the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin would write to his delight in the welcoming of this change when he expresses, "It is pleasant for an old man to be able to go to bed on September 2, and not have to get up until September 14" (Cohen 2018). The papal bull *inter-gravissimas*, issued by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, decreed that ten days would be dropped when shifting to the Gregorian calendar. It was believed that the later the interchange occurred, the more days that would have to be omitted. At the time of the transition, a shorter month of 18 days, and odd dates like February 30 would occur (Webexhibits.org 2008). Prominent

Catholic countries, including Spain, Portugal, and Italy swiftly adopted the new calendar for their civil affairs.

Conversion from Julian to Gregorian dates.		
Gregorian range	Julian range	Difference
From 15 October 1582 to 28 February 1700	From 5 October 1582 to 18 February 1700	10 days
From 1 March 1700 to 28 February 1800	From 19 February 1700 to 17 February 1800	11 days
From 1 March 1800 to 28 February 1900	From 18 February 1800 to 16 February 1900	12 days
From 1 March 1900 to 28 February 2100	From 17 February 1900 to 15 February 2100	13 days
From 1 March 2100 to 28 February 2200	From 16 February 2100 to 14 February 2200	14 days

Figure 2 “Conversion from Julian to Gregorian dates.” (Clavius 2018).

Other countries and nations originally rejected the calendar in opposition to the Roman Catholic church. The European Protestants, for example, largely rejected the change seeing this as an attempt to silence their movement. The Protestants also accused Pope Gregory XIII of being the “Roman Anti-Christ,” and lamenting that the real purpose of the new calendar was a Catholic plot to keep true Christians from worshipping on correct days (Cohen 2018). It is also important to note that both calendars were based on the connection to the birth and life of Jesus Christ, which would also draw opposition from non-Christians and those who followed other faiths of religion. Essentially, the focal point of time is centered on the birth of Christ and is arguably the dividing point in time in world history (Wellman 2014). The terms, Before Christ (B.C.) and Anno Domini (A.D) meaning “in the year of the Lord,” are used to label or number the years in the Julian and Gregorian Calendars, which are religiously based. These varying religions such as Christianity, Islam, Catholicism, and Hinduism, to name just a few, are all examples that continue to divide families, friends, and in recent cases nations of people (Thirty Years’ War 2018). Historically, Protestants and Catholics were at war with each other; individuals on both sides killing each other in the name and in defense of their respective faith (Kane 1951) It would be plausible to believe because of instances such as this, and other multifarious factors, that many countries now use C.E.,

an acronym for “common era” and B.C.E., which means “before common era;” This is used as an alternative to track years of time in a non-Christian manner.

### MCLUHAN’S LAW OF MEDIA

By having an extensive background of the history, and significant knowledge of the calendar, it can be discerned as a transformative medium of technology. McLuhan (2007:128) asserts that tetrads are, “A means of focusing awareness on hidden or unobserved qualities in our culture and technology.” In this way, McLuhan reasons that in reference to the calendar the effects of this media can be viewed in four ways. The tetrad offers us an “exegesis on four levels, showing the logos – structure of each artefact, and giving its four parts as a metaphor or word.” With this model, the calendar can be examined in association to this tetrad. Based on the aforementioned information the calendar amplifies time. The calendar is an extension of time, people’s culture, and religious practices. The calendar also manifests days and events in time that are relevant to us. For instance, the Gregorian calendar is widely used today and was originally enacted to protect Easter from falling further away from the spring equinox with each passing year. In this example, this historic observance is known as the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, according to Christian faith. This faith-based connection that exists with this observance is amplified here in the United States in addition to other parts of the world. Presently in the United States, Easter in many households have become the day that everyone goes to church or mass, get dressed nicely in new suits, dresses and shoes, perform recitals and readings in front of the congregation, and later indulge in an elaborate Easter dinner, accompanied with baskets and marshmallow peeps for the children. At least, this was the case in my household.

### *Enhancement*

Due to the calendar and other historical and other sociological concepts, a multitude of other events in time would soon be emphasized. In contradistinction to an Eastern country like China, where for example, January 1 is recognized as the beginning of a new year of life for all citizens, and Western

countries like the United States and Canada recognize Christmas as a major holiday and celebration based on the birth of Jesus Christ. China, on the other hand, does not celebrate Christmas as a major holiday as the day is observed casually, with no time off granted for such an affair. For many nations, specifically those that considered a Christian or Catholic majority, celebrating Christmas encompasses activities such as buying gifts or purchasing a Christmas tree, with folks full of Christmas spirit, kindness, gift-giving, and other gestures that have been made customary. Western countries tend to take a significant amount of time aside from work or school to spend time with family, known as a “Christmas vacation.” In consonance with this, in the United States, there are historical events that are held dearly in this country to different groups of people. One of the days in American culture that has been amplified over time is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday, which signifies the honorable and heroic work of his civil rights activism in this country. Another day is “Mother’s Day,” a day reserved as a celebration of all the mothers and an opportunity to acknowledge them. “Memorial Day” is our nation’s day of paying homage and respects to all those that have lost their lives for this country, like that of the 9/11 attacks, or those in the duty of service to the United States, presumably defending our freedoms from attacks of the likes of Isis, the Taliban, or rival nations like North Korea or Russia. There’s also the “Fourth of July,” which marks the celebration of the day in time that the United States declared its independence from Great Britain in 1776. It is also important to contemplate that the calendar enhances how our society traditionally observes it, which in other countries may be an ordinary day. For example, “Mother’s Day” dictates to many that we must buy lavish flowers and cards for our mother or loved ones who may have children of their own. Dr. King Jr. Day is an observance that warrants all state and government buildings be closed and is usually celebrated with a “Kingdom Day” parade in most major U.S. cities. The “Fourth of July” is conventionally an exciting day of food, fun, family activities, and an extraordinary firework show that can be seen throughout the day, but mostly over the night sky and across the country simultaneously. Even on a more personal level, there are examples of amplifications that I can point to in my life. These

exemplifications include my birthday, which I generally celebrate with family and close friends by going out to dinner and dressing nicely. My parents' wedding anniversary, which gratifies their years of a loving marriage together. Another day of importance was when my son was born on September 19, 2016. This is a day that I'll never forget, as it marked the beginning of a new life and a better version of me. Most recent would be my brother's release from state prison, which will forever mark the beginning of the newest chapter in the book of our lives.

### *Obsolesce*

The calendar has become the recognized norm in which we track time, days, seasons, and years. Earlier practices that were used to do these same things would now become, "*the erosion of formerly significant artifact*" (2007:129). Some of the things that would be pushed to the background would be the use of astronomy for the purposes of studying seasons and intervals of the year. Before the calendar, there was a reliance on studying the patterns of the sun and moon to have knowledge of seasons and the time of day it was (Hobden). The cycle of the moon's phases, for example, provided a convenient means of counting days. This methodology would no longer be needed with the calendar now in place. In earlier civilizations, the community also relied on shamans and priests as calendar-keepers to provide accurate predictions for the purposes of initiating economic activities. Farming and hunting needed efficient rituals based on an accuracy of the calendar to ensure success. Just as the evolution of print would eliminate the use of scribes for hand copying, the calendar would allow for shamans and priest to focus on other duties besides calendar keeping.

### *Retrieval*

Another concept that recently has been moved to the periphery is the theory of measuring time according to the birth and life of Christ. Many countries and people have pushed aside B.C. and A.D. in favor of using B.C.E., which is an acronym for "before common era," and C.E. which refers to "common era," as a non-religious or anti-Christian means of their description of measuring time, without portraying an allegiance or affinity to



Christianity or any religion for that matter. Being that the terms B.C. and A.D. are affixed to Christ, there are people who don't agree or refuse the practice of following a calendar system that is bias to this, thus, justifying why many countries originally stood in opposition to calendar standardization. An example of this would be Saudi Arabia, an Islamic state, that would adopt the Gregorian calendar as recent as the end of 2016, over 200 years since its original inception. In Saudi Arabia's use of the calendar, the terms B.C. and A.D. are non-existent, and the country's practices of the Gregorian calendar is in regard to it being confirmed as the Common Era calendar. Lastly, the Gregorian calendar would cancel out the Julian calendar as the "World's calendar," whether the transmission over to the more accurate Gregorian calendar was immediate or eventual. One of the practices that would reinvent itself and would be used as a basis of academic study would be Astronomy. The study of the sun and the moon are no longer relied on as intently for knowing the time of day or year. These studies can be concentrated on the basis of studying the patterns of the sun and moon from a scientific perspective. Throughout the calendar, specific days are noted as to inform us of different moon patterns that we can expect to see in the sky. The weather portion of Los Angeles' Channel 7 news does this as well. The meteorologist typically gives the viewer the seven day forecast for the upcoming week, yet also details the time of the sunrise and sunset for any given day, in addition to listing the different phases of the moon; e.g. This Tuesday, we may visibly be able to see a crescent moon, this Friday the sun will rise at 5:39am and set at 7:46pm, and this Sunday will mark the first day of Spring. The study of animal migration and hibernation patterns now centers around the studying of nature and the natural sciences and are no longer needed as a basis of tracking time or seasons. These are a few of the various concepts that were pushed aside that were responsible for the calculation of time, days, and seasons as humanity once knew it. These concepts would resurface with new invigorated purpose and permanence.

### *Reversal*

With the practices and uses that analogize with the calendar, an argument can be legitimately made of the detrimental

effects that the calendar can have on a person and society. The ideology of abuse and pessimism can make this medium an enemy instead of an ally in some cases. According to McLuhan (2007:128), every innovation has within itself the seeds of its reversal. In the case of the calendar, this technology has the ability to facilitate stress, anxiety, sorrow, or even anger among several other emotions when pushed to its limits. Deadlines, court dates, or an impending prison sentence that is scheduled to be enacted can serve as scenarios in which the calendar “flips” against society. It would also be just to say that calendars and its structures and constraints can push people to the limits of not following important dates, events, and engagements that may have been scheduled on one’s calendar in an act of defiance and deviation from the norm. The calendar can serve as a painful reminder of specific days, like when family members have passed away, the day that our professor for Statistics will administer their dreaded final exam assignment, and the length of a school year in Los Angeles County, which may cause parents and students alike the inability to travel freely to vacation in Papeete, Tahiti or San Juan, Puerto Rico, causing some anger and extreme frustration. In this way, the calendar over-extends itself to a culture of due dates, long awaiting appointments at the dentist’s office, the ennui leading up to a not-so-important staff meeting at work, and the fear of flying on a plane to Detroit on a ‘red-eye’ by Wednesday morning to protest police brutality and the subsequent civil unrest in the city’s urban communities. These are all realistic scenarios of the calendars being “flipped” against a society and its people.

## CONCLUSION

In the sociological examination and application of Marshall McLuhan’s laws of media to the calendar, there are extensive details and research on the calendar and its history to further understand and conceptualize the calendar and its interconnection to McLuhan’s tetrad, and how this tetrad is confirmed and applies to the calendar. The calendar has the components of all four effects: It enhances holidays and religion; it obsolesces the study of moon and sun patterns for timekeeping; it retrieves the study of Astronomy and natural sciences; and reverses into deadlines and the sickening anxiety that

accompanies it. These are some of the numerous concepts that apply in the evolvement of the calendar. In my analysis, I was able to ask the same questions in the same way with all the effects; as a social scientist, I indeed found all the answers that were needed to validate my collected datum. McLuhan (2007:128) is quoted as stating, “human artefacts are human utterances, or outerings, and such they are linguistic and rhetorical entities.” In this way, Calendars shape us, and thereafter we have come to shape our calendars.

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## **Racial Hierarchies Globalized: From Colonialism to Informal Empire**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Modern society projects a belief that humanity is in a post-racial age (Goldberg 2016). However, many events of the 21st century across the world, such as Black Lives Matter and the genocide in Gaza, contradict this. What causes such a disjunction between the supposed post-racial belief, compared to the reality shown through the lived experience of continued domination? We posit this stems from issues of empires engineering control strategies and tactics since the emergence of modern civilization. The societal construction of stratification between oppressor and oppressed persists by perpetuating worldwide systemic subjugation via power-based hierarchies. Our macro theoretical framework seeks to explain that the process through which the system of racial inequality became globalized is still fueled by the evolution of formal empire into a more informal, and therefore less perceptible, version of dominance. Ideology based on a ‘rule of colonial difference’ (Chatterjee 1993) has created an insistent racial hierarchy stemming from modes of oppression through stratification by categories, with other pivotal variations of hierarchies around the globe continuing through the ages in various forms of class-type systems. The current actions of informal empire to maintain a ‘global apartheid’ (Besteman 2019) has been deeply successful under tactics of ‘liberal white supremacy’ (Beeman 2022), ‘racial liberalism’ (Abrego and Villalpando 2021) and psychological warfare (Osgood 2008). This framework focuses on the U.S. as an imperial force through its legacy as a settler-colonial state and hegemonic world power.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Through the ages, struggles for power and domination have plagued humankind. Those in power have persistently advanced the form through which hierarchical domination is executed, by enforcing stratification of differences through societal constructs, such as race, ethnicity, caste, and class. These societal constructs employ power to mask stratification, as if it is a natural phenomenon of humanity. However, stratification does not naturally occur but is a form of systemic exploitation, often

using stigmatization to reinforce hierarchy by asserting the norms of dominant forces throughout the entire globe. The contention for this theoretical framework is that the practice currently known as globalization is a project engineered by empire and that this model is the focal point at which empire, informal empire, and race intersect. The expansion of hierarchies through globalization has two phases: the first involves colonialism, where the stratification of humans by race through a rule of difference (Chatterjee 1993) is central to the facilitation of empire; the second involves the ways more informal methods of imperialism utilize knowledge production to facilitate domination within a post-colonial globalized society including liberal white supremacy (Beeman 2022), racial liberalism (Abrego and Villalpando 2021), and what we argue are forms of psychological warfare. Additionally, the sociological theory of world-systems (Wallerstein 1974) analyzes the way capitalism has had massive effects worldwide as it has become a global system. Both phases perpetuate social norms that maintain human-enforced roles of oppressor and oppressed, mainly through racial hierarchies that establish those who can approximate whiteness as superior while stigmatizing Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) as inferior.

This theoretical framework will emphasize the empiric forces pioneered by the United States in the form of ideological globalization. The U.S. is an illustration of a state apparatus positioning itself as the main global power through domination techniques which have encoded racial hierarchies into standard societal practices. The U.S. empire was able to establish itself as the richest nation and world superpower within its first two hundred years of nationhood (Gonzalez 2022:378), a feat which no other nation, “whether in ancient or modern times, ever saw its influence spread so far or determined the thoughts and actions of so many people around the world as our nation does today.” This success was largely due to the endless American quest to realize “Manifest Destiny” (2022:378) through subjugating others, specifically targeting Indigenous and Latin Americans as well as enslaving Africans, and subsequently claiming as much territory as possible. As further noted by Juan Gonzalez (2022:378), “that expansion transformed the entire hemisphere into an economic satellite and sphere of influence of the United States.” Therefore,

the U.S. empire is the primary perpetrator of world domination through white supremacist racial inequality and capitalism on a global scale.

#### EVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRE: ENGINEERED HIERARCHIES

The rise and decline of empires are important in understanding how structures of domination function. Historically, the origins of empire (Darwin 2008) coincided with the emergence of modern civilization and the state – or a society with organized political elements – where it continues to function essentially as people ruling over other people. Empires are defined by their hierarchical structure utilizing conquest to occupy foreign lands and reinforcing marked disparities between the occupied and occupiers. According to sociologist Julian Go (2020:83), “Empire, definitionally, requires the management, regulation, or even eradication of alterity; the imperial episteme was born from a near feverish obsession over civilizational, cultural, racial, ethnic, and sexual difference.” This stratification positions one society to dominate another as a separate entity. Sociologist George Steinmetz (2014) notes that the various evolutions of societal hierarchies in history are derivative forms of empire. As civilization evolved under more intricate social structures, the practice of empire developed further through the state as a more complex territorially expansive organization with more elaborate structures of power. Imperialism – the process of enforcing empire – is where changes in social structures are most visible. When looking at how these structures of domination evolve, a noticeable change emerges in the recounting of Western European history where previous imperial strategies of exercising control over societies transform into our modern understanding of colonialism.

#### *Class Society with Global Dimensions*

The two phases of globalization – empiric colonization and informal empire – both have a class structure as the basis for structural domination to facilitate other modes of control. Economic domination is just one aspect of empire (Heinrich 2012:13), where colonialism is a specific form of control with historically distinct processes. The products of colonial labor took on global dimensions, with the first iteration involving the

continents of the Americas, Africa, and Europe. The Transatlantic slave trade was a major factor that gave rise to a global capitalist society in these continents, where labor production outside Europe was being transformed into capital and shipped back to Europe (2012:17). This imperial transformation of society into a global economy of empire came to be known as globalization.

### *Globalization and the State*

Globalization can be defined as the expansion of capitalist society into the global production of capital in a world market and results from the constantly evolving imperial structures of domination. To better understand this form of empire, one must understand its relationship to the state. Steinmetz (2014:80) explains that empire “can be pictured as a solar system in which the colonized peripheries circulate around the metropolitan core,” and that these “planets in this imperial solar system also all possess states of their own.” In essence, the state acts simultaneously as both the mother country in which the resources and capital produced by labor production are sent, as well as the colonies themselves. These colonial states are either directly ruled by the metropole or are given autonomy to some extent as a form of indirect rule “by proxy through indigenous elites” (2014:81). The world-systems perspective created by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) frames the “global periphery as being condemned to produce raw materials for processing by the core” (Steinmetz 2014:87).

### GLOBALIZATION PHASE 1: EMPIRE AND COLONIALISM

The pretext for globalization is colonialism, a recent practice of formal empire. A defining feature of colonialism (Steinmetz 2014:79) “involves the arrogation of sovereignty by a conquering power.” Settler-colonialism is the unwarranted territorial conquest over an indigenous people by a conquering metropole followed by their presumptuous claim of supreme power in the new land (2014:79), as well as the transformation of the society through the implementation of power structures that situate the conquered population as inferior to their colonizers in “legal, administrative, social, cultural, and/or biological terms.” This practice was the driving force in the formation of what is now

known as the United States, through the seizure of land and subjugation of the Indigenous peoples. The era of formal colonial domination marked a paradigm shift in how empire functions, defined by the transformation of labor production and control into a global economy based on a system of converting resources and labor production into capital and the inception of the idea of race as a power structure.

### *Rule of Difference*

Historian Partha Chatterjee (1993) developed the term a ‘rule of difference’ to explain the construction (Steinmetz 2014:80) where “All colonial states divide their subjects into different tribal or racial groups in an effort to enhance control, but at the same time the colonized are subsumed by the colonial state under a single, overarching category.” The rule of difference enforces superiority and inferiority of stratification by creating a hierarchy among people with resources unequally distributed. Colonizing practices used in the establishment of the U.S. included the aforementioned relegation of Indigenous people to reservations as well as the Transatlantic slave trade enslaving African people against their will as hard laborers. Such tactics of power and domination focus on conquering people by destabilizing sources of community support practices through redirecting reliance of needs being met solely under those who have seized control.

### *The Invention of Race*

The stratification of humans through the societal construction of race was fueled by Eurocentric capitalism colonizing the globe to increase power domination. Sociologist Anibal Quijano (2021:533) states explicitly that one of the fundamental characteristics of globalization is “the social classification of the world’s population around the idea of race.” This shift produced a control axis (2000:533-534) that socially stratified people from power based on a purported biological factor of race intersecting with class-based labor roles. The use of the race concept created an immediately identifiable hierarchy with skin tone as a signifier of power. This proved an effective distinction (2000:535), allowing race to become “the fundamental



criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power." Since the conception of race began under the globalization force of capitalism, class-based labor roles were strongly linked to the visual appearance of skin tone due to the strength of the power domination occurring. This meant that even though race and class are not mutually dependent, the circumstances under which racism and capitalism developed did create a division of labor (2000:536) that systemically reinforced inferiority of race. As capitalism gained control of labor under globalization, the race-class association was further strengthened through white colonizers establishing paid labor as exclusive to their own race while assigning colonized races unpaid labor (2000:539) in the forms of serfdom for Indigenous populations and slavery for Africans who were sold as part of the slave trade.

*Eurocentric Colonialism Erasure of Cultures*

The establishment of colonial capitalism served to strip diverse people groups with a multitude of cultural varieties into singular racial identities with strong negative associations. In the span of just three hundred years (2000:551-552), the "Aztecs, Mayas, Chimus, Aymaras, Incas, Chibchas, and so on. . . had become . . . Indians" while "the people forcefully brought from Africa as slaves: Ashantis, Yorubas, Zulus, Congos, Bacongos, and others . . . were Negroes or blacks." By overriding unique cultural identities, the power of colonial empire set the standard for what was considered modern and what was considered outdated through a rule of difference. This has continued into the practices of informal empire, where the concept of the Global South reinforces Eurocentrism through setting a status quo of idealistic modernity, which stigmatizes any cultures that deviate from the achievement of capitalistic profits. This marked distinction between the valued behavior of whiteness and the stigmatization of supposed negatively deviant non-white cultures further serves the adjusted narrative of white supremacy.

*Approximation of Whiteness and Eugenics*

As time went on, descendants of what became known as mixed-race relationships were often able to approximate

whiteness due to the external presentation of their genetic phenotype. An example of this was in Latin America, through the documentation of mestizos during the colonial American period (Quijano 2000:536), most notably that “the more ‘whitened’ among the mestizos of Black women and Spanish or Portuguese had an opportunity to work. But they were late in legitimizing their new roles, since their mothers were slaves.” The existence of mestizos with genetic phenotypes creating a stratification of visual appearance from dark to light reinforced the errant belief of division by race being a natural phenomenon. This led to the pseudo-scientific practices of eugenics producing new excuses for the societal construction of race as a natural factor of genetic attributes, particularly to justify the subjugation of those with darker skin tones. In fact, in the U.S., the serfdom of Indigenous people and the enslavement of Africans (2000:550) were “deliberately established and organized as a commodity in order to produce goods for the world market and to serve the purposes and needs of capitalism.”

Although colonial rule, and therefore formal empire, has technically ended, both the process of global capital production through globalization and stratification through racism have persisted in modern times under more informal modes of imperialism. Colonial empires were essentially dismantled upon reaching the twentieth century (Go 2020:87), but the “U.S. empire maintained colonial relations with Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam, for instance; and around the world, formal empire dissipated only to give way to new forms of imperial domination.”

## GLOBALIZATION PHASE 2: INFORMAL EMPIRE

According to environmentalists and economists Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster (2012:13), the process of decolonization was seen as inevitable for colonial empire. To adapt to such radically new conditions of a postcolonial globalized society, preparations were made for the transition from formal controls of empire to “informal imperialism,” or “imperialism without colonies.” This mode of empire (Steinmetz 2014:84-85) is referred to as “informal nonterritorial empire” in which “international control is exercised through military, economic, and

other means, but there is no conquest or permanent seizure of political sovereignty and therefore no possibility of systematically enforcing a rule of difference.” Informal empire is deemed such because this form uses more subtle methods and technologies as employed by a state-organization that wishes to dominate another, instead of utilizing outright physical occupation to replace local sovereign powers, effectively acting as a disguised form of dominance. The abundance of U.S. military bases globally is one example of subliminal dominance, posited as universal allyship but these bases can easily become a way for the U.S. government to subdue any activity deemed as uprisings. Additionally, in the pursuit of globalization, the U.S. government has utilized tools (Steinmetz 2014:85) such as: “manipulated market exchanges, extraterritoriality arrangements, black sites and extraordinary rendition, drone strikes, and unequal military alliances and status of forces agreements.”

### *Controlling the Narrative through Capitalism*

The U.S. empire has been the prime example of informal modes of control (Magdoff and Foster 2012:11) which is understood as the “continuous reality of economic expansion in modern times.” The economic domination within the world market and the changing landscape of the global economy was marked by the emergence of multinational corporations. Informal imperialism then functions (2012:15) as not only occurring “through the policies of states but also through the actions of corporations and the mechanisms of trade finance and investment.” This involved class structures both within countries of the periphery (Prebisch 1950) and the core imperial metropolises dominating them. These actions of multinational corporations (Magdoff and Foster 2012:15) included “the nurturing of local collaborators or comprador elements in the dependent societies.” The installation of puppet regime dictatorships within these peripheral countries rich in resources and cheap labor was done so to secure imperial interests of capital accumulation.

### *Freedom and the American Dream*

Capitalism ignores societal needs in favor of being profit-oriented (Heinrich 2004:18), which creates major power

differentials among citizens, pointing to the informal empiric practices of enforced hierarchy. This is an example of control by manipulation: a subtle method that seeks to make individuals comply with domination through non-coercive means. Once the emancipation of Americans who were enslaved was successful (Quijano 2000:567), “freedom was not a transformation of labor relations, but a reason to substitute slaves with immigrant workers from other countries.” This shift lures immigrants to the U.S. through the attractive ideal of achieving economic and familial freedom via the ‘American Dream’ based on the social belief that hard work leads to upward mobilization. The U.S. investment in capitalism has manufactured the narrative that one can pull themselves up by their bootstraps to achieve wealth and power. However, this American Dream is not universally accessible or genuinely attainable due to the maintained rule of difference through systemic racism. A major “problem with the American Dream,” as it plays out in reality (Abdurraqib 2022:184), “is that it manifests itself in different times and places and ways for different people, depending on any number of identity factors.” White supremacist practices baked into the inception of the U.S. only serve to reinforce the inequality of power domination through the informal imperial practice of approximation to whiteness.

The true nature of coercion occurring under capitalism in the form of workforce reliance is disguised by those in power:

The obscene transfers of wealth over the past forty years from ... bottom to a privileged few at the top – and from much of the Global South to financial elites in the West – were all excused as the natural evolution of the market, when, in fact, they are products of unparalleled greed by those who dominate and direct the market. (Gonzalez 2022:382)

The stratification maintained by capitalists owning the means of production prevents workers from truly being in control of their own survival. Instead, workers are manipulated into accepting that alienation of the self from one’s work production is a norm within society, causing most to believe that the low wages paid are the true worth of their labor. Stratification of wages is even more pronounced through the white supremacist enforcement of racial

domination further devaluing those who cannot approximate whiteness. Even the U.S. empire outsourcing work to other countries under the supposed efficiency of cost savings is an exploitative labor practice (Benjamin 2019:29) that paradoxically reinforces “indispensable disposability of those whose labor enables innovation . . . [failing] to account for the social costs of a technology in which global forms of racism, caste, class, sex, and gender exploitation are the nuts and bolts of development.”

*Western Exceptionalism and Liberal White Supremacy*

The concept of ‘Western exceptionalism’ is a repeated rhetoric the U.S. government has utilized to further its covert empire, attempting to disguise systemic practices of white supremacy that continue to employ a rule of difference as a means of unquestioned control through repeatedly asserting the standard of freedom. Yet, the supposed free market that the U.S. promises through capitalism is controlled by exploitive elements that employ a modern form of stratified subjugation. The explicit forms of racial hierarchy established during colonial rule became unprofitable as racism began to be formally recognized, to a certain extent, due to evolving social mores. Race began to function through more indirect forms of empire within a new set of ideas such as ‘liberal white supremacy’ (Beeman 2022). This concept refers to the belief that the ideas and institutionalization of freedom, human rights, and democracy originate in Western cultures and philosophies and suggests a moral superiority of Western societies. The latter part of this idea implies that the system of government based on these ideas and institutions can self-correct and self-perfect itself. In other words, it is the idea of ‘a few bad apples’ within a system of government as opposed to the reality where governments are perpetuating institutionalized structures of control such as racism.

*Racial Liberalism and Neoliberal Multiculturalism*

As the Cold War began after World War II, the U.S. government utilized its recognition and condemnation of racism to justify informal expansion of its empire. Latin American Studies scholars Leisy Abrego and Alejandro Villalpando (2021:51) refer to this period of U.S. government policy as ‘racial

liberalism,' in which the goal was to "mask racialized inequities by promoting the idea of an 'abstract equality' predicated on market-driven individualism and the promise of inclusion into the national project." Racialized individuals have had to adapt to capitalist and individualistic modes of thinking and production as a prerequisite for being formally considered full citizens in the U.S. Race was still an essential factor in facilitating class structures, although class dimensions are less readily perceivable, while capitalism evolved into its contemporary framework of neoliberalism. The end of the Cold War marked another necessity for empire to adapt its informal modes of control to a globalized society without the perceived global threat that communism assumed. With communism considered under control, one method informal imperialism utilized to maintain its power structures was to combine racial liberalism and neoliberalism into what scholar Jodi Melamed established in 2006 as the model of 'neoliberal multiculturalism.' This was due to the U.S. government no "longer relying on an abstract sense of equality across race, the transnational capitalist regime [U.S. informal empire] now required nation-states, businesses, and key social institutions to include multiculturalism as a policy goal" (2021:52). The idea of multiculturalism here refers to a "generalized mainstream understanding that progress requires a (usually superficial) centering of race," but only so far as to acknowledge and celebrate the cultures of BIPOC if they are willing to adapt to capitalist and individualistic modes of labor production. Such initiatives of multiculturalism as a matter of policy by the U.S. government revolved around ideas of diversity as well as using metrics to measure one's social status outside of race based on one's work performance. The fallacy, however, is that because the power structures of race did not end with colonialism but instead proved more durable and merely adapted to the social mores of the environment, an imbalance of power still existed in these neoliberal modes of social control. The goal of neoliberal multiculturalism was to obscure "the ways global capitalist expansion in fact exacerbates and amplifies racialized inequity, the way it reproduces precarity and mobility for racialized groups" (2021:52). A historical example of this was in Central America, where, for the first time, Indigenous peoples and cultures were

formally recognized by their respective governments as a matter of policy. The end of civil wars in Central America was marked by neoliberal multiculturalism through calls for peace and nationwide initiatives to respect and celebrate historically oppressed groups, including Indigenous and Black Central Americans. These initiatives failed to address the structural imbalances of power that were facilitating the struggles of these groups, as is the nature of this ideology (2021:52), to promote “cultural acceptance of Indigenous and other racialized communities while materially advancing their political and economic marginalization.” This ideology, as a matter of policy, can also be considered a form of psychological warfare.

### *Psychological Warfare*

The strategy of psychological warfare utilizes globalized interactions, which are colonial in origin, to still retain the same imbalance of power between post-colonial third-world countries and “imperial centers” (Magdoff and Foster 2012:18). The origins of psychological warfare as a matter of policy for U.S. empire came about during President Eisenhower’s administration at the beginning of the Cold War. Eisenhower’s understanding of the success of psychological warfare as a military tactic during World War II (Osgood 2008:47) led him to conclude that “the battle for hearts and minds was one of the most critical dimensions of the Cold War struggle.” This is best understood within a globalized society (Abrego and Villalpando 2021:52) as a “fight to secure the United States’ ability to continue to extract wealth transnationally.” Alongside this new strategy of establishing and maintaining global hegemony came the necessity of implementing the idea of plausible deniability that Eisenhower and other succeeding administrations would only internally acknowledge during and after the Cold War. Magdoff and Foster (2012:9) contend that “the existence of an American empire is no secret. It is widely, even universally, recognized in most parts of the world, though traditionally denied by the powers that be in the United States.” This plausible deniability, or formal denial of existence, implies the tactic of control through psychological warfare by manipulating peoples’ understanding of how a globalized

postcolonial society functions by obfuscating any discussion of empires existing after the period of decolonization.

*Utilization of Globalization for Knowledge Production*

One effective method of psychological warfare was knowledge production. During the Cold War, the U.S. empire utilized knowledge production as a technology of control. The goal of knowledge production as psychological warfare was to maintain control of a country's political, cultural, and economic landscape within the U.S. sphere of influence to ensure U.S. interests in that country. This strategy employs an informal and covert network (Simpson 1996:60) involving U.S. intelligence agencies, philanthropic organizations, and university programs. U.S. scholars are sent to universities in countries of the Global South to teach the local scholars the methods of particular programs, such as social sciences and communication studies, to inject Western capitalist modes of thinking into the academia of these universities. Knowledge production utilized the mechanisms of globalization channeled through already established global communication networks originating during the era of formal empire. One of the most prominent historical examples of this network was of the Ford Foundation in Indonesia (Parmar 2014:148), where "Ford intervened in and intellectually penetrated Indonesia principally because of its economic resources and strategic position as well as its political-ideological attraction to communism and socialism and desire to carve out a specifically Indonesian path to development."

Knowledge production as utilizing information to promote a particular interest was also conducted in developing countries by U.S. intelligence agencies through covert and overt propaganda campaigns utilizing films, images, and leaflets, amongst other tactics. In this case it promoted Western capitalist values while demonizing communist and socialist ideals in peripheral countries the U.S. empire deemed particularly vulnerable to communist influence. A historical example of this is when the U.S. Information Agency carried out propaganda campaigns where U.S. anti-communist operations were most prominent in Southeast Asia "to reach rural areas where communications were poor, trucks labeled 'USIS' brought



loudspeakers, film projectors, and movie screens to show propaganda films to villagers” and “teams of operatives traveled by boats and jeeps to bring leaflets, posters, magazines, and books to the countryside” (Osgood 2008:120-121).

## CONCLUSION

Though it has morphed in appearance over the ages, the societal construction of empire persists in its present form through projects of stratification and globalization continuing to engineer structures of power. Historically, stratification played a crucial role in the first phase of globalization by colonialism perpetuating empire through a rule of difference allowing dynamics of control to stem from the Eurocentric invention of race. A self-sustaining system of domination spread worldwide by equating power access with approximation to whiteness through the visible marker of skin tone. As modernization forced formal empire to adapt the way it manifested, informal empire ushered in the second phase of globalization. The U.S. used capitalism and systemic racism to establish a narrative of Western exceptionalism by way of liberal white supremacy, racial liberalism, neoliberal multiculturalism, and psychological warfare. All of these forms of propaganda supporting the U.S. government on its rise to the forefront of global power fuel the social norms calculated to maintain roles of oppressor and oppressed at global, national, and even subnational scales. Psychological warfare was a key to convincing the world that society had moved beyond empire and colonization into a supposedly more advanced, post-racial global civilization.

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**Taryn Bates** (She/Her) enrolled during the Fall 2023 semester in the cross-listed course *Knowledge, Power, Community, and University* under sociology professor Wai Kit Choi, PhD., who prompted this piece. Joining forces with classmate Rubén, the pair co-wrote a piece for publication in CSF and to present with a panel at Cal State LA's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Social Theory Symposium.

**Rubén Huerta** (He/Him/El) is graduating in 2024 with a B.A. in Latin American Studies from Cal State LA and is proud to have made the Dean's List for Fall 2023 under the College of Natural and Social Sciences. For the Spring 2024 semester, he has taken part in playing intramural soccer. His other passions include composing original tracks as a music producer which he curates into his DJ sets. In Fall 2023, the LAS Department advised Rubén to enroll in Dr. Wai Kit Choi's cross-listed course *Knowledge, Power, Community, and University*. In preparation for both publication in CSF and panel at Cal State LA's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Social Theory Symposium, he worked alongside Taryn to synthesize their perspectives into a joint theoretical framework.

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## **Black College Students' Hardship in Post-Secondary Education**

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KEYWORDS: Black College Students, Race and Racism, Structural Hardships

### ABSTRACT

This study is designed to pinpoint the hardships Black students endure and why these students are treated differently. Some of the barriers related to college access and college environmental settings (which I label “internal issues”) that have affected Black college students include the cost of higher education, which that can lead to them dropping out due to being unable to afford their education, a lack of spaces of belonging, and difficulty finding helpful mentors for guidance. These internal issues are compounded by challenged Black students often face outside college contexts (labeled “external issues”), including raising dependents, a lack of community or family resources, and experiences of racism. Taken together, internal and external issues interact to impact Black college students’ experiences and outcomes in post-secondary education.

### INTRODUCTION

Black students in the United States must deal with several unnecessary barriers created by policies and ideologies that systematically exclude them from post-secondary educational success. When Black individuals encounter a system that historically has not accounted for them or treat them as equal, it can create hardships that affect their journeys in post-secondary education. Some of the misfortune Black college students encounter include racism, biases from instructors, and negative stigma attached to them due to their skin color. It can also be challenging for Black college students to feel connected to a particular institution. One of the points mentioned by Broom (2018) is academic and social isolation. Broom (2018) delineates that when Black college students do not feel connected to the college, they will isolate themselves. This can cause them not to

be engaged and even affect their coursework. Such barriers have been longstanding over time in the U.S. across various types of public and private institutions, regardless of what policies universities have tried to change to adapt to Black students. Unfortunately, Black students continue to be judged for the color of their skin in ways that negatively impact their educational experiences and outcomes. It is vital that educational college institutions acknowledge and work to address barriers that can affect these students, so they are in a better position to be successful.

Segregation continues to be a widespread de facto reality for Black people in the U.S., especially in education. According to Hakkola (2019), there remains a lack of recruitment efforts for students from segregated Black communities by post-secondary educational institutions. The recruitment process is used by colleges to select who is given opportunities to attend their institutions. Yet, past and present practices demonstrate that Black people continue to be systematically rejected by dominant white colleges through a dearth of recruitment. Beasley (2021) further proposes that social engagement can help Black college students flourish in college. Black college students' interactions with staff, faculty, and other students can positively impact their education and experience at their institutions. However, a lack of Black representation in university settings, combined with ongoing discriminatory behavior persists today. Black students often report that they are treated as if they are dangerous to society and should be feared, or as if they are less capable or less worthy than non-Black students (Beasley 2021). This creates unnecessary barriers for Black students to access, belong, and be successful in post-secondary education.

One of the solutions to emerge from longstanding Black marginalization in higher education was the creation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs were created so Black students could have a safe environment to learn and obtain an education without the barriers they would face attending a dominant white institution. The first HBCU created was the Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, established in 1837. Following this great school, a chain of HBCUs emerged to provide a space for Black students to learn in an environment that tailored

to their needs and best interest. Unfortunately, most Black students cannot afford to travel and pay the tuition necessary to gain the HBCU experience, leaving most Black students to navigate the public and private colleges most financially and geographically accessible to them.

Unfortunately, not much has changed for Black students' experiences in post-secondary education. Though Black students may be accepted at higher rates than the past, their skin color and unique experiences living in the U.S. can make it harder for them to feel part of the school compared to non-Black counterparts. A pervasive marginalization and associated of subjective belonging have long term consequences for Black students throughout their journeys in college and after graduation. Previous researchers have found similar themes that Black students still encounter at their institutions. The college educational system still has a long way to go to become diverse and be a place for Black students to feel accepted and trusted.

The purpose of this research is to document the hardships that Black students in the United States face when navigating higher education. To accomplish this, I conducted 20 semi-structured qualitative electronic interviews with former and current college students from different generational cohorts and states who self-identify as Black or African American. My findings suggest that, while their experiences can and do vary, Black students generally continue to face a set of hardships that systematically marginalize them from a positive educational experience in colleges and universities in the U.S. These negative experiences span time and space in ways that threaten to continue to affect Black educational outcomes at the individual and intergenerational levels.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Poverty/Class/Income*

One of the many challenges Black college students' often face is growing up in impoverished communities with limited educational resources. These communities can cause significant stress to the student due to income availability and how they are perceived. In these communities' parents must work two jobs to support their families and hustle to have enough funds to put food

on the table, which can limit their availability to assist young students with educational needs. Economic issues also distract Black students from their academics and affect their ability to apply and attend universities if they must work to support or assist their families. Heimans and Singh (2019) argue that individuals who need food security, health security like access to clean water and food, and or electricity might face decreased chances of success.

K-12 schools in poverty-stricken communities typically do not have the resources to prepare Black students properly for college (Simon and Steele 2020). These schools are mostly in impoverished communities where there is often violence, minimal resources for families, and instructors who may feel underpaid and treat these students differently. There are usually metal detectors to ensure students are not bringing in weapons, with Black students being the prime suspects (Bell 2015). Black students can also be victims of bullying owing to skin color or if they cannot afford the most popular clothing and wearing off brands. If any Black college students have had these negative experiences described above, how are they supposed to feel they belong at a UC or Cal State institution?

Family structure was demonstrated by Simon and Steele (2020) as a factor in financial hardship, especially if they come from a single-family outcome. Mammen and Woodford (2010) describe low-income mothers' experience striving to be successful in post-secondary education. In many cases, these families are single parents and mothers who are left to fend for themselves due to the father being in the criminal justice system, often because they were compelled to break society's norms to make a living for his family. How can a Black mother who is a college student with children attend school and be successful when she has external responsibilities? There is a lack of acknowledgement and support for these types of students, and they can struggle in college as a result.

Poverty can also bring about problems in the household for Black college students. In their study, Brown et al. (2015) demonstrated that family issues can cause tremendous psychological and physical effects on the children involved. One of the issues mentioned by Brown et al. (2015) shows that when a

family is not financially stable, it can cause several issues, including domestic violence. How is a Black college student supposed to succeed in post-secondary education when they are exposed to hostile environments, often due to economic pressures, at home? These actions can harm the students regardless of whether they witness the hostile environment directly or indirectly. When Black college students are trying to escape such a hostile environment, the last thing they need is to enter a college that treats them like they don't belong or create another set of barriers they must endure.

The community Black students are raised in affects their financial status, resource access, and choices. Bourke et al. (2019) focus on situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers that affect low-income individuals pursuing their education. The *situational barrier* is defined as an individual's circumstances. The *institutional barrier* is defined as how to apply for school and funding. Finally, the dispositional barrier is the psychological factor in the equation. The *dispositional barriers* Black students' experiences that can affect their mindset in continuing their educational journey. According to Bourke et al. (2019) it is essential to factor in those three variants together when dissecting the access and success rates of Black people from poverty-stricken communities.

In addition to the negative situational and institutional barriers Black students from poor communities' face, they often hear the message that they cannot be successful. Black college students often report that they are seen as a threat as to society, as a stereotype persists that Black people – especially those who live in poverty-- are thugs or criminals They may also be seen as a welfare case, or that they are not as bright as the other kids. Sometimes Black students are the object of pity. Rather than providing solidarity and meaningful support, people feel sorry for these poor Black college students. These kinds of experiences can affect Black students' mindset and even lead them to stop pursuing their education and instead focus on the external responsibility of providing for their families.

*Detachment/Marginalization/Mental Health*

Feelings of detachment start forming when society rejects an individual due to its rules and standards. Heimans and Singh (2019) mention that Black college students can feel detached from society as they are marginalized in the institutions around them. This experience of marginalization and detachment can cause students not to seek post-secondary education. When Black students make it into college, they continue to face difficulties due to the stigma attached to their communities. They often realize that their culture is not welcome or accepted, which reinforces feelings of marginalization and promotes severe detachment from the college. When individuals begin feeling this way, one of two things can occur. They might transform and try to be the person society wants them to be. In this case, they might try to abandon all their cultural beliefs and practices to no longer be outsiders. Conversely, they may stay to themselves and disappear in the background. Both outcomes are harmful.

Black students often experience racism and discrimination in post-secondary educational institutions even though it can and often does start sooner. Black students are reportedly more likely to be investigated and punished than any other category of students on campus due to negative stereotypes if they are suspected of any violation on campus (Scott and Allen 2020). In their study, Allen et al. (2018) describe that some individuals do not have the proper relationship with the staff to gain information necessary to help them navigate higher education due to bias and stereotyped treatment. Allen and Jacques (2020) imply that these interactions harm Black students' educational achievement. Black college students may encounter rough interactions from the first day they enter their institutions. They feel they must walk on eggshells most of the time because they do not want to be perceived in a negative way.

If we analyze the college environment, Harris and Linder (2018) describe what a typical person of color would experience in educational institutions. One of the examples used in their study come from Amy, a Black female student. Harris and Linder (2018:149) quoted Amy saying, "the classroom is a constant struggle. Sometimes you really wish that you could just put down your arms and not fight as much, but it does not always go that



way. And then also like I am marginalized in so many areas that it is hard sometimes to keep fighting.” When Black college students must endure this kind of treatment of always having to fight to fit in and accept that can cause detachment and fatigue among Black college students. Harris and Linder (2018:150) delineate that, “David perceived that white student, who did not have to go through life “seeing” or “getting” race, invalidated his views in the classroom simply because they were not their own views or experiences.” When Black college students try to educate them on their cultures and backgrounds, it is shrugged off or deemed invalid.

Black students deal with stigmatizing biases in higher education that derive from stereotypical representations prevalent in the media that link Blackness with threat. This can have a severe impact on their mental health, impacting educational success. Barr and Neville (2014) explore mental health and racial ideology in post-secondary education, finding that the educational system can generate mental health problems for Black students if the environment is hostile or the student has encountered racism or discrimination. This can prohibit Black college students from being engaged if the environment is causing them not to focus and lead to feelings of marginalization. When Black students feel isolated, as described by Harris and Linder (2018), they are also more likely to leave the educational system. They may also carry trauma due to the experiences that were rendered while in college, which can follow them outside of college institutions. Bringing in old stereotypes and dehumanizing Black college students by treating them harshly or making them feel detached thus only causes unnecessary problems for both the student and the college.

This research on Black student belonging suggests that college campuses should be an environment in which Black college students can confidently enter and connect. Space is a significant aspect of this environment and is key to Black college students' success. Chapman-Hillman, Collette, and Beasley (2017) describe that when Black students can have a space they identify with, it can give them a sense of belonging and attachment. It allows them to see and connect to other Black students and can provide a support group during their time at the institution. It also gives them confidence that they can be a

success. Giving space does not mean providing Black college students with an area with little to no resources, but rather it means that their unique needs should be satisfied. Black college student space means having faculty and staff supporting them in designated spaces and throughout institutions of higher education. These spaces are too often unavailable on college campuses, to the detriment of Black student belonging and success.

According to Beasley (2021:241), “Black students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) report higher levels of engagement compared to their same-race peers at PWIs.” Black students are given more support at HBCUs, which encourages attachment to the institutions, peers, and academics. In non-HBCU colleges, Chapman-Hillman, Collette, and Beasley (2017) find that having BSC (Black Studies Courses) assists Black students with developing their identity and attachment to the institutions as they receive their education. Pan-African Studies is an excellent example of BSC because it offers courses to help Black college students identify their roots. Pan-African Studies explains diverse Black experiences, views Black history beyond slavery, differentiates between African and Black American History, and shows why Black people are essential in society. Black students are more able to recognize racial barriers and can use them as motivation to succeed rather than reasons to disengage (Chapman-Hillman, Collette, and Beasley’s 2017). Every campus should have Black Studies and Pan African Studies courses available for Black and non-Black students to learn more about Black cultures. Black students deserve to feel welcome and be able to compete and be successful at their colleges.

## METHODS

Qualitative and semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty participants using the Zoom platform. I used two sampling strategies to attain the data I listed above. First, I utilized the purposive sampling method because I was looking for participants who fit the criteria, I have former and current Black college students. Using the purposive sampling granted me access to the participants needed to gain the data needed to provide a reasonable and formal study. The second sampling strategy method I implemented was convenience sampling. I located the

individuals using my personal and professional networks. Convenience sampling allowed me to select participants who are close to me, which allowed for rich, conversational interviews.

The participants of this study chose the date and time the discussions took place. The earliest was around 10 am, and the latest was around 5 pm. The length of the interviews ranged from 17 minutes to an hour and five minutes, with an average of 40 minutes each. The topics discussed their experiences as Black students attending either a community college or a university. I protected their rights by having them sign a consent form stating the rationale of the interviews and their rights as a participant in this study. I also have their transcript and audio data secured in a OneDrive account with a password that is needed to access the data. Only my Chair and I have access to the participant's information. I used pseudonyms in my reporting to protect the identities of my participants throughout the report.

I analyzed the data by using thematic coding in the Qualitative Data Analysis web-based program, Dedoose. I uploaded the transcripts and inductively coded on themes related to Black students' experiences as they navigated college. This included environmental factors outside the educational institution and factors within higher educational systems. I drew from language used by the participants when developing my thematic codes to stay as true to their perspectives as possible.

My position on the data is personal since I have experienced racism and discrimination in post-secondary education. I understand and can relate to the participants' experience. Because I can relate to them, it makes the interviews richer and more profound since the participants feel they are talking to someone who knows the struggle of what they have experienced. It also allowed them to be more comfortable and open in the interviews. The rationale behind this study was based on my experience as a current Black college student at a post-secondary institution college; the obstacle we must take is unique.

The limitation of this study is that I am not using quantitative methods, so my data is strictly based only on the participant experiences. My sample was a convenience sampling strategy based on 20 participants and thus cannot be generalized to the general population. Time constrictions inhibited the

collection of a bigger, more generalizable sample that includes statistics that confidently reflect the broader population of Black colleges across time in the U.S. Nonetheless, the findings are broadly consistent with previous research on Black students' experiences and outcomes in the U.S. indicating a high level of external reliability.

I chose participants I know who fit the criteria to be part of the project. I conducted phone banking to inform them about the project I am analyzing. I let them know what the interview is about and how they will contribute to the study. I read to them their rights as a participant in the study so they will have the proper knowledge going forward with the interview. I also notified them of the importance of the interview and how it affects Black college students today. My relationship with these individuals made it an easier transition to convince them to participate since I am not a stranger but a friend, former classmate, or co-worker.

## FINDINGS

The study findings stated several factors. I will break down these findings by themes and use the twenty participants' narratives as evidence. Some of the findings that will be discussed are financial issues, racisms, and bias. Every participant had experienced racism and bias in their institutions. Also, students with dependents have had extra barriers versus those who have no children. Homelessness had been experienced by a few participants in their educational journey. Overall, the study findings describe Black college students' hardships by analyzing them as internal to the institutional landscape of higher education or external to it (i.e., community, family, societal factors).

### *Internal Hardships*

Internal hardships are experiences of hardships that Black college students have within their colleges. Some of the findings that were discovered in this area were financial barriers due to not having enough income, which can affect their education. The lack of space for Black college students to identify with or make a connection within their institutions was also discussed by interviewees. While mentorships were identified as a hardship due to Black college students' difficulties in developing meaningful

and beneficial relationships at their educational institution, they were a beneficial factor when mentorship was accessible, attentive, and respectful.

### *Financial Barriers*

Financial barriers were one of the questions asked and many Black college students identify them as a hardship. Since most of my participants come from the lower class, a few from the middle class, and none from the upper class; affording college is expensive, depending on the school you attend. Since many Black college students come from lower class communities, they can run into financial issues. Jerry stated, He had to work two jobs to pay his tuition, and it affected his schoolwork, so he had to quit one to raise his grades. Some Black college students can't find a job on campus, so they must go off campus, which makes it more challenging since work-study is based on your school schedule. An off-the-campus job typically does not consider school schedules and is based on the company needs and not the students. Mark stated, "But when I transferred, I was working off campus and working more hours; however, my coursework was not up to par." Finding work to pay for books and tuition is challenging; financial aid issues have also come up. Susan stated her financial aid would be delayed, and there was no accountability in the office. She would be rushed off, and it cost her an extra semester to graduate because she had to drop a class, she was supposed to take due to insufficient funds. Jae and Jack both had to drop out of school for a semester to get the funds to take courses through focusing on work. Resources need to be shared with every student, and when Black college students do not have access to or lack knowledge of these resources, further assistance should be provided so they will have the proper support in their educational journeys.

### *Mentorship*

When Black students enter a college, traditionally they are to be welcomed, and supposed to feel accepted by their peers, administrations, staff, and faculty. Unfortunately, that does not happen frequently, and most of the Black college students I interviewed stated that mentors were their most prominent

supporters in post-secondary education due to a lack of relationships developed due to negative biases and stereotypes. Mentorships heavily impacted Sarah, and they helped her graduate from her institutions. One of the quotes she stated was, “I had a mentor who was a counselor who was not assigned to me; however, she would go out of her way to assist me in my goals and keep me encouraged when I wanted to leave college.” Her second and most important comment about her mentor was, “She made me feel like I belong at the college and guided me to resources that help me succeed and never judge me or look at me differently because I was Black.” Showing interest in Black college students’ educations can positively impact their educational journey. Mentors are significant to Black students in post-secondary education because they need that prep talk and an extra push to make it through their prospective programs.

These mentors also help them deal with encounters or issues they may face as Black college students. James stated, “I still remember [name of camp counselor] and other counselors that I forgot to name, but I’ll never forget their faces, but they were like our mentors, our coaches, our supporters, and they love us.” His statements describe what every Black college student needs to feel when they enter any institution, regardless of whether it is an HBCU. Every Black college student needs that community and love from their institutions. The few Black college students who did not experience this kind of mentorship in their institutions had to go outside the college to find someone to help them succeed, like Justin, who had his parents to lean on for that mentorship and guidance, or other Black college students who had friends external to college to lean on to deal with some of the issues they would face in college.

### *Lack of Space*

All the participants felt that there was a lack of space with which they could identify. They had to find an area or room to get a sense of belonging. Stacy, Jack, and Fred were all part of a Black Student Union club where they found unity and a support group to lean on during their post-secondary education. Jack stated, “Without BSU, I wouldn’t have graduated because I needed that support from my people.” When I asked my follow-up question

about whether he felt supported by other peers and faculty that did not look like him, he said no. His support strictly came from the advisor of the club and BSU.

Stacy liked the group because it gave her space. She stated, “I would get stares like I do not belong here.” However, BSU made her feel welcome. Space is important to Black college students who need that to feel welcome. The other 17 participants who were not in the BSU had difficulty identifying a space and had encounters with staff and faculty that made them uncomfortable. Mariah stated, “I had a hard time finding resources, and when I would ask someone, they would just brush me off or have an attitude.” George stated, “Black staff was more helpful than non-Black staff and friendlier.” Campuses with a space for Black college students allow them to see themselves as more belonging and able to receive assistance to avoid interactions that can lead to detachment. If Black college students do not have an area they can identify with, their likelihood of dealing with hardship increases. All seventeen participants without the BSU had issues connecting to their college due to a lack of space.

### *External Hardships*

External hardship deals with anything outside of college. Several issues can affect Black college students’ educational journey. Some of the findings are external issues such as Black students who have children or dependents they must care for, because not all students come straight from high school. Family structure and culture was identified as a hardship because many of the participants experienced single parent household. Housing was an issue for a few participants, and it highlighted that Black college students also go through housing hardship. Internal and external racism and bias are also described below in the findings because all participants experience this inside and outside of the college.

### *Black College Students with Dependents*

There have been times when a few of my participants had to leave college to care for family members. Five of the female participants I interviewed have children. Jasmine’s story was very compelling. She stated, “Once I became a mom, I had to neglect

my education in preference for my daughter. So, it wasn't that I did not want to be in school; I had to be home to be a mom." There was no support for dependent students at her college, so she dropped out. The childcare services at her college were too expensive. Henry stated he had to drop out to take off his daughters; however, in his case, he was able to return shortly afterward. These are just a few examples of participants who had external responsibility, and their college needed tools and access to resources to assist them in their situation. Which role these parents adopt plays a critical part in their education because they may have to choose which one is more important; being a full-time parent or a full-time student. Institutions need more resources for parents because Black college students are no longer just 17 or 18 years old. The age demographic is changing from younger to more senior, and the older students and even the younger students have children, and that needs to be considered when serving Black college students.

### *Housing*

Housing was identified as a hardship among my interviewees. If students do not have stable housing, that will affect their grades, basic needs, and other issues caused by homelessness. I had five participants who experienced homelessness during their time in college. Joe stated, "I had to move out of a family member's house because they thought I had money since I was attending college. When I told them no, I do not have all this funding, I was kicked out and stayed in my car for six months while going to school." Housing is critical for Black college students to be able to focus. When I asked these participants did the institution help them in their situations, they said they were just given a piece of paper and rushed out of the office. That is why Meeka stated, "Not just having stability, but just personally to feeling like you're going, you're going through this process by yourself." Housing is an issue for Black college students, especially those with dependents, and there should be resources for these students and support so they can complete their degrees and meet their basic needs requirements.



*Family Structure and Culture*

Black college students' background is crucial to their success because most low-impooverished communities do not promote post-secondary education college-going. Most of these communities define success as completing high school and obtaining some employment to take care of yourself and your loved ones. I asked participants if post-secondary education was promoted in their households. Below are some of the responses and findings.

Eight out of twenty participants had a two-parent household. Five out of the eight participants experienced being in a single parent household due to divorce or separation. Out of twenty participants, only four had parents or siblings who achieved post-secondary success, including an associate or bachelor's degree. Helen had two members in her family with post-secondary degrees. Helen stated, "Having parents who had a master's degrees encourage me to seek my education and show me I can be successful at that level." This statistic is very alarming because most of my participants needed someone to look to when it came to navigating colleges. Most participants had to witness their parents work two jobs and even work themselves to support their parents.

For the four participants who had a relative who had post-secondary education success, it encouraged them to be successful in college. It enables them and many others to attend college and overcome barriers and the other participants. One of the participants, Marquise, stated it was a positive experience for him to see family members being successful, "We hold secondary degrees, and my brother and sister both have master's degrees." Kenneth stated his mother used to tell him he had to go to college. Participants who had previously successful parents typically attended college and finished their degrees.

For those I interviewed who did not have any siblings or parents who achieved a degree in post-secondary education, I am excited to report their parents encouraged them. Some of these participants are the first generation in their families because they took that first step in pursuing their education. Shirley's mom was a single parent who told her to attend college and get a formal education. Jackie said her mom told her to "be the first to graduate

in the family and set the standard.” Because of those encouraging words, Jackie is no longer the only family graduate with a bachelor’s degree. Her brother also has one, and they are grooming their nephews and cousin to follow suites. Vicky stated that she wanted to attend college to experience a different community.

Overall, family culture does impact Black college students’ success in post-secondary due to the influence inside the home and how education is viewed. It can affect what barrier these Black college students will face and how they will respond. Family culture also dictates how they will see the world and others.

Many Black communities are not faring well since most of the participant’s family members have not finished their degrees or have not attempted post-secondary education. The sixteen participants who graduated from college and had no one with previous experience were motivated by the lack of success and were determined to break that barrier. It demonstrates that the educational systems need to get Black people more involved in post-secondary education starting at an early age because not everyone is as fortunate as these participants who encourage education in their household.

#### *External And Internal Hardships Related to Bias and Racism*

Unfortunately, racism and bias exist in the educational system. For Black college students this experience is not new. Eighteen out of twenty participants in this study reported experiencing racism or prejudices from staff, faculty, and peers. Brianna shared a story with me that she was going by a sorority table and asked how she joined. The non-Black group told her they were full. When she was walking away, she heard them say, “why Black girls wanted to join us. They need to stay in their lane.” There was another incident where a white athlete assaulted her, and because of his status, she did not report it because she felt no one would believe her. When I asked why she did not want to tell anyone, she just stated, “I don’t trust the system here because a friend of hers who is white experienced the same thing and was denied justice. I am Black, so what chances do I have?” Because

of this terrible experience after she graduated, she refuses to step foot on the campus and wishes she had just attended an HBCU.

Leslie shared that on her campus, she was called a “Nigga,” and she did not belong there. Raymond shared that when he heard about his universities, he encountered the KKK. He stated that they call him a Nigga and threaten his life. When he told the administration, they did not act upon it immediately until he had it printed in the school newspaper. There are many incidents that occurred on college campuses that are not reported due to Black college students’ distrust within the college system. They do not believe either the perpetrator or the college will take their complaint seriously.

The last two examples delineate heavy biases when Black college students deal with staff or faculty, starting with Johnny. Johnny’s experiences with instructors could have been better in his institutions. He stated a teacher was grading bias because he was Black. When I asked a follow-up about why, he just said the teacher would never talk to him like he does the other students. When Johnny comes by during office hours, he would never be there or says he is busy. His tone with Johnny was like he was afraid of him. He had to retake the course because he felt he would not pass with how the teacher was acting toward him. Finally, my last example is with Angela, who detailed how she walked into the financial aid office and stated she had an issue with her financial aid status. The elderly white lady told her, “You people always have these issues” smartly. Angela asked what she meant by “you people,” so she pointed to the room that was dominated by Black. A Black employee stood there looking shocked, so he helps instead.

Overall, Black college students report dealing with these issues daily from entering college until leaving. Biases and racism can be untaught by having mandatory diversity training and having employees who understand the demographic they are working with, especially instructors. Those three Black students’ stories describe an insight into what they must endure in the UC and CSU system.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, Black college students have experienced internal and external hardships affecting their educational journey. The findings display that financial hardship was a significant problem for Black college students. Heimans and Sing (2019) found basic needs were an issue and this study also confirms this as a factor as most of the participants experienced some basic need insecurity as an external factor. Ten of the participants had to gain employment to support their families. The primary rationale behind this is that fifteen participants had experienced the single parent family structure, with only one being a single father.

The income in these families has created external barriers for Black college students because they must work and depend on a scholarship or financial aid. When these students have external issues, it can lead to internal economic problems. A few participants had to drop out because they needed help to keep up with their tuition. There are cases where if a Black college student must depend on financial aid and employment, they will not be a hundred percent focused on their academics if they must work and do schoolwork. Some participants found that quite challenging to do and had a challenging time handling both. One of the concerns from these interviews is that colleges need to figure out how to support Black college students who have financial issues coming into their colleges. Are there enough resources or scholarships offered for them to participate in? Do the scholarships, if any are offered, help them in their educational journey? These concerns and issues can and will affect Black college students attending or intending to attend any UC or CSU institutions.

Black students with dependents face an additional layer to external hardship. The barriers that single mothers face is twice as problematic compared to someone who does not have children. Their external responsibility will affect their educational responsibility if they do not have a support system. Mammen and Woodford (2010) describe single mothers with children. The most challenging road to success is dealing with role conflict. Will they be full-time students and focus on their studies or be full mothers and put all their energy into raising their children? Being a mother or father is a job that does not turn off because you have an assignment due. Also, they are Black college students, who are

often labeled and treated as irresponsible and looked down upon. There is a lack of support for Black college students with dependents due to the culture colleges are used to. When these types of students are entering college, then additional resources are needed to assist them. When a Black college student with a dependent cannot get the proper help due to the college not having the necessary resources for them to be successful, that creates an additional barrier for that student. It will become an internal issue due to a lack of support from their institutions.

College culture should always try to avoid racism, and bias; however, it still occurs and heavily impacts Black college students' educational journeys. The old ideology still exist that Black individuals are to be feared, which triggers certain behaviors from non-Black peers like clutching their purse and becoming suspicious when they see a lot of Black students around, assuming Black students are uneducated due to the community they come from and the class they are associated with. Allen et al. (2018) describes that due to racism and bias, they cannot form the relationships needed.

Furthermore, this can cause serious mental health issues if Black college students endure constant discriminatory treatment constantly. Barr and Neville (2014) delineate that when Black college students encounter hostile situations, frequently, it can cause them to perceive other non-Black individuals as unapproachable due to these experiences. It may cause them to react positively or negatively depending on the situation. There is a folktale saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" – however, words hurt, especially if they are racially or biased motivated. It can cause Black college students to be mentally broken down and unable to focus academically.

Colleges need to implement mandatory diversity training to prepare their staff better when dealing with Black college students and to be aware of triggers that can cause mental issues. The training should be limited to staff and students. They come from various parts of the world, and for most students, it is their first time dealing with another ethnicity in this environment. Training is critical for everyone, especially in today's critical state where Black people's image is painted as violent when they are

just trying to find a path to have the same opportunities for success as anyone else.

Black college students want to feel they belong to their institutions. They want to think that they are on a non-judgmental campus where they can be themselves and be accepted for who they are. Unfortunately, that is not happening, and it goes deeper than having money, what class students are in, or even how they are approached by staff, faculty, teacher, and their peers. The primary problem at colleges resides internal to institutions of higher education themselves. When colleges decide to prioritize Black college students, the detachment they are faced with constantly will change. This will in turn improve mental health, which is likely to positively affect students' educational experiences and outcomes.

This research suggests several steps that colleges can take to better integrate Black students into a sense of communal belonging. They should have a dedicated space for Black college students and not just give them an empty room. A more vigorous effort in placing resources in their area would be a significant improvement and having someone there to answer questions and address their concerns. Hillman and Beasley's (2017) research states that having a space for Black college students can increase their chances. The colleges must make a more substantial effort to connect them to the community. Training is critical for everyone, especially in today's critical state where Black people's image is painted as violent when they are just trying to find a path to have the same opportunities for success as anyone else. Also, I recommend that universities dedicate mentors to guide Black students, especially in a heavily Hispanic or white college, since the percentage of Black students at any college that is not an HBCU is generally remarkably low.

Many of my participants have been in classes where they are the only Black student. The ratio of seeing another Black student decreases when a Black college student attends a non-HBCU institutions, so any non-Black traditional colleges need to make a better effort in making Black college students connected to their colleges, since there is only a small percentage of them in attendance at these colleges. The recruiting strategy needs to be reviewed due to the percentage of Black people in post-secondary

education. inferior quality educations, and the resource for college is rarely promoted to our Black generations. These Black college students want a chance to improve their lives, and these stereotypes and biases must stop starting from administration to their peers.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, Black College students are a unique population and need specific resources to succeed in post-secondary education. The study suggests that more funding opportunities for them are necessary, so they do not have to leave school because of financial rationale. Also, connecting them to mentors right away will assist Black college students to not feel detachment from the school. They will have someone who can relate to them and guide them. Having resources for Black college students who have children is crucial. We have grown-ups and older people who are attending college now. The culture of having all resources dedicated to younger college students must change significantly for those with dependents so they can continue their education without having to deal with role conflicts.

Increasing diversity training and adding students to that training would be extremely helpful, so all students know how to deal with diverse cultures. White colleges especially need to focus on staff, who must remember that thousands of students come to institutions from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Cultures will clash, and conflict will arrive shortly after, unless students know how to deal with various kinds of people, especially Black college students. Knowledge of another culture should not be based on just the media and social outlets.

Colleges should offer more Black Studies Courses for students and staff to take so they can learn more about Black student cultures and where they come from. I would recommend that all college institutions make it mandatory for all students to take a Pan-African Study class. It will help non-Black students learn something more about Black college student history than just slavery. For Black college students, it would show them where they come from, as ancestors of kings and queens. They will be able to relate to their Blackness more in-depth and feel more comfortable in their institutions. This will help interactions with

Black students overall and hopefully provide more positive than negative interactions.

Black college students should be offered a space by their institutions that is worthy of their rich history and accomplishment. Black college students need to see an area that looks like them and is created just for them, not just an empty room with chairs and tables. Have a special welcome for them, especially if you have a small percentage of Black people at the college. As stated previously, most of my participants have been the only Black student in a class, so the chances of them seeing another Black person in class is very unlikely. It can be extremely uncomfortable going into a heavily Hispanic or white department. Diversity is needed across the board at the college level for students to feel comfortable, especially Black students. Having Black college students comfortable in college is not complicated. The formula is simple: treat them with the proper respect and assist them in their educational journey so they can succeed.

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**Managing Alone: Single Parenthood and Silver Linings in the Time of COVID-19**

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken the world by storm. It has been a hundred years since a pandemic of this scale – of devastation and interference – has struck the global community with expansive social, economic, political, and cultural ramifications. Despite the medical and technological advancements of our time, the COVID-19 pandemic has immobilized modern society in unprecedented ways. There was no viable cure when it first struck, healthcare systems were on the brink of exhaustion, death toll skyrocketed, widespread closures amassed, and supply-chain scarcities marked the first months of the pandemic. We are still grappling with the implications of this moment in history.

My study focuses on the implications of the pandemic on single parents, arguably an understudied demographic group. My findings, based on 5 in-depth interviews with single parents suggest that the pandemic has been a double-edged sword – on the one hand, it has pushed single parents to the brink as they juggled rigorous parenting duties while shouldering work responsibilities. Yet, surprisingly on the other hand, single parents also found priceless moments of time that brought forth joy in those uninterrupted moments spent together with their children. The government’s assistance schemes (e.g., expanding EBT, rent moratorium, hot school packed lunches) that were put into effect in the first months of the pandemic sustained them through the worst forms of precarity.

This study, based on a feminist lens, contributes to the sociological scholarship on families in significant ways as it examines the micro-dynamics of everyday life in single-parent households during an unprecedented global crisis. The demographic group (single parents in California) as well as the context (COVID-19 pandemic) lend sociological credence to this article for several interrelated reasons. First, the U.S. has the

highest rates of single parent households in the world (Kramer 2019) wherein a quarter of U.S. children under the age of 18 live with one parent. Additionally, women outnumber men as single parents. A Pew study estimates that 9% of women between the ages of 35-59 years live as single parents (Kramer 2019); this is four times the rate at which men of the same group live as single parents. Yet, even as studies depicting everyday lives between families and children are emerging, they disproportionately focus on two-parent households.

Second, existing sociological scholarship on families has shown that single parents often create and rely on a network of extended kin and community (that includes friends and neighbors) to augment everyday needs of childcare. Brewster and Padavic (2002) found that, *“Mothers with fewer social and economic resources of their own—those who were single, less educated, or very young—were significantly more likely than other mothers to use relatives for childcare.”* The pandemic often closed these communities off limiting the very support and childcare that single parents once relied on. Given these circumstances, it becomes necessary to investigate the challenges experienced by single parents at this historic juncture. In addition to contributing to the sociological literature on families, this study fills the gap in mainstream news reporting on families which overwhelmingly depicts stereotypical family arrangements –comprising of two parents and children living in a household. My long-term hope for this study is that in the future it will generate awareness and provide insights for social policies related to single parents in times of crises and otherwise.

## CONTEXT

*“COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and rapidly spread to all parts of the globe, earning the title of a pandemic and changing the modus operandi of all segments of society”* (Almeida, et.al 2020). While the world remained unaware, patients with cases of severe pneumonia or upper respiratory illness began presenting themselves at the hospitals in Wuhan, China. By the end of the month, the world confronted a highly infectious variant of coronavirus that was impacting Wuhan, China. *“The outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 was*

*considered to have originally started via a zoonotic transmission associated with the seafood market in Wuhan, China. Later it was recognized that human to human transmission played a major role in the subsequent outbreak” (Yuki, Fujiogi and Koutsogiannaki 2020).*

Within two months, on January 31, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a global health emergency. Soon thereafter, WHO, declared the novel coronavirus as a pandemic setting the stage for sweeping changes all over the world. As of May 2022, 6,210,719 people had succumbed to the virus. The United States reported, *“COVID-19 has been impacting many people worldwide, being reported in approximately 200 countries and territories. As of April 7th, 2020, around 1,400,000 cases worldwide have been reported according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University”* (Yuki, Fujiogi and Koutsogiannaki 2020).

This wasn't the first time where humans experienced a pandemic, and it won't be the last. The Spanish Flu of 1918 is often compared with the COVID-19 pandemic for the extent of disruptions that it caused. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) statistical data,

*The Spanish Flu of 1918, was one of the deadliest outbreaks in the last century. It is estimated that about 500 million people or one-third of the world's population became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide with about 675,000 occurring in the United States.*

Despite the surface similarities and high death toll, the Spanish Flu occurred a century ago and therefore is not a living memory for the majority who populate the world today. Yet, the precautions taken in that historical period are reminiscent of the ones that this current pandemic brought forth (such as closures of businesses and schools as well as social distancing protocols).

In March 2020, our whole world changed overnight. The COVID-19 pandemic manifested in ways that were unforeseen and unpredicted. Many countries shut down their daily operations; businesses, schools, recreation, and all other places that were deemed “non-essential” were shut down. Supply chain disruptions

caused further panic. The fear of running out of an essential product led to excessive hoarding where stores couldn't fulfill the needs of the public.

*As consumers play a key role in food supply chain, changes in consumer behavior strongly affected the food supply chain. COVID-19 outbreak caused a significant rise in food price related to lockdown restrictions accompanied by panic buying, as well as supply chain disruptions.*

(Aday and Aday 2020)

There was a unique and unforeseen phase in the pandemic where people were hoarding toilet paper. For a long period of time, disinfectants, hand sanitizers, disposable cloths, masks, gloves, and even baking yeast among other items were unavailable and if they were—only one per customer could be purchased. Food items also became scarce on the shelves. In the early days of the first shutdown, The New York Times (2020) reported, *“They grabbed milk and aspirin, paper towels and spaghetti. Cans of soup and bottles of laundry detergent. Olive oil and sanitizing wipes. With futures suddenly thrust into the unknown, they did what felt reassuring: panic shop.”* Consumers experienced long wait times to purchase goods, which wound around parking lots. Banker (2021) wrote, *“during the early months of the pandemic, demand planning error jumped to 59%, up 14% from the pre-pandemic error rate of 45% as companies could not accurately forecast demand in this unprecedented time.”* Many compared the lack of food and goods to the Great Depression of 1929.

In the United States, the first state to experience full shutdown was California and this occurred in March, 19, 2020—making the Californian population remain at home due to this mandate. It is in this social context of elevated fear, scarcities, and social distancing that single parents found themselves “managing alone” while balancing childcare with work.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Scholarship on Single Parenthood (Pre-COVID)*

Single parents refer to a parent – a mother or a father - living without a co-parent and with their dependent children. Circumstances that bring on single parenting can be due to

separation, death, divorce. With the growth of reproductive technologies (IVF, surrogacy etc.) women have also made the choice to have children regardless of being in a relationship. *“In the US, there are more than 11 million single-parent families with young children that are younger than 18-years-old. Single moms make up just over 80% of single-parent homes”* (Pace 2021).

*Mother-only families have become increasingly common during the past three decades.’ Whereas in 1960 only about 9% of families with children in the United States were headed by nonmarried women, by 1985 the number was over 2007 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960, 1961, 1988). (McLanahan and Booth 1989)*

While a taboo in the past, as compared to today, being a single parent is becoming more common. This is in part due to the women’s rights movement and the sexual revolution that introduced sweeping changes in society. However, scholarship shows that *“individuals serving as a single parent for their family may experience more stressors than those who co-parent their family including poor finances, reduced social support, and higher rates of depression”* (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine 2003).

The first challenge is the absence of the other parent to share in parenting and childcare. Raising children can be quite stressful, even if it is a meaningful responsibility, and stressors multiply when one is forced to manage them alone. Factors that contribute to chronic stress and mental health issues among single mothers are numerous and include a lack of financial resources, challenges with job stability, issues with health insurance, stress in the home, and increased instances of experiencing or witnessing domestic violence (Broussard 2010).

The second challenge are finances; scholarship shows occupation sex segregation and gendered differentials in income and wealth coupled exposes the financial fragility that households with single mother’s experience (as noted before, 80% of single parents are women). Pressman (2003) argues the complication that holds with having a lone earner is that they become vulnerable to financial shifts, various obstacles such as being laid off from work, getting sick, getting reduced hours due to an economics low

down. Previous research (Augustijn 2022) has repeatedly shown that separation or divorce can lead to a substantial decline in economic resources, and that it is mostly mothers who suffer from the severe economic consequences.

Thus, the household is more than likely to wind up in poverty due to these circumstances. The emotional strain of struggling with finances takes further toll on the family (Kotwal and Prabhakar 2009). Though there is public assistance it should be noted that it is hard to come by, public benefits can be denied, and there are delayed wait times in receiving the actual assistance. As a result, many single parents also deal with poverty and food insecurity.

*Food insecurity, broadly defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a lack of “enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members,” generally rises and falls with changes in the economy but has fluctuated between 10 percent and 15 percent since the USDA began tracking it in the early 1990s.”*  
(Coleman-Jensen et al. 2020)

Food insecurity amongst single parent households is already a challenge due to it being a single income household. On the downside, parents may also have to navigate an unhealthy relationship with the other parent. This relationship might manifest onto the child(ren) as well and can create a hostile environment where the child(ren) finds it hard to “choose” between parents due to their own parents' strained relationship and so forth. The relationship amongst parents may be strained due to previous physical and emotional domestic abuse and there may be certain restrictions set in place by a high level of authority—such as a court order. The other parent may have a court order that restricts them from seeing their child(ren) and can place another added challenge that the family may experience. On the upside, there are parents who work together and co-parent effectively.

### *Challenges of Single Parenthood (COVID-19)*

The pandemic affected *everyone* as was often repeated in the media through the popular slogan, “We are all in this together.” However, the extent may have varied depending on

factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, class, race, occupation, and country of residence (to name a few). As this paper will show, the pandemic has brought forth a new set of challenges for single parents. It affected each corner of their lives and continues to impact them negatively and, in some cases, positively. In the following paragraphs, I detail the nascent literature that has described the many ways in which the pandemic has affected single parents and the new set of challenges and hardships that they have faced.

### *Financial Hardships*

Businesses, schools, recreation, and all other places that were considered “non-essential” were forced to shut down. The shutdown placed a financial burden on employees. With having to stay home, many individuals were out of employment. A percentage of the population included single parents. The unexpected loss of income and not having any funds to cover expenses is a tremendous hardship for the family. Even before the pandemic, solo parents were experiencing challenges, said Juliana Horowitz, an associate director of research at Pew Research Center. She noted that Pew’s research shows a quarter of solo parents living in poverty; that number was even higher, 30 percent (Bowen 2020), for single moms.

*Vulnerable communities face significant risks in times of COVID-19. Communities with deeply entrenched poverty, overcrowded housing, and limited employment flexibility (e.g., communities where individuals are unable to work from home, miss a day of work, or face long and crowded commutes), face greater immediate risk of COVID-19. (Fisher et.al, 2020)*

Financial hardships such as losing a home and/or becoming houseless changes lives. The impact that this would have on the family is tremendous. Not only would the loss of a home impact on the family, in a physical sense, the loss of comfort of a safe space is removed. This would not only affect the parent but the child(ren) as well. Another factor in experiencing financial hardship is food insecurity. Not knowing where to locate emergency social services and/or the accessibility of food is



something that the parent confronts. There is often shame brought forth in seeking these types of services and can have the parent feeling a wave of helplessness that may affect the family as well.

### *Childcare*

Another challenge that many single parents faced were school closures. School-aged children attending school in the traditional setting (in person) were restricted to staying at home and processing their daily schoolwork via virtual learning. Their mode of operation for learning was having a teacher instruct a classroom via the computer. Teachers and educators used different modes of learning, and many used the video application, Zoom, to communicate with students. This may or may not have taken a toll on the student. Considering issues regarding connectivity i.e., a stable internet connection, could be classified as a barrier to the student in effective learning.

Another foreseen drawback is if the student may have had difficulty in learning in this new virtual setting as opposed to their usual mode of learning. The challenge here would be if the student could or could not thrive in this learning space and if they were able to manage their schoolwork. *“Communication is essential for any task, and due to the lockdown, communication through technology has replaced face to face interactions. It has its own limitations”* (Debbarma & Durai 2021). Communication is key in transmitting the information that is imperative in learning and flourishing as a student.

The limitation with online learning is not having that “face to face” interaction that a student is typically used to in a traditional school setting. *“During the lockdown, children and adolescents were experiencing physical isolation from their classmates, friends, teachers, and other important adults (e.g., grandparents) leading to further emotional stressors”* (Luijten et.al, 2021). With the issue of virtual learning occurring in the same household environment as the parent, working from home also became an issue for both parties to work effectively. Moreover, having a parent considered an “essential” employee—one that must work at an institution or establishment that cannot be shut down, can pose a concern for childcare.

*Co-parenting*

The issue of co-parenting is a major concern for many single parents. The issues of child custody are always relevant and may be cumbersome for parents to deal with especially if the other parent is “difficult” and there may not be a harmonious agreement between parents. The pandemic may pose several challenges for co-parenting. If one parent falls ill the other parent may have to take on the full load of parenting due to the other quarantining and not being able to see the child(ren). The other factor is that the other parent may not even be in the picture and not have any responsibilities shared. An added difficulty is if there is child custody in place. The courthouses, being considered an essential establishment in the pandemic, may have only a small window of operating hours and/or communication was limited. Thus, arranging any modifications to a court order could be incommodious and sometimes not possible due to their constricting hours of operation. Considering if there was a violation of court order, an enforcing institution such as a police department, was available for the public and parents could seek aid if there was cause for any type of court order violation or case of domestic dispute amongst parents.

*Mental health children and families in the United States have suffered greatly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. School shutdowns, unprecedented job loss, and the grief and loss related to COVID-19 deaths have highlighted the mental health and financial needs of parents—particularly single parents. (Shipe, Ayer and Guastafarro 2022)*

The social distancing and restrictions may impede single parents from reaching out to others “face to face” for companionship and/or support. All the issues together pose a risk for a single parent to suffer from depression, anxiety, and distress.

*With so many people forced to conduct paid work from home—and with so many social services like childcare and public schools that are essential to people’s ability to work shut down—the*

*pandemic has stretched family to a breaking point.* (Hertz, Mattes, Shook, 2020)

This accumulation of these issues coming together at such a vulnerable time in a parent's life can stress the family out and make them reach their breaking point.

## METHODOLOGY & DATA

### *Data Collection*

This study examines 5 in-depth interviews with women who also identify as single parents living in California. The term single (alternatively, sole) parent refers to a parent who may be divorced, separated, widowed, single, never married, or not living with a partner. The study was reviewed, approved, and granted "exempt" status by the CSULA IRB and conducted during academic year 2021-22.

To recruit participants, I posted fliers on social media sites (e.g., primarily through Facebook) to recruit my participants. I posted the flyer on Facebook in a specialized group that included nearby neighbors in the city of which I live in. I also posted this flyer on two other university school pages and lastly on a single parents Facebook page. The fliers contained my contact information so that potential participants could contact me if they were interested in the study.

Over four months, I received over ten email messages from individuals who wanted to take part in the study. Ultimately, only five of the ten followed through with an interview. Based on the recruitment parameters, all participants identified as currently "single" parents and had at least one child living with them. I used Zoom to conduct my interviews for several reasons. First, on account of the pandemic, zoom was the safest option to get together. Second, the ability to conduct interviews from comfort of homes would be especially important to my participants who were singularly juggling childcare and busy work schedules. For example, even during the interview the hum of everyday life and parenting was happening in the background. I could hear mothers instructing their children to take a bath or get ready for bed.

If a participant did not have access to a computer or internet access, I was prepared to offer the interview via a mobile device—such as a telephone call. I should add that all participants were

able to connect via zoom. Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes and were, with the consent of the participant, recorded. I decided to use interviews as a method to elicit in-depth stories that spoke of their unique experiences/ familial situation and the pandemic. I transcribed each interview and coded them thematically to arrive at my findings.

### *Participant Characteristics*

All the participants for this study identified as women i.e., Karina, Lizette, Jennifer, Crystal, and Annie (names altered per IRB). I did not specifically seek single mothers as I understand that there are single fathers out there as well. However, as data shows—most single parents are mothers. Even though 3 single fathers had initially responded to my flyer, none followed through despite multiple emails from me. All the participants were women of color – four of them identified themselves as Latinas and one as Black. All of them had sought higher education with three completing a bachelor’s degree. Their income range varied. Crystal \$125,000/annually and was arguably an outlier as the rest made between \$24,000 – 50,000 annually. At least two worked more than one job. Their ages ranged between early 30s and early 40s years. Two of the mothers had only one child, while three of the participants had 2-3 children. All the children were minors, lived with their mothers, and their ages ranged between 4-14 years of age.

Further, all participants self-identified as “single” parents. All women had been in heterosexual relationships before its dissolution. Four of the participants had separated before the pandemic. Only one of them (Annie) separated and started the divorce process at the beginning of the pandemic. In Annie’s case, as related by her, the domestic violence she had endured before the pandemic had escalated during the pandemic and during the pandemic the children were also becoming victims of abuse. In fact, Annie made the decision to separate when her ex-husband physically abused her son. As I discuss in the next section in more detail, all participants were solely responsible for the care of children and for most of them their ex-partners were not invested in childcare. Two ex-partners reported active restraining orders against them due to a history of violence. The data provided for

the pieces of information and taking a “closer” look at the lives of these single parents provided a foundation for further analysis into their very own hardships and struggles.

### *Managing Alone as Single Mothers*

All my participants said that the fathers of their children were mostly absent from their lives. None of the fathers made financial contributions and the few that met their children did so rarely. Crystal mentioned that even when they were together, she essentially operated as a single parent and divorce just solidified that responsibility. She said, “*sometimes even when you're married, you select you're single anyways, I just want to make that a point that women do a significant amount of work in the household. And so, it's just hard either way.*” Karina said that her son’s father wasn’t majorly involved in his everyday activities as she was. He would visit when it suited him. For all intents and purposes, she was the only parent who held the sole responsibility for her son.

Lizette and Jennifer reported that their ex-partners were both incarcerated during much of the pandemic, but their substance dependence meant that they didn’t contribute even when they had been together. In Jennifer’s case, it has always been an uphill battle when it came to the inconsistency that her ex-partner provided for her and her child. Lizette’s ex-partner was released for a short while before being incarcerated again. Annie and Crystal reported that the fathers of their children had a current restraining order on file. They were both survivors of domestic violence. Even though the fathers saw their children for supervised visits according to the court’s child custody order, there was no shared parenting relationship due to restraining orders. Annie said,

*So, when we separated, um, we had that domestic violence situation. And so immediately, I had a restraining order put in place. And I still Okay, now I know that people are most likely going to relapse multiple times before they could get sober, you know. So, I decided to stick around with him for two years. It was on and off, he would get clean, then he would relapse...When he*

*was clean, everything was fine...but I can't have a part time husband or father figure for my son, you know. He had gotten released from the state facility. So, whenever he came out, he had to go live with his sister. He couldn't...he didn't have the resources to support or share custody, buying food for the kids. He didn't even have a job. I have a restraining order in place till this day. And within that restraining order, it gave me executive control over the children with their persons, their medical, so I am their number one caregiver and in the eyes of the law and just in general. But I also want to preface this by saying, even when I was married, I was basically doing all the work anyways. So, I was already doing everything.*

Clearly, the participants are the sole caregivers and the household's only breadwinners. Going through the challenge of living through a historic pandemic—or not—they report that they were always there for their children. They couldn't depend on or even place the father of their children in consideration in their children's lives. This is due to the constant inconsistency that they experienced even when they were together, as a couple, at some point in their lives. Managing alone is a recurring theme with all these participants and it is clear that they carry the tremendous responsibility of playing all these roles simultaneously to provide a quality of life for their child(ren).

### *Positionality*

Like my participants, I identify as a single mother. I am also the sole caretaker of two school-aged children—aged twelve and seven years old. As an “essential worker,” I was required to go into work even as my children were home due to school closures. I was fortunate to have my mother close by to rely on. She looks after my children while I am away. But that came with its own challenges, I had daily contact with the public and feared contracting the virus and bringing it back to my family. My mother is immunocompromised, and I constantly feared for her well-being. Unlike my participants, I was also fortunate enough to have developed a healthy co-parenting relationship with my ex-

partner. Since he was able to work from home, he would often come by to my house and assist our children with online learning. He also had a computer desk set up for our children when they would visit him at his home. I was acutely aware that I was extremely fortunate in this regard, and this was not the case for most of my participants yet the shared realities between myself and my participants forged a rapport and intimacy that would have been harder to achieve had I been an “outsider.” If I had been an outsider, I wouldn’t have gained my participant’s trust so easily. It is difficult to open to someone, let alone talk about hardships and challenges that one goes through. If I claimed to be single with no children, I wouldn’t have a commonality to share with them. They would have possibly not wanted to be emotionally open to me and might have withheld information if that were the case. All in all, as single parents, we shared a deep knowledge and empathy for each other’s challenges. At the end of the interviews, they added that they were grateful to have participated in this research study and claimed it to be a form of therapy and felt that they were “seen” and “heard”. Thus, my own personal history, common and shared stories of challenges and resilience aided in gaining my participant’s trust and confidence.

## FINDINGS

My findings suggest that single parents experienced the pandemic as a double-edged sword – on the one hand, it pushed single parents to the brink as they “managed alone” the intensive tasks of parenting while shouldering work responsibilities. Yet, surprisingly, they found moments of joy in otherwise trying times due to uninterrupted time spent with their children.

### *Managing Alone and Pushed to the Brink*

The single mothers I interviewed were pushed to the brink during the early months of the pandemic as school closures weighed heavily on the mothers as a “new” expectation of round-the-clock parenting without breaks added to already existing challenges that single mothers endured while keeping a balance on work and life. As Karina noted, “*For one if you're single, right, so you cannot rely on your partner late at night or in the morning, it's kind of you... kind of just have to keep on going without*

*hesitating or, or even have a time to complain, because at the same time, you're so busy trying to get things moving, like taking your child to school, to the doctor, to providing food on the table, that it has been very challenging... there is just no time."*

Due to fear of spreading and contracting the virus, they further isolated themselves from others. While in the past they had the support of their mothers and friends to step in, the pandemic took that away from them. With no one to fall back on, Lizette summarized and said, *"There's no time I can't even be sick, because if I'm sick every ship will sink!"*

Since schools and childcare centers were shut down due to the lockdown, it became a hardship for those parents that had to still go to work "in person" and leave their children at home. With no one to turn to, some like Lizette left her children – who were of "legal age" –home alone as she went to work. But she worried about them nonstop. She said, *"Without anyone to watch over them, there is no one to even make sure they wake up for school on time."* Some others like Crystal, who jobs to find one where she could take her youngest with her. Ultimately, she took a job at a daycare to be able to take her youngest son with her. She said she worked in a school district, took her children with her when she went to work. Annie had to change professions—she notes the following:

*I reached out to this school that had daycare. They have special programs for low-income families, like you know... So, I went in there looking for daycare, and they offered me a job, because I said I need a job. So, I had to stop looking out for things in my field, you know, office, clerical stuff—to changing diapers and potty training and all that just so that I could be close to Kayden so that I can obtain childcare.*

It was not a job Annie wanted. She did not want to *"clean poopie diapers all day,"* but she settled for the sake of her son. All in all, the feature of childcare has always been an issue with or without the pandemic taking place, but the pandemic took away the few support systems that my participants had previously relied on.

Virtual schooling added another layer of stress. All the participants wanted to make sure that their children did great in



school. They often reported checking their work and rearranging their work schedules and/or meetings to accommodate their children. In addition to it all participants reported being stressed, due to the pandemic, and the uncertainty of everything occurring around them. Parents were often responsible for facilitating the education of their children during the pandemic. As one participant said, *“They call us the parent coaches...I have to help him with doing the homework, experiments, reading and I have to check everything before he submits. So, in addition to everything else I’m basically his teacher at home.”*

Single mothers also feared for the welfare of their children. They worried what would happen to their children if they had COVID and were hospitalized or worse. Fear was a constant that would further isolate them from others. Annie, for example stated the following, *“We would go outside for a little while, but it was always that little fear, like, the uncertainty of like, is it okay, is it not?”* Moreover, the losses they experienced during the pandemic made it harder. Two of the participants (Lizette and Crystal) lost their own mothers during the pandemic leading to tremendous emotional turmoil. Scholarship has shown the important roles grandmothers typically play in low-income and/or single-parent families to supplement childcare (George and Dickerson 1995). The women in this study had also relied on their mothers on occasion before so their mothers’ loss left yet another gap in their lives. During the interview, all the women reflected on the pain and loss, yet not being able to find time or space to properly grieve losses. They felt stretched thin. Annie’s words put that in perspective. Annie who had just left a violent marriage knew she needed therapy, but she said,

*The kids are going through therapy, right? You know, every, every Tuesday they get therapy. They offered me help as well. I said no at the time, they are priority right now. I still have a lot of a lot going on. And I go to work, I come home, I have to cook, I have to do homework, I have to give showers. When do I even have time to do therapy? during my lunch break? So, I don't have time for school, I don't have time for therapy*

*sessions. I know, they will probably benefit me a lot, but I don't have time.*

Having to manage alone in this pandemic and life overall wasn't enough for these participants— their quality of life was at a standstill or to place it in a literal sense—they felt defeated. They were all “burnt” out in having to just exist in their child(ren)’s lives and having to constantly juggle everything all at once without having to drop anything because everything, each role, was just as important. They constantly had to manage the ever-changing climate of their surroundings and had to adhere to these special circumstances that made life cumbersome for them. They expressed a tiresome tone in their interviews. They felt like they needed a “break” from it all but when was that going to happen?

*“Silver Linings” while Managing Alone*

Despite the struggles and hardships that the participants faced, it was surprising to hear that they felt the pandemic had its silver linings for them. All of them claimed that they were able to spend more time with their children and that it was a blessing in disguise. They experienced this quality time that they had not experienced “pre-pandemic.” There was time “saved” in not having to get ready and the time it took to travel from point A to B was just a walk to the living room to start work or school. They created this special bond with their children. They felt they were more than just parents—they were their teachers now. While this was sometimes overwhelming, as noted above, they also got a chance to be involved more with their children’s schoolwork and academics, which was meaningful.

All, except for Crystal, had dealt with severe financial strain before the pandemic but things shifted after the pandemic. As Karina said, *“Financially, it is challenging, because I’ve always worked two or three jobs in order to maintain a healthy financial status for me.”* In fact, their finances were less impacted by the pandemic and most continued to work where they had worked before. Ironically, for some, the pandemic offered more hours at work and therefore, more money. Jennifer reported that she was offered more overtime which added more income to the family. She stated the following, *“In my field, I feel like we’re always going to be...considered essential. So workwise, it didn’t*

*really affect me...we were getting more hours...it was even a better working schedule for me.”* However, this came with the possibility of exposure which constantly worried them. She related the extra time she would spend sanitizing her workplace to keep herself safe.

Government assistance programs during pandemic further added to their financial stability. However, they all reported that they qualified for the EBT card and were able to purchase groceries to help sustain their families. The “free lunch” pickup feature at school was another feature that helped them. Even Crystal, who makes \$125,000 annually, qualified for the EBT card because of her children’s school district in a low-income neighborhood. Lizette said,

*We were fortunate, their school district without us even knowing they applied for a grant. So, what they did is that if your children received free lunch, and all the kids get free lunch here in the district, they don’t have to pay for lunch. Pretty much everybody got it...They would do curbside meals. So, the cafeteria would supply breakfast and lunch...my kids didn’t have a way to get there when I was at work...They got a food benefit card...That helped tremendously.*

Further, Child Tax Credit programs helped them create some savings. Under the American Rescue Plan, parents were eligible to receive an increased child tax credit, if they were caring for a child in the household. The monthly child tax credit was \$250 per child. This occurred from the time of July through December 2021. Annie had fared the worst amongst all. She had just begun the process of separation when the pandemic started. Upon separation, she had to find employment and a place to live with her children. Her ex-spouse refused to provide support in any form and even kept the money received from Child Tax Credit programs. She worked multiple jobs to stay afloat and relied on social services (e.g., EBT, Section 8 Housing, Church, and domestic violence shelters) to get her back onto her feet and provide a type of security for her and her children. Annie would spend hours and days trying to ensure that she and her children had basic amenities. Yet, she felt that the pandemic also saved her

and her children, because pandemic related assistance programs helped her out:

*I'm under a program where they're helping me with housing, which is for women and children that suffer from abuse. So, it's called, "(name removed)" They're helping me with my rent. I had COVID in February. I reached out to a church that helped me...So I've been looking out for different programs to help me because it's really hard getting paid \$15 an hour when your rent is \$1,800. And I get paid \$2,000 a month?*

The process of healing also not only occurred within each participant, but it was apparent on the outside. Annie claimed that she started to notice changes on the outside. She started to become healthier, and her mental health was getting better. Despite all her struggles, she expressed that she felt that the pandemic saved her life.

*My health is better. I was on heart medication. You know because he had me on edge. My heart rate was always like 185 and I was sitting on the sofa. It was because of the tension because he would bring my adrenaline you know, like this (snaps fingers) like a switch. No, I'm not on that anymore...I had this weird allergy on my face...it was all stress related. My hair is actually growing out. It's all those little things that you start noticing. It's like, "Wow, this man was affecting so many people in so many different ways." Even my son is thriving, and now for the past year now, since he's been with me... we've been away from all that mess. He's nothing but straight A's, honor roll. 4.0 grade point average. I mean, he's doing so well.*

This significant feature is the most remarkable silver lining in the study. Annie was the participant that showed the most turmoil and was in great distress. Although she remained calm and positive. She managed to cope and handled her hardships with grace and hope.

Thus, despite the many challenges the pandemic presented the single mothers in this study found their solace in the few indirect perks the pandemic brought them, they found more time with their children and sometimes more of a financial safety net they had not experienced before due to pandemic relief programs. While the study had initially expected to find that challenges for single parents were exacerbated during the pandemic, I unexpectedly found narratives of hope and resilience. Despite these silver linings the study points to the fact that even before the pandemic, single mothers were hard pressed to find quality time with their children. Perhaps, more importantly, it shows the need for stronger safety nets for single parents. The moderate offerings in public assistance during the pandemic made so much of a difference is both eye-opening and troubling; and suggests that the public safety net needs to be broadened more generally.

## CONCLUSION

I expected the pandemic to only bring more grief and challenges along the way for the single parent and make life worse for the household. However, there were silver linings in these times uncertainty and unforeseen circumstances. The resilience of the participants and how they approached and coped with the challenges was remarkable. There was a medley of hardships that each of them uniquely encountered, however, they were all able to jump over that obstacle and make the best out of a bad situation. The participants shared a wealth of information about how they coped with the many factors that they encountered during the pandemic. They provided a lens into their lives and told stories about “managing alone” through the pandemic as a single parent. They spoke about their children and how much they cared for their well-being during this uncertain time. They tended to their basic human needs such as shelter and food security. They also were concerned about their children’s education. They all coped with virtual schooling that brought many challenges that needed to be dealt with. They worried about childcare and who could be present to ensure their children’s physical well-being if something were to happen to them. These parents worried about social distancing and mask requirements. After the school reopened and the

children were able to get back to a so-called “normal” they had to rebuild their past friendships and teacher relationships once again since they had spent so much time apart. While single parents are and were resilient for the sake of their children, the pandemic offered unforeseen silver linings that they all experienced during doubt and uncertainty.

The information gathered here and the data that was analyzed, especially what mothers called “silver linings” is also a troubling insight into our current world. What kind of world do we live in that it takes a pandemic for a single parent to find quality time with their children? What kind of work culture have we created that allows us to ignore the crises of childcare experienced especially by single parents, day after day? The study showed the importance of public assistance/welfare measures for the health and welfare of children and women. All these participants benefited from a social service, one way or another, that was provided by the government during the pandemic. How would Annie have fared without these given her ex-husband had not provided for them financially? The school lunches enabled the mothers to work, parent, and teach without worrying about making food during school/work hours. Consider this, what would have happened to the mothers in this study had these services been absent during the pandemic? How would these single parents fend for themselves and their children? If anything, this study shows the importance of strengthening our social safety nets even after the pandemic.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF RESEARCH

A major limitation of this study was sample size. This research is based on five participants due to time constraints and the difficulty in recruiting from a demographic whose time is stretched thin. Being a single parent and managing everything all at once is cumbersome and they simply may not have any extra time reserved to answer the questions involved in the interview. Many single parents are still trying to manage and maintain their households and their mental health might be at risk. Some potential participants may not have been ready to share their own challenges and struggles. They might be struggling with

homelessness or food insecurity and do not feel that they are in a safe space to speak about these hardships.

Future research could feature a larger sample size. Further, as this study focused on single mothers, future research could compare the experiences of single fathers. The study would benefit from viewing the coping mechanisms according to a single father's perspective, a group we rarely hear from. Finally, future research could include an explicit analysis of vulnerable groups within categories of single parents, like undocumented single parents. Such research would add nuance to our understandings of how groups living under multiple layers of oppression cope with the systemic challenges facing them.

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***Land, Resistance, and Radical Care: Additional Exploration and Musings of Cover Image Design***

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*Milo M. Valentine*

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The cover piece, *Land, Resistance, and Radical Care*, for the sixth volume of the California Sociology Forum stems from conversations between myself and the Student Editorial Board in hopes of prompting a discussion around the violent history of colonization and our role in the ongoing fight for Indigenous sovereignty. My goal for this written work is a more in-depth expansion on the cover piece to provide additional information and description, explore the concept of radical care from the Black Feminist perspective, and seeks to integrate these concepts as guides which inform both scholarship and praxis.

The primary object of *Land, Resistance, and Radical Care* is an illustration of two hands side-by-side, palms up, with fingers slightly rounded. In the palm of the hands rests an object that may resemble Earth, though all personal interpretations can be unique. A warm pink backlight surrounds the hands, symbolizing the interconnection of care and resistance. This piece is set against the backdrop of the Los Angeles County map from the 1800s, which includes topographic symbols and borders marked by colorful patches overseeing miles of land. Additionally, the phrases “Stolen Land” and “LandBack” are inscribed across the wrists of the hands holding our world, symbolizing the necessity of our pursuits to stem from this foundational historic understanding.

The division of territory on the Los Angeles County map is a result of the violent colonization of the Gabrieleños people and their land. As individuals attending a university on land stolen from the Gabrieleños, it is crucial not to view colonization as a historic event set in the distant past, but rather, as an ongoing process of violence that can be resisted by looking to Indigenous organizers who have long been fighting for LandBack. According to the Indigenous organization NDN Collective (LANDBACK 2021), LandBack is an organizing framework with goals of acquiring sovereignty over stolen lands, as well as language, ceremony, food, education, housing, healthcare, governance, medicine, and kinship which “allows us to envision a world where Black, Indigenous & POC liberation co-exists.” LandBack initiatives work towards Indigenous sovereignty and reclamation justice for what was stolen. We must listen to Indigenous voices to better understand the complexities of colonization, become better equipped to organize, and

imagine a future where all communities can experience liberatory justice.

The practice of radical care, rooted in Black Feminist thought, seems particularly instrumental when envisioning a liberated future. In their book, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition*, Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie (2022) portray Black feminism as offering visions of “collective practices based in an ethics of care and personal accountability.” They illustrate how care, as a longstanding practice, fuels their efforts to combat state violence, secure necessary resources, and cultivate the future they desire through mutual aid and transformative justice. The foundational and supportive role that care plays in Black Feminist praxis highlights its necessity in creating meaningful movements and communities. In this way, radical care becomes a cornerstone for building a future where marginalized communities can thrive.

As we navigate our roles as students, sociologists, and residents on unceded stolen land, we must recognize our position within the context of a long history. By centering the perspectives and practices of Indigenous organizers and Black Feminists, we can guide our scholarship and actions towards a more just and equitable society; a society that includes collective liberation for all marginalized communities.

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## **Humanity and Technology Explored Through Poetry**

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### EXPLANATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

A collection of five poetry pieces all featuring the social theory of interactionism through the ever-increasing hyperreality of digital technology influencing humanity; social identity is a main theme throughout all.

**Streaming** does not directly reference any technological devices, using analogous wording describing a stream of water; this illustrates how natural it has become to use modern tech as part of daily norms.

**Can't Connect Right Now** wrestles with “the looking glass self” being influenced by external perceptions.

**No Data Connection** explores “the I” & “the Me” of interactions with technological devices, playing with analogies of various features used both in and out of tech, such as how fingers are also known as digits.

**The Vast Nothingness of Space** follows a journey of cutting off humanity – both personally and socially – in an act of distancing the self from all else to avoid role strain and role conflict through the technological advancement of space exploration as a metaphor.

**I Am Human** essentially brings all the previous components together by focusing on the natural state of being human, putting a spin on roboticization of the modern world. The visual formatting of the piece is meant to resemble a spine.

*Streaming*

A stream of sound & images  
Coursing like a powerful river  
Never-ending, flowing one into another

Once it starts, it sweeps you away  
Following familiar but undefined paths  
Never questioning stepping into the stream  
Just going with the flow  
Mindlessly taking the course  
Numbing the senses  
Vaguely aware of the passing time

Until you find yourself farther than you expected  
Disoriented and struggling to get back control  
Leaving, but knowing you'll be back

*Can't Connect Right Now*

The connection is unstable  
No strength in bandwidth  
The audio is cutting out  
The imagery fuzzy and frozen

These time zones  
And packed schedules  
The distance prolonged  
By lack of conversation

Priority of minutes  
Limited by plans  
Mismatched carriers  
Prevent any signals

Am I still seen  
Even when not perceived  
Free to speak my truth  
If no one can hear me now?

*No Data Connection*

I am left to my own devices  
Trying to establish a safe connection  
Stable, steady ~ a secure net  
Inter-dependent communication  
Information at my fingertips  
Digital era only opens options  
Overwhelming the senses  
Limited data capacity in an unlimited world  
Wide web entangling understanding  
Pages and pages to keep tabs on  
The stimulation keeps me Wired  
Less I lose the signal of affirmation  
Fidelity to society  
App-lying the expected tools  
Rules of conduct instructing  
To suffer no fools  
Agreeing without reading  
The terms of conditions  
The policy of privacy  
White noise in a stream of static  
Taken for granted  
When my access is gratified  
But woefully distressing  
When not found Online  
Prone to servicing my need for confirmation  
That I'm never truly alone

*The Vast Nothingness of Space*

I carved out my heart long ago  
Cleaved it from my chest  
Put my instincts on ice  
Locked them up, laid to rest

Instead of using bandages  
I built an outer wall  
Sealing off infected areas  
Quarantining from all

A resolute mission developed  
Becoming a satellite  
Jettisoned out into space  
Spinning in never-ending night

But then the deep ache came  
In the absence of the whole  
I longed for healthy living  
But my actions undermined that goal

While my spirit was claimed redeemed  
My head pulled a heavy load  
Spinning from intellectual plates served  
From a diet of self-preservation mode

Slabs of frozen meats applied  
To dull the swelling senses  
Trying to fill the emotional void  
While not fully letting down defenses

The time was passed with fairy tales  
Surely I was a cursed victim in need  
Believing all the stories  
Awaiting a brave, heroic deed

A taste of being understood  
Instilled a persistent craving  
Desire for deep connection  
Awakens hope I'm worth saving

Looking for any signals of fulfillment  
Embedded in me since birth  
I hear my purpose calling  
Free falling back to Earth

Overpowering destiny  
Real love is to be known  
Truly seen and heard, received  
Finally welcomed home

*I Am Human*

I am Human  
Framed in bone  
Stoney support  
Standing tall yet fragile in its own way  
Grasping onto what life can give  
Sometimes breaking in the process  
But becoming stronger for it

I am Human  
Streamed in blood  
Flooded with tears  
Sweating the small stuff  
Mingling into a concoction unique to this species  
A life juice of courage and persistence  
Of filling this existence with meaning

I am Human  
Networked in nerves  
Serving a variety of sensations  
From pain to pleasure  
And a multitude in between  
Ending and beginning connected as one  
Increasing the experience ready to be had

I am Human  
Covered in flesh  
Freshly encompassing all  
Though time will leave its marks  
Like the rings of a tree trunk  
Weathering changes while still growing  
A visible sign of a signature story

I am Human  
Bone, Blood, Nerves, & Flesh  
Combined in the Physical  
Composed of the Emotional  
Corroborated in the Mental  
Creatively singular within the sameness  
That is Human



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## **Estimado Padre**

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### EXPLANATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

The video poem I created for my CLS 1600-03 class is a poignant exploration of the immigrant experience through a sociological lens. By crafting the narrative in Spanish, I constructed a direct dialogue with my immigrant father, delving into the intricacies of his journey and the motivations behind leaving his life in Mexico. Through this intimate portrayal, the poem sheds light on the reality and complexities of the American dream from the perspective of immigrants, illustrating the challenges and sacrifices inherent in pursuing a better life.

Moreover, the poem offers insights into the Latinx view of hustle culture, depicting the determination and resilience required to navigate unfamiliar territories and societal expectations. It captures the essence of the coming-of-age story of my father and I, who gain a deeper understanding of our familial roots and the intergenerational struggles embedded within our upbringing.

As a first-generation college student, exploring my father's journey resonates with a broader sociological context, reflecting the experiences of many who grapple with the legacies of hardship and resilience passed down through generations. This narrative serves as a testament to the strength of immigrant communities and the complexities of familial relationships shaped by adversity and the pursuit of the American dream.

To watch the poem in its original video format, scan below:



*Estimado Padre*

En los campos donde el sol se hace uno con la tierra  
Donde la tierra produce el fruto que nos alimenta  
Donde el alimento crea fusiones de sabores que toca nuestro paladar  
Donde se te hacen las manos desgastadas  
Y la ropa desgarrada  
Allí trabajas aunque tu cuerpo te diga que ya no puede más

Pensarías que hablo de un adulto  
Pero en verdad hable de un niño  
Ese niño es mi padre  
Nuestro padre

A los 10 años ese niño ya era un adulto  
Se cuidaba solo  
Se decía que era listo  
Se sabía que el niño era muy trabajador

Nunca tomó la moneda de judas  
Nunca tomo el camino fácil  
Nunca se dejó engañar por la gente  
Nunca dejaron a ese niño, ser niño

Con lágrimas en los ojos  
Y el corazón acelerado  
Se despido de su tierra a los 16 años

Por el sueño americano  
Arriesgo sus manos  
Pero por un milagro  
La Virgencita lo mantuvo sano

Trabajando de noche  
Trabajando de día  
Cuando miraba el sol  
No sabía amanecía o anocheecía

Ya no tienes que esconderte  
Ya no tienes que huir  
Porque tu sueño ya se te pudo cumplir

El sueño americano no será lo que dicen  
El sueño americano es numas para los que nos contradicen  
Llegando aqui pronto aprendistes  
Que el sueño americano, se trata de poder ser feliz  
Ni con dinero, ni con riquezas  
Pero con tu familia todo si se puede complir

Aquel nino ya no es un nino  
El es mi padre,  
Mi padre el que me dice  
Échale ganas  
Y ponte las pilas

Gracias mi padre por ser mi padre

*Dear Father*

In the fields where the sun is one with the earth  
Where the earth produces the fruit that feeds us  
Where food creates fusions of flavors that touches our palate  
Where your hands become worn  
And your clothes torn  
There you work even though your body tells you to stop

You would think I'm talking about an adult  
But really I speak of a child  
That child is my father  
Our father

At the age of 10, that child was already an adult.  
He took care of himself  
It was said that he was clever  
The boy was known to be a hard worker  
Never took coin of Judas  
Never took the easy way  
He never let the people fool him  
They never let that child, be a child

With tears in his eyes  
And a racing heart  
At the age of 16, to his motherland he said goodbye  
For the American dream

He risked his hands  
But by a miracle  
The Virgin kept him complete

Working at night  
Working during the day  
When he looked at the sun  
He couldn't tell dawn from dusk

You don't have to hide  
You no longer have to run away  
Because your dream has been fulfilled

The American dream is not what they say  
The American dream is for those who contradict us  
Here you soon learned  
That the American dream is about establishing happiness  
Neither with money nor with riches  
But with your family everything can be complied

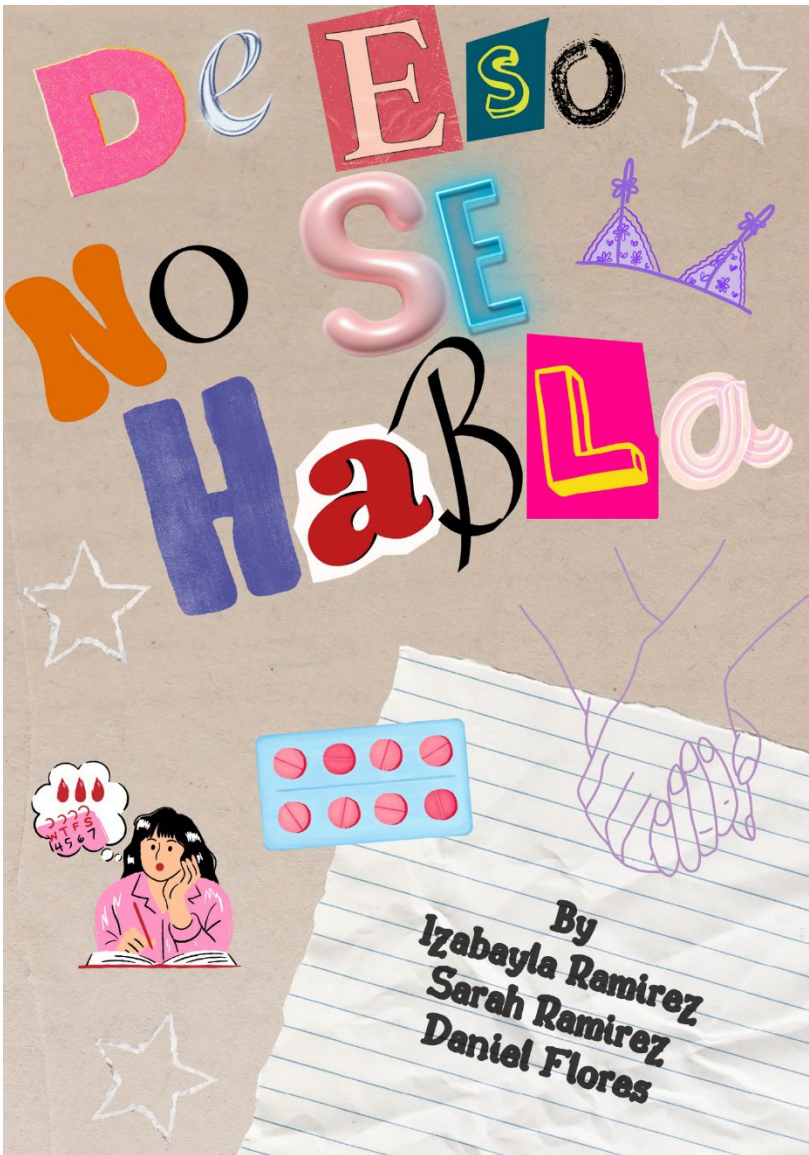
That child is no longer a child  
He's my father,  
My father who tells me  
Never give up  
Look alive

Thank you my father for being my father

**Astrid Calderon** (She/Her/Ella) is a first-generation, undergraduate junior at California State University, Los Angeles. She is an active participant of the CSULA Pre-PA club and was the historian of the former Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A) de CSULA organization. Majoring in Sociology with a focus on gerontology, Astrid has a passion for researching societal issues and diseases correlated with socio-economic status. Her works often delve into themes of identity, inequality, and social justice. Alongside her academic pursuits, Astrid brings a wealth of practical experience in patient care and healthcare administration gained through her role as a COPE Health Scholar at Glendale Adventist Health Hospital. With a commitment to advocacy and community engagement, Astrid submitted to CSF as an opportunity to share her perspectives through this piece, which delves into the immigrant experience through a sociological lens.

**De Eso No Se Habla**

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# SEX CULTURE

## Why is sex such a taboo subject for Latinos?

Factors like religion, machismo, and purity culture all play a role in our lack of correct sex education. The long term effects of colonization and patriarchal values have enforced rigid gender roles and regulations on what is culturally acceptable and what is not.



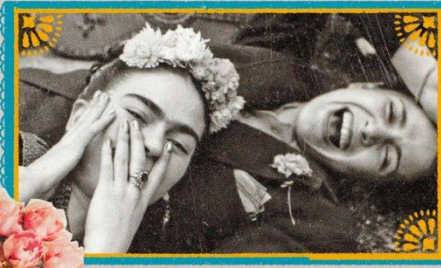
- Europeans colonizing the Americas enforced their religious and conservative views on sex
- lack of education in schools (olan)
- parents not being educated correctly about the complexities of sex (generational) (Luquin et.al, 2020)
- not using the correct terms to describe anatomy (ex. cocina, papaya, cola, flor = vagina, pajarito = penis ("Pajarito", 2017))

WHAT'S SEX?





# Did You Know?



## Frida Kahlo & Chavela Vargas

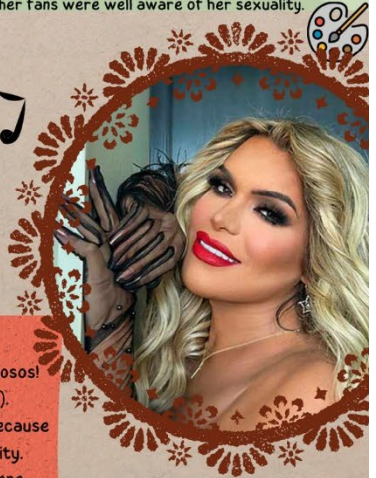
Frida Kahlo, the famous Mexican painter, was an openly bisexual woman and did not conform to gender norms ("Chavela Vargas"). Frida's wardrobe consisted of both masculine and feminine clothes. Chavela Vargas, a Costa-Rican-born Mexican singer, was one of the women with whom Kahlo had an intimate relationship ("Chavela Vargas"). Although Chavela did not publicly come out until the age of 81 in her autobiography, the public was well aware of her sexuality before her passing. Chavela did not come out before because she built a powerful, rebellious, and free-spirited public persona and her fans were well aware of her sexuality.

## Canciones de Sexo, Sexualidad

- 1.) El Gran Varón - Willie Colón
- 2.) Mariposa - Isabella Lovestory
- 3.) Reggaeton Champagne - Bellakath, Dani Flow
- 4.) Short Party - Cartel De Santa, La Kelly
- 5.) Mariposa Traicionera - Maná
- 6.) XT4S1S - Dana Paola
- 7.) La Tortura - Shakira, Alejandro Sainz
- 8.) Loba - Shakira
- 9.) Yo Soy Tu Maestro - Los Telez
- 10.) Eternamente Bella - Alejandra Guzmán

## Wendy Guevara

Wendy Guevara! Primera chica trans to win La Casa De Los Famosos! Gained fame from her and her friends' 'PERDIDAS' video (Glaad). Wendy has gained the attention and hearts of Lationamerica because of her honesty about her life, her sense of humor, and her humility. Wendy does not shy away from her sexual encounters, her hygiene tips for sexual activities, and her journey as a trans woman in Leon, Guanajuato (Staff). Mexico is a very conservative and religious country when it comes to not following gender norms and discussing "taboo" subjects. Wendy has become a voice for the trans community, and she has educated many people about sex and has encouraged more people to openly discuss about sexuality.





*Your experience of finding out what sex was?*

"I was introduced to sex at the age of 8. I had a project to do in the 3rd grade about apes, and one of the questions was how apes reproduced. I remember going to my parents and asking them for help; they told me apes had sex. Naturally I grew curious of what it was and I continued to ask questions and based on my response and reactions, my parents felt I was mature enough to understand the topic." - Izabayla

"I found out about sex mainly watching tv shows with my parents. A couple shows they watched included some sex scenes and as a child, it was so confusing seeing people do that. And with also not being monitored online, I very quickly stumbled across what actual sex was like on accident." - Daniel

"I had heard about sex from the kids at school, movies, and magazines, but I didn't understand it. All I knew was that it was 'bad'. I didn't find out about what sex really was until my 9th grade biology class and I was mortified when I figured out the process. I thought it sounded scary, weird, and gross. Later I started to get more curious about it, but I kept it to myself." - Sarah

*Did your parents talk to you about sex? If yes, what did they say?*

"Yes, my parents talked to me about sex. My parents went over the basic contraceptives such as birth control pills and condoms; they also went over all the STDs there are. My parents also encouraged me to ask more questions if I had any and if or when I felt ready to be sexually active to let them know so I could discuss birth control options." - Izabayla

"My parents never talked to me about sex. It was always a very taboo subject and I never felt comfortable asking any questions about it. Whatever I know, I've had to find out on my own. I would often read my aunt's Cosmopolitan magazines in search for answers. But when I was a teen, my mom explained STD's to me as another way to scare me into abstaining." - Sarah

"If I remember correctly, my parents never really had a proper sex talk with me. It was one of those things where it was never really spoken of since they didn't feel it was necessary. Most of what I learned came from other people or the media I consumed." - Daniel



Were you worried about cultural expectations when wanting sex?

"Being gay, the expectations of sex are very different for me. Gay relationships are deemed as taboo in Latino households, and especially in religious households. So for me, it feels like there's even more pressure put on me." - Daniel

"Absolutely! Cultural expectations were central to my unhealthy relationship with sex. For me, the thought of sex was wrapped in shame, guilt, and self-hate. I was raised in a Mexican, traditional, Catholic household, which had ingrained in me that modesty and purity were the most valuable traits of a woman. I was ashamed of what others would think of me if they knew I thought about it or wished to have it someday. I didn't want to taint my 'good girl' image." - Sarah

"No, I was not worried about cultural expectations. My family is not very religious, so I never felt bad for wanting to explore what sex was." - Izabayla



Looking back do you wish for any changes throughout your entire experience with the subject of sex?



"I honestly wish I learned about sex properly from my parents than having to find out about it on my own. I feel like if I was told the important things, I would've had a better grasp on it a lot sooner." - Daniel

"Yes, I wish my parents, or someone I trusted had been open about it with me at a young age. My adolescence and teen years were confusing and painful. I thought I was a horrible person and a disgrace for thinking about sex. I also thought I'd go to hell for it and that God hated me. My lack of education also landed me in uncomfortable situations that I could have avoided if I had known better. I wish someone had told me it was natural and okay to be curious about sex and that there was nothing wrong with me. I wish I had given myself some grace, too. Now that I'm older, I'm still trying to unlearn the cultural shame and religious guilt. I'm still struggling, but it's been a lot easier. I hope I can reach a point in my life where I feel completely comfortable with the topic, but I'm still not there yet. I know that if someone had properly educated me on it when I was young, I would have reached that point a whole lot sooner." - Sarah

"Yes, I wish there were changes in my high school sex-ed. I think it would be beneficial to have sex experts or nurses to talk about sex and it's complexities." - Izabayla



# SOPA de Letras

## DIVERSIDAD SEXUAL

D	G	I	N	T	E	R	S	E	X	U	A	L	E	S
G	E	W	E	B	I	S	E	X	U	A	L	D	N	K
Ñ	N	Z	M	J	D	W	N	W	V	P	E	I	O	O
Y	E	L	F	M	E	M	Y	E	J	U	L	U	H	C
V	R	Z	T	R	N	G	W	L	Ñ	S	B	H	L	T
O	O	S	X	Ñ	T	N	Ñ	A	E	M	I	N	A	R
P	X	E	R	Y	I	B	U	Y	Z	X	X	U	A	
M	P	X	S	F	D	Ñ	K	X	T	W	E	C	X	N
D	X	U	J	Y	A	I	L	E	P	O	L	R	E	S
A	P	A	R	E	D	C	H	S	I	L	F	A	S	G
E	X	L	X	F	E	A	W	O	Y	A	O	D	O	E
A	V	N	V	N	S	T	K	M	X	U	R	N	R	N
F	C	N	T	P	X	N	D	O	D	X	E	J	E	E
K	Ñ	Z	Y	A	X	E	L	H	T	E	T	M	T	R
D	W	J	O	T	M	I	P	D	C	S	E	T	E	O
Y	M	O	D	L	X	R	X	Y	Q	N	H	J	H	S
U	T	Z	M	V	K	O	P	X	O	A	I	J	S	F
B	Y	O	K	A	V	J	U	L	J	P	O	C	T	H
F	I	N	O	T	D	E	Y	J	T	U	Z	P	A	O
L	D	A	D	I	S	R	E	V	I	D	Ñ	G	K	W

- BISEXUAL
- DIVERSIDAD
- GENERO
- HETEROFLEXIBLE
- HETEROSEXUAL
- HOMOSEXUAL
- IDENTIDADES
- INTERSEXUALES
- ORIENTACIÓN
- PANSEXUAL
- SEXUAL
- TRANSGENROS





# MACHISMO CULTURE

- Machismo culture is the practice of men, specifically, Latino men, who dominate in the family dynamic (Sotelo, 2023)
- Sons more often than not can get away with things that daughters wouldn't be able to
- Machismo is hidden under the guise of "boys will be boys"
- Men in the household are typically more aggressive and highlight just how much of a problem toxic masculinity is



**BOYS  
WILL  
BE  
~~BOYS~~**

HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR  
ACTIONS, JUST LIKE GIRLS.



# THE side effects

Machismo makes men believe they are superior to women when that's simply not the case

The practices of machismo have their effects on men:

- Machismo pushes the idea of toxic masculinity by making them think they "need" to act aggressive



## *Makes Men More Violent*

- Machismo is seen as a cause of femicide happening in countries like Mexico (Christ, 2022).
- In 2020, Mexico had 940+ reported cases of femicide (Christ, 2022).
- It also has ties to LGBTQ+ related hate crimes because men are less likely to respect queer people either



# Purity Culture

What is it?

As a result of European colonization, Latinos are predominately Christian, specifically Roman Catholic. Latin American countries are also heavily patriarchal and sexist due to religion. These two ideologies result in strict gender roles and expectations for women centered around sexual purity and modesty (D.K., 2024).

**Marianismo**~ The opposite of machismo, marianismo originates from the image of the Virgin Mary, women are expected to live up to her unattainable standard of purity (Loeppky). They must be clean from sin in all aspects- physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Verywell Mind, 2023)



- Chaste until marriage and submissive.

- Sexual thoughts or desires are unacceptable- women must repent.

- Dress/ behave modestly to avoid tempting men.

- Women are told sex is "sinful" and to keep their virginity intact. Women who defy these standards are deemed dirty, sinful, dishonorable in the eyes of God, and unvaluable.

- Which is hypocritical because they are also told they "need" to get married and have children to fulfill their duty as women!!



## The Harmful Consequences...

- **Double standards!** While most women can't date, men are encouraged to. Most women are taught that they shouldn't experience pleasure. Pleasure and intimacy are then tied to guilt and shame. As a result, some women learn to neglect their needs and repress their emotions.
- Most women develop unhealthy relationships with their bodies and sex. They don't understand their bodies or their needs because they were never granted sexual freedom. Because of purity culture, they abstain from sex in fear of punishment from God, and in fear of being judged harshly by others (Natarajan, 2022).
- Objectifies and dehumanizes women as something men can use for pleasure without having to prioritize her consent, needs, or comfort. This leaves women vulnerable to unwelcome sexual experiences and promotes rape culture.
- Femicides are a direct result of machismo and the power dynamic at play. In México, some 10 women and girls are killed every day by intimate partners or other family members (Christ, 2022).



# Periods

**Menstruation Myth:** Many girls who get their periods are taught that using a tampon will “pop their cherry” and are often not allowed to use them. Tampons are linked to impurity and in more extreme households, periods themselves are believed to be impure. Purity culture needs to stop criticizing periods!!!

~Vaginas and menstruation are labeled “disgusting” by Latinos. This leads women to believe that their vaginas and the natural menstruation process are something to be ashamed about.

~Parents often rely on school to teach their children about periods. When girls eventually get it, they either aren't aware of what's happening with their bodies and are frightened, or are uninformed and don't know how to use menstrual hygiene products.

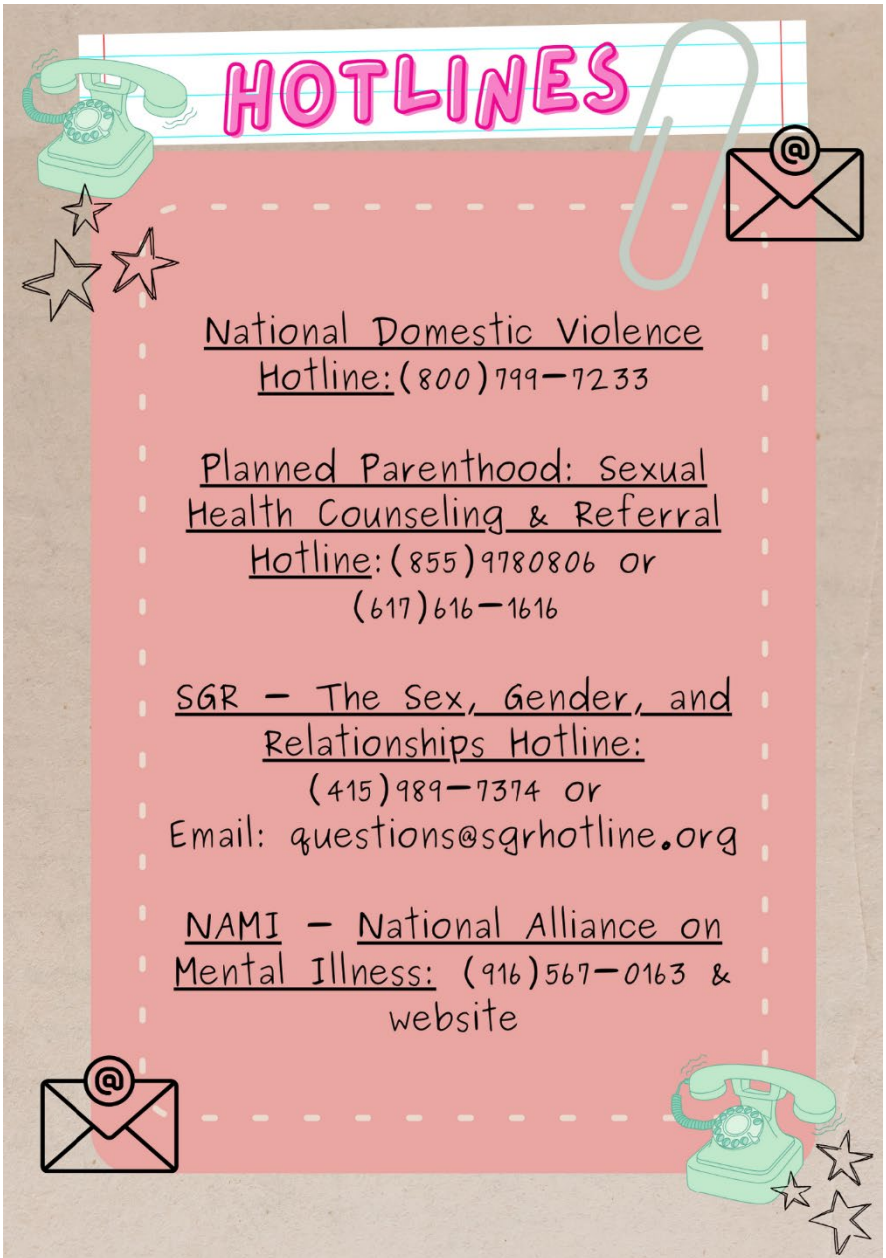
Bottom line- periods are a natural part of life and need to be talked about!!! Talk about it to your brothers, fathers etc., they need to understand that a period is natural and okay!!!

“The first time I got my period, I put my pad on backwards and ay Dios mio, you can only imagine how that went when I had to take it off!”

“My mom had never told me about it, so when I got mine the first time I thought I was dying lol!”

“I remember I was in in spring break and 9yrs old with my mom at home, I didn't feel anything, just went to the bathroom pulled my pants and underwear down and there it was, blood on my underwear. I called my mom and she brought me a pad and showed me how to put them on and that was it.”

“My mom wouldn't let me leave the house when I was on my period. She didn't want me running around 'in heat.'”



# HOTLINES

National Domestic Violence  
Hotline: (800) 799-7233

Planned Parenthood: Sexual  
Health Counseling & Referral  
Hotline: (855) 9780806 or  
(617) 616-1616

SGR - The Sex, Gender, and  
Relationships Hotline:  
(415) 989-7374 or  
Email: [questions@sgrhotline.org](mailto:questions@sgrhotline.org)

NAMI - National Alliance on  
Mental Illness: (916) 567-0163 &  
website





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**TreePeople: Bringing Sociology, Climate Research, and  
Community Voices into the Same Room**

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**ABSTRACT**

This is an exploration into being the first and only Cal State LA sociology student intern at TreePeople, a seasoned non-profit environmental justice organization. TreePeople's Policy and Research department teams host multi-component environmental initiatives which use participatory community engagement and outreach to dynamically record new urban climate change research and maximize resilience outcomes in underserved neighborhoods. Los Angeles is one of the most historically notorious urban landscapes for resource and land discrimination, racial and class segregationist policies, and extractive/polluting enterprises. My internship sought to bridge the gap between researchers and community members while encouraging a new approach to climate studies that brings all stakeholders into conversation equally. My team and I are employing micro to macro motivations, technological details, and sociological theoretical frameworks during the pre-outreach and beginning sampling stages of our initiative launch. LA provides a potent location for implementing more sociologically rooted environmental research, especially in the face of imminent climate crises, that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. *LA's Urban Soil Future* combines quantitative measurements of soil health and biodiversity in LA and documented qualitative feedback and collaborative ideation about nature-based solutions, giving community voices an empirical and social platform. It is my fervent wish that organizations like TreePeople become progressively interested in compassionately and respectively widening the breadth of stakeholder collaboration and collectivism in all their current and future scientific research. I believe there is no better arena than climate justice to foster in a plurality in connection and wisdom, because we all share the threat of an inhospitable future, if we cannot work together.

## INTRODUCTION AND POSITIONALITY

When I first walked onto TreePeople's operations hub in Beverly Hills, *Coldwater Canyon Park*, I wasn't sure what to look for or what to expect. This fifty-year-old LA based organization began with one impassioned high school student planting trees to challenge air pollution, but it's obvious from the park's long attended beauty and ample resources that the achievements of this organization are at least due in part to a relatively elevated degree of privilege. Beyond the unassuming but cleverly curved parking area, there's a small cluster of energy efficient office buildings, the foundation's nursery, a conference center, a yurt village (where employees and guests alike come for refuge and/or work), a small outdoor amphitheater (that doubles as a venue and field trip teaching post) and a host of shady mulch laden hiking paths lined with magnificent vistas and old growth trees. At first, I felt uncomfortable on TreePeople's campus, as it's surrounded by some of the most obscene wealth in the nation. But as I ventured further, I realized that the legacy of this place represents a rare mainstay in publicly accessible green space. Its iron-clad trust agreements cannot be touched by the private speculation or urban development that plague many of the communities where TreePeople's work takes place. This means that the organization has a unique opportunity to try new approaches to community engagement without jeopardizing its local social capital and municipal partnerships in the grander environmental non-profit sector of Southern California.

TreePeople's community organizing strategies and mission statement reflects its central ambition to empower community members to think of themselves as active land stewards rather than passive city dwellers:

TreePeople is Southern California's largest environmental movement whose mission is to inspire, engage and support people to take personal responsibility for the urban environment, making it safe, healthy, fun and sustainable and to share our process as a model for the world.

To date, the organization remains a major contributor to research and direct action(s), for everything from expanding canopy cover,

school greening and food justice, to local forestry protection efforts. It's the only non-profit organization of its size and influence in the Los Angeles region that uses its privilege to confront *all* of these issues simultaneously and has established itself as an important consultant for city and county urban greening. Accelerating climate threats have further pushed TreePeople to think more creatively about how to elevate community involvement in vulnerable neighborhoods—including pursuing relationships with local universities—while staying cognizant of the historical tensions between the academy, race, and low-income urban residents.

The desire to commit myself to a common cause around ecological and community healing is what first brought me to TreePeople. But as a white woman, it would be dishonest of me not to acknowledge race and class influence and bias in my own life. As TreePeople continues to diversify its largely upper- and middle-class staff of white and Latinx professionals, one of the crucial challenges it faces in attempting to reimagine how it values marginalized community input centers around the willingness to admit that it too will make racially biased assumptive mistakes along the way.

Low-income folks have suffered under a ruling neoliberal framework that pursues private market investments in socially vulnerable areas and enjoys tax exemptions and other wealth consolidating incentives at their expense. The nationwide wealth gap and growing wage disparity provide enough evidence of this reality, but it's the largely white-benefiting spatial control and occupation of marginalized communities that shows the harms of neoliberal ideologies in urban landscapes. I am more aware than ever of the impact whiteness can have on the dynamics in a room, and that it is something that often catalyzes unintended damage in the non-profit industrial complex. Many years of higher learning and direct action helped me to accumulate the language and intersectional framing critical for meaningful civil activism. Climate justice work is a useful place to start building intercultural empathy and recognize shared humanity and wisdom, as no amount of privilege buys full protection from climate change. The white anti-racist group, White People for Black Lives (WP4BL) often asks its members to think about their personal stake in

toppling systems of oppression, and I revisit this notion often throughout my day. I believe it is the duty of white people in *all* industries to grapple with their unearned privilege and to embrace the interconnectedness that White Supremacist cultures purposefully deny, to maintain social power. TreePeople is primed to center this in its practices and research.

## METHODS

TreePeople's work is boldly turning toward a research paradigm that establishes open communication and collaboration with communities (Davidoff 1965) and moves away from myopic practices that lead to remitting prescriptions based on limited, biased and/or exclusionary data. This strategy (TreePeople 2021) brings the contributions of scientists, scholars, and policymakers into equal partnership with community leaders and advocates to strengthen the innovation and robustness of climate change solutions in their unique areas and translate community response in a culturally and linguistically relevant way. By prioritizing a holistic consideration of situational circumstances involving race, class, gender, area history, and other factors, it also contributes to resistance efforts against the historical onslaught of gentrification and redevelopment projects that has tormented South and East Los Angeles in particular. The basis for this kind of approach, often referred to in the field as "community science" (Moulite 2017), will help bolster, "the stories of marginalized communities through an intersectional lens, by adjusting for the multiple spaces people occupy."

This path presents an exciting and empowering opportunity to meet folks where they are and build resilience together as equal stakeholders in climate action. It's a notion that also aspires to champion "resilience hubs" (Resilient Cities Catalyst 2023) in under resourced neighborhoods, by providing training and support, and welcoming alternative ways of thinking and knowing about land management and protection that reside outside of dominate systems. As a social science student, I feel *very* passionately about maximizing the collective wisdom of scientific research, activism, and collectivism, because it reseats autonomy as the core goal, rather than development (Escobar 2020), and builds a platform for residents to become local

management ambassadors. Indeed, the reason that strengthening collaboration in this work is so critically important is that it's simply consensus and not conjecture that will move against the climate crisis. At its core, the story of "extractivism" (Besteman 2020) is the story of Earth's witness to the Anthropocene. Many humans have and continue to commit profit motivated atrocities against the land in the name of socially constructed benefits, and we see it filter down to every species on the planet (Klein 2014). To put it bluntly, climate change is the ultimate "find out" phase for humanity and potentially all existing life.

For decades, Los Angeles has shown itself to practice "Dracula urbanism," (Kirk 2023) and the consequences logically stoke distrust and a sense of powerlessness from low-income folks and BIPOC, who've felt more of the brunt. According to Kirk (2023), the ongoing effects of speculative capitalism and the privatization of resources belies good faith "development" and "renewal schemes" in LA, masking a more insidious agenda to gentrify and exclude already disadvantaged communities from land occupation and ownership wherever profit is perceived. Thus, our collective work must be profoundly dedicated to "uplifting local perspectives & voices," because "people won't trust a program that doesn't prioritize their needs, knowledge, and critical input" (Fabian 2022).

## PROJECT DETAILS

Headed by our principal soil scientist, Dustin Herrmann, I have been thrilled to be assisting in phase 3 of a county wide climate resilience initiative called *Los Angeles' Urban Soil Future*, in accordance with the "LA Urban Soil Collaborative" and funded by Accelerating Resilience Los Angeles (ARLA), under the supervision of the policy & research department at TreePeople. This project targets residential soil health and biodiversity in LA, so that residents can be connected with the resources they need and want, with the intention to effectively boost resistance to forthcoming climate change challenges in their neighborhoods. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to capture the diversity of the soil in LA, to help support its health, and to inform new policy on building and infrastructure that considers hydrology conservation goals.

In phases 1 & 2 of the project, TreePeople’s scientific staff and community organizing team released a report in 2021, *Healthy Soils for Healthy Communities*, which recounts the thorough needs assessment they conducted on local soil knowledge in unprotected neighborhoods. Over 1300 locals from four stratified groups were surveyed online about their land management experiences and familiarity with best management practices (BMPs) for soil health. These surveys along with the subsequent discourse at TreePeople’s annual Los Angeles Urban Soil Symposium & Workshop in 2020 guides the community engagement and action strategy design for phase 3, when I began my internship.

Our team is utilizing the unprecedented aerial detail of the LA Regional Imagery Acquisition Consortium (LARIAC) urban geospatial data set to quantify soil type in socially vulnerable parcels of land, identify bright spots we hope to physically sample and evaluate, and help contextualize soil status assessments more precisely. Armed with this data, we are more able to discuss the details of the project with residents in a way that resonates with what they must navigate on their properties, such as limited parcel vegetation and shade, heavy impervious ground cover infrastructure, and highway corridor air quality.

Indeed, some of the trouble with past research and theory in climate justice (Foran 2017) begins with a misunderstanding of the foundational and ongoing implications that colonial imperialism and capitalistic thought have in the climate crisis. The field acknowledges some of the current impacts of oppressive systems in environmental justice, but a general disconnect still remains between many scientists’ and scholars’ planning and the ethical limitations that our institutional systems uphold. “Market worship” perspectives (Klein 2014) still pervade our society in ways that directly shape the questions we ask, our motivations and methods for research, and our policies. However, I am hopeful that climate change and its impending effects are meaningfully changing the way things are done, ushering in more holistic strategies (Escobar 2020) that may inspire greater shifts in the ways people “sentipensar” (or “think-feel”) about the urban land in which they inhabit and how it forms their lives. Going forward, we must remember that solidarity is not rendered through an

isolated action or protest, but through committed practice in “building meaningful relationships, making spaces for others, (un)learning, and listening” (Sholock 2012:709).

So called North America built itself on the deliberate destruction and demoralization of Indigenous groups throughout the continent (Dhillon 2016), and American society has a duty to divest from wealthy speculators and to tear down the “Terra nulls,” (or “nobody’s land”), justification for the seizure and exploitation of lands, if we are to mitigate climate change. We should look to Indigenous communities for wisdom and knowledge of the natural world and include them and other communities of color in developing insightful effective protections against future environmental threats (Klein 2014), as they may represent the best shot we have for avoiding total climate crisis. I agree that this is especially true in urban settings today, where demographic flux often indicates imminent redevelopment projects that further disenfranchise low-income residents from the land (Hassberg 2020).

*LA’s Urban Soil Future* operates in two very distinctive dimensions. On a basic level, it seeks to bridge a historically large gap between low-income and BIPOC communities and researchers so that development and execution will include local voices and goals in an equitable way throughout. Yet, on its most meta level, it is intrinsically intertwined with regional and global land & food sovereignty, as well as housing and other civil rights discriminations. Arguably, TreePeople’s most ambitious and expansive research project to date, a venture like this has the potential to inform other TreePeople projects, such as ongoing education focused school greening and community garden programs. It could be used as a steppingstone to bigger investments in humanity and ecological wellness in general, because soil is our most foundational living organism and supports us all.

## THEORIES

Another recent report released by TreePeople’s sustainability scientist collaborators, *Cooler & Healthier: Increasing Tree Stewardship & Reducing Heat Health Risk Using Community Based Urban Forestry* (Guzman et al. 2023)



spotlights resident engagement in tree planting and continued management programs in LA. Study participants principally expressed their biggest barrier to participating in a planting program was a perceived lack in continued maintenance support after initial help with planting their trees. Likewise, Buchler (2021) explored the frequency that residents who practiced mindful landscaping and gardening tested their soil health found that people felt the absence of a centralized testing facility in LA and the resulting costs of sending their soil samples elsewhere to be processed was a major barrier to consistent testing. Refunds, rebates, and other convoluted governmental incentive options were not what most persuaded folks to want to take part in either activity. Instead, earned trust and reliable, affordable, continued knowledge & materials support gave people more positive imagined outcomes, and they were far more likely to engage long term (Eisenman, Guzman, and Wohldmann 2023). Past research such as this, in conjunction with Tree People's own focused and varied pre-outreach conversations with residents, has helped our team synthesize and operationalize theory into thoughtful engagement, through mailer copy, brochure literature, and producing an informative webinar.

Some of the most crucial work I have done for this initiative involves designing community engagement materials along with participant interview guides that accurately convey solidarity and a deeply shared social commitment to land reclamation and climate resilience transformation goals. This includes figuring out how to tell the story of microbe species living in soil in a way that connects people to it and inspires them to want to contribute more time and effort to protect it. If we can't bring people into the work with us, then any and all actionable parts of this initiative could be lost. To establish this critical link, my supervisor and I utilized several sociological theories to help us in approach, language, and accountability. The foremost theories we've used so far as reference guides for material design are: community based participatory research or CBPR (Detroit URC Board 2011), community based social marketing or CBSM (McKenzie-Mohr n.d.), theory of change or TOC (Center for Theory of Change 2023), the protective action decision model or

PADM (Lindell 2012), and the health belief model or HBM (Washburn 2020).

My other important role has been designing and authoring recognition and compensation materials for the study's participants, offering them an appropriate menu of beneficial options in exchange for allowing us to enter their property, collect and catalogue soil samples, and interview them about their personal land management interactions and perspectives on larger environmental issues. In my view, the likelihood that a resident takes part in this study may very well rest on how well executed recognition and compensation materials are, and I believe environmental justice non-profits in general should allocate more resources to developing sincere recognition platforms for study participants, both on site, on social media and at community event(s). In order to establish solid resilience hubs in LA that will also expand and share TreePeople's larger mission, *all* of our participants must be officially thanked and acknowledged for their contribution and encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings on the experience with the wider community, so that they feel appropriately valued as an essential part of climate resilience solutions. I have also assisted TreePeople and its partners to formulate a plan for keeping the project transparent and the research accountable to communities, so that all findings can be disseminated in a timely and inclusive way, something I see as a crucial component of sincere community science efforts. As we continue outreach to engage target residents about the study, we cannot forget that we are also meaningfully inviting them to participate and contribute to the process of sampling, management program design, and implementation in their communities, so our methods must stay clear and inclusive.

The sociological theories we're utilizing can be applied to studies such as the tree stewardship one mentioned previously, even with the added constraint of it being written based on needs assessment data alone. For example, a CBPR focused environmental program would address past distrust in governments and non-profits by consulting community leaders and other residents on blueprinting short-and-long-term components of the plan(s), as pertains to the community's particular constraints and concerns. CBPR rightly includes

feedback from the community from the beginning, often even prior to official research, and implements their input throughout the entire process of an initiative, so that blind spots can be identified ahead of any rollouts. *LA's Urban Soil Future* was not designed to include community input at the start, but there are already plans to amend that oversight in future TreePeople projects. The CBSM framework compliments the CBPR approach, because participants are far more likely to organize/nominate their neighbors to participate in environmental desired behaviors when there is an understanding that all locals are treated as equal partners in planning solutions.

Additionally, the theory of change (Center for Theory of Change 2023) offers researchers a platform for preparing against community disengagement by critically diving into, “the ‘missing middle’ between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to achieving desired long-term goals. Behavioral hypotheses are strengthened using this model, by creating an “outcomes framework” which endeavors to determine what nuanced context may most successfully activate participation *before* community engagement begins. Essentially, TOC aims to make social research more robust and efficient by working backwards from the goal to the plan. TOC also invites researcher and participant evaluation throughout, creating a more flexible planning environment (Center for Theory of Change 2023). We believe this model has been very helpful with our outreach campaign, fortunately bolstered by TreePeople’s established relationships with an array of seasoned local consults and staff, which have offered us advice while building our outcomes framework and engagement materials.

The final two specified theoretical models we are employing get to the heart of individual perceptions in an emotional and existential way. PADM analyzes the social and environmental cues that most influence decision-making about perceived threats to health and safety (Lindell 2012). As stated in the tree stewardship report (Eisenman, et al. 2023), “Heat exposure is a public health hazard that burdens disadvantaged communities in urban areas disproportionately and threatens the livability and sustainability of cities.” Because climate change is

very much manifested through increasing heat, both regionally and globally, appealing to an urgent need for temperature mitigation is a great way to call folks in to actionable behaviors in land stewardship. Healthy soil can majorly reduce erosion, trap carbon and water vapor, and support shade providing plants like trees; By this logic, green infrastructure begins to make sense. I'm excited about the potential for protective action decision making models to show people that green infrastructural solutions are not just desirable but essential, and they are cheaper and more gratifying than most tech-based resiliency options.

To aid my individual work further, I'm borrowing the well-known Japanese concept of "Ikigai," a concept meaning "a reason for being," because it helped me to visualize what internal elements compose our human need to serve, something that has often alluded my conscious mind. Ikigai can communicate the intertwined needs, desires, and abilities that can bond us to land stewardship. This concept (Figure 1) is typically represented as a



Figure 1 Ikigai: A Japanese Concept Meaning "A Reason for Being".

Venn diagram with four main parts: what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for. This concept is culturally tied to the Japanese belief that a life's work never ends. Retirement is not even a word in the Japanese language, instead, they acknowledge that all individuals have a purpose and an avenue for contributing to the world. It's common practice in Japan (Pasticha 2016) to carry reminder "ikiagi card(s)" to jot down daily or weekly affirmations and aspirations throughout one's life. Keeping the first three components, I augmented the last to "what can benefit your community," to connect individual behavior(s) to community vs. profession. With that, a reason for being transforms into a reason to be a good land steward. I think this idea is best located in the PADM realm, because it may be a good way to challenge people with reasonably few resources from discounting themselves altogether as land managers/protectors and help residents to mitigate feelings of overwhelm and burden when it comes to climate action.

Finally, HBM explicitly acknowledges (Washburn 2020) that individual health in the short and long term is impacted by behavioral choices. This model was originally developed for use in the medical field, but I believe it provides a perfect opportunity to convey the necessity of initiatives like ours to the public, especially in historically disadvantaged communities. Some elements of the self-efficacy theory are incorporated into HBM, to help empower people who may have negative perceptions of their own impact on their health. I believe these theories, taken together, will advance *LA's Urban Soil Future's* final success tremendously. I am excited by the connections with community members that have already been mindfully built and am eager to bear witness to what is possible when an epistemological "pluriverse" (Escobar 2020) is further embraced.

## EFFICACY

For years TreePeople has also been working toward increased diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as an overtly anti-racist approach to their work. However, it continues to be an ongoing challenge. Our entire team must stay acutely aware of our personal biases and assumptions throughout this project, and continually ask locals to point out inevitable misinterpretations or

deficiencies, to honor self-determination and avoid unhelpful deficit thinking. This can be especially difficult for white academics and practitioners who have not had enough meaningful contact with underprivileged residents in LA, something TreePeople has been working to correct for years. This city's socio-political history is riddled with discriminatory dynamics based on race, class, and gender, and attitudinal context often differs from neighborhood to neighborhood, sometimes even from street to street. I appreciate the work TreePeople does to invoke this notion in its work, through implementing community led needs assessments, participatory workshops, and educational discourse throughout the process of many projects, such as the "Learn@Home" webinar series which translates complex scientific research to the public and "T.R.E.E. Talks" lectures that facilitate and encourage community members to discuss their actionable role(s) in climate related issues.

Moving forward, it is also essential to continue cultivating successful collaboration between nonprofits, researchers and communities to persuade municipalities to make genuine investments in community-based climate action(s) and continue support for scaling them up. Importantly, TreePeople's collective has been accepted as a consultant for the City and County of Los Angeles Urban Forest Management Plans (UFMP), LA City Biodiversity Guidelines, and LA City Bureau of Engineering's Biodiversity Checklist. Building climate resilience undoubtedly requires a reexamination of urban ecosystems on every scale. It is in the best interest of *all* stakeholders that this initiative collects useful data and supports local efforts to mitigate extreme weather effects. Our grant initiative is therefore funded by Accelerating Resilience LA (ARLA), and in conjunction with the LA Urban Soil Collaborative, is partnered with a multitude of municipal and community based groups, including the US Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) and US Forestry Service (USFS), the city and county of LA Chief offices of Sustainability and Public Health, the Safe Clean Water Program (SCWP), LA Compost, and several South LA community leaders, including organizers from the Watts community garden. The coalition power of these groups demonstrates how the positionality and mission of organizations like TreePeople can facilitate critical

connections and conversations between government agencies and grassroots community action.

## CONCLUSION

Green infrastructure (GI) solutions *desperately* need a wealth of grassroots support to affirm their validity to power holders and offer them as a better and more flexible response to future climate effects over expensive tech-based options that are inexorably tethered to fossil fuels. The urgency and price of inaction is much harder to illustrate to individuals and governmental bodies, without a solid demonstration of this approach's strength and viability. If a community understands how to protect and increase the health of their soil after participating in this initiative, there will be better opportunities to build even more power, rooted in local empowerment toward better health outcomes. We hope to leverage strong results to inspire other cities, counties, and state systems to adopt urban soil solutions across the US, and hopefully the globe. It is, after all, undeniable that Earth's hospitality to life is what's really at stake (Escobar 2020).

Invoking the “just growth” advocacy planning model may also be a useful tool, as it asserts that equity concerns are often left underserved in the vast non-profit industrial complex, and that “lifting them up sharply and crisply can require the sharp elbows of community organizing” (Benner & Pastor 2015). This idea echoes arguments that advocacy and collaboration cannot exist separately from one another, and that in fact, a “principled conflict” is the vital shared platform from which people from different spaces can come together to solve problems. TreePeople's lens (2021) anticipates that building legitimate climate resilience necessitates a strengthened feedback loop among residents, government, and other neighborhood institutions that can provide community members the tools to shape their neighborhoods both during crises and on an everyday basis. Indeed, every actor in planning and action has a genuine interest in a “shared regional destiny” (Benner & Pastor 2015) and can become an ambassador for change, with appropriate support.

Amid the grim acceleration of climate-based threats, both locally and globally, my experience working with TreePeople

shows me that hope is the collective muscle that can carry us all to a better world. As humanity embarks on this journey, I can't imagine a better ground up starting point than improving soil health and resilience; urban soil health is the linchpin to natural solutions. In some ways, we as researchers are only there to listen and facilitate the implementation of nature-based plans for socially vulnerable areas of LA. But we also crucially endeavor to advocate for bridging the gap between community leadership and future projects and policies that will make sure informed local choices and needs are reflected (TreePeople 2021). With TreePeople's continued support, residents in under resourced neighborhoods and beyond can collaborate and cultivate a stronger cultural bond to environmental action(s) that appreciates the benefits of tree and soil preservation over the limited offset gains available in a marginalized community.

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## **Opioid Addiction and Overdose in America**

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### INTRODUCTION

In 1971, Richard Nixon declared the war on drugs. Today, almost 53 years later, it's clear the United States has not only lost this war but is also suffering the consequences. In 2014, the life expectancy of Americans decreased for the first time since World War I (Deweerd 2019). The drug related death toll in 2017 alone surpassed American casualties (Minhee and Calandrillo 2019) from “the Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars combined.” Three drugs in particular are to blame for what the American government has deemed a public health emergency: opioids, heroin, and fentanyl. Ironically, legally acquired prescription opioids are the biggest culprit as they have acted as a gateway and created a snowball effect into the more serious drug use of heroin and fentanyl. Drug addiction and drug overdose is now considered to be a number one threat to the American people (Minhee and Calandrillo 2019).

### CONTEXT

To understand how the United States got here, let's rewind to 1995 when Purdue Pharma began a manipulative and deadly anti-pain campaign. Prior to 1995, the medical community viewed opioids like Purdue's OxyContin as medication only to be used by those who were terminally ill. Purdue hoped to expand the possibilities for who might be deemed appropriate to receive this kind of medication, so they went on a nationwide lobbying offensive. Their goal was to manipulate physicians into believing that these opioids did not pose a risk for their patients because opioids were not an addictive substance if used under the appropriate supervision of a medical professional. Purdue did this by citing a 1986 study, which only included 38 participants, to prove to physicians that opioids would only pose an addictive threat if used recreationally (Minhee and Calandrillo 2019), and invented a new term called “pseudoaddiction” to downplay the

actual threat their opioids would pose to the American people. Despite this history, it would be an oversimplification of a very complex situation to only blame Purdue Pharma for the current drug epidemic; they were not prescribing the opioids, medical professionals were.

According to an expert in pharmacology (Minhee and Clandrillo 2019), “the success of OxyContin stems partly from the fact that so many doctors wanted to believe in the therapeutic benefits of opioids.” Whether this was true or not, it was not long after the opioid flood gates were opened that it should have become very clear to all parties involved that something was going terribly wrong. Minhee and Clandrillo give one example of what should have been an alarming warning sign was the fact that “some counties and states had more prescriptions than people, yet distributors continued to let the drugs proliferate.” Purdue Pharma and the doctors would have been aware of the number of opioids they were selling and prescribing, and yet the number of drugs being introduced to the American public accelerated at hazardous levels. Jones et al. (2018) notes: “From 1997 to 2002, OxyContin prescriptions increased from 670,000 to 6.2 million.” A large part of why opioids like OxyContin skyrocketed in sales was because, unlike Purdue Pharma’s original claims, their drugs were extremely addictive and users were now needing larger doses (Ryan, Girion, and Glover 2016). Due to the benefit of hindsight, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now knows that “up to 24% of people on the drugs long-term become addicted.” With more and more negative statistics like this becoming known to the public, it was only a matter of time before Purdue Pharma had to pay for its wrongdoing.

After 12 years, Purdue Pharma had been sued and fined 635 million dollars for marketing OxyContin as less addictive when they knew from the outset that this was false information. Unfortunately, this fine did nothing to help the millions of Americans who now suffered with addiction and were seeking out cheaper and more potent drugs (Minhee and Clandrillo 2019). At this point, phase two of the epidemic began. As restrictions mounted and legal opioids became harder to acquire, addicts began turning to heroin. If it seems like hyperbole that one drug can lead to another drug, Minhee and Clandrillo (2019) found

that "94% of opioid-addicted participants reported switching from prescription opioid pills to heroin because the former was far more expensive and harder to obtain." Unlike opioids like OxyContin, which are synthesized in a lab and can almost guarantee that the user is getting a consistent dose, heroin is illegally manufactured and far less safe for the user. In fact, "between 1999 and 2016, heroin related overdoses increased by a factor of five" (Minhee and Clandrillo 2019). Unfortunately, this is because heroin is often laced with one of the most dangerous drugs of all time: fentanyl, which represented phase 3 of the epidemic.

Fentanyl poses such a danger (Minhee and Clandrillo 2019) that it is only "medically appropriate for individuals facing imminent death. It is not only 100 times more potent than natural morphine, but 50 times stronger than heroin." What adds to the level of danger that Fentanyl poses is that many users have no idea they are about to ingest it, as dealers cut either heroin or cocaine with it to increase its potency. By 2016 (Minhee and Clandrillo 2019), "deaths involving synthetic opioids, mostly fentanyl, had risen 540 percent in just three years." In a period of 18 years, the United States witnessed how a legally prescribed drug can ravage communities, morph into increasingly dangerous forms, and seemingly have very little in the way of effective responses for how to combat this deadly epidemic. It is past time for the United States to look for new solutions to end its 52-year war on drugs.

## UNDOING THE DAMAGE FROM THE WAR ON DRUGS

Reversing the damage of the war on drugs requires major changes on federal, state, and local levels. Instead of punishing people who are addicted to drugs, we should be ensuring that they get the help that they desperately need. The Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act of 2010 were major steps in the right direction. The former increased the number of insured Americans, and the latter prevented insurance companies from blocking access to mental health. Individuals with substance use issues who previously had no insurance can now access life altering drug treatment programs and receive benefits (Jones et al. 2018) formerly not accessible to millions of citizens. When circumstances allow, witnesses can call 911 for help, apply first aid themselves and administer the lifesaving drug

Naloxone (Narcan) before it's too late. The Opioid Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution program seeks to distribute Naloxone more widely to opioid users and to educate the public about this non-addictive drug's potential to save lives. The program distributes Naloxone to veterans at-risk (Dunn et al. 2017) and has had favorable outcomes thus far. In addition to this initiative, the federal government has also taken positive steps to reduce the number of overdose deaths in America.

## STUDIES ON DRUG OVERDOSE RISK

The ways in which drug addiction and overdose have been studied are numerous. When it comes to analyzing the yearly death toll, drug overdose numbers are a reliable metric of the epidemic because all deaths are required to be reported in all U.S. states and territories using standardized International Classification of Disease (Jalal et al. 2018). From this point, drug overdose deaths are categorized as either unintentional, suicide, undetermined intent, or homicide. This is a vital piece to consider when studying overdose mortality as it shows how most of the overdose are unintentional. A study by Dunn et al. (2017) administered a demographic survey for individuals who had overdosed, but not died from it, and used the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)-5 checklist to review and categorize responses related to symptoms of opioid use disorder. One question asked opioid users if they used opioids exclusively or if they mixed them with other drugs--an important piece of information to understand about individuals who have survived overdoses. Mixing synthetic drugs like opioids with other dangerous drugs was found to greatly increase the likelihood that the user will experience an overdose.

Drug overdoses which result in death are reliably tracked on a yearly basis, so we have a good sense of the scope of the problem. Future research would not only focus on the overwhelming negative side of the epidemic but look to individuals who have gotten sober and live healthy lives despite having had an overdose and substance use issues. This kind of information would be very beneficial for people who are newly sober to understand what elements have and have not worked for actual opioid users who have been in similar circumstances. Like

the study previously mentioned, one could administer a survey about past use of synthetic opioids and ask specific questions about what has helped them get and remain sober. In terms of what hasn't been studied about this epidemic, "there are few empirical data regarding the experience and understanding of opioid overdose risks among CP (chronic pain) patients, and this information is necessary to develop overdose prevention resources for this population" (Dunn et al. 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Almost 53 years ago, the United States waged a War on Drugs. They used aggressive and forceful tactics often against communities of color to combat this "domestic enemy." At the time of President Nixon's declaration, no one would have guessed that the most dangerous threat we would eventually face in this war would come from legal, physician prescribed drugs. Yet, through manipulation and lies from Purdue Pharma, which is exactly what transpired. It is now time for the United States to rethink and come up with a brand-new strategy if it hopes to provide a safe and healthy environment for its citizens. The War on Drugs is a war that the United States has lost miserably, but it is not too late to help those in need now and for future generations.

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**Brian Benjamin Parsons** (He/Him) will get his CSULA Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology in May of 2024 and will be graduating cum laude. He has recently been accepted into Antioch University's Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology Program with an emphasis in addiction and recovery studies. Brian hopes to earn his master's degree and begin a career helping people overcome their issues with addiction and help them toward recovery. This paper examines the failed war on drugs and highlights some of the reasons why the United States finds itself in the 'fourth wave' of an opioid overdose crisis. This is Brian's first published paper, and he is extremely grateful to CSF for this publishing opportunity.

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**Book Review: *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth* by The Red Nation**

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*Marie Rivera and Christopher Snyder  
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In the wake of a growing consensus about global warming and the imminent climate crisis, the “Green New Deal” (GND) is a catchphrase that has increasingly gained political traction in recent years. Defined broadly, GND proposals call for policies which address climate change while also targeting social and economic efforts like job creation, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy. Some critics of GND proposals claim these efforts do not go far enough. The Red Nation – a coalition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, students, academicians, and organizers – is one such group with an alternative and more radical vision for climate change and social justice. In their book *The Red Deal*, they set forth a liberatory political vision that calls for an end to capitalism, settler colonialism, and global imperialism. Across three major sections, the book argues for the abolition of these systems and the institutions which support them in favor of a vision of society that affirms common life – Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – and revitalizes relationships with land and the environment.

In the first major section, Red Nation’s objective is to demonstrate the necessity of eliminating the carceral regimes that support settler colonialism, global imperialism, and global capitalism through divestment and abolition. The interrelated institutions of the carceral system are the military, police, and prisons – or, as they call it, the military-prison industrial complex (MPIC). According to the Red Nation, the MPIC is in place, serving to protect the settler ruling class by maintaining control over stolen lands. Extensions of this carceral system consist of Child Protective Services, Customs and Border Protection, and Customs Enforcement. The Red Nation proposes that these systems of oppression are known for reflecting white supremacy and settler dominance. It is worth noting that the MPIC expands to the detention and deportation of immigrant people. The Red Nation calls for divestment as a strategy to dismantle these



systems of state violence that seek to steal people from their lands, place them in cages behind bars, and remove Indigenous children from their families and tribes. Further, the Red Nation implies that these racialized systems of incarceration are functioning as intended and cannot be reformed – and, thus, must be abolished. The abolishment of these carceral systems is a key aspect of the Red Deal.

Mindful of the broad implications of settler colonialism and capitalism, the Red Nation aptly identifies other sites of struggle which must be divested from as well. For example, they call for an end to violence in bordertowns. As The Red Nation posits, “Bordertowns emerged from the dispossession, relocation, and ethnic cleansing of Indigenous people” (2021:51). These towns – highly populated by Indigenous people, yet surveilled and policed as settler-controlled spaces – function as sites of capitalist exploitation of Indigenous bodies, land, and labor. These extractive spaces have also been significant sites of violence for Indigenous women, trans, and non-binary individuals. The Red Nation elaborates, “A common form of violence inflicted upon Indigenous people is ‘Indian rolling’ or the targeted assault, torture, and murder of Native People” (2021:53). As such, the Red Nation asserts a need for the extension and enforcement of treaty rights in these off-reservation sites. Furthermore, the Red Nation calls for an end to US occupation of Indigenous lands globally. Just as Indigenous colonization and genocide of the past (and present) has served as a measure of ensuring US economic and political dominance, contemporary US foreign interventions, wars, and occupations across the globe serve to assure continued capitalist dominance. Thus, they assert that movements and campaigns must embrace anti-imperialism as a necessary tenet of change.

Equally important is their call to abolish nation-state borders. Much like global imperialist occupation, they point out that borders serve to segregate, surveil, exploit, criminalize, and overall aid in enforcing the agendas of nation-states – particularly in the Global North. In an especially effective example, the Red Nation refers to the Kumeyaay and Tohono O’odham Nations, whose lands are divided by the US/Mexico border, demonstrating how state borders are in direct opposition to Indigenous

sovereignty and self-determination. They end this chapter of the book by stating, “No one is illegal on stolen ground,” which is perhaps one of the best summations of this contradiction.

Divestment and abolition of these carceral institutions and arms of the state is only one part of what the authors of the Red Nation call for. As they argue in the second major section, divested money and resources from these institutions can and should be reinvested into collectively healing our bodies. As the authors (2021:7) tactfully point out, capitalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism have incapacitated Indigenous peoples (along with many others outside of the ruling class) ability to develop and thrive according to their own “needs, principles, and values.” Furthermore, they point out the United States’ enforcement of global austerity programs, economic sanctions, free trade agreements which favor large corporations in the Global North, and the burning of fossil fuel as contributors to the international displacement and forced migration of Indigenous peoples.

In light of these disparities, they point out a number of possible paths forward. For example, they propose extending citizenship rights to all migrants – especially climate migrants – affected by the fallout of US global imperialism. They also suggest universalizing access to a wide range of resources that fulfill basic human rights. These include free, sustainable, and accessible housing, education, healthcare, and transportation/infrastructure. They also stress the need for access to healthy and sustainable food. Under a capitalist system, food is a commodity, which further drives class inequalities. For Indigenous peoples, this has - in part - translated to an inability to grow their own food and left them with dependence on processed junk foods. Here, they suggest building food sovereignty movements which reestablish relationships with the land, collective efforts such as cooperative gardens and seed banks, and community organizations to feed people. These recommendations call for and encourage self-determination, collectivity over commodification, and access to resources that benefit *all*.

In the final section, the Red Nation makes the case for reinvesting in our common future to heal the planet. The Red Nation argues that healing the planet is not possible without Indigenous liberation and decolonization of our atmosphere. The

future of our ecosystem is dependent on the transition from exploitative extraction or, in better words, extractive capitalism to renewable extraction led by Indigenous people creating clean, sustainable energy. The extraction of minerals for Lithium-ion batteries, which power solar panel systems and sustain renewable energy, may be viewed as a form of renewable extraction. The Red Nation emphasizes this transition cannot be led by anyone other than Indigenous peoples because they are not profit-driven and are not motivated by green capitalism; they are simply attempting to rekindle their relationship with the land, which they consider a relative. Therefore, Indigenous people demand mass land return so they can begin the cleansing of the Earth. This follows with a call to decriminalize all water protectors and land defenders. As part of the process of transitioning to renewable extraction, the Red Nation acknowledges the need to pay reparations to those the US has exploited in the past. We must consider that the US has created the most carbon gas emissions in the world and thus owes what the Red Nation refers to as a “climate debt.” Land, water, and air restoration – polluted and poisoned by capitalist endeavors – will take years to restore. With Indigenous peoples leading this restoration through mass land return, the Red Nation proposes reliance on hydroponics and aquaponics for subsistence. This ultimately means that food will be grown indoors, without groundwater, and not in soil - while the lands are being restored. Biodiversity thrives in areas where Indigenous people are free to caretake land. Humans are not separate from the Earth; the Red Nation believes we are all interdependent and related. Who better to restore our ecosystem than its relatives who view the Earth as sacred?

The Red Nation’s call to action is a call to all of humanity – not just Indigenous peoples. According to their ideology, every human on this Earth is a relative and should act accordingly. This call depends on an anti-capitalistic, anti-imperialistic, and decolonial transition that would ultimately benefit our ecosystem. References to this transition include abolishing borders, carceral systems, and their extensions, providing universalized access to resources, paying reparations and climate debts to those countries of the global north exploits, and mass land return so that Indigenous people can begin the restoration of the Earth. As a call

to action, the *Red Deal* is incredibly comprehensive and covers numerous dimensions and sites of struggle. Whether a scholar, activist, policy maker, or simply interested in changing the world for the better, we highly recommend this book. Although the incredible breadth of the book can occasionally make disseminating information difficult, it is incredibly inclusive as it calls for action from all of those who inhabit the Earth. Despite its shortcomings, this book serves as a vital warning and reminder that “it’s decolonization or extinction” (The Red Nation 2021:7).

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**Marie Rivera** (She/Her/Ella) is a graduate student pursuing her M.A. in Sociology. Her research interests consist of intersectionality, gender and sexuality studies, race and ethnicity, abolition, and climate justice. Marie currently holds the position of Vice President of the SOC Club. She is also a Research Assistant to several faculty members in the Department of Sociology. She is passionate about organizing with her Abolition Study Action People’s (ASAP) Collective and educating students on abolition as a teaching assistant. She has a strong enthusiasm for the written word and its capacity to convey the distinctive thoughts of others. She is grateful for the opportunity to work on such an amazing, dedicated editorial team and admires the journal’s ability to display the work of students. Marie acted as Graduate Managing Editor for CSF in the Spring of 2023 and Publication Co-Managing Editor in the Fall of 2023 and Spring of 2024.

**Christopher Snyder** (He/Him) is a CSULA alumni who graduated with a Master’s in Sociology in May of 2023. His research interests include race and ethnicity, inequality, climate justice, surveillance capitalism, and abolition of the carceral state. At CSULA, Christopher served as the 2019-2020 Vice President for the Sociology Club. Currently, he is a member and organizer in the Abolition Study Action People’s (ASAP) Collective. Christopher thanks and is grateful to CSF for this publishing opportunity.

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**Book Review: *Just Mercy: A True Story of The Fight for Justice*  
by Bryan Stevenson**

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Imagine having to spend 6 years in prison for a crime you did not commit. Now imagine being executed on death row for a crime you did not commit. The true story of Walter McMillian and other innocent people of color on death row would infuriate anyone who truly supports justice being served. McMillian's lawyer, Bryan Stevenson, released over 140 wrongfully convicted prisoners on death row. Walter's story in the 2015 book *Just Mercy: A True Story of the Fight for Justice* is just a mere glimpse of what Bryan Stevenson's time as a lawyer truly entailed.

The author, Bryan Stevenson, is an American lawyer, social justice activist, and law professor at New York University School of Law. He is also the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. He is not only brilliant for the way he authors the book *Just Mercy*, captivating the readers with diligence, but also for how he advocates for the people he represented in court and what the people he represented did for him unknowingly. The author is ingenious for not only serving imprisoned men without being paid a penny by the families but also for spreading the word on the injustices he had to face as a Black man himself back in Alabama in the late 1980s. Publishing his memoir out there was the best decision he could have made to raise awareness about these injustices and the fulfillment of serving justice for the underrepresented and wrongfully convicted. The book has several strengths, beginning with its advocacy for the truth. People often like to turn away from the truth because it can be ugly and horrendous, and no one wants to recognize it so that they can continue living comfortably. However, as we learn from this story, the truth will also save lives, and there is no limit to advocacy when it is the truth. If there is anything to learn about this book, it would be patience and perseverance to find what is right.

The criminal justice system at the time of this story failed so many people of color, especially Black men. The book *Just*

*Mercy* begins with the story of Walter McMillian in 1987 when he was arrested and convicted to death row for murdering an 18-year-old white woman. Yet, Walter was nowhere near the place of the crime when it occurred. Unfortunately, during the time of the crime, Black people were afraid to speak up to authorities because of the consequences it would bring to them and their families. Instead of fighting the allegations, Walter McMillian knew that his fate was set as it came down to his word vs. a white man's word. During the time that Walter was awaiting his execution, we learned of the injustices that had also been pinned on other people of color just like Walter. Other innocent men of color who also had just accepted their fate on death row simply because they never had hope to begin with. As a Black man himself, Bryan Stevenson saw himself in his clients. The frustration imposed on him by the judicial system inspired him, even more, to give some sense of hope to the innocent, as well as simply stating the truth and advocating for them since they were poorly represented at the time of their initial conviction.

The book proceeds through a series of stories that begin with the author experiencing his first execution of one of his clients, Herbert Richardson, by electric chair for a crime that he did not commit. In all of Stevenson's best efforts, he could not stop Herbert's execution. Stevenson's experience with Herbert made him even more determined to get the resources to help the following clients he represented in the following years. Throughout the book, Stevenson faces discrimination for the color of his skin, and he faces racism simply for supporting his own race. Stevenson's partner and ally, Eva Ansley, faces threats as well, especially since she was a white woman collaborating with a Black man to get wrongfully convicted felons of color on death row released. She stood by Stevenson as a white woman who was also tired of the discrimination she was forced to be surrounded by every day. For the underrepresented Black community, it was the entire world against their own words. They are surrounded by corrupt officers who are in it out of loyalty to their corrupted leaders who dictate what to do, or they will kill their families or put them in jail, too.

It is people like Bryan Stevenson who give the world hope in a dark place that seems almost hopeless. Stevenson's equal

justice initiative in Alabama brought a small amount of reform into an entire country that was corrupt. It, of course, took the help of Stevenson's allies, who made everything possible. Advocacy is an especially important theme in this story as Stevenson advocates for others who inspire him to learn more about himself. This represents how important it is to stand together to spread the truth. Spreading awareness in the original time that the events occurred seemed almost impossible, as people of color were afraid to stand up for themselves, let alone for others. Resistance is also a particularly important theme, as Stevenson's resistance to the way the system was functioning saved so many lives. Unfortunately, these themes highlight a very dark history that has now led to mass incarceration simply because of prejudices.

*Just Mercy* is a gripping story – simple, suspenseful, upsetting, and fulfilling all in one. Walter's story moves the audience in a way that makes one question their life choices – even when innocent. That is what corruption can do to a man: change you, make you believe that you are the problem, and belittle you to the point where you are afraid to speak up for what's right, even if a person's life is at stake. These real-life events reminded us that racism is an issue that started long ago and is still practiced today. As people try to justify it, it is important to advocate for one another, especially for the truth. The significance behind the story is of extremely high importance as it advocates for justice being served.

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**Emely Gavini Mendez** (She/Her/Ella) is a Sociology, MA Graduate student at Cal State LA. She attended San Bernardino Valley College and received four Associates Degrees: Administration of Justice, Humanities and Fine Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences and Sociology. She proudly transferred over to Cal State LA and pursued her B.A. degree in Sociology and graduated in less than two years. Emely's final Thesis project focuses on family dynamics and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected those dynamics. Emely will be graduating with her M.A. degree in Sociology during May 2024 as a proud published student on the CSF Editorial Board in hopes to continue her passion for writing.

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**Film Review: Unveiling the Shadows**  
***Shadow of the Vampire* by E. Elias Merhige**

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*Sammy Garcia III**Department of Sociology**California State University, Los Angeles*

E. Elias Merhige's film *Shadow of the Vampire* (2001) is a mesmerizing cinematic journey that transcends the realms of horror, art, and social commentary. At its core, the film offers a chilling glimpse into the complexities of power and control, masterfully presented through a sociological lens that forces viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about the entertainment industry and human nature. Set against the backdrop of the silent film era, "Shadow of the Vampire" centers on the making of F.W. Murnau's iconic *Nosferatu* (1922). However, this film within a film takes a sinister twist as it suggests that the actor portraying Count Orlok, Max Schreck (played brilliantly by Willem Dafoe), may indeed be a real vampire. This narrative device forms the perfect allegory for the sociological exploration of power and control through these examples of directors' tyranny, exploitation and sacrifice, collateral damage, and art vs. reality.

John Malkovich delivers a formidable performance as the visionary F.W. Murnau, a morally dubious and tyrannical director. Murnau embodies the archetype of a director who wields absolute power on the set. His relentless pursuit of cinematic perfection blinds him to the ethical boundaries of filmmaking. This imbalance of power reflects the hierarchical nature of the film industry, where directors often hold unquestioned authority. Malkovich's portrayal of director F.W. Murnau is a poignant representation of the power-hungry filmmaker. Murnau's relentless pursuit of artistic perfection mirrors the ambitions of directors who seek to make their mark in the industry. In this context, Murnau serves as an embodiment of the artistic control asserted by directors, as highlighted in the 2022 NPR article by Bob Mondello called "Hollywood and tyrants: How filmmakers take on the powerful."

The film exposes the darker side of the entertainment industry by portraying the exploitation of Max Schreck. He is treated as a disposable commodity, a means to an end in



Murnau's quest for cinematic immortality. Schreck's physical and emotional well-being is disregarded, highlighting the callousness with which those in power can manipulate and exploit those beneath them. He becomes the embodiment of the exploited artist, subjected to the whims of a powerful director. Schreck's willingness to endure physical and emotional hardships for the sake of his art reflects the power imbalances in the film industry, where the desire for creative expression can lead to the vulnerability of actors and other artistic collaborators. Because of his willingness to endure those hardships, Schreck's dedication to the role was unquestionably remarkable, even by contemporary standards. His performance was so convincing and captivating that it gave rise to rumors and legends about him being a vampire. This notion has persisted over the years and is a testament to his extraordinary ability to become the character he portrayed. While Schreck was not a "method actor" in the modern sense, his commitment to his role and the impact of his performance were certainly ahead of his time. The rumors of him being a vampire serve as a testament to the power of his acting and the lasting impression he left on audiences.

Beyond Schreck, "Shadow of the Vampire" underscores the collateral damage of Murnau's single-minded pursuit. The crew and cast members are forced to endure dangerous and unhealthy working conditions, echoing real-world instances where the safety and welfare of workers have been compromised in the name of art. The secrecy surrounding Max Schreck's true nature and the manipulative tactics employed by Murnau create a climate of fear and mistrust on the set. The actors, particularly those who share scenes with Schreck, are subjected to a level of uncertainty that amplifies the horror of their roles. This atmosphere of secrecy and manipulation has tangible consequences on the emotional well-being of the cast and crew. The film poignantly portrays the impact of unchecked authority on artistic collaborators, highlighting the emotional toll it takes on those who find themselves at the mercy of a director's relentless ambition. The power dynamics within the film industry are mirrored in the power struggle between Murnau and Schreck. The collateral damage on the set, whether it's emotional distress or physical hardship, is a direct result of the unchecked authority

wielded by the director. This dynamic emphasizes how power imbalances can create an atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and mistrust among those who are not in positions of authority.

The film raises pertinent questions about the boundaries of artistic expression. How far should artists go in their quest for creativity, and at what point does the pursuit of art become an excuse for cruelty and inhumanity? *Shadow of the Vampire* forces viewers to contemplate the ethical responsibilities of artists and the societal implications of their work. The film challenges the notion that artistic ambition can sometimes lead to the compromise of one's morality, and it blurs the line between artistic expression and ethical boundaries. The moral dilemmas faced by the characters in the film, particularly Murnau and Schreck, invite viewers to reflect on the societal implications of artistic choices and the potential harm they can inflict. It underscores the idea that artists, in their quest for creative expression, must grapple with the ethical considerations of their work and the potential impact it may have on individuals both within and outside the industry. An example of this is at the end of the movie when Murnau and crew are filming the final scene where Count Orlok is going to bite Ellen's neck, he does it once for the film, and then he can't contain himself any longer, and actually bites her and starts to suck blood from her neck. He ends up getting his strength back and proceeds to break the neck of photographer Fritz Wagner and chokes producer Albin Grau, all while Murnau is still filming, capturing all this. In his quest to create the perfect vampire movie, Murnau ends up sacrificing his people to Count Orlok, all to fulfill his ego and power. As the outside crew breaks down the door to let the sun rays come in, Orlok dies for real, and Murnau says, "I think we have it."

*Shadow of the Vampire* is a masterpiece that invites viewers to explore the sociological dimensions of power and control within the film industry. It is a chilling reminder of the consequences of unchecked authority, exploitation, and the sacrifices made in the name of art. Merhige's film serves as a thought-provoking allegory that transcends its horror genre, leaving us with a profound reflection on the dynamics of power and control that permeate both the world of cinema and society at large. In a world where the shadows often conceal uncomfortable

truths, this film shines a light on the darkest corners of human ambition and desire for control. As the narrative unfolds, we witness the sacrifices made in the name of art, the emotional toll on collaborators, and the blurred ethical boundaries that artists may grapple with in their pursuit of creative expression. The film serves as a reminder of the delicate balance between artistic dedication and artistic exploitation, highlighting the complexities of human ambition and the far-reaching consequences of unchecked authority.

Yet, *Shadow of the Vampire* leaves us with a lingering question, one that continues to provoke thought long after the credits roll: Was Max Schreck truly a vampire, as the film suggests, or was he simply a remarkably skilled actor? This question challenges our perceptions of the boundaries between reality and fiction, a theme that echoes throughout the film. It compels us to consider the role of art in blurring those lines and raises the intriguing possibility that even the most captivating performances may leave us questioning what is real and what is illusion.

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**Sammy Garcia III** (He/Him) is a Sociology, M.A. graduate student at Cal State LA. He graduated with his B.A. in Sociology and Minor in CLS Spring 2023. He made the dean's list for Sociology twice (Fall 2021, Spring 2022) and received a Sociology award for being part of CSF Student Journal in Spring 2023. His research interests are in music and film, and he is proud to have an op-ed on music published in the Spring '23 CSF Volume 5. He was part of the editorial team for Spring Semester 2023 and returned again in the Fall 2024. He enjoyed the process of working with his fellow students and new editorial team each semester.

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**Film Review: Breaking Barriers: A Critical Examination of Transgender Representation in Media through *Disclosure***

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Directed by Sam Feder, *Disclosure* (2020) is a groundbreaking documentary on Netflix that provides a comprehensive sociological analysis of the symbolic annihilation of transgender individuals in film and television. Symbolic annihilation refers to the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of a particular group in media, reinforcing stereotypes and limiting the visibility of that group. Through a combination of historical context, critical analysis, and personal narratives, the film sheds light on the harmful and inaccurate representations of transgender people in mainstream media, as well as the broader societal implications of these portrayals.

One of the most striking aspects explored in *Disclosure* is the complete absence of transgender characters in film and television. Transgender individuals have long been erased from mainstream media, perpetuating their marginalization and reinforcing the notion that they are abnormal or non-existent. By showcasing the lack of representation and its impact on transgender individuals' self-image, mental health, and overall well-being, the documentary highlights the devastating consequences of this erasure.

Moreover, the film delves into the harmful and inaccurate portrayals of transgender characters when they are included in media narratives. Transgender individuals have often been reduced to caricatures, perpetuating harmful and unrealistic stereotypes and misconceptions. These portrayals do not only misrepresent the transgender community, but they also contribute to the stigmatization and discrimination they face in society. *Disclosure* meticulously analyzes specific examples of such portrayals, providing a detailed sociological analysis of their negative effects on both the transgender community and broader societal attitudes towards transgender individuals.

In addition to examining the content of media representations, *Disclosure* also explores the power dynamics

within the film and television industry that perpetuate the symbolic annihilation of transgender individuals. The documentary sheds light on the systemic barriers transgender individuals face in accessing meaningful roles both in front of and behind the camera. By exposing the inequities in media production and distribution systems, *Disclosure* calls for structural changes within the industry to foster more inclusive and accurate representation. It emphasizes the need for diverse voices and perspectives to be included in the creative process to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and biases.

Furthermore, *Disclosure* delves into the intersectionality of transgender representation, highlighting how gender identity intersects with race, class, and other social categories. The film recognizes that transgender individuals from marginalized communities face compounded forms of symbolic annihilation, as their identities are further erased or misrepresented due to intersecting systems of oppression. By exploring the intersectional experiences of transgender people, *Disclosure* provides a nuanced understanding of the broader societal dynamics that contribute to their symbolic annihilation in film and television.

While *Disclosure* offers a powerful sociological analysis of the symbolic annihilation of transgender individuals, it also has some shortcomings. One critique is that the documentary focuses primarily on the negative aspects of transgender representation without fully exploring the positive strides being made in recent years. While it is crucial to address the harmful portrayals and erasure of transgender individuals, it is equally important to highlight the progress being made towards more accurate and inclusive representation. By balancing the analysis with examples of positive representation and showcasing the efforts of filmmakers and activists who are working towards change, the documentary could provide a more comprehensive perspective.

Additionally, though *Disclosure* acknowledges the intersectionality of transgender representation, it could delve deeper into the experiences of transgender individuals from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The documentary primarily features the narratives of white transgender individuals, which limits the examination of how intersecting systems of oppression uniquely impact transgender

people of color and those from marginalized communities. By incorporating more diverse voices and experiences, *Disclosure* could provide a more comprehensive analysis of the complexities of transgender representation.

Despite these limitations, *Disclosure* remains a valuable and thought-provoking documentary contributing to the ongoing discussion about representation and inclusion in film and television. By providing a sociological lens through which to understand the symbolic annihilation of transgender individuals, the film challenges viewers to critically examine the media they consume and the broader societal dynamics at play. It serves as a call to action for the film and television industry to prioritize diverse and accurate representation and for society as a whole to recognize the importance of visibility and inclusion for transgender individuals.

In conclusion, *Disclosure* is a great documentary that offers a comprehensive sociological analysis of transgender individuals in film and television. Through its examination of historical context, critical analysis, and personal narratives, the film portrays inaccurate representations of transgender people in mainstream media and highlights the broader societal implications of these representations. While the documentary falls short in certain aspects, it remains an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about representation and inclusion. *Disclosure* challenges viewers to examine the media they consume critically and calls for structural changes within the film and television industry to foster more inclusive and accurate representation.

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**Jessica Rivera** (She/Her/Ella) is a first-generation graduate student at Cal State LA. Jessica will be graduating with her M.A. in Sociology in May 2024. Her research interests consist of deviant behaviors, gender and mental health. She is currently working on her portfolio project on the topic of social media specifically Instagram affecting college students' self-perception. She is grateful for the opportunity she has been given to explore, grow in her writing and learn from her CSF team. Jessica had the opportunity to be a part of the book/film review team. She is a proud member of the editorial board and hopes to continue her passion in writing.

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**Film Review: *Don't Worry Darling* by Olivia Wilde**

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## INTRODUCTION

The film *Don't Worry Darling* (2022) depicts unhappiness with married life, toxic masculinity, and the fight for gender equality. Seemingly set in the 1950s, several couples live in a pretentious, thriving community that shelters successful couples under an experiment. Everyone in the town of Victory lives in a simulation initiated by a character named Frank. In the actual present day, throughout the film, Frank is portrayed as a cult leader. In this experimentation he is leading, Frank has motivated and swayed men to give him their money to exist in a virtual-reality stimulation similar to life during the 1950s. This voluntarily paid experiment transfers them mentally into another dimension, leaving their failed lives behind for the make-believe lifestyle they choose. The new life entails a successful career for the husband, a luxurious lifestyle, and joy, while the wives stay home cleaning, cooking, exercising, and living up to what the perfect woman entails. The film represents a vision of femininity that relies on essentialist assumptions about what it means to be a woman; it also underscores the risks of ignoring those who don't perfectly align with this image.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURES EXAMINED

The movie describes our society's obsession with a perfect world. It demonstrates the pressure on individuals to live a 'perfect life,' to the point of violence against women. In its most straightforward explanation, *Don't Worry Darling* challenges its spectators to test our typical and traditional social structure by the story narrative of characters falsifying and creating a new world shaped to their liking by disassembling the social structures forced onto them.

In the present day, it is revealed that Alice and Jack, the main characters, are both working-class individuals. Alice maintains her occupation while her partner Jack has growing feelings of hopelessness in his search for a job. For Jack to become

a man in his own eyes, he chooses an independent route that affects Alice's entire life. While he may have had the option of ending their relationship and pursuing his new life goal, he chooses to bring her along without her knowing. Jack had an unrealistic view of what society he wants to be a part of, which is one where he has more of an impact as a man than any of the women. Although Jack ultimately wanted a better life for himself and Alice, he took a path that affects others without their consent.

On the other hand, Alice opposes this lifestyle once she learns she's been living in a technologically controlled community called Victory. The experiment manipulates the participants into believing that having the men assume the role of breadwinner allows them to be in charge of everything while their wives will be left at ease not by having to worry about working or any personal obligations or own ambitions other than to be a regular housewife. Despite the life of luxury and comfort Victory provides, Alice wants more in life. She wanted no part of this; she prefers a society which encourages gender equality. The film illustrates a battle for change. By refusing to be a part of this community, Alice is violently putting her life at risk, possibly even death. Even in her inferior position within the simulation, she keeps fighting to end the experiment and make the world better through gender equality.

## CONCLUSION

This film meets the audience with curiosity, confusion, mystery, thrilling, and even controversial observations. Director Olivia Wilde brings the viewers on an appealing adventure full of deceit. Wilde's ability to represent the inequalities and predetermined gender roles put into society is magnificent. The story speaks on women's rights issues, especially the shared role in strengthening equality as opposed to patriarchy. In the development of the movie *Don't Worry Darling*, Wilde focuses on preventing a biased portrayal, trying to steer clear of defining men as characteristically bad and women as characteristically good. Additionally, she investigates to which level individuals acknowledge their contribution in a system that belittles them. However, the story fails to account for the experiences of lower-class women, women of color, and people living non-



heteronormative lifestyles. There's an economic privilege that the film doesn't acknowledge. It assumes that all members of the two depicted genders have shared experiences and that the struggles or successes middle-class white women go through are the same for all other women. Nevertheless, this film is for anyone who wants to experience a challenging and different view of society and gender roles.

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**Christina Mary Ramirez** (She/Her) is a sociology M.A. student at Cal State University, Los Angeles and will be graduating in the spring of 2024. Her interest is in intergenerational solidarity, children's psychological well-being, and family dynamics. She believes exploring these topics is vital for society because the family may be the first to serve as a foundational source of love, companionship, and understanding. She is in the process of completing her thesis, studying the effects parent-child conflict has on children's depression, especially while enduring a traumatic experience like divorce. Christina is grateful for the opportunity she has been given to explore her writing in sociological areas and to be able to work alongside brilliant, goal-orientated students and faculty.

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**Film Review: To Enjoy Our Cherry Pie in Community: A Commentary on *Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori* by Jōji Shimura**

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*Image of the Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori DVD cover. (Nookipedia 2023).*

**ABSTRACT**

Produced in 2006, and never formally released outside of Japan, *Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori* - otherwise known as *Animal Forest: The Movie* - follows the journey of Ai, a young girl who transplants herself to a new town in hopes of finding her talent and goal (her cherry pie). Along the way, she experiences the highs and lows of finding an identity, a sense of purpose, and belonging in a new space. Throughout her time, she wrangles with the journey of acceptance that the grandness of life requires the acceptance that she is not the main character in other people's lives, as they have their own dreams and cherry pies. In turn, she realizes she is an interdependent element of her new community whereby she sees the greatness in others, others see the greatness in her, and she sees the greatness in herself. As a film modeled after Nintendo's *Animal Crossing: Wild World* for the DS, it encapsulates familiar, nostalgic feelings fans of the franchise experience as they learn to find their cherry pie, identity, and belonging through life simulation.

## INTRODUCTION

*Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori*, translated to *Animal Forest: The Movie*, is an animated film directed by Jōji Shimura, known for his creative mastery of translating manga to film, and produced by OLM, Inc., VAP, and Nintendo. Shimura's goal was to retell the *Animal Crossing: Wild World* gaming experience on the big screen. Their faithful retelling of the gameplay experience follows Ai, a young human girl, who moves to the anthropomorphic animal town called Animal Village. The opening sequence holds a familiar formula for those who have played *Animal Crossing: Wild World*, as Ai answers the Kappa cab driver's questions about her name and reasons for moving. When she arrives at the village, nostalgia should hit any fan of the games as the opening credits play *Animal Crossing: Wild World's* "Title Screen" song. Unbeknownst to Ai, her move reflects the sociological journey of finding an identity, a sense of purpose, and belonging in a community.

## SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

To expand, let's look at sociology professors Edles and Appelrouth's (2021:400-404) explanation of how Geroge Herbert Mead used symbolic interactionist methodological approaches to highlight the dialectic relationship between the self and society through social evolution during childhood development. Specifically, Mead highlighted how children often shift from internalizing the attitudes of discrete, disconnected others ("the play stage") to simultaneously internalizing the attitudes of multiple others ("the game stage") as they age. From the "game stage," Mead believed children grew to recognize "the generalized other," a phenomenon of general attitudes and beliefs rooted in the assumed roles of a person and those around them. Through these transitions, Mead pinpoints the inseparable relationship of the self and society, where the self-acts as a byproduct of how people view themselves as the subject and object through others' perceptions. With this in mind, Ai undergoes the journey of becoming part of "the generalized other" as she learns to accept how the grandness of life requires understanding that she is not the main character in other people's lives, as they have their dreams and cherry pies to pursue (a metaphor we will explain shortly). As for franchise fans,

the film encapsulates familiar, nostalgic feelings as they, too, learn to find their cherry pie, identity, and belonging through life simulation.

Returning to the film, it showcases the start of Ai's first year living in Animal Village, which is on a warm spring day. Symbolically, her first spring represents her new beginning in the village as she haphazardly tries to find her footing in a bustling environment. The villagers do not acknowledge her presence or treat her with the kindness she expected; they talk over her, run past her, and make her fall as she attempts to deliver their orders. Despite this rocky beginning, she blooms a close friendship with Margie and Rosie. In this budding relationship, Margie shares with Ai her cherry pie metaphor: people find satisfaction in the things they wish for, strive for, and actualize; whether making a cherry pie or a goal. Following this conversation, the season transitions into summer.

Summer represents Ai's growth and connection with her neighbors as she realizes the importance of cooperation, compassion, and celebrating diversity in developing her identity. For instance, the notion of cherry pies resurfaces as Ai acknowledges her neighbors' talents and goals, ranging from Margie's desire to become a fashion designer, Blather's desire to complete the museum, Yū and Alfonso's desire to find every collectible, and Hopper's desire to catch a fish. The season ends with the summer festival and the unexpected performance of "K.K. Bossa" by the famous Animalese singer K.K. Slider at Margie's request. As he plays the song, Ai realizes it highlights the wonders of venturing outside life's familiarities to chase a cherry pie.

However, the beautiful ending of summer transitions into a mournful, rainy autumn as Ai learns Margie moved away to pursue her cherry pie without letting her know. Mourning and questioning her friendships and identity, Ai heads to the local coffee shop to contemplate. While at the coffee shop, Whitney offers Ai a complex rethinking about friendships and identity: the validity of both foregoes physical proximity through the mutual belief in the self and each other to reach one another's goals. When she returns home, she finds Margie's farewell letter, reassuring Ai that she did not want to leave on a sober note and encourages Ai

to “eat her own cherry pie.” Inspired by the letter and Whitney’s words, Ai resolves to finish the tasks given to her by the mysterious messages in bottles she kept to herself throughout the film. Spending all of Autumn paving her newfound cherry pie, winter brings a tone of completion and unity as the season represents another year finished.

During the winter festival and the annual decorations competition, Ai reaches an unexpected realization as she, the entire village, and Margie (who visited on holiday) support an alien’s return to space after it used Ai’s trees to crash into the village. For their efforts, the alien’s community expressed an extravagant gratitude for Ai’s determination to support the one who fell, leaving Ai as a hero in the eyes of many and the winner of the decorations contest. Realizing that her neighbors value her as part of the village, Ai finally expresses that she is a genuine resident of Animal Village. The story ends with a new spring, where Ai reads a letter to her mother expressing how she feels at home in her new village. Alongside her letter, pictures fill the ending credits to showcase how her neighbors reached their cherry pies, such as Margie’s successful launch of her clothing line, Blathers completing the museum, and Hopper catching a fish. In the final scene, a bloomed Lily of the Valley sways in the warm breeze as Ai heads to the village’s museum to discuss astronomy with Celeste, the local astronomer.

Though the flower represents an environmentally beautiful village in the games, here, it represents the beauty of Ai solidifying herself as an interdependent element of her community whereby she sees the greatness in others, others see the greatness in her, and she sees the greatness in herself. In other words, the flower highlights how she has become part of her community’s “generalized other.” However, this metaphor does not conflict with its representation in the games, as players also undergo the rocky journey of finding their cherry pie and supporting the cherry pies of the villagers around them to create a beautiful town subjectively and objectively.

Akin to Ai in the film, the emotions she felt moving into a new space and the heartache she felt about Margie moving away mirrors the difficult experience people across the fanbase undergo. For example, TreyTheWilliam’s (2022) *Animal*

*Crossing (GNC) Retrospective* expressed feelings about how *Animal Crossing: Population Growing* is technologically simpler than the newest game, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. But, even in the simplicity of the game, he argues that *Population Growing* cultivates advanced and human-like villager personalities, creating memorable player-to-character and character-to-character friendship-building rooted in the interconnected experience of his goals aligning with the goals of the villagers. Even Lauren (one of the co-authors for this piece), who played *Animal Crossing: Wild World* in elementary school, clearly remembers their first days in their village of “Snow” and developing their identity and community purpose through taking care of their home mortgage, populating the museum, and supporting animal neighbors. However, in this simulated self and “generalized other,” she vividly recalls heartache caused by the unexpected move of her favorite villager, Pinky, and her journey of reaffirming her sense of purpose, connection, and expectations for herself and those around her. Even in the decades since Pinky’s move, Lauren hopes Pinky is happily chasing her cherry pie and is making someone’s experience with “the generalized other” brighter. Further, TreyTheWilliam conveyed feelings of missing and wondering about villagers such as Murphy and Rasher, who “moved” in his game reset, and Hank, who moved from his game file but never appeared in future games. They express how their moving equates to real-life experiences of friendships not lasting but the ability to still think about them with good intentions (TreyTheWilliam 2022). From player experiences such as these, *Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori* captures the adventures, emotions, and journey to develop a self and community with villagers through life simulation. Expectedly, these life lessons carry into players’ experiences of interacting with the real world as they use what they learned about cherry pies to experience the joys of strangers becoming best friends, finding support in unexpected places, and finding comfort in the uncomfortable journey of developing identity, community, and dynamic friendships wherever they go.

As the games and film encourage the development of a complex understanding of the self, friendship, and community through the lens of “the generalized other,” players learn these

relationships transcend physical proximity as both parties must wish the best for each other and themselves to achieve their cherry pies no matter where they go to find a new sense of belonging. For instance, as many transition from high school to the ‘real world’ and begin to pursue their unique cherry pies through grander and more divergent paths, they may also experience strains in friendships that were originally built upon proximity. Often, many feel discouraged by this reality and promise one another they will -always stay in touch- to maintain the familiar while pursuing the unknown. As *Animal Crossing* depicts both instances of venturing into a new life and not wanting life to change, it offers solace that physical limitations do not define the boundaries of friendship and community as everyone is part of a “generalized other” that holds norms and expectations for everyone to wish the best for each other as they actualize their dreams. Therefore, even in physical distance, friendships strengthen even as people pursue different goals through their mutual hope for the best.

For a more tangible example of players realizing the potential of “the generalized other” in real life, *Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori* was released only in Japan in 2006, despite amassing 1.7 billion Yen (approximately 16,216,000 USD) at the box office (Internet Archive 2012) and the franchise’s continued popularity. Adding to the surprise, Nintendo of America made a statement in 2007 expressing that they did not intend to release the film in their jurisdiction (rawmeatcowboy 2007). Because of Nintendo’s decisions, information about the movie’s promotion is limited to Japanese announcements in the magazine *Hochi Shimbun* (Groenendijk 2006), a website (Internet Archive 2007), and video trailers (OLM n.d.). Currently, any interviews with the cast and director are limited to an untranslated *Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori* promotional booklet available only to those who bought the Japan-exclusive movie DVD (Nintendo 2006). Irrespective of these decisions, franchise fans collaborated to create subtitled (Automatic-Reindeer14 2023) and dubbed (siilhouette 2014) adaptations to share online for all to enjoy while archiving information about the movie to wikis and WayBackMachine. Unsurprisingly, the efforts of the fan base to use their talents to reach a collective goal encapsulates the message of the film and games, sharing this community cherry pie.

## CONCLUSION

Considering the insightful sociological lessons *Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori* and the Animal Crossing film games offer for real-life experiences, the authors wish to leave readers with the lyrics to “K.K. Bossa” as a reminder that though life may not be easy, whether it be experienced through film, game, or real life, we are not alone when it comes to the feelings and tribulations that come with navigating friendships, the desire to belong, and the individual pursuit of dreams. Notably, Ai understands “K.K. Bossa” as an inspirational song about her friendship with Margie; it is about the pursuit of dreams and taking life into your own hands to fulfill such dreams. Knowing this, Margie had to take the opportunity to fulfill her dreams and encouraged Ai to do the same. Paralleled to Ai’s experience, the song serves as a reminder that just as life does not end when friends venture out into the world to make their cherry pies, neither do ours when we pursue our own as we are all part of one large “generalized other” that hopes the best for one another and ourselves.

### “K.K. Bossa”

Waves crashing down, splashes and beauty resound;  
Oh, oh, oh,  
Where the shore ends, become unwound.  
Treasure is found down by the sands of the sea;  
unlock the door, you may have the key...  
Out past the door, Adventure lies;  
Thrills are in store, Worthwhile and engaging.  
Open your eyes, Roll on with the tide;  
and maybe, you’ll find there’s a new life awaiting.  
Waves crashing down, splashes and beauty resound;  
Oh, oh, oh,  
Where the shore ends, become unwound.  
Treasure is found down by the sands of the sea:  
its calling out, it’s time to be free.

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**Esai Santana** (He/Him) is an undergraduate senior at California State University, Los Angeles who transferred from East Los Angeles with an A.A. Degree in both Sociology and in General Studies: Social and Behavioral Sciences. Graduating in Spring 2024 with a B.A. Degree in Sociology, he joined CSF as an opportunity to connect more with his peers in sociology, step out of his comfort zone, and take an interest in publishing a journal. His main sociological research interests include inequalities, sexuality, and gender. As a video game enjoyer, he co-authored a review on *Gekijōban Dōbutsu no Mori*, a movie on the Animal Crossing Franchise focused on the development of self.

**Lauren Whiting** (She/They) is a Sociology M.A. student at CSULA but attended AVC for their ADT in Sociology and CSUB-AV for their B.A. in Sociology: Human Services. Lauren's sociological areas of interest cover topics such as US interactions with and perceptions of the justice system and the parent-child relationship when parenting with disabilities. For her thesis, she hopes to explore the influence of parental religiosity on the relationship between disabled parents and their children. Their passion for these topics offered them opportunities to tutor, present at six conferences, and receive various accolades. While working toward their M.A., Lauren is a case manager at a reentry nonprofit in the Antelope Valley. With a passion for supporting others, participating in CSF as a peer reviewer and media team member has offered Lauren the joy of aiding fellow students in their journey of sharing their passions with others.

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**Music Review: A Haunting Sociological Masterpiece in the Song “Left Behind” by The Plot in You**

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Music has always been a powerful medium for artists to explore and express sociological themes. The Plot in You’s single “Left Behind” is a testament to this, as it explores profound sociological aspects like interpersonal relationships, abandonment, and emotional resilience. The Plot in You is a metalcore band formed in Hancock County, Ohio, in 2010. They have consistently pushed the boundaries of post-hardcore and metalcore genres; their 2023 single release, “Left Behind,” is no exception. With its emotionally charged lyrics, relentless instrumentals, and haunting atmosphere, the song tackles moving on from a toxic relationship, abandonment, loss, and betrayal and having the strength to leave it all behind and move forward. In this song review, we embark on a sociological exploration of how “Left Behind” resonates with the complex dynamics of marriage and human relationships. From the impact of time to the nuances of power dynamics, this song encapsulates the multifaceted nature of human experience within the context of intimate connections. As we embark on this exploration, we navigate the haunting melodies and introspective lyrics, shedding light on emotional labor, the looking-glass self, and the temporal dimension intricately woven into the fabric of this musical masterpiece.

Embedded within the emotional tapestry of “Left Behind” are the concepts of emotional labor and the looking-glass self. The singer’s introspective journey reflects the emotional labor involved in maintaining a relationship—navigating desires, sacrifices, and the weight of societal expectations. The concept of emotional labor (BetterUp 2021) refers to when a person is responsible for managing their own feelings and the feelings of others. In the song, the singer’s struggle to make the other person care can be identified as a form of emotional labor. Although they are investing emotional effort into the relationship, it appears to be one-sided. In other words, he is giving his all in this, but it isn’t reciprocated. In contemporary society, many individuals find

themselves performing emotional labor, often in the pursuit of maintaining relationships that may not be mutually beneficial. This unequal distribution of emotional labor can lead to feelings of frustration and exhaustion, mirroring the sentiments expressed in the song. According to ThePRP website (2023), guitarist and vocalist Landon Tewers commented on the release of their single and discussed the motivation for it, saying, “‘Left Behind’ was inspired by old nostalgic bands and artists I grew up listening to. I wanted to make something as a tribute to that sound and hopefully elevate it. It’s a song about gaining back confidence and hope after cutting off a person that was draining and moving forward with a fresh perspective.” Both musically and lyrically, you can detect those inspirations; similar to the bands he grew up listening to, their songs were so raw, visceral, and emotionally charged that they resonated with teenagers. Tewers is also doing the same thing but with a metalcore twist.

The looking-glass self, a sociological theory by Charles Horton Cooley, is manifested as the singer gazes upon the self through the perceived judgments of the other. Lines such as “*Craving me was useless, all excuses drained*” capture the emotional labor of yearning within a relationship. The drained excuses signify not just personal exhaustion but also the societal pressures to justify one’s desires, echoing the looking-glass self, where individuals shape their self-concept based on imagined judgments from society. The haunting opening lines thrust the listener into the temporal dimension: “*Time has hit you different, but I don’t think you’ve changed.*” The interplay of time and personal evolution takes center stage, introducing a sociological perspective transcending individual experiences. In sociological terms, the temporal dimension refers to the dynamic nature of relationships over time.

In the context of “Left Behind,” the temporal dimension becomes a canvas on which the singer paints the evolving landscape of a relationship. The notion that time hits each person differently becomes a collective reflection on the temporal ebb and flow that shapes the sociological landscape of marriage. The singer’s observation that “*I don’t think you’ve changed*” introduces a sociological lens through which we view personal growth within the confines of matrimony. This observation

prompts contemplation on societal expectations surrounding change in relationships. As the lyrics progress, the exploration of sacrifice unveils a sociological theme deeply embedded in the institution of marriage. “*Craving me was useless*” speaks to societal expectations of fulfillment within relationships. The concept of drained excuses suggests emotional exhaustion, pointing to the societal pressure to justify one’s desires within the context of marriage.

“*All the sacrifice had robbed me of my time*” introduces a poignant sociological exploration of societal pressures to make sacrifices within marriage. While sacrifice is often praised, the line suggests that certain sacrifices celebrated by society may erode the essence of self over time. This resonates with broader sociological discussions on the expectations and consequences of sacrifices within the context of marriage. The narrative takes a sociological turn, addressing power dynamics within relationships: “*You’d keep me down. I know better now. Won’t bring me down again.*” The acknowledgment of being kept down suggests societal imbalances within marriages. The singer’s declaration of knowing better now becomes a sociological proclamation of empowerment, reflecting the collective understanding of the sociological evolution of personal strength in the framework of marriage. The refusal to be brought down again signifies a sociological shift in power dynamics—an emancipation from oppressive forces within marriages. The singer’s voice becomes a resonant vessel, carrying the collective narrative of those who have overcome societal imbalances in the context of marital connections.

The acknowledgment of keeping secrets and knowing one’s biggest errors introduces a sociological investigation of intimacy—a fundamental component of marriage. “*I still keep your secrets, know your worst mistakes*” portrays the singer as a repository of shared vulnerabilities, reflecting the societal norm of emotional intimacy within marital relationships. This complexity is further emphasized by the notion of playing into weakness, offering a sociological commentary on the power dynamics that can erode individual strength within the context of marriage. The stripping away of strength becomes a poignant observation of the societal pressures and vulnerabilities that may compromise one’s

resilience within marital connections. The singer's voice becomes an auditory canvas, portraying the nuanced interplay of societal expectations and personal weaknesses within the context of marriage. As the lyrics draw to a close, the temporal theme resurfaces, reflecting on emotional transformation within the context of marriage: "*Time has hit me different, I don't feel the same. Know I feel this distance, but I don't share the pain.*" The singer's voice becomes a sonic vessel for nuanced emotions—time hitting differently, a sense of emotional detachment, and an unshared pain within the broader societal framework of post-marital dynamics. The intentional repetition of "*I left behind*" serves as a sonic bookend, bringing the narrative full circle. The singer's voice becomes a sonic thread, weaving together the temporal, emotional, and sociological elements. The unshared pain becomes a sociological exploration of how societal expectations and norms shape the aftermath of marital relationships.

"Left Behind" by The Plot in You emerges as a profound sociological commentary on marriage and relationships. Through its evocative lyrics, the song navigates the temporal, sacrificial, and power dynamics inherent in intimate connections. It unveils the complexities of societal expectations, vulnerability, and emotional transformation within the context of marriage. As the song unfolds, it invites listeners to reflect on the shared sociological experiences embedded in the intricate dance of human relationships. In a society where marriage is often idealized, "Left Behind" disrupts the narrative, shedding light on the societal pressures and complexities that individuals face within the confines of matrimony. The lyrics become a mirror reflecting the collective challenges and triumphs within the broader sociological framework of intimate connections. As we delve into the haunting melodies and introspective lyrics, "Left Behind" stands as a testament to the power of music to articulate, resonate, and dissect the profound sociological intricacies woven into the fabric of human relationships. The Plot in You has a discography that often explores complex emotions, relationships, and personal struggles.

*If you enjoyed the themes in “Left Behind” and are looking for other songs that delve into similar issues, here are a few recommendations from The Plot in You’s repertoire!*

**From their 2018 album *Dispose*:**

With themes of self-destruction and the toll of toxic relationships, “Disposable Fix” provides a raw and unfiltered exploration of personal struggles and emotional turmoil. “Rigged” addresses themes of manipulation and deceit in relationships. It explores the realization of being deceived and the emotional aftermath that follows. “Feel Nothing” explores themes of emotional detachment and numbness, offering a deep dive into the complexities of feeling nothing in the face of tumultuous relationships. While more musically upbeat, “Not Just Breathing” explores themes of liberation and self-discovery. It touches on breaking free from the constraints of a suffocating relationship and reclaiming one’s identity.

**From their 2015 album *Happiness in Self Destruction*:**

A raw and intense track, “Dear Old Friend” delves into the darker aspects of personal relationships, addressing betrayal and the emotional toll it takes on individuals. The lyrics of “My Old Ways” delve into the struggle of breaking free from destructive habits and patterns in relationships. It reflects on personal growth and the challenges of leaving behind harmful behaviors. “Better Vibes” reflects on the aftermath of a toxic relationship and the pursuit of better days. It explores the idea of moving forward and finding solace in a more positive mindset.

**Stand-alone Single:**

“Crows” touches on the aftermath of a failed relationship and the emotional scars that linger. It delves into the haunting aspects of memories and the impact of past connections.

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