

MENTORSHIPS FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH  
**IN AGRICULTURE, LETTERS, AND SCIENCE**



RESEARCH JOURNAL  
**2021 • VOLUME 2**

**UCDAVIS**



## MISSION STATEMENT

Mentorships for Undergraduate Research in Agriculture, Letters, and Science (MURALS) is a pre-graduate opportunity program designed to enrich the research experience of students situationally disadvantaged in their access to graduate school.

Initiated in the spring of 1988, under the sponsorship of the Office of Student Affairs and the academic leadership of the College of Letters and Science, MURALS was initially established to address the needs of students who were majoring in programs within the humanities and the social sciences. Now MURALS includes students from all academic disciplines, including mathematics, the biological and physical sciences.

The mission of MURALS is to encourage students to further their education beyond the baccalaureate. It is hoped that by working with a faculty mentor, the student will not only have an opportunity to participate in academic research, but that the experience may give the student an incentive to pursue graduate work that will lead to a master's or doctoral degree.



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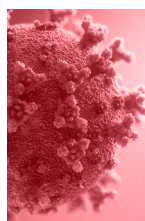
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## INTO MY MOTHER'S WOMB: THE VIOLENCE OF NARRATION

*Written by Grace-Lynn Bridges*

*Sponsored by The Department of Anthropology, University of California Davis*

### Acknowledgements

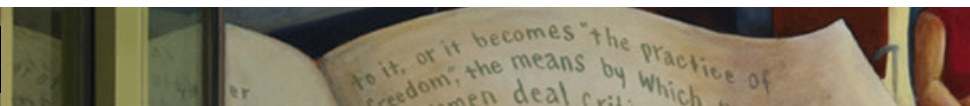
To my mother,  
Who has swallowed more grief  
Than her stomach can bear  
Who has carried more heartache  
Than her back can withstand  
Who has walked through more struggles  
Than her feet can allow  
Yet every morning  
She gets up to keep fighting  
As if her bones do not ache for rest  
As if her heart does not long for peace

And my father  
Who never had a father  
Yet became the best  
Who never had soil and water  
Yet bloomed into a rose  
Who never had anything to believe in  
Yet learned to have faith  
Who never belonged  
But managed to fit in  
Who was never taught how to be a man  
But grew into a great one.

-Thank you

*"We know that the law is good if one uses it properly"*

*-Timothy 1:8*



## Abstract

Slavery was the first attack on the Black family unit, making it nearly impossible for family formation, let alone stability and security within these bonds. During slavery, Black mothers were renowned for trying to protect their children and keep the family together. Nearly 200 years later violence against the Black community persists. Many of these evil acts have been justified in systematic ways: The Black Codes, Jim Crow, mass incarceration and police violence. Karl Marx argued that capitalism seeps down even into the family unit, and so I ask: does not structural violence do the same? Through ethnographic interviews with Black mothers and archival research, my hope is to bear witness to the voices that have been drowned out and turned into statistics. I am interested in exploring how violence enters the home shaping subjectivities and relationships, psychic experiences, and bodily presences. For centuries, Black families have had to navigate an extremely violent America. This research project posits to understand just how parents teach or do not teach their children to circumvent societal strain and trauma. As a society we've separated the private from the public, I aim to express just how interconnected the domestic and the social really are.

*Keywords:* structural violence, chattel slavery, narrative, Blackness, motherhood

## The Slave in American Media

*"Nkrumah, Nkrumah"*

*Sometimes I say this at the end of my prayers,  
As a reminder of the once hope of acceptance,  
Of community,  
Of home.  
Rejection.  
Estranged my body is foreign in all its parts.  
Slave.  
My only origin found  
within my mother's womb.*

I was in the sixth grade the first time I was asked where my family was from. Oddly enough, it was no eleven-year-old girl at recess who asked me this question. Instead, it was my history teacher asking me not only where my family came from; but the names of those family members as well. All the students were assigned a family tree which we would later present to the entire class. That day I rushed home to ask my Granny all about our ancestors. Now my Grandmother had twelve siblings, and she told me all about them, as well as her Mother and Father. After that however her answers became vague, struggling as she tried to tell me about my Great Great Grandmother. She said she was a Native American but that was about it, nothing about her character, just simply race. Nonetheless one thing she was adamant about was this: our ancestors were slaves.

For centuries Hollywood has worked to try and give the public an understanding of Slave life. Nevertheless, this depiction has always been watered down so that it would be more fitting to public comfortability. In D.W Griffith's 1915 silent film *Birth of a Nation*, he depicts the American slave as happy and enthusiastic about the servitude in which they were forced to provide to Anglo-Saxon Americans. It wasn't until 1977 when the happy joyous slave representation was counteracted by Alex Haley's 1976 book *Roots*. In an article written by Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture they write;

Roots marked the first time America witnessed slavery portrayed in detail. Along with the scenes of transporting, selling, and trading men and women, were scenes showing the brutality African Americans often suffered at the hands of slave owners. The depictions of abuse and cruelty were limited, of course, by the medium and by what American society would accept at the time. In keeping with the series' marketing campaign, the show focused heavily on the family's ultimate triumphs. For all of Roots' firsts, and there were many, it was ultimately a story of resiliency (Slavery, Hollywood, and Public Discourse, n.d.)

Having said that, America continues to try to move forward. Three decades later we see movies like critically acclaimed *12 Years of Slave* within the Hollywood film industry. Smithsonian continues saying,

Unlike prior motion pictures and television shows, *12 Years* does not retreat from the brutality many Blacks endured. The movie is not for the faint hearted, as the violence and cruelty it portrays is not the highly stylized violence found in films like *Django Unchained*. *12 Years* is true to the reality that for years many Americans treated fellow human beings with ruthless brutality — and that reality is harder to face. (Slavery, Hollywood, and Public Discourse, n.d.)

Slave Narratives have often been viewed as first-hand accounts of slave life. Yet, when given a deeper look, one is able to see how these narratives have also been translated to suit the White American political agenda and level of comfortability. As slavery flourished in the United States helping the country gain power and economic success, the image of slavery was that of the happy joyous slave, content with the labor forced upon them. However, this narrative conflicted with that of the fugitive slave hoping to flee the horrors of the institution. These narratives opposed the stereotypes created by slaveholders to justify their barbarism. Nonetheless it was not the tragic tales of mothers and fathers, sisters, and brothers, that qualified their publication in abolitionist journals, but the economic value. An article published by the Library of Congress writes;

Their often sensational revelations of the realities of slave life provided a persuasive challenge to Southern justifications of slavery. During the antebellum period thousands of autobiographical and biographical accounts of slave experiences were published and generally promoted and distributed by abolitionist propagandists. These narratives enjoyed immense popularity, were eagerly sought for publication by abolitionist journals, and proved financially successful. (Slave Narratives from Slavery to the Great Depression, n.d.)

Following the civil war, the tone of slave narratives changed. As American government fought to prevent another war, they once more sought to shield the population from the horrors that constituted slave life. The Library of Congress explicitly writes,

A nation weary of war and intent upon reconciliation expressed little desire to be reminded of the realities of life before the war. Most of the narratives that did appear in the half-century following Reconstruction [...] reflected a radically different conception of slave life. Now the narratives were employed almost exclusively as a nostalgic and sentimental reaffirmation of the "plantation legend" popularized by Southern local colorists. (Slave Narratives from Slavery to the Great Depression, n.d.)

It was not until the 1920's and 30's that White America again gained an interest in the everyday activities of the Slave. This time, however, there was a sociological aspect to the research that was conducted. Black people were given questionnaires that sought to capture the just of slave affairs.

Many projects that populated the slave narrative discourse at this time claimed that these stories would soon vanish as the number of ex-slaves rapidly diminished. Yet an article published by the Library of Congress argues one should be hesitant to accept this answer.

This fact was often cited as a motivation by those compiling the narratives. However, while it goes far toward explaining the sense of urgency that inspired the several narrative-gathering efforts, it is insufficient to account for the heightened awareness of the narratives' value at this particular time. The underlying sources of this interest must be sought elsewhere. (Slave Narratives from Slavery to the Great Depression, n.d.)

The use of slave narratives in America's political agenda is clear. As the antebellum period began to fade so did the truth regarding the horrific nature of slavery. Instead, Slave narratives were used as political propaganda to ensure that another civil war would not break out. Thus, the disgusting truth of White America's actions were once more hidden in plain sight. In Christopher Lasch's 1979 book, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in The Age of Diminishing Expectations*, he describes narcissism as a cultural crisis in America. He argues that this blatant denial of the past has led to a superficially progressive and optimistic society, that on closer analysis truly embodies a people who are unable to face their future(18). But how do we acknowledge a people that historically, and systematically, have been wiped out of history? How do I write a narrative of survival if there is refusal that any harm was ever done? If slavery was purposeful for our country, then there is no story of survival. America's inability to account for the gruesome nature of slavery within it means that we have yet to acknowledge the Black body as a whole. Every institution in America actively ignores the cries of my Black brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. However one's identity cannot be separated from "the scars left by forgotten episodes and hidden discourses" (Arextaga, 125). This rings true for the Black community in contemporary America today, and the current political climate is a testament to that.

So I ask, how do we acknowledge the Black body in a way that is not out to accomplish some political agenda? What writing methods does one employ to begin to see the slave, the outsider, the foreigner, those transformed into commodities, property, and statistics? Zora Neal Hurston's ethnography, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last Black Cargo*, rings loud in the back of my head as I pray for revelation. Kassula's (the last living slave to have survived the middle passage) story begins to pour into my heart. As she writes about the life history of Cudjo, it is as if I get a side to a story America always thought was not worthy of telling. The story of my own ancestors who in all their bravery and strength managed to live through the horrors of the Middle Passage yet were unable to loosen chains. Cudjo's story is no narrative, it is a history textbook, a survival guide, and Hurston tells it as such. Through the language she provides we become immersed in not only Cudjo's life, but his grief, joy, and loss. We begin to see his life as less of a series of unfortunate events, and more as a testimony of resilience. So yes, I cry with Kassula, because as I read his story it is as if it is the language in which my own sadness is derived. His loneliness feels all too familiar, his grief all too homely. Cudjo speaks the language of my ancestors. The native tongue of memory, the saving song of grief, the careless cry of loneliness, the grim gospel of Black cargo. A lineage who's burdens only Christ can bear.

I do not wish to bring up the horrors of one of the most violent institutions in the world to make my people once more a victim. For I do not choose to classify myself as someone who barely survived, and neither will I subject my fellow brothers and sisters to such a language. However, to call my ancestors survivors instead of victims, humans instead of slaves, I must acknowledge the pain that the Black body has been made to not only endure, but thrive in. I must first expose the follie that Western historicism (which seeks to find the general in the particular), has tried to ascribe some ontological meaning to: Chattel Slavery (Chakrabarty 2000, 23).



## The Slave

Prior to The arrival of English men in Virginia, one of the greatest of the thirteen colonies, England was without any laws that established humans as property. When Africans were first brought to America they were classified as indentured servants not slaves; meaning one could eventually earn their freedom. In an essay entitled *Slavery in the United States: Persons or Property*, Paul Finkelman expresses the confusion surrounding slave freedom:

The first Africans in Virginia were treated as indentured servants, held for a term of years, and then eligible for freedom. ‘Antonio a Negro’ came to Virginia in 1621, and was listed as a servant. He later became free, changed his name to Anthony Johnson, and ultimately accumulated land, held whites as indentured servants, and would later own a black slave.<sup>13</sup> The earliest legal records of Virginia illustrate a confusing process. Some Africans were held in lifetime servitude; others were free. (Finkelman 2012, 107)

While never stated in political discourse, Africans worked as slaves alongside many European indentured servants. However, it was not until 1660 that a Virginia law finally reflected the use of the Black body as slave labor. As Finkelman describes, this was the first time the Black body was seen as a mere commodity in political discourse;

In 1659–60, a Virginia law recognized slavery for the first time, although without defining it. The law provided ‘That if the said Dutch or other foreigners shall import any negro slaves, They the said Dutch or others shall, for the tobacco really produced by the sale of the said negro, pay only the impost of two shillings per hogshead, the like being paid by our owne nation’.<sup>23</sup> By this time slaves were seen as commodities being imported into the colony. This was the first clear statement that Africans in new British colonies were considered ‘things’ or prop-erty, rather than persons. (Finkelman 2012, 109)

What then is the definition of the word Slave? As a child, I pondered this question hoping one day I might sit in a class and find the origin of this unspeakable history. In Saidiya Hartman’s book, *Lose Your Mother*, she defines the Slave as a stranger, one “[...]torn from kin and community, exiled from one’s own country, dishonored and violated, the slave defines the position of the outsider” (Hartman 2006, 5). It wasn’t until the Transatlantic Slave Trade that the concept of race was attached to what it meant to occupy the position of the outsider or the slave. Prior to this, the word Slave or “Slav” was used to define Eastern Europeans who during medieval times constituted the slave population. Hartman writes;

The very term “Slavery” derived from the word “Slav,” because Eastern Europeans were the slaves of the medieval world. At the beginning of modernity, slavery declined in Europe as it expanded in Africa, although as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was still possible to purchase “white” slaves... Iberians can be credited according to one historian “for restricting bondage... to peoples of African descent.” It was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the slave and the free...hardened into a color line. (Hartman 2006, 5)

Throughout my life, I have clung to a Blackness in which I was told slavery was its only origin. This answer has always felt incomplete, making my own identity feel as if it could never be known. I was left wondering where, then, is the home of the stranger, the outsider, those torn from kin, or the Slave? Hartman describes how many African Americans in the fifties and sixties migrated to Ghana hoping to find a state in which their human rights would be protected, a place where for once they could



find freedom from violence, and a sense of homecoming. How fast must one run to try and escape the horrors of Jim Crow, the Cold War, the backseat of the bus, a trail of slain leaders... what they called... second class citizenship (Hartman 2006, 17)? They arrived in Ghana with bruised feet and the hope of freedom in their back pockets which quickly dissolved. After only a short time under the rule of Kwame Nkrumah, also known as the *Black Messiah*, it felt as if God had once again forsaken them. African Americans were once more exiled and made to be foreigners. Those who remained found themselves living only as a means of survival,

A small community remained and stuck it out, weathering more coups and food shortages. Typically, those who stayed were...the stateless ones who were unable to erase the image of a fourteen-year-old boy's bloated corpse dredged from the Mississippi, or four dead little girls buried in the rubble of a church in Birmingham, or Malcolm's slumped figure on the floor... or Martins body in the hotel Balcony in Memphis, or the bullet-shattered bodies of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark (Hartman 2006, 36).

Surviving and Blackness go hand and hand. Black people living as a means of survival is in our genetic blueprint. In New York Quaker Samuel Wood's 1805 article, *Injured Humanity; Being A Representation of What the Unhappy Children of Africa Endure from Those Who Call Themselves Christians*, he details the horrific nature of the slave trade. Silence and slavery are two terms I now know to be synonymous. There however is a difference between the silence one maintains to deny wrongdoing, and the silence that fills the room when language no longer describes the sorrow one feels. In Wood's article he describes the latter,

Even those who, from motives of interest, still favour or engage in the trade, have been obliged to be silent upon the injustice of first procuring the Negroes, and have not had the hardiness to excuse or palliate the horrors of the *middle* passage: but still they assert, that the treatment the slaves meet with in the West-Indies amply counterbalances their previous sufferings; nay, they have not scruple to extol a state of servitude as a happy asylum from African despotism, and calmly maintain, that the condition of the laboring poor in England is much harder than that of the Negroes in the West-India islands (Woods, 1805).

Wood goes on to describe the lack of care and consideration for kinship when sales were made. At no point during the buying process was consideration for kinship ties considered. Instead, husbands and wives were split apart, and children were ripped out of the arms of their parents. This would be the start of one of the most vicious attacks on kinship ties.

Slave: an umbrella term that has kept my people from ever really being seen. Slave: a word without gender, home, or humanity. The general classification ascribed to my Great Great Grandmother, a term she would spend her whole life trying to outrun. Black, a color I spent most of my childhood attempting to wash off my skin, spending hours in the bathroom trying to brush off my gums. Maybe I am no different than my ancestors hoping to pass as White or taking refuge under a Native American identity. To be a woman and Slave is at its core intersectional. It is in the very breath found within the female Slave that we see lust and disgust collide, romance and power entangle, breeding and childbirth become one.

Slave breeding is often one of the most unspeakable aspects about the slave institution in America. Maybe it is too hard for Americans to believe that White slaveholders in the south actually took on the role of God? Perhaps it is too hard to fathom that they decided they too could produce a new human race in which at the time they considered animals: Blacks. Slave Breeding was a common practice in the South. One slave woman could easily be forced to give birth to over a dozen slaves.



These slaves were often sold off at slave auctions or used to add to the master's property. Georgy D. Smithers gives a slave's account of their master's breeding practices, in his 2012 book *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History* writing,

"My master . . . started out wid two 'omen slaves and raised 300 slaves." So testi- fied John Smith, a 108-year-old former slave who was interviewed by a Works Project Administration employee in the late 1930s. Smith's testimony was as sensational as it was disturbing. He recalled that "Short Peggy" and "Long Peggy," the two women his master "started out wid," were prized for their fe- cundity. The sexual exploitation that Smith claimed these women experienced led to the reproduction of slaves who enriched Smith's master through their labor or sale. But Smith also insisted that the exploitation of enslaved women like "Short Peggy" and "Long Peggy" resulted in the master appointing them to positions of authority among fellow slaves. Smith explained, "Long Peggy, a black 'oman.... Master freed her atter she had 25 chil- luns. Just think o' dat," Smith concluded, "raisin' 300 slaves wid two 'omen. It sho' is de truf, do' [though]." (Smithers, 1)

One mother and 25 *chilun*, seen as nothing more than cattle. Chattel Slavery or Slave breeding was never explicitly spelled out in the laws regarding the early slave institution in America, yet many laws made it clear that Black women were not only denied the right to protect their own body, but their children as well. Just two years after declaring African people as utter commodities in which Virginia landowners could purchase The House of Burgess wrote a statute with catastrophic implications, Finkelman writes,

Thus, in 1662 the white men in the House of Burgesses wrote a statute with far reaching implications: 'WHEREAS some doubts have arisen whether children got by Englishmen upon a negro women should be slave or free [sic], Be it therefore enacted . . . that all children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother . . .'.<sup>30</sup> This law left slave women vulnerable to all white men, because the law simply would not take notice of sexual activity that resulted in mixed-race children of slave women. Masters had free sexual access to their slaves without legal sanction. Non-slaveowners could, in theory, face a trespass suit from a master of a slave woman for having sex with her, but no such lawsuits appear to have been filed. This law helped define slaves, by denying a slave woman the right to control her body or have any control over her children. (Slave fathers similarly had no control over their children). The law also led to a particularly disgraceful aspect of American slavery which would continue until final abolition: masters would be the owners of their own children fathered with slave women and would treat them as property, to be bought, sold, used as collateral, and gifted. This law reduced the children of all slave women to property and, perversely, led generations of white southern men to treat their own children as property. (Finkleman, 112)

From then on, the God-like political leaders of America would go on to use the Bible to justify their barbarism, and because Africans were not "Christians," it was morally acceptable to enslave them. Despite the fact that Baptism freed the Slave from their pagan status, the chains around their hands and feet continued to tighten. Ultimately keeping them in bondage to their Slave master for the entirety of their life. Therefore, I aim to understand how Black people have not only navigated but survived in an environment in which they have become the target of structural violence. Oftentimes finding our identity hidden in the blood shed by our ancestors. I suppose it is the paradox of Blackness to be invisible only up to the moment of death.

One: Emmett Till  
Two: Paul Archer

Three: Breonna Taylor

Four: George Floyd

Five: Treyvon Martin

Six: Unknown Negro

So, would you believe me if I said I had PTSD? After only a week of reading up on my history I have not been able to find sleep. I do not rest. Instead, I listen to the cries of my ancestors, strong enough to make it through the Middle Passage, but unable to break out of chains. I often struggle to breathe from the noose around my neck, the hangman's knot piercing the back of it. My mind works from sunup to sundown, like my ancestors on plantation fields. All to understand this identity in which I've been ascribed, unwillingly I am Black. What then is the origin of Blackness: the foreigner, the outsider, those torn from kin, and turned into commodities; Black prisoners who once more occupy the place of the slave in contemporary America? I suppose my only origin is my mother's womb.

*"For you created my innermost being;  
You knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
Your works are wonderful,  
I know that fully well."*

*-Psalms 139:13*



While the purpose of the term intersectionality is to make way for the multitude of experiences that Black women go through, oftentimes we find ourselves hidden due to this terminology. And no longer is intersectionality a term about personal experiences, but rather about stereotypes. I met Jaiden through Instagram, and while we never met in person, I now consider her a friend. I would easily describe her as a Black mother and social justice activist. But what happens when activism and motherhood intersect for Black Women? Perhaps it isn't any psychological experiment or survey that can provide us with this answer but a testimony. A testimony where one does not seek any political or economic gain, only the truth. I long for the truth, Jaiden's truth:

'I don't get the ability to really hide anymore... it comes with the work it comes with the territory and especially the new age of social media that we're in, it is a part of it now so you just take it and it's unlike anything else. Like I'm an artist, you know, so I was saying to my partner, the other day wow if all of this type of care or attention was coming from towards my art, you know. If I was having the experiences that I am like going to the grocery store and people seeing me and identifying who I am and things like that it would be a completely different experience. yeah um and this one, where people who are on the outside looking in that exude maybe jealousy or wish to be in a position, like this aren't, taking into consideration that, like any of these interactions when i'm at the store, when i'm out to eat, when i'm with my child I don't know why someone's walking up and based on the work I do they could obviously feel really good about it or really not good about it. And so it's a constant feeling of paranoia a lot of the time. And as i'm looking further into activists who have done real work just the suicide rate. The tendency to fall victim to just the circumstance of people and the way that they respond to doing this kind of work has really opened my eyes, a lot of people forget I'm a mom...

How is it that we could so easily forget that Jaiden is a mother? That her body once broke for what she now breaths for: her son. But there are no familial ties when it comes to property, only ownership. I posit it is the right to motherhood that was stripped away by The House of Burgesses in 1662. Historically Black women did not have the right to motherhood. For a slave to give birth to a slave there has to be no familial ties involved, only property. Jaiden's history, my history, American history, made us into nothing more than land. Our ancestors worked the land and gave birth to it, yet somehow never owned it. Never possessing a right to anything, especially our children. So I am not surprised that people forget; to be Black was to once be forgotten. It was to be that very moment in which you both exist and cease to be all in one, to merely live in the shadows. But how thankful I am for the truth. That we are the light of the world, and a town built on a hill cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14). Therefore even though America tries to once more drown out and make the Black body invisible through statistics; there is a story of humanity behind every one of those numbers, and that is the narrative in which I choose to tell.

According to the Center for Disease Control, for every 100,000 live births by Black women, 44 women will die during the process. Pregnancy is often seen as a beautiful experience, where a woman is surrounded by friends and family, and her support system comes together for her. Nonetheless, there is a violence that comes along with this single story, the violence of invisibility, of being forgotten. I refuse to forget Jaiden. With closed eyes Jaiden began to detail her own pregnancy experience saying,

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'Grayson, Jaiden. (2021, Jan 30). Personal Interview.

Note: All the following Quotes are from an interview done with Jaiden Greyson on Jan, 30, 2021. Quotes are left unchanged for authenticity and accuracy.



Having a child I had a lot of issues with depression with undiagnosed issues. Really...not feeling comfortable going to see someone because I feel like they're not going to really see me, and not really be able to help me. Having a lot of blanket terms and having to figure out my own mental health. To having a child and being thrust into postpartum. Yeah which resulted in a psychiatric stay and then became a tool to use and weaponized against me as a mom by my son's father. That experience was the most life ( i've been through a lot) changing experience ever. There's so much conversation about how beautiful having a child is...and ... there is the other conversation about how hard it is to be a single mother, but there is not a big conversation about being a human being who has now been assigned mother and is still themselves, and the disconnects. The deep disconnect that they physically go through of removing something from their body. And then having to be who they were before with all of these new titles. Show up in the same ways that they were before and how it doesn't happen and the fallout from that. I went from being a full time, independent, living on my own supported person to being a single mom on food stamps with no help anywhere. In an abusive relationship, I'm an educated person...a pretty strong willed person. I think that's clear to a lot of people. It's not easy to picture me in that situation. Based on the statistics. So there's either something missing in the statistics, or the statistics aren't telling the story that they should.

Numbers will never have the capacity to tell a story the way a soul can. No wonder Jaiden feels as though something is missing from these numerical representations. A life is lost when we turn it into a number, a voice disappears into the void. There is no longer anything left for a family to mourn, or a mother to hold. Furthermore, you would think that just maybe in the process of creating life, the creator would be made known, but instead she evaporated into the thin air that engulfed her.

But what happens when the number is too small, and the time is too short? Like the number seventeen. The amount of years in which Treyvon Martin got to live, and the amount of minutes in the presence of Minneapolis police officers that it took for George Floyd to die. But my heart breaks at the sound of the number eight. The amount of time the officer spent with his knee on his neck. People all over the world watched these eight minutes over and over again from our homes, and suddenly this very public death now took up space in our private lives. On May 29th, immediately following the death of George Floyd protests began in Seattle. Jaiden details her experience,

I spent 250 days straight on the ground. And the first month I took off, after those 250 days of missing out on my son. Missing out on those at home conversations, missing out on a lot. And I'm taking on the police, who are obviously going to be wondering who I am and where they can cut me short. And, seeing that I'm a single mom made me a target for sure. But after coming back from those 250 days ... I in the first month started getting messages from people ... calling me out for not being there. All of a sudden. And I had to figure out how I was going to address this because. Because of cancel culture, because they felt entitled to my presence being on the ground, and at that point, I had to come forward and say "You know, I have a son," which shocked a lot of people. Okay well now you've been on the ground are you a good mom if you haven't been there? you?...and it turned into this back and forth conversation. I had to ask myself how do I really address this? ...I have to assess the same way I tell everybody when they arrive at a demonstration, I have to assess my skill set. My skill set was becoming depleted being on the ground. Every day I was dealing with unbelievable PTSD and trauma responses to the point that I wasn't sleeping anymore...I would have night terrors mixed with demonstration terrors and abuse. They were all just kind of blending together at that point, and it was like I had to get right because, while I'm fighting for my son's ability to live in a different world... I'm not present in his current world, which is changing it. And I'm not showing up anymore safely to demonstrations, ultimately, because my mind is now at home with my child that I'm missing out on. And in that process I'm going to start making mistakes. I'm



going to potentially be putting people in danger, so I had to make that call for myself. I didn't know it would be a call I had to explain, but again that's that loss of freedom, that loss of privacy. Yeah and coming forward with that changed my entire activist life. It changed everything, because now I had people targeting my son. For these white people out here, and hopefully some brothers and sisters too that may be in areas where they're not getting this information or people who just don't know goes out the window. Yeah all of it. All of my efforts stop the moment that something happens to my son. Everything that I stand for and have done stops, and there's one sharing of a manifesto and then I'm popping like I really don't know what else to say. It erupts something in me... and to have my son be targeted in that way, he's two years old, he shouldn't have to hold the weight of this and I shouldn't either...I'm not advocating for anything other than black liberation and yet that has resulted in almost the loss of my own life multiple times and my son's.

I cannot forget my trail of slain leaders, my Black Messiahs, and Black Marys sacrificing their lives, their sons, and their daughters so that the Black body might for once be free. Nonetheless like Jaiden I am afraid. I worry that maybe I should stop writing this paper? I am not sure I want to partake in the dangerous mission of fighting or perhaps writing for Black liberation. I do not know if I am ready to pick up my cross and crucify my body so that I can for once be unchanged from the White gaze. I, too, am confused like Jaiden as to why the Black journey for freedom must always end so soon. In 2020, we seen young leaders such as Oluwatoyin Salau stripped from us as well. So, I pray every night on my knees that they too might resurrect and wake from the sleep of death. I write till my fingers blister so that their sacrifices might not be forgotten. So that Jaiden's sacrifices might not be in vain,

I don't think people really recognize how much sacrifice goes into this and that it's only because of social media, I was an activist long before this...and it never got any type of social media attention because...you're trying to be as anonymous as possible....If you're not someone who didn't do this for clout who didn't want that type of attention to have it is terrifying. To not be able to go to the grocery store by myself, to not be able to go get gas by myself to not be able to let my son go to the park...To having cameras suddenly outside every moment, I'm a very private person to not have any of that anymore and also not have the financial safety that you would think would come with this type of attention. I'm without a job. It is very hard for me to get a job in Seattle, because all of that shit that i'm talking to people about is happening in real time when I go to apply for a job, it could bring a lot of negative or positive attention to their business having me working there....A lot of people don't want to take that risk in a pandemic.

There is a big difference between risk and sacrifice. Every move Jaiden makes is a risk. She has sacrificed her entire life in hopes that there is a light at the end of this dark tunnel. And there is no greater love than this: for one to sacrifice their life for their kin, for their friend, for what has not even lived. Yet in all her giving she has found no life; she speaks as if lost comes everyday like a thief in the night. So

yes, I will continue to write, even when fear creeps up my spine. I resort to numbers because that is the language in which you are most fluent. Most people in America know about the wealth gap that exists. I am sure that you are well aware that Black households hold 3% of all household wealth in America according to research done at Brookings University. But If I am honest with you my friend, I've grown tired of constantly repeating that fact over and over again. Numbers do not translate the pain of this experience to you. Therefore, I will no longer accept numbers as an explanation for genocide, as if the Black body could be explained through simple mathematics. The question should be why is it that such a large wealth gap still exists in America? Why isn't anybody asking that? Is it because we must first speak the unspeakable, and detail the horrific nature of Chattel slavery? If that is the case, I will no longer hold my breath, so I don't disturb my neighbor. I shall confess only that God's beloved children

were once more enslaved for four hundred years to build up a new land; this so-called “great” country of America: the contemporary *Babylon*.

*“This is what the Lord says— your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb:  
I am the Lord, the Maker of all things, who stretches out the heavens,  
Who spreads out the earth by myself,  
Who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners,  
Who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense,”*

*-Isaiah 44:24-25*



Alice Johnson

I met 70-year-old Alice Jonson in an African American studies class. She spoke with so much knowledge that I sought to learn the story of how she acquired such wisdom about the world. However, the first time we met she described herself as not having a story: “I’m just an old woman who decided to go back to school.” She describes her reasoning for taking on such a task,

<sup>2</sup>Now that they have African American history, because they didn’t have it when I was growing up... we might have had Booker T Washington, and George Washington Carver, and Nat Turner because he turned the slaves into a revolt. When I first started back to college, the first

thing I took was African American History, and I did a report on Sojourner Truth, and my sister said go see what they are doing at the schools, and I went to the middle school and she said well we just have a little bit and the high school does from reconstruction up to present...As they said the daughters of the confederacy rewrote history because they had to honor their heroes, and I'm thinking heroes, what heroes?...my brother lives in Virginia and the first time I went back there, because I love museums all this stuff, I said well do they know they lost? Because like every 500 feet is a monument, a historical marker.

As a result of the death of George Floyd, there were numerous efforts made to get rid of these historical markers of slavery and racism that Alice speaks of. Many people sought to tear down and even vandalized these monuments that praised slave holders for their unrighteous acts. However, historical markers are not just limited to material objects. Language has forever been used as historical markers, as well as a way to classify the world. During slavery, many slaves took on their master's last name to signify to whom they belong to. Ergo, when slavery was finally abolished and the Black body went from property to human, slaves' last names transformed into reminders or historical markers of the tribulations they had previously faced. For this reason, immediately following emancipation a lot of newly freedmen changed their last name. Perhaps there is something liberating about eradicating and redefining what once was, potentially freeing? Alice shares a memory of her own family's history which speaks to this:

...my mother doesn't discuss her family. Once she left I guess whatever happened she didn't discuss it anymore. But my father's family always had family reunions so I went there and we've been talking. Found out they have one last name but they changed it, but nobody knows why it was changed...and no one discusses it. So it's a lot of buried history in all uh African-American families, there's a lot of history that they don't talk about ...ones that have white in their family if it's really close they really don't want to talk about that so ...I say all of us have white in us. Look at the statistics of how many women were raped and stuff that's why we all look different colors and when you have a family we're all different shades so it's the history of uh of slavery and they act like they don't, uh they don't want to talk about it.

Slavery and silence are two words that go hand and hand. I can only assume silence allows us to hide from the truth. That if it is not spoken, I suppose it does not exist. Nobody wants to talk about slavery, or the slaves, or us. So, our Black skin is a reminder of a genocide nobody deemed worthy enough to record. Perhaps that is why the population at UC Davis is only 4%. A classroom cannot have too many elephants in the room, they just won't fit. But that does not mean we are lost or even forgotten. Maybe that is the difference between a narrative and a life. A story must come to an end while a life lives on, with their names often ringing louder in the afterlife. Thus, you cannot tell a narrative of slavery in America, as if the slave and the master ceased to exist when the pages come to an end. Both the slave and the master live on, and so does the violence. Alice explains:

I will never forget when I was in [...]my first sociology class at my junior college and the shooting that happened in Pittsburgh and over all that weekend and when I got in my class I told my teacher I said you know what I'm tired of hearing, that this is n't America. This is America. This is what America does, and he says "Alice who's gonna..." I don't care if

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<sup>2</sup>Johnson, Alice (2021, Jan 28). Personal Interview.

Note: All the following Quotes are from an interview done with Alice Johnson on Jan, 28, 2021. Quotes are left unchanged for authenticity and accuracy.



anybody follows me, but this is what America does and this is what we live with. So why don't you go get those pictures of those people that went to those lynchings and let's match them up the way you do Black people. Let's go get those pictures of those people at those lynchings that it was a picnic and they're cutting off because I went to the the uh the equal justice museum and we went visiting that. Oh my god it's so it's powerful everyone should go see that and we found out in my family on my father's side a distant relative was lynched. They found that one of their relatives, my uncle said that's why he left, they were worried about his safety, so they said you know when you're a teenager it's time for you to leave and that was in the 50s. It may be better for you to go someplace else.

Oh Alice but where do we go? Where do we run to flee the Blackness of our skin that seems to hide the humanity within? What happens when one cannot flee a country to escape violence? What must one do when the poverty, violence, and genocide of your people is ignored by the rest of the world? How do you navigate a world in which your suffering has become a part of the ordinary?

You try to make a safe environment for your kids. I think the interesting story about Fannie Lou Hamer was so cute. She said her mother would always be singing, maybe working in the fields picking cotton, and she didn't realize until she was older then why her mother always kept them together. They had like 20 kids um but in her mother's bucket she had a gun out there in the fields. So if someone did come to mess with them she would be prepared because what she had. And when you talk about violence um a lady my sister know she was a young girl and they were working in Mississippi and one day this man this black guy didn't do anything right, and this guy just killed him! And they just kept on working, no police came she said nothing was done. And you know so did we get immune to this violence that you come to just accept the part of life because there's nothing you can do? Is that what we get? Is that what our kids see in the inner city that they just get immune to it because they can't do anything about it? Yeah when you see your friends killed by a bullet and nothing is done?

Can one ever get immune to death? Does not grief become the blanket that tucks you in at night? Do the dead not come back to haunt our dreams, and roam the streets? My people, whose feet blister and arms ache from carrying the burdens of ancestors. Whose soul hardens just to numb the pain from being passed down another generation. My Black Marys' trying their best to protect the true lineage of Abraham crafted inside your womb. My Black refugees moving cities to run away from the beatings, murder, lynching, and lack of resources. I fear we may be running out of places to hide. I often pray that we don't lose the families we fought so hard to keep together, but they seem to be fading. Black people make up 13.4% percent of the population, yet 31% of our children are in foster care. America is once more stripping our sons and daughters from us, yet no one seems to hear our cries for help,

...everyone doesn't have like you said two parents... especially now a lot of Black children are in foster care so...how do you make that child feel well? I don't have a mother. I can't go and say we're going to have a party at school. Who do I bring? Who do I bring to the school? so... it's a lot of pain I think in the Black community. I think it's even more pain now because we're more divided. I'm seeing more kids in foster care, except when I was growing up we had a couple of kids. But i'm seeing more kids that are in foster care and that's a lot of pain because you're not really part of a group you know. You're like ostracized and you're like set aside and you really don't ever feel secure because you don't know how long you're going to be in this foster family ...you can be moved ...so they're never really putting themselves out there



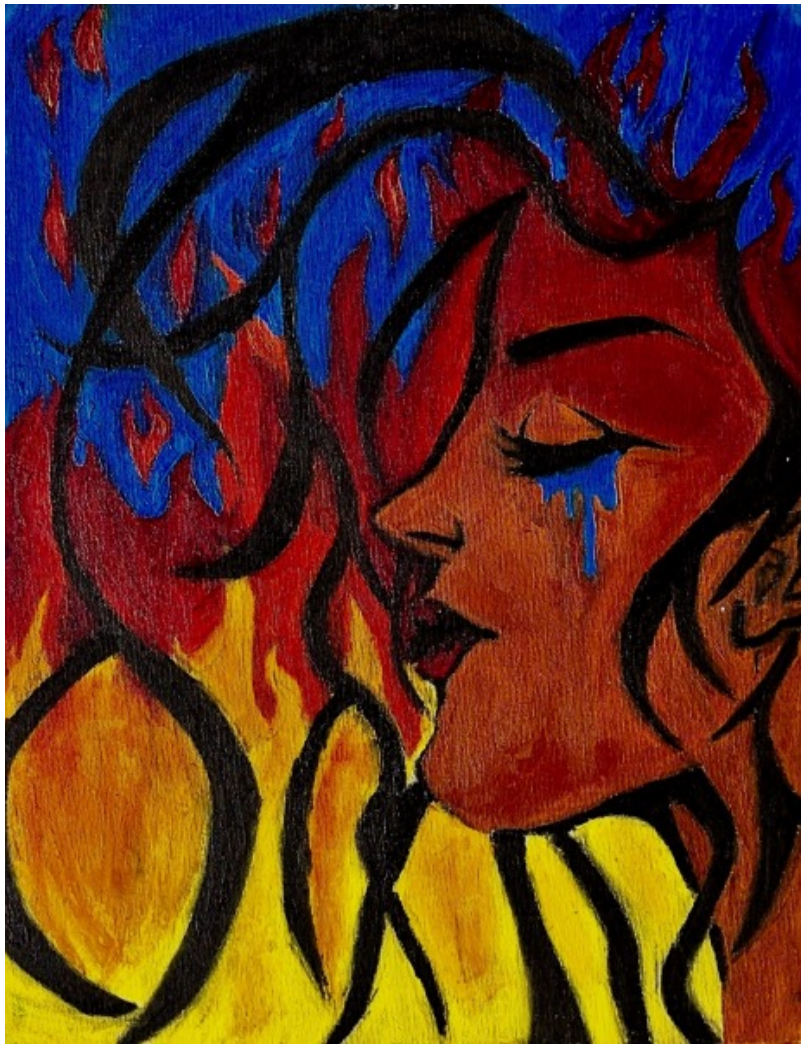
because they don't know...how long they'll be there. Where are you going to be protected?  
And then they have that violence in the certain foster care and they're not protected so nobody  
to go to. Yeah so we got that violence going on because kids are abused in foster care... and  
then you realize that all you are is a paycheck to them. That you're not part of that family, all  
you are is a check. They get money for you, but you're not included that's what i'm seeing  
...when my grandkids were younger some of their friends were in foster care and uh  
yeah...they didn't do anything they were just there. They had a place to stay but they were not  
included in that...and they end up... getting into trouble

My people, we were only supposed to wander the wilderness for forty days, but instead we've spent  
a lifetime wandering the streets of America. Like Black Jesus we do miracles; but instead of turning  
water into wine we make families with no home; wealth with no money, all while turning hatred  
into love. So take a break from the fight. Let your bones rest, and your spirit finally find peace. Let  
out the cry you sing to sleep. Release the breath you hold so you don't disturb your neighbor. My  
Black brothers and sisters whose suffering cease to end so healing never starts. I often worry we've  
been forced to make a home out of war. Nevertheless, our God has not forsaken us.

*"My people have been lost sheep;  
their shepherds have led them astray  
and caused them to roam on the mountains.  
They wandered over mountain and hill  
and forgot their own resting place.  
Whoever found them devoured them;  
their enemies said, 'We are not guilty,  
for they sinned against the Lord, their verdant pasture,  
the Lord, the hope of their ancestors.'  
"Flee out of Babylon;  
leave the land of the Babylonians,  
and be like the goats that lead the flock.  
For I will stir up and bring against Babylon  
an alliance of great nations from the land of the north.  
They will take up their positions against her,  
and from the north she will be captured.  
Their arrows will be like skilled warriors  
who do not return empty-handed.  
So Babylonia will be plundered;  
all who plunder her will have their fill,"*

*declares the Lord.*

*-Jeremiah 50:6-10*



### Sabrina Edward

One of the first people Sabrina told me about was her mother, describing her as if she was the motherland. She told me how her mother had spent most of her life in the mental hospital. I found this to be intriguing being that the most common narrative in the Black community is that we don't "do" mental health. Talking about our feelings is often not an activity that is acceptable in our homes, thus therapy is not likely to be seen as a necessity. However, this dominant narrative fails to account for the fact that 21% of the patients in psychiatric facilities around America are Black, with Sabrina's mother being a part of that percentage.

<sup>3</sup>We just...started having a relationship with my mom. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia. And...she's been in the hospital for most of her life...she spent her entire life in the psychiatric hospital in fact. My Grandfather...he was very...harassing and abusive towards her and she stabbed him and went to prison, but she was crazy so they sent her to a mental hospital. She

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<sup>3</sup> Edwards, Sabrina. (2021, Jan 29). Personal Interview.

Note: All the following Quotes are from an interview done with Sabrina Edwards on Jan, 29, 2021. Quotes are left unchanged for authenticity and accuracy.

stayed there for 15-20 years. She just went back recently because she almost threw ...a glass at my aunt's head so um yeah....my mom actually is very sick. She is so sick that ...you can have a conversation like this, my mom start talking about puppies. She ...not there at all so. Then ...when your mother has Schizophrenia, you have a 10% chance of getting schizophrenia. And then, after that birth it's 1%. So i've always been...you know my family's always been a little bit nervous about ... how I might...get sick, but I didn't get sick and I'm way past the age, now that you know I would be sick....and so that was an issue and now i'm just kind of rebuilding my life. And ...I was taking care of my mom you know every day and going to school, working, taking care of my daughter. I've taken care...of my mom you know every day and going to school working taking care of my daughter.

Sabrina went on to describe how since the pandemic, she hasn't been able to see her mother. Instead, she has only been able to bless her with food, not her presence for almost a year now. She describes the experience in this way:

Like you know feeding her and making sure that she feels safe and I feel bad because we haven't been able to visit her. Since COVID so that's been a year we haven't been able to visit her unless it was like on video conferencing. And she doesn't understand it's like you know, having a small child somewhere away from you. And so it's really sad. And she just got COVID so she was on a ventilator .... and she barely survived. She just came back from the hospital a week ago but she's still in the mental hospital. She went back from the hospital to the mental hospital. That's the big thing right there. So like, all I could do was send her some food, I DoorDashed her some food.

They say the fastest way to the heart is through the stomach. That is fifteen times truer if you find yourself locked within the walls of a psychiatric hospital. I always abstained from eating during my time in the valley of death. Constantly wishing I would have known that my last meal at home was going to be my last supper. However, there are a multitude of other narratives outside of the one me, Sabrina, and her mother share. The story of the homeless man who finds himself a warm bed for the night, or the story of the woman who just needed food to eat, and a safe place to rest. Or the one about the little Black boy trying to navigate the world with no food stamps or money. Or perhaps the homeless woman with no more hotel vouchers. All these narratives, lives, and testimonies behind those psychiatric walls. Schizophrenic, Manic-depressive, psychotic, Insane: all identities, lives, and ultimately stories silenced by the powerful language of the DSM-5. With one diagnosis your sanity, liberty, and credibility are stripped from you. In an instant, identity is hidden under the gaze of abnormality. And now a book meant to be as prophetic as the Bible, simply simplifies the truth. Sabrina details her last time in the hospital saying;

And I've been in the mental hospital at least three times. I was just in the mental hospital, a year ago yeah. I got into it. and they were like we need you to calm down. So we're going to take you to this hospital, and so I was in the hospital for two days and... because you know how ...you can tell them that you want to appeal it, or so I appealed it and got through so I got out in two days.

Can someone tell me what is soothing about cop cars, and sirens? Do you think we will find rest back in chains? Is one supposed to be calm while handcuffed to a hospital bed, with their freedom once more stripped? In Jonathan Metzl's book, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (2010), he describes what happened when physicians sought to calm down civil rights activist:

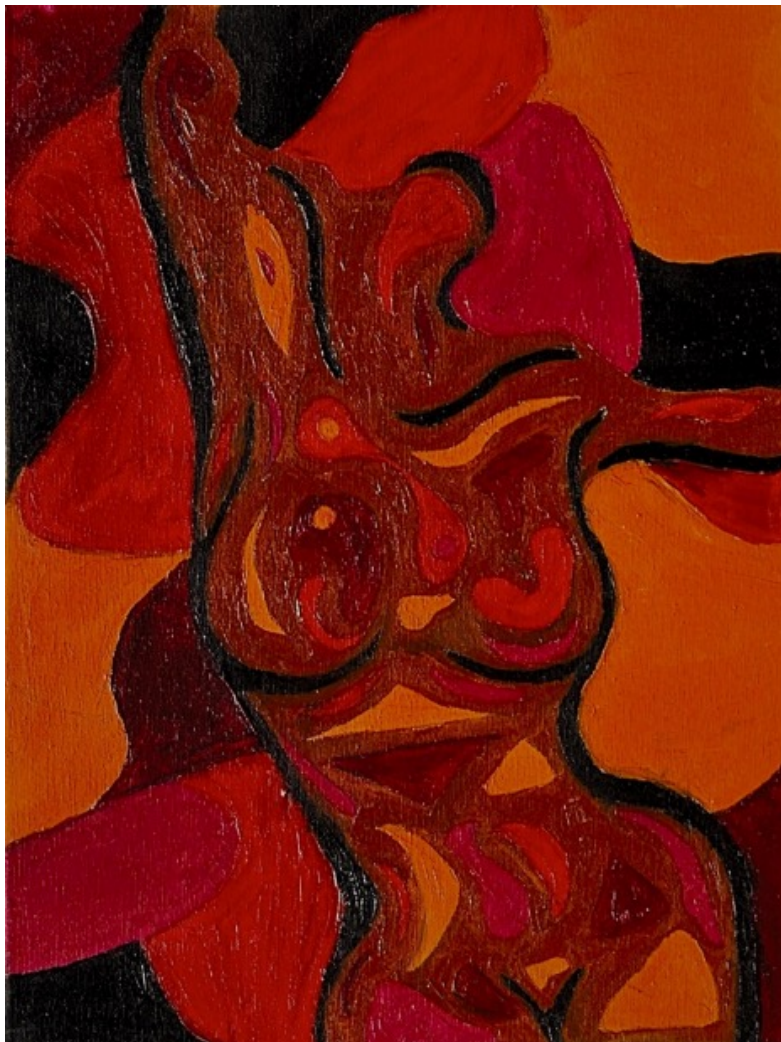
Thus was the case with schizophrenia in the 1960s and 1970s. Far beneath the national glare



of bus boycotts, sit-ins, and marches, another hidden civil rights-era history unfolded in response to national events. Here, the currency was neither liberation nor equality, but containment. And the result was not increased voting rights, legal protections, educational access, or other hard-fought liberties. Instead, the civil rights era catalyzed a shift in the structure of buildings, institutions, diagnostic codes, and even in the structure of minds, attitudes, and identities. Schizophrenia literally, and then figuratively, became a black disease. And prisons emerged where hospitals once stood. (Metzle 2010, 26)

Today, the largest mental health facility in America is the Los Angeles Twin Towers Correctional facility. How is it that in the land of the free, one can find oneself classified under both prisoner and patient?

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”*  
-Matthew 5:3-5



## The Violence of Narration

One of my mother's favorite sayings is this, "I didn't raise children, I raised little people." So, I wasn't surprised that this was the first thing she said when I sat down to speak with her. I had heard this all my life, and for a long time it saddened me that she never saw me as her *child*, just her person. For so long I blamed her, thinking that it was her who robbed me of my childhood. Every missed opportunity, every unheard cry, and sleepless night was my mother's fault. It all started with her so who else could it be? But I was wrong, my mother never robbed me of my childhood; America did that. I supposed when your job has been to birth workers for so long, there is no childhood. It all begins and ends with labor. How did the Law go? Oh yes, a *slave* merely gives birth to a *slave*.

Have I not made it clear? There is a violence that comes along with narrative. The violence of loss and what must come to a finish. As one picture is painted another is lost, and thus never known. And as a result, when a story comes to an end, one is led to believe that so does a life. And although we walk around as though the dead cannot speak, it is their very grave that we walk upon. The bones of the slaves shatter like glass beneath our feet. I can hear their cries in my sleep, or is that the mourning and weeping of mothers facing defeat? I refuse to live in a world where there is no victory left for me. Where my ancestors cease to be because we refuse to acknowledge Chattel Slavery. Where Jaiden is nothing more than a rioter on the street, and Alice's stories never find a place in history. Where Sabrina's voice is merely empty, and all the work of the generations before me is nothing more than vanity.

There is a violence to narrative, and who gets to write down the words I speak. White America documented the slave trade, but never Chattel Slavery. Because what a disgusting collision for one to have to see, their holiness and barbarism highlighted for all the world to see. So, they documented stories not for truth but to cover up follie. Yet the truth remains this: The Black slave in America was never set free. Thus, I urge us to stop telling this narrative of Chattel Slavery, where the slave and master no longer exists. Since all things live forever through language and memory, and perhaps even numbers.

*"And they will rise again.  
Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life,  
and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment."  
-John 5:29*

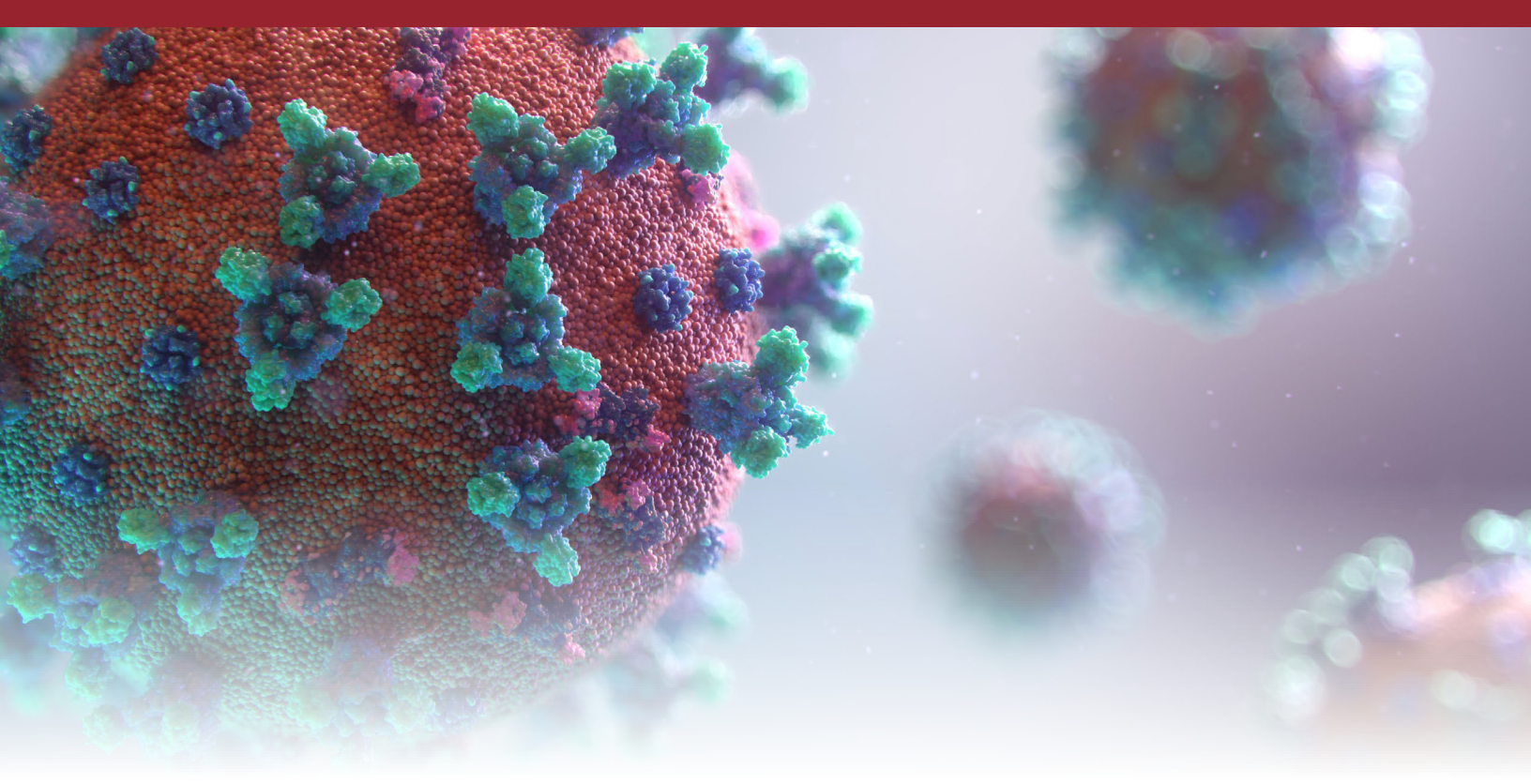
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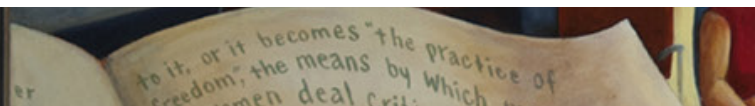
# USING NEURAL NETWORKS TO STUDY SARS-COV-2 MUTATIONS

*Written by Caitlin Brown*

*Sponsored by The Department of Mathematics, University of California Davis*

## Abstract

Infection of individuals by SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for the disease COVID-19, varies greatly in its manifestation. While many individuals remain asymptomatic, some develop severe respiratory symptoms and much of this mechanism is still unknown. Evidence suggests part of the answer may lie in the viral structure itself. A region of particular interest is the receptor binding domain (RBD) of the viral spike (S) protein which binds to the human Angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) and ultimately leads to infection with SARS-CoV-2. Understanding the dynamics of this protein docking will help predict potential mutations of the novel coronavirus and may illuminate genetic factors influencing the symptomatic heterogeneity. In this paper, I generate a dataset of RBD genomes with both observed and artificially generated variants, render them in a three-dimensional space that accounts for the atoms' biophysical properties (voxelization), and use them to train and test a backpropagation neural network. The network will predict the binding affinity resulting from different mutations to the RBD. Ultimately, these results pave the way for identifying deadly theoretical mutations to SARS-CoV-2 before they emerge by natural evolution, and allow public health officials to prepare accordingly.





## Introduction

COVID-19 has caused over 3 million deaths worldwide[1], and an economic recession or depression in many countries. The disease is caused by SARS-CoV-2, a single-stranded RNA virus whose genome is about 32,000 base pairs in length.[2] These thousands of base pairs encode 20 proteins, including the spike (S), envelope (E), membrane (M), nucleocapsid (N) and 16 other non-structural proteins.[3] See Figure [Figure5.png] for a graphical anatomy of the virus.[2] The S protein plays a key role in mediating human cell infection by binding to angiotensin-converting enzyme-2 (ACE2), which is on the surface of human epithelial cells. Notably, we have these receptors in the ciliated cells of our upper airway epithelia. Specifically, a portion of the S protein known as the receptor binding domain (RBD) is crucial in this docking process. The RBD is also a hotspot for point mutations, causing the virus to evolve and adapt new ways of infecting humans as well as other species.

SARS-CoV-2 is a member of the *Betacoronavirus* genus of the *Coronaviridae* family. Other members of the genus that have caused public health crises in the past are Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and SARS-CoV (SARS) from the 2002-2004 outbreak which was largely contained in Asia. MERS and SARS are thought to have originated in bats and been transmitted to humans through intermediary animal carriers: dromedary camels and market civets respectively. Research is ongoing as to whether SARS-CoV-2 was transmitted to humans directly from bats or if the novel coronavirus came through an intermediary host as well.[4] These notable earlier *Betacoronaviruses* didn't cause global pandemics for a variety of reasons, highlighting why it is so important for researchers to gain insight into how these viruses evolve. SARS is not contagious when the infected individual develops a fever, making it easy to identify and isolate sick persons.[2] MERS, while quite dangerous with a 35% death rate, requires close contact between individuals to spread.[5]

Variants of the novel coronavirus are becoming more of a focus for researchers. According to the CDC, there are currently 5 variants of concern (VOC) circulating in the United States.[6] On April 9, the Biden administration announced that it is allocating \$1.7 billion to detect and monitor mutations in the coronavirus that have led to the emergence of more transmissible and potentially more deadly variants. The original strain of SARS-CoV-2 only makes up about half of the cases in the country at this time, 14 months after the start of the pandemic.[7] Getting ahead of the virus before it evolves has never been more pertinent.

## Methods

My project hinges on the coming together of a large dataset and two algorithms: voxelization and deep learning via a feedforward neural network. A feedforward neural network is a relatively simple artificial neural network architecture in which the nodes, or neurons, don't form a cycle. A lot of data is needed for machine learning, the umbrella term for many algorithms including deep learning. Briefly before I describe in more detail, the data type I use is a graphical representation of the novel coronavirus docking to a human cell. The purpose of the voxelization algorithm is to alleviate some of the computational complexity of running these large files through the neural network by decreasing their resolution.

The file type I use is called protein data bank, or PDB, many of which are freely available from online databases. These files contain atom types, like carbon or hydrogen, and their coordinates in 3D space. I use PDB ID 6m0j, which consists of the novel coronavirus RBD

bound to a human ACE2 receptor.[8] A “ribbon diagram” of 6m0j.pdb can be seen in Figure [Figure3.png]. The image was rendered using UCSF Chimera. Ribbon diagrams are composed of  $\alpha$ -helices, shown as coiled ribbons or thick tubes, and  $\beta$ -sheets, shown as arrows or thin tubes. They show the visual basics, or “bones,” so to speak, of the molecular structure. In our case, the different colors represent the two molecules in the protein complex, with the RBD in red and the ACE2 in blue. 6m0j represents one piece of data, but as mentioned, large amounts of data are required for machine learning. With the original virus from Wuhan as a template, I use *Cov-Ev: The Covid-19 Evolver Package* by Ryan Polischuk to computationally simulate point mutations in the RBD. About 1000 samples will be needed for training the neural network. These samples must also be paired with their labels, or target network classifications, in order to calculate the loss after a pass through the network. We are measuring binding affinity, to which interfacial hydrogen bonds on the protein complex will be a good proxy. The *Cov-Ev* software package provides a count of these interfacial hydrogen bonds, so training the network on this simulated data will be possible.

PDB files themselves are quite large. Feeding a volume of 1000 or more of them into a neural network will be unrealistically computationally intensive. To reduce some of the computational burden, I voxelize the protein complexes. Voxelizing a 3D structure is analogous to pixelating an image, with a 3D pixel being a voxel. An artistic representation of a voxelized 6m0j can be seen in Figure [Figure4.png]. The voxelization algorithm consists of three fundamental steps. Firstly, extract the carbon backbone of the protein complex. Next, locate its center of mass by calculating the mean in each of the x, y, z directions. Lastly, embed the structure in a 3D grid filled with grayscale values in [0,1] representing the density of atoms per voxel. A value of 0 corresponds to no atoms in a given location, and 1 will correspond to the relative maximum of atoms per voxel. The number of voxels in the final voxel cube will determine the overall resolution, and the cube will have the dimension of the maximum length of the complex in either the x, y, or z directions.

Next, I use a feedforward neural network trained with backpropagation, written from scratch in Python. Neural networks, which are deep learning algorithms, can be thought of as large-scale iterative functions whose outputs gradually change as they “learn” by being fed input data and gently corrected between iterations. In practice, my network consists of several layers of matrix multiplication of input data against parameters that are initially random but become optimized. These parameters are optimized by loss, or error, calculation and gradient descent, a process from numerical analysis involving derivatives. Among the matrix multiplication I use a sigmoidal activation function to keep the network values between (0,1) and add non-linearity to the network. Without activation functions, neural networks would be more akin to simple linear regression models, and not suitable for complex problems. There are several popular activation functions that are each more attuned to specific outcomes, but I chose to use the sigmoid function because it is effective for probability calculations. I also multiply in a learning coefficient  $\eta$  at every step. Learning coefficients work to slow down the network’s learning process enough so that the optimal parameter configuration is not overshoot and accidentally missed. Usually, this coefficient should be between 0.01 and 0.1.

In my case, the input layer will be a flattened voxel, or a long array of grayscale values in [0,1]. This will be multiplied against several layers of weights, randomly initialized to values between, but not including, -1 and 1. If I did include these interval endpoints, the unfortunate event of neuron saturation could occur, where a network node gets stuck, so to speak, on a 0 or 1 sigmoid output and refuses to “learn” and update itself. The output layer will be a guess

of whether the mutated, voxelized protein complex would be a good candidate for binding, based on the number of interfacial hydrogen bonds.

### Preliminary Results & Future Work

Voxelizing the protein complexes instead of feeding large PDB files to the neural network has proven to lessen the computational complexity of the algorithm considerably. The original PDB file was 2.7 megabytes in size, and the voxelized transformation is 1 megabyte, reducing the size by 63%.

To optimize my neural network, I did some preliminary training and testing on non-coronavirus data, using the MNIST database of handwritten digits.[9] This database is excellent for these purposes, and is often used by deep learning scientists. It is freely available online, and consists of 70,000 images of different digits 0 through 9. These images are all scaled to exactly identical pixel dimensions, greatly easing the process of feeding many of them through a network.

I trained using 1,500 randomly selected digit photographs. Through some trial and error, I was able to obtain remarkable accuracy using the following parameters: 5 hidden layers, 50 nodes per layer, and a learning coefficient  $\eta = 0.01$ . On training data, my network was able to guess each of the 10 digits with at least a 99.29% accuracy. Next, trying test data, meaning data my network hadn't seen before, I tried 890 samples and the same parameters and obtained a guess accuracy of at least 98.88% for each digit.

These preliminary results validate my model. Furthermore, they suggest that five hidden layers with 50 nodes each and a learning coefficient of 0.01 in the neural network produce high accuracy results. Moving forward, I will use these same parameters on voxelized protein data. It's possible that these parameters won't be optimal for coronavirus data as they are for MNIST data, but they provide a valuable benchmark. Now that I have both the voxelization and deep learning algorithms working, the next step is to curate a large dataset of mutated, voxelized protein complexes for training and testing. As the MNIST data was paired with the proper identifiers 0-9, my voxelized protein data will be paired with the corresponding number of interfacial hydrogen bonds. If this number exceeds a certain threshold, the complex will be labeled as a realistic candidate for binding. Because we already know of some highly contagious variants, namely B.1.1.7 and the four other aforementioned VOCs, I'll have a reference for my model's accuracy on the voxel data. That is, if it says B.1.1.7 and others are good binding candidates, it increases the likelihood of the network being correct if it identifies some theoretically mutated voxels as good candidates as well.

### Discussion & Conclusion

The novel coronavirus is rapidly evolving. New variants will likely continue to emerge around the world for some time to come. Learning to anticipate and deal with them will be crucial in our efforts to manage the virus and return to our lifestyles before the pandemic.

By implementing my voxelization algorithm and optimizing the parameters of my neural network, I'm well on my way to being able to identify potentially deadly variants of SARS-CoV-2 before they emerge by natural evolution. The next steps will be to combine these algorithms and train my network to recognize which mutated RBD-ACE2 complexes are

realistic candidates for binding. The number of interfacial hydrogen bonds is a good proxy for binding affinity; I'm modifying my neural network to return guesses at that number. The algorithm will then say "yes" or "no" that the mutation will lead to binding, based on whether the number of hydrogen bonds exceeds a certain threshold. In the future, I also intend to use sequences rather than PDB files, and computer software packages to fold them into proteins to produce more RBD-ACE2 structures. This work could have positive impacts like allowing other researchers to strategically develop vaccine boosters, and helping public health officials to implement policies to prevent disease spread.

As scientists, we have many tools now that we didn't during the 1918 Spanish Flu. Many of the ideas and technologies I'm using in my project are from the last 40 years! Machine learning algorithms have proven to provide many new insights in areas like the tech industry or data analysis; applying them to biological data presents new challenges but is very promising. Predicting variants ahead of natural evolution will allow us to better combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# REIMAGINING COUNSELING SERVICES AND THE POWER OF TRADITIONAL HEALING FOR UNDOCUMENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

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## Abstract

Through my initial research, it has come to my attention that underserved communities, such as undocumented immigrants, are very resistant to counseling services. I argue that they are unable to connect with the Western ideologies that are utilized in counseling services. Reason being, undocumented immigrants seek out their culture's traditional healing, a practice that centers a holistic approach of the mind, body, and spirit. In my research, I focus on the innovative possibility of integrating traditional healing practices into counseling services as a pathway to provide the most effective and sustaining care to the undocumented student community<sup>1</sup> at a UC campus. To explore this possibility, I will be interviewing two on-campus counselors to inquire about their practices as well as two undocumented college students. I expect my research findings will yield knowledge on how we can reimagine counseling services into a dynamic system that is accessible, inclusive, and transformative for the undocumented student community.

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<sup>1</sup>The undocumented student community is a diverse population comprised by an array of ethnic groups, and unique statuses pertained to each individual.



## Literature Review

For the purpose of my research, I explore my interest on mental health advocacy for the undocumented community. I proceed by exploring previous research associated to the utilization of counseling services by undocumented immigrants. One particular research journal, "Beyond access: psychosocial barriers to undocumented students' use of mental health services", examines undocumented students in the UC system by identifying how their immigration status hinders their utilization of mental health services. In this study by Biblia S. Cha et al., undocumented college students have expressed mental health related stigma that derives from not knowing what to expect from counseling. In addition, the same group of 30 undocumented students have addressed the stigma tied into their status. This was highlighted throughout their interviews by expressing the emotion of fear in terms of how counselors would not understand immigration related issues or worse being deported. Overall, students perceive mental health service providers culturally incompetent or limited in some form to understanding their lived experience; thus, their hesitation to seek out support. In relation to this study, a few questions came to mind such as the following: If all counselors engaged in a cross-cultural and undocumented allyship program training would this improve counseling services? Would undocumented college students be more receptive to seek out services? I also wonder if considering the cultural background of undocumented students, would integrating traditional healing practices make counseling more inclusive?

Keeping these questions in mind, I explored literature that analyzed the importance of practicing traditional healing in conjunction with counseling. In "Traditional Healing, the Body and Mind in Psychotherapy", Roy Moodley et al. addressed how traditional healing and Western health care are disconnected from each other. Patients must go out of their way to see a traditional healer when Western mental health services fail to provide sufficient support. A central reason being that patients are rooted in their cultural backgrounds that place emphasis on the mind/body/spirit-a concept addressed in traditional healing. Upon reading this, I wondered if Western health practitioners have attempted to incorporate traditional healing in their services as a way to provide holistic support for patients who derive from non-Western cultural backgrounds. Perhaps this would shift the perception of counseling services and open a pathway of connection for undocumented students.

In "Embedding Curanderismo and Cultural Rituals into a Mainstream Healing System: Boundary Spanners and Innovations in Action," researcher Ramon Del Castillo addresses the resistance of incorporating curanderismo, a form of traditional healing, into Western mental health services. Dr. Castillo addresses this issue through the experiences of Valazquez, a practicing curandera who offers services in a Denver clinic called *Centro de las Familias*. In her testimony, curandera/clinician Valazquez explains how she had to study Western psychiatry in order for her healing practices to be accepted. In addition to this, Valazquez facilitated cross-cultural training seminars with the intent to educate other practitioners about curanderismo. Although very few accepted the practice, many other practitioners perceived curanderismo as superstitious. As a matter of fact, this skepticism of curanderismo was upheld despite the positive recovery of clients treated by Valazquez. Although Valazquez was allowed to practice treatment plans that incorporated curanderismo as a way to ensure patients' recovery, her work was not perceived in equivalence to that of Western mental health practices. Due to this I wonder the following: if traditional healing, such as curanderismo, were to be regarded with the same respect as Western mental health and practiced by all counselors, what benefits would these changes bring to non-Western

communities? I also wonder, why does this intense skepticism exist in understanding curanderismo? Could this barrier be eliminated within counseling services? Thus, through my research I intend to bridge the gap between counseling and the undocumented community by exploring how undocumented students can be effectively supported through counseling services that value traditional healing.

## Introduction

During my analysis of each research journal a few questions came to mind in association with incorporating traditional healing into counseling, making counseling more culturally sensitive and how doing so can potentially alter the utilization of this resource by undocumented college students. Being critical of the current counseling system made available to students is significant for various reasons. For one, undocumented college students experience a sense of discomfort when seeking out counseling services due to not knowing what to expect from a counseling session. This is a stigma that exists for most students, yet is compounded for the undocumented community. For example, undocumented students are skeptical whether counselors have an understanding of immigration issues, or they fear being deported. This poses a problem for the community, because not receiving mental health support at a time of need can negatively impact their academic performance, personal relationships and overall their health. Hence, for the purpose of my research I pose the following question: What impact does the incorporation of traditional healing into counseling services have on the accessibility and inclusivity for undocumented college students? What is the pathway to connect undocumented students to the mental health services they need due to their particular life experience?

## Methods

For this project, I decided it was best to use qualitative methods. To ensure ethical procedures were followed, I went through the IRB process at UC Davis to ensure my research was ethical and supportive of two vulnerable groups-undocumented college students and counselors. I was particularly concerned about the students' well-being in participating in my research project. Moving forward with the project, the qualitative data was gathered through an IRB approved set of questions that targeted the following themes: utilization of mental health resources by undocumented college students, their awareness of resources on campus, perception of traditional healing, belief in the power of traditional healing, and perspective whether traditional healing incorporated into counseling is an alternative method to support undocumented students' mental health. The reason I choose to focus on these topics for my questions is to understand the underlying issue that factors into the disconnect between undocumented students and mental health. In addition, to gage with each participant whether incorporating traditional healing into counseling is the best method of support. After acquiring an IRB approval, I proceeded with the recruitment process by using the UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services website to research counselors who have experience supporting undocumented students. I was able to reach out to potential participants by email to inquire about their interest or was redirected to other counselors. As for recruiting students, I used my contact list from last year's internship at the AB540 and Undocumented Student Center in order to connect with community members through email or text messages. Using these recruitment procedures allowed me to be both efficient and establish a connection with potential participants. In addition, it was imperative to recruit both counselors and students in order to acquire information from both sides of the narrative.

Once I was able to recruit participants, I asked participants to sign a consent form indicating how they would like their confidentiality to be maintained whether it be having their camera off and/or if they would like to have a pseudonym. After their 30-45 minute interview, each participant was compensated a gift card as a way to thank them for their time and support.

## Results

After the completion of my interviews and the transcription process, I was able to categorize my data into the following themes: (1) utilization and awareness of mental health resources on campus, (2) perception of traditional healing, and (3) incorporating traditional healing into counseling as an alternative method of support. For each of the categories I analyzed participants' perspectives by drawing comparisons between the students and counselors. Doing so allowed me to understand any discrepancies and how to go about addressing them.

### *Utilization and awareness of mental health resources*

At the start of the interview, I wanted to gauge with how informed undocumented students are of the mental health resources on campus before inquiring their perception on traditional healing. To proceed I posed the following question: "Are you familiar with any mental health services on campus?" Juliett<sup>2</sup>, one of the student participants, expressed they have little knowledge about on campus mental health resources, but were familiar with the mental health support services provided by the AB540 and Undocumented Student Center. As expressed, "if you were to ask me where you could go to get services, I wouldn't be able to tell you. I don't have UC SHIP so I wouldn't even know how to go about looking for it especially through campus. The only mental health support that comes to mind were the coffee talks at the center with the psychology PhD interns." As one can see, Juliett's knowledge on resources was limited due to the accessibility they had in the first place. Since Juliett did not have the school's insurance, they had no idea of other mental health services they could still acquire without UC SHIP. Hence, they relied on the AB540 and Undocumented Student Center to connect them with resources according to their needs. As for Diana, second student participant, they were familiar with the counseling services provided on campus but demonstrated hesitation to consult them due to the cap placed on sessions. As mentioned, "I didn't want to get a therapist only to be like oh third time's up you know what I mean. I felt like that would just mess me up even more because I understand how my issues would have sparked if I had someone and then couldn't afford it, or keep going." In this case, Diana did not want to commit to seeking out counseling services with the fear of being lost in the system after having used their sessions. However, it seems students are misinformed about how they can receive additional support based on their needs. In conversation with Diana's concern Dr. Tatum, an on-campus counselor, offers knowledge on how counseling services extend sessions for students from vulnerable communities in order to ensure students are equipped with resources that will allow them to meet their academic goals. As commented, "We do have to put session limits, but oftentimes I would say, for our AB540 and undocumented community, I think we really try to make accommodations for students and push the envelope as much as possible." Keeping this in mind, there's a possibility the uncertainty of not knowing what happens after all the sessions have been used offers a possible explanation of the

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<sup>2</sup>As a way to protect each participant's identity, pseudonyms are used instead of their names



underutilization of mental health resources by undocumented students. Hence, counseling services should disclose this kind of information to underserved students as a way to ensure there's not any discrepancies between particular student communities and utilization of counseling services.

### *Perception of traditional healing*

One of the objectives for the study is to have an understanding how both undocumented students and counselors perceive traditional healing. Both interviewed students had their own way of defining traditional healing based on their cultural background. For Diana, traditional healing meant it was both holistic and diverse in how individuals in her life go about practicing. As shared, “through holistic healing there's like I guess in English it's called green witches, people who are really into herbs and oil ointments and things like that. In Spanish, there's also a term called curanderas/os, people who perform a different type of healing. And recently I've discovered, I have friends who practice santeria so that's a different type of healing too and that's what I think about non-traditional forms of healing.” In comparison to Diana, Julieta is aware of traditional and spiritual healing through her family's experiences. As commented, “I know my mom believes a lot in traditional and spiritual healing, like limpias and things like that which were always done by someone who in our family would feel had the capability of doing that connection.” As one can see, both students' knowledge of traditional healing was influenced by their cultural background and their experiences they had consulting the practice. In addition to their awareness of the practice, both have expressed traditional healing being their preferred method of healing for the mind, body and spirit. Not only did student participants have their own experiences with healing, the interviewed counselors also had their own encounterment with traditional practices. Marcus, an on-campus counselor, shared how they had a positive experience with their culture's form of traditional healing at a precarious moment in their life. In addition to sharing their experience with the practice, Marcus made a point of how it can be a challenge for clinicians to perceive traditional healing as a legitimate form of holistic care for the mind, body and spirit. As expressed, “I think within Science and within the United States and within most of the world there's really a focus on materialism or studying things in the physical world and there's also, at the same time, an automatic bias against things like traditional healing practices as things that we may not be able to explain.” This poses a potential problem, because it takes away the opportunity for individuals such as undocumented immigrants to consult counseling services that genuinely considers their preferred way of healing. When these services fail to provide alternative ways for healing it fails to meet the needs of underserved communities. Thus, as a collective we need to consider possible ways to provide holistic care in counseling in order to efficiently support undocumented students.

### *Incorporation of traditional healing into counseling*

For the last portion of interviews, I inquired how we can reimagine counseling by incorporating traditional healing and if this would be the best method in supporting undocumented college students. In response to these questions, both students and counselors were uncertain how traditional healing can be embedded into counseling. Moreover, counselors were uncertain if altering counseling into a holistic format would encourage undocumented students to consult the services. As Dr. Phan expressed, “I think it just depends on the student and what practices they engage in or that their family engages in. I



wouldn't want to make an assumption that just because we have it there, the students would access it more because I think there might also be a component of education around that too, and also where we're located." Thus, in order to go about supporting students there has to be an understanding of their needs, and being fully transparent about what counseling has to offer. Reason being, the lack of education and transparency exacerbates the stigma associated with mental health which is a concern expressed by one of the students. As Diana expressed, "at least for me it used to be a big stigma of going to counseling. That was the biggest turn away I guess that you could say. This thing of like oh you have to be crazy or you're really off the charts if you go to counseling." This demonstrates how the stigmatization associated with mental health is still an issue that must be addressed through education. Moving forward, clinicians must consider ways to address the stigma around mental health while considering possible ways to alter counseling into a more holistic practice. Hence, it is uncertain whether the integration of traditional healing into counseling is the best method in supporting undocumented students.

## Discussion and Conclusion

At the start of the investigation, I had a few objectives in mind such understanding the possible social barriers undocumented college students encounter in their process of seeking counseling support, exploring how undocumented college students and mental health providers perceive traditional healing according to their culture, exploring the possible ways undocumented college students would like to receive support through counseling services. To have a better sense of direction with the research I posed the following questions: What impact does the incorporation of traditional healing into counseling services have on the accessibility and inclusivity for undocumented college students? What is the pathway to connect undocumented students to the mental health services they need due to their particular life experience? Based on the analysis from the data above at the moment integrating traditional healing into counseling services is not the best alternative method in supporting undocumented students. Although traditional healing, being a holistic form of care, was not considered as a way to reimagine counseling services, yet all of the participants expressed a need to have culturally sensitive support. Moreover, both counselors and students need to strategize how they can create a welcoming atmosphere towards mental health as a way to dismantle its stigmatization. Reason being, the stigma associated to mental health remains to be a prominent factor as to why undocumented college students are hesitant to consult counseling services. Even though undocumented students are uncertain about mental health resources offered on campus, they are more receptive in receiving similar support through the AB540 and Undocumented Student Center. As analyzed in the above data, undocumented students are not only well informed about mental health support offered at the center, they have been more inclined to utilize these services. This demonstrates how essential the AB540 and Undocumented Student Center is for the community given how it acts as a bridge to connect students to the resources they need to succeed academically. Keeping this in mind, administration will need to increase the funds allocated to the center in order to meet the high demand of resources utilized by the community. In addition to increasing funds for resources, the student community should consider advocating for a satellite counseling office upstairs in the Student Community Center. Doing so not only creates accessibility to mental health resources, it also creates visibility since these resources are being brought directly to the community. Having this could initiate the act of bridging undocumented students to mental health support. Hence, this research has demonstrated how necessary it is to continue advocating for the undocumented student community in order

to ensure success both in their personal and academic lives.

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## CELEBRATING DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS: HEALING AND GRIEVING THROUGH ART

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### Abstract

Death is a part of life that is inevitable. People process and understand the concept of death differently. Chicanx participation in Día de los Muertos offers them an alternative perspective and way to grieve and celebrate the cycles of life and death. A celebration full of traditions that has survived colonization and a global pandemic serves as a day of remembrance for those no longer with us. How does Día de los Muertos create a space for grieving and healing? In this study, I specifically look at Taller Arte del Nuevo Amanecer (TANA) annual Día de los Muertos event to better understand how art plays a role in grieving. An event that incorporates silkscreen prints, altars, and danza. Community members from around the area gather to honor their loved ones. This study uses photographs from the event, interviews with the organizers, and autohistoria-teoría to explore how a space for collective and individual healing is possible. The artwork created for this event is also analyzed to map the possibilities of using art as a tool for grieving and healing.

### Introduction

According to California's COVID-19 government website, "California is preparing to get back to normal" since the majority of businesses and other activities are beginning to have their restrictions lifted. Unfortunately for many, life will never go back to normal. As of June 3rd, 2021, there have been 62,044 deaths from COVID-19 just in California. Since last year, families



have lost multiple parents, grandparents, children, friends, and other loved ones. Communities of color have been one of the ones significantly impacted by all these deaths. There is a sense of grief roaming in the air as California begins to open up. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, grief is "... an emotional, spiritual, and psychological journey to healing" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, 227). It is a journey where we experience all these feelings when someone we love is no longer with us. Losing a loved one can be like a roller coaster of emotions, and at some point, we all experience that ride more than once. We can not expect everything to go back to normal when people are still processing all these deaths. Death might have come sooner than expected to people we know because of COVID-19. Those deaths might be more brutal to grieve and accept. Everyone's understanding of death is different, which affects the way we process losing the people we love.

While communities were experiencing one of the most challenging times in 2020, people were still able to virtually come together to honor those who we lost through the celebration of Día de los Muertos. A celebration that has roots back to pre-Columbian times, Día de los Muertos can be traced back to the Olmecs, who shared this tradition with other cultures to honor the dead (Chagoya, 1989, 2). Consisting of two separate feasts on our calendar would begin on August 8th, where they would have a Small Feast of the Dead known as Micailhuitontli. It was a day to honor the dead children. Then the second feast would be on August 28th, which is the Great Feast of the Dead. This feast is known as Huey Micailhuitl, where they honored the dead adults (Gonzalez, 2002, 1). Colonization forced Indigenous people to incorporate new practices while also keeping their rituals alive. The Catholic Church had its way to honor and remember the dead that, in some aspects, was similar to Indigenous people's Día de los Muertos. They started with All Saints Day on November 1st and All Souls Day on November 2nd (Reyes, 1989, 6).

A new understanding of death came with colonization, as the Catholic Church believed in only two destinations after death: Heaven and Hell. In contrast, Indigenous people believed that after death, the dead would travel to Mictlan, the Land of the Dead. The dead would begin their journey through the nine levels of Mictlan guided by a dog to reach the thirteen heavens. A mixture of traditions and beliefs to honor the dead from the Catholic Church and Indigenous people created a hybrid version of Día de los Muertos. Día de los Muertos moved to November 1st and 2nd instead of August, where loved ones gather together to honor and remember those who are no longer physically here. Families and community members follow traditional practices to welcome the spirits of our loved ones back to earth.

This celebration was first recorded at an art center in California back in 1972 at Galería de la Raza in San Francisco, CA, and Self-Help Graphics in Los Angeles, CA. These events were described as a "...perfect vehicle for artists and participants to create their own celebration, a hybrid of ancient culture informed by spiritual elders, and a celebration of life narrated by neighborhood cultural leaders" (Benítez, 2000, 16). Since then, more art centers have begun to organize Día de los Muertos events in November. One of those art centers is Taller Arte del Nuevo Amanecer (TANA), a community art center located in Woodland, California.

The Chicana/o Studies Department at UC Davis manages TANA since it opened back on December 9th, 2009. The space serves as a silkscreen studio, exhibition space, and a teaching center for the local community. Throughout the year, they host events where they invite the community to attend, offering them an opportunity to have access to the creative space. One of their most significant events is their Annual Día de los Muertos event that started in 2011. On this night, they have danza, baile folclórico, community-made altares, live music, silkscreen prints on display, and live screen printing.

In 2019, I was fortunate enough to participate and attend TANA's Día de los Muertos event. It was the first time I got to celebrate and witness the different components that make up this community celebration. I grew up as a Christian and learned that once our loved ones passed away, they either went to heaven or hell according to their actions on earth. We would not see them again until we died or the rapture happened. Death was not celebrated or talked about in my family, making it very difficult for me to understand and process it. I had to learn to grieve in silence like everyone else around me. This was quite painful. That was not the case at TANA's Día de los Muertos event. Attending this celebration opened the door to a whole new side of death and expression for me. Leading me to wonder: how does Día de los Muertos create a space for



## Literature Review

A lot has been written about grief and mourning. Most people have learned about the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross 1969). As years have passed, people no longer fully see the stages of grief in that way or being in that order Kübler-Ross and Kessler wrote about grief. Yet their research on grief can continue to influence our understanding of how someone grieves. They note that the pain we feel from grief reflects the lost connection we have to those we love (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, 203). The relationship and love we have for the people in our lives are unique since everyone takes on different roles in our lives, resulting in everyone experiencing their journey through grief differently. Kübler-Ross and Kessler explain, “Your loss and the grief that accompanies it is very personal, different from anyone else’s. Others may share the experience of their losses...But your loss stands alone in its meaning to you, in its painful uniqueness” (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2014, 29). In this discussion, grief is then understood as an individualistic act when someone passes away, leading us to believe that healing is also exclusively an individual journey.

Many of the books available on death and grieving tend to focus on western cultural ideologies. In recent years, literature around grief has changed as it has started questioning how western culture deals with it. Megan Devine in *It’s Ok That You’re Not Ok: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn’t Understand*, observes how in our culture, grief is a negative thing that has to end to be happy again, and if it does not end then it can be viewed as if there is something wrong with you (Devine, 2018, 26). When we view grief as a bad thing that should only last temporarily, it affects people’s relationship with death and their understanding of healing.

To shift from this negative perspective of grief, we must look outside of the western perspective on healing and grieving. Mark F. Ruml’s “Coping with Death: Dakota and Ojibwe Mourning Ceremonies and the Healing Process” provides us with Indigenous knowledge and practices around death. Ruml reflects on how participating in Dakota and Ojibwe ceremonies has provided support through the grieving process. They highlight the spiritual aspect of grieving. Ruml writes that these ceremonies “keeps the memory of the loved one alive and provides a regularly scheduled context to grieve; perhaps freeing one of the need to dwell on the loss of loved ones during the rest of one’s everyday life” (Ruml, 2016, 302). Contrary to what Devine mentions about our society forcing people to stop grieving to heal from the loss.

We can sit with what we learn from the impact the traditions of Dakota and Ojibwe have with the grieving process and relate them to the practices done for Día de los Muertos to understand how healing is possible. There is a lot of literature about the history of Día de los Muertos throughout the years in Latin America. Although it is the same celebration, the United States has adopted its version of this tradition. Regina M. Marchi’s *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon* offers us the rich history and cultural impact of Día de los Muertos in the United States. At the same time, it briefly points out the spiritual, healing, and grieving aspects. Marchi also addresses the community events dedicated to Día de los Muertos, where communities have a chance to celebrate. We learn more about the influence of these events specifically in California from Terecita Romo (2000) and the Mexican Museum’s *Chicanos En Mictlán: Día De Los Muertos in California*. The exhibition book reflects on the celebration through the art and events hosted by art centers throughout California. The art that comes out of celebrating Día de los Muertos is a vital part of the tradition. *Chicanos En Mictlán* offers us a catalog of the art pieces included in the exhibition related to Día de los Muertos but leaves out the dimension of the making of the art and the art itself has with understanding as well as processing death. Although both these books mainly focus on the cultural aspects, they offer a foundational starting point for understanding how Día de los Muertos provides a space for grieving and healing.

## Methods

In order to conduct my research, I focused on the Taller Arte del Nuevo Amanecer (TANA) 2019 Día de los Muertos event. I specifically looked at the three main components of the event: (1) silkscreen posters, (2) community altars, and (3) danza.

I requested photographs from TANA, taken by their staff, of the events to do a media analysis. I believed doing a media analysis would help me break down the different elements each component offers. I also conducted interviews with the staff of TANA. I wanted to know the perspective of those who envisioned and organized the behind-the-scenes of this event. I interviewed their student intern, Marina Contreras, who has helped out at three previous Día de los Muertos events. As well as workshop coordinator Edgar Lampkin, who has a long history with the legacy of TANA. He was once a participant, then an intern, and now has served as the workshop coordinator since 2017. Finally, I interviewed the director, Jose Arenas, who has been part of TANA since 2017. The team I interviewed at TANA consisted of different level staff members whose experience with the event varies, offering other points of view of the event that are weaved together in my research. The final method I used for this research is autohistoria-teoría. For this paper, I will be using Leslie C. Sotomayor's definition of autohistoria-teoría: "...a decolonial theorizing of one's own experiences, historical contexts, knowledge, and performances in creative acts" (Sotomayor, 2020, ix). I wrote and reflected on my experience of grieving and participating in the 2019 Día de los Muertos event at TANA to explore how healing is possible. I used autohistoria-teoría as a method since it can offer the readers the ability to "associate their own embodied experiences and vulnerabilities with the narrator's, this serves as a collective form of meaning-making" (Pitts, 2016, 358).

### Results: The Power of Art

Although art is not the sole reason that makes this event an opportunity to grieve, it is still an important piece contributing to the whole puzzle. Three different forms of art happen at TANA.

The event consists of danza, community-made altars, and screen print posters. Each form offers the community various tools to grieve. As the years have passed, those three art forms have persisted throughout changes in programming.

### Danza

At the 2019 event, they invited Danza Mexica group Calpulli Tlayotl of Woodland, CA, to begin the event by honoring the four sacred directions: East, West, North and South. Each cardinal direction represents different life cycles, elements, and lessons (Gonzalez and Medina, 2019, 31-32). Lara Medina writes, "In the Nahua tradition, we begin by facing the east, then turn to our left (as our heart is on our left) to face west, then turn a three-quarter turn to face the North, then half a circle to face the south. Return to the center and raise arms or gaze up to the sky, and then kneel down to touch the earth" (Medina, 2019, 34). When we get to the North, which is the location of Mictlan, we call our ancestors back on earth to join us (Alarcón, 2008, 267)—highlighting the importance of having the Danza group open the event this way. After honoring the four directions, they proceeded to bless each altar to welcome the people who were being honored and remembered.

While they blessed the four sacred directions and each altar, they also burn copal as an offering to our ancestors. The elders say the copal takes the collective prayers to the cosmos. In Figure 1, you can see the *danzante* holding a copal burner as they face the altar while saying a prayer. The copal is known for carrying our prayers to the dead, uniting heaven and the earth bringing everyone together (Cordero Vazquez, 2002, 13). The space is filled with the aroma of copal in the air. Afterward, as seen in Figure 2, they placed the copal in front of them and began their Danza. The Danza was prayers and offerings full of stories for our loved ones who had passed away and the people attending the event.

Honoring the four directions or even the art of Danza is not something that you see that often. This was the first time I had witnessed such a beautiful ceremony in public. I had recently learned about these practices in my decolonization class. At the same time, as the group, Calpulli Tlayotl blessed the fourth direction, they made sure to explain to the crowd the meaning behind their actions. Their explanation invites the people who might not be familiar with this practice to learn something new. It offers people an opportunity to feel reconnected with their loved ones who have passed away. Calpulli Tlayotl reminds us of our ancestors by reclaiming these spiritual practices taken from some of us by colonization, resulting in a reflection of our Indigenous roots, spirituality, and the sacredness of Día de los Muertos.



I was raised to believe that when someone passed away, I would no longer be able to connect with them here on earth. Their spirit was gone leaving only their body here. The idea of them visiting or still being part of my life after death was something no one ever taught me. One of the challenges I faced while grieving people, who had passed away, was accepting that they were gone forever. Experiencing this ceremony served as a reminder and teaching that they are never gone. I remember clearly the feelings I felt while watching them perform. It was nothing I had ever experienced before. The sound of the drums beating, the ayoyotes rattling, and the sound of their voices all coming together to bring us music to our ears. It was a blessing being able to witness Danza on that day and for the first time. It created this unique energy at TANA where you could feel the presence of our loved ones with us. A sense of peace followed me after the Danza, and I felt that way throughout the night.

### *Community-made altars*

A signature art form at TANA's Día de los Muertos event is their community-made altares or ofrendas. This part of the celebration dates back to Mesoamerica, where Indigenous people would honor those sacrificed by displaying offerings to help them transition (Cordero Vazquez, 2002, 13). Now altars are raised to have offerings ready to welcome our loved ones back during this time when the veil between life and death is thin. Altares vary by the person who creates them, where they are from, and who they are remembering. Yet there are some elements to altars that are specific to children or adults. Families can decide to stick to the traditional style while others may bring in their twist. Some features included in an altar are photographs of those who passed away, water, religious symbols, calaveras, candles, papel picado flowers, pan de muerto, and food. Any personal objects that remind family members of their loved ones. An important flower that is essential in the altar that has roots from pre-Columbian times is "the cempazúchil (marigold), which symbolizes the regeneration of life" (Chagoya, 1989, 2). The four sacred elements earth, wind, water, and fire are also incorporated in the altars. Some altars include different levels (usually three) to represent various steps our souls take and/or the stages of life.

TANA invites community members to build their altars dedicated to their loved ones or anyone who has passed away. Often it could be political in nature as well, for example honoring the mujeres whose lives have been taken due to femicide. The staff at TANA shared that weeks before the event, they welcomed them into the space to begin building these ofrendas. Jose Arenas, director of TANA, shared that members can share stories of their loved ones during this process as they are making their altars. They are given the freedom to honor their loved ones how they wanted with the assistance of the staff.

At the 2019 event, there were 15 community-made altars that each told a different story. People were allowed to walk around to see all the various altars and admire the details throughout the event. The people who had created them were there to share their memories with the loved ones they were honoring and explain what different elements meant for their altar. In his interview, Jose Arenas shared that one of his favorite moments at the event was seeing the face of a community member light up when asked about their altar and having the chance to talk about it. Altars have been said to make "... visible that which is invisible and brings near that which is far away; it marks the potential for communication and exchange between different but necessarily connected worlds, the human and the divine" (Turner 1999, 7). Not only do altars connect us with those above but also those around us. We can come together in the same space and share personal memories we have with those who passed away through the making of these altars.

There were about fifteen community altars that each told a different story through their versions of an altar. In Figure 3, you can see one of the altars made by a community member for various family members who had passed away. This altar has six levels that contain different components that make up a traditional altar. We can see how the elements are included with candles representing fire, the crops on the plate near the photographs of the family members represent the earth, and finally, the papel picado above the altar represents the wind. This altar does not shy away from the use of calaveras. It is accepting death and displaying it as a celebration and remembrance, not of only sadness. There is also a lot of religious imagery throughout the whole altar, reminding us of the blend of cultures after colonization.

Although I didn't know the families who made these altars, I still took the time and stopped at each one. Each altar



had different but, at the same time, similar elements that made them an altar. When it came to personal belongings to those who had passed away, each altar had different items. I tried learning about the people these altars were made for by looking at all the unique components the altars were offering. I felt so honored to witness the vulnerability of the family members who took the time to provide us with a piece of their loved ones.

It was the first time I got to see altares in person. The type of Christianity I was raised in was very against any form of *brujería* or *curanderismo*, which also meant any Indigenous practices. So making an altar for my loved ones who had passed away was never part of my practice in honoring the dead. Death was entirely out of sight in my family. We weren't allowed to cry or grieve. After the burial of someone in my family, we pretended as if nothing had happened. We didn't talk about the people we had lost or the pain we might have felt. It was very difficult to keep all the emotions internalized. Seeing others at TANA's event being so open about their loss of loved ones was an eye-opening experience for me. It validated my desire to grieve publicly after years of suppressing my emotions to continue my family's cycle of grieving in silence.

### *Silk Screen Posters*

The final type of art available for the community at TANA's event is silk screen posters made by participants and interns. These posters are up on display around TANA all night. I didn't know the backstories of those posters, but that didn't prevent me from enjoying their art. These artists combined cultural symbols to create their interpretation of honoring the dead for Día de los Muertos. A lot happens behind the scenes before you get the end product. People create a poster to remember and honor the dead, making it a serious process that leads to participants having to be vulnerable. Some participants decided to make a poster about a broader issue that affects them and the community, while others choose to make a poster honoring a specific person in their life they have lost.

At the event, I had the opportunity to display a poster I had made honoring my student, Angel, and his parents, who had passed away earlier that year. The death of Angel was very challenging to process. I could not wrap my head around the idea that this child who was full of life is gone forever. While mourning, I allowed myself to feel every emotion that comes with losing someone for the first time in my life. While trying to break this pattern of grieving in silence, I got stuck in my sorrow. I did not know what to do with all this pain. It was not until I found the creative outlet of making a silkscreen poster where I slowly was able to find myself again.

It was a long journey to get to where I felt ready to be open about this pain I was feeling for months. Making this poster with the help of my art professor was a transformative experience that guided me through one of the darkest moments of my life. As you can see in Figure 4, I tried to include everything that reminded me of him to stay connected with them. I also incorporate his name and of his parents. Looking back at the poster, I see that without knowing it, the four elements are present. The papel picado for the wind, the rocks for the earth, the candles for fire, and the roses for water.

I was unaware that I had begun my healing process when I started to embrace my grief while making this poster. There was a shift in how I was raised to understand death and grief. The process of creating a poster to remember Angel was an intimate and transformative experience. The poster wasn't perfect, but it meant the world to me. It makes me pause and take a moment to acknowledge the pain as well as the love I have for Angel. This poster not only helps me keep his memory alive but also shares a piece of who he was with others. It felt like I had a piece of my heart framed. The part of my heart I was learning to be more open. I felt honored that I had the opportunity to show a piece of who Angel was to those who might have never gotten the chance to meet him. My hopes with my poster were always to honor who Angel was and to keep his memory alive. I wanted to share his light with others which reminded me that his light is never gone.

When I was making my poster, I had a chance to talk to others about Angel and share some of the memories I had with him. I had previously not had an opportunity to talk about him. Other people would also share stories of their loved ones. We would exchange memories while we remembered those we had lost. These interactions made me feel less alone with my pain. When creating posters collectively, we have learned that there is the possibility of transformation through the space



that the participants create through communicating with each other about their posters (Jackson, 2017, 270).

Besides my poster, there were other beautiful posters honoring community members and celebrating life and death. These posters were made possible by TANA, offering the community the necessary materials and the space to print silkscreen and the support of the staff to guide them through the process. I recognized some of the posters from my class. I witnessed my classmates work so hard on their print, and to see the final product was a warm feeling in my heart. I remembered the stories they shared about their loved ones who they were honoring in their print. I had an idea of what they were feeling and the pain that comes up when you do such a personal print. The artists were offering the community beauty in their journey with grieving. At the event, TANA also offered the community an opportunity to live print to experience the magic behind pulling their copy of a poster. You can see an example of this special moment between the staff and the community in Figure 5. Here a TANA intern helps out a community member pull their copy of a silkscreen print. You can see the joy on their faces after they pull the print and are about to see the results when they lift the screen. People might not always have access to an opportunity, but at the event, people are offered to come back to make a poster if all the art they saw that night inspired them.



Figure 1: Adelita Serena, Calpulli Tlayolotl maestra and founder offering a prayer to an altar, 2019. Image courtesy of TANA



Figure 2: Calpulli Tlayolotl offering Danza, 2019. Image courtesy of TANA



Figure 3: Community-made altar, 2019. Image courtesy of TANA Garza 16



Figure 4: Angel's poster, 2019. Screen print, 18 x 24 inches.





Figure 5: TANA intern printing with a community member, 2019. Image courtesy of TANA

## Discussion

In this study, I looked at TANA's Día de los Muertos event and analyzed all the different art and visual elements that make up the event. While doing this, I learned how the traditions and events that happen when celebrating Día de los Muertos provides us with a way to connect with our loved ones. It is when the young and the older people come together to remember those who have transitioned. The act of remembering and reclaiming these traditions to teach future generations how to grieve is an act of healing from years of cultural erasure from colonization. Through this celebration, we can reconnect with the Indigenous knowledge that has not always been available in our communities.

The art made for Día de los Muertos is not about creating fine art but having an outlet to use all the love you have left after losing someone to create something meaningful. People do not create art honoring the dead for the walls of a museum but the hearts of their community. Amalia Mesa-Bains stated, "Art is about healing. When people participate in art, when they make it, when they view it, is it the same as making yourself well" (Mesa-Bains 1990). When people make silkscreen posters, this healing tool transcends the poster and touches the soul of community members who need it. Art allows us to bring balance into our life when we are experiencing rough moments. We can share our stories with others and connect with them with the art we make or view. Art helps us tend our wounds of losing those we love.

After my interviews with the staff, one of the things that stood out to me that I had previously not considered as having that significant influence on making TANA's Día de los Muertos event special is the community. There is an exchange



between TANA and the community to create a safe space for those grieving. Eddie Lampkin, the workshop coordinator, expressed that what made TANA's event so special is that it is made for the community by the community. People gather together and build public altars, display their silkscreen posters, and have a chance to experience the offerings and prayers that happen through the Danza. All these types of art combine then create another level of space to heal and grieve. "Giving the gift of space that allows one to be heard and to create can be a powerful healing force..." (Alarcón 2019, 86), which is a gift TANA provides the local community.

At this event, people can grieve in public which is the opposite of the western practice where it is done in private. Death is not celebrated but is seen as something you should fear, while Día de los Muertos accepts death with an open heart even while acknowledging the pain that comes with it. This celebration offers us an opportunity to redefine as a community how we grieve and understand healing. We don't have to get over it or move on; we can cry, acknowledge the pain we feel. Celebrating the dead is an act of remembering them, which helps us process our grief. Participating and attending TANA's event gave me the freedom to embrace my grief and the knowledge to understand.

## Conclusion

We have learned that Día de los Muertos lets us move forward with all the love we have for those no longer with us. A way to continue living with our loss. Día de los Muertos events like the one at TANA offer us an opportunity to publicly and with no shame grieve our loved ones and create art to honor them. We are shown different tools which can guide us through our healing journey. Everyone's journey is different, so you have to find the tools that work for you and help you in this complicated journey. Yet when participating in this community event, we can honor the dead and our grief collectively which is significant. Devine explains that "creating something good out of loss is not a trade, and it's not a cure" (Devine, 2018, 150). Losing someone you love is painful, and you might still experience some bad days and good days even if you participated in Día de los Muertos. Grieving the loss of a loved one is a wound you have to continue tending.

Everyone at TANA's event, one way or another, had experienced a loss. Even if we experienced our loss differently, we were all together that night, remembering and honoring those we had lost. There was a mixture of emotions in the air, but I felt like the main one was love. Love to those who transitioned before us, to our community that gathered that night, and to the people who displayed a piece of themselves for us to connect with at the event. Grief can be an isolating journey, and it can take you on a dark path, but Día de los Muertos teaches us that we don't have to experience it alone. There's no judgment on where you are in the grieving process. You have to embrace and acknowledge the pain you can start to walk with your grief, and when that happens, your journey with healing begins.

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## FROM SOUTH CENTRAL TO BLACK LIGHTING AND EVERYTHING IN-BETWEEN: THE REPRESENTATION AND ENGAGEMENT OFFERED THROUGH MARA BROCK AKIL'S PROJECTS

*Written by Kyerah Kyles*

*Sponsored by **UPDATE***

### Introduction

For this research I decided to focus on the acclaimed writer, producer, and show creator Mara Brock Akil. My interest in Brock Akil began during the summer of 2020. Netflix announced a deal that would allow the platform to stream several series that have grown to be considered to be classic Black television shows, (Komonibo, 2020). The shows part of the deal were Moesha (1996-2001), The Game (2006-2015), Sister, Sister (1994-1999), Girlfriends (2000-2008), The Parkers (1999-2004), Half and Half (2002-2006), and One on One (2001-2006). This announcement created a lot of excitement for people, myself included. When I first saw the announcement, I thought about the nostalgia of the series because these were shows that I saw my parents watching while I was growing up and have been interested in from a young age as well as others that I did watch when I was younger and have been looking to try to find online. This announcement also came during a time where the world was still experiencing the beginnings of the covid-19 pandemic as well as social unrest following the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. This combination of social impacts highlighted social injustices that live deep within our nation and these shows were seen as bringing some light



to the harsh realities of American society. Since these were shows I was exposed to at a young age, I was attracted to them once they were available to stream. I started with *The Game* and *Moesha*, then moved on to *Girlfriends* and *Sister, Sister* as the other titles were released. As I was watching the programs, I started to recognize names that are present today and were reoccurring, one of those names being Mara Brock Akil. I soon found out that she was the creator behind multiple shows I was watching and others I knew about because of my parents. This made me think about and realize the impact of Brock Akil's work and the long lasting effect her shows have had. For this paper I will be working through the research question, how do Black Americans engage with others who have seen acclaimed writer, producer, and show creator Mara Brock Akil's work as well as how do they internalize what they see in her projects? To guide this study I will be relying on content analysis of a number of her shows as well as related podcasts, literature review of works written about Brock Akil, and a focus group that includes people who have seen Brock Akil's work.

## Literature Review

For the pure reason that Brock Akil has intersectional identities, she is relied on for being someone that takes on the responsibility of telling Black stories. This has then been expanded to Black women specifically. There have been few stories on mainstream television that put Black women at the center of the storylines. Popular series at the time of her shows included *Sex and the City*, *Friends*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *Gilmore Girls*, among others. A commonality between all of these shows is that they focused on predominantly white casts. Brock Akil's works provided something that was different because she placed emphasis on having predominantly Black casts that also focused on Black storylines. "Her first project, the beloved *Girlfriends*, effectively challenged stereotypes and pushed boundaries in the wake of predecessor *Living Single* and at the height *Sex and the City*," (White & Harris, 2019). Brock Akil has shared in multiple interviews that with her characters her intention is to make them "Black on purpose" (Gaffney, 2015). With this, she never has them shy away from that part of their identity and instead allows for them to embrace it fully. This also means exploring different areas of their Black identities because Brock Akil never portrays the representation that Black is a monolith. This is seen in all of her works, but especially in *Girlfriends* as she portrays the friendships between four Black women. "The characters individually and collectively reflect the complexity and richness of humanity that exists within the African American community. Each woman was designed to offer counter images that resist conformity to the images of Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire, among others, that have come to inaccurately represent African American female identity," (White & Harris, 2015). With the rise in popularity of her shows, she became known as a decisionmaker in this area because she was part of a growing demographic of Black women in Hollywood involved with film and television. This is an important distinction because it relates to Brock Akil's sense of responsibility as being a Black woman in the field of media representation (Dates, 2005). Brock Akil creates characters and storylines that are authentic and this has been a main attraction for her audience. It gives them the opportunity to see themselves portrayed in an accurate depiction. Because of this, people are also able to relate to the characters and storylines. Black Americans cannot do the same with characters like Carrie Bradshaw of *Sex in the City* because the writers on this show and the other mainstream series have consistently been predominantly white.

Due to a lack of diversity in the writing rooms for tv shows, this leads to a lack of diversity being replicated in the series. Audiences notice when there has been no attempt made at trying to include them in the storylines, or if they've been portrayed inaccurately or in a



stereotypical way. Brock Akil has shared that she strives for diversity in her writing rooms so that there are different perspectives and ideas coming from people that also emulate the audience watching it. Black Americans have watched enough of and are tired of storylines that focus on either white male or female Americans. She brings up the idea that because America is diverse, writers should replicate that in order for this diversity to be replicated on the screen. People want to see themselves and their stories on screen (Curtin & Sanson, 2017).

## Methodology

The first part of this study involved content analysis. This included me watching Brock Akil's projects and listening to various podcasts related to different series. Due to time constrictions and lack of access, I was able to watch all of *Girlfriends*, *The Game*, and the three aired seasons of *Black Lightning* at the time of this project. Watching these shows gave me a better understanding of what my project would be focused on. This was important for me to do because I knew that I was going to be collecting data and talking to people about these series, so I wanted to be knowledgeable of the different topics, characters, and stories that could have been brought up. I listened to the podcasts "Oh, Hell Yes: A *Girlfriends* Podcast", "Black *Lightning* Podcast", "Being Mary Jane Reviews and After Show", "Okay, Now Listen", and "Go Off, Sis". Some of these were specific to a certain series, as indicated by the title, while two were episodes of general podcasts that had episodes dedicated to talking about Brock Akil's projects. I found podcasts to be a great resource because I was listening to "Okay, Now Listen" before this research and heard them talk about Brock Akil and the importance of her work as well as having Brock Akil herself on the podcast. I felt that listening to other podcasts would be a substantial method of collecting information because of the engagement offered between the hosts.

I decided to conduct a focus group as part of the methodology because I felt that structure was representative of how audiences have viewed Brock Akil's shows. Before starting this research I observed that people will get together, have what is referred to as watch parties, and watch new episodes of these shows together. I believed a focus group would be able to offer a bit of the sense of feeling offered from watch parties. It represents a group of people coming together to do something they enjoy and I thought a focus group could allow them that space to talk. I preferred a focus group over interviews because I thought it could be used as a way of connecting all participants as they talked about the shows while possibly sharing similar sentiments and finding relatability in their experiences with the shows, while also being able to get ideas from each other. I felt a focus group would align with Brock Akil's projects because they encourage a lot of engagement with other people and the focus group would offer the same. A limitation of this was the lack of participants who were willing to be part of the group even after multiple communication efforts were made. The attempts were made by sending a mass email to a listserv that Black identifying students are placed into when registered at UC Davis. It is unclear how many people are part of the listserv since some people could choose to withdraw themselves while others could choose to add themselves. The information was also shared on a Groupme channel which is a communication platform. I shared the focus group outreach there because the channel is called "Black People of UC Davis". It is meant to bridge connections between Black students at UC Davis by sharing different resources and opportunities while also being a space to socialize. There are currently 690 people in the chat, but not everyone is active. I did not receive a lot of engagement on this platform so I only shared it once here and multiple times through the listserv email. The communication consisted of a google form survey



that asked people their nationality, ethnicity, gender identity, which shows that Brock Akil has worked on have they seen, and whether or not they've seen the show(s) multiple times. I received a total of 46 responses ranging from ages 18 to 54, majority identifying as female, and the most popular series watched was *Girlfriends* with 32 people saying they've watched it. The last question asked was whether or not they would like to be part of a focus group to further talk about the series with 13 answering yes and 18 answering maybe. Once follow-up communication was initiated, this number declined and there were eventually 3 participants, all female identifying.

## Findings

Black Americans feel seen because of Brock Akil and have appreciation towards her because of that. Podcast creators Scottie Beam and Sylvia Obell recorded an episode in which it focused on their perceptions of Brock Akil's works and even had her on as a guest. Together they talk about how they felt when they were originally watching her shows as they aired. At the time, both Beam and Obell were in their teen years as they watched *Girlfriends* and its spinoff *The Game*, both created by Brock Akil. They share that both of them felt seen in that moment because there were Black women being represented and it gave them an idea of what they could experience once they reached the age of the characters. For them, they were able to see strong Black leads in the spotlight and this gave them reassurance that they mattered and their stories are worth telling, (Beam & Obell, 2020). At the time of the Netflix deal, both women were beginning to enter their thirties, so as they rewatched these series, they were able to view them in a different light. At this new age, they were able to recall shared experiences between them and the characters and also talk about how they would have imagined themselves behaving more like a different character when they were teenagers. They felt as if they had grown up with these series, especially *Girlfriends*, because a big part of the show was about how four Black women were navigating new and different ages, people, and all around experiences. This is something Beam and Obell were able to relate to whether they were still in their teenage years or going into their thirties. They were able to relate even more so to the characters now because they were also going into their thirties in the show. Beam and Obell found themselves watching the series saying "that is me, that is my friend", (2020). This highlights the timeless aspect of Brock Akil's stories.

A trend I noticed throughout all of the podcasts was that the hosts talk about the characters as if they are real people and actually friends with them. Thinking specifically about the "Being Mary Jane Reviews and After Show" podcast, the hosts share what they believe Mary Jane of *Being Mary Jane* did wrong, what she should have done instead and even offer advice on the situation. This level of interaction was noticed after one episode. The reason they enjoy the series is because it is relatable and the characters are flawed, saying it "shows you real women. Women with careers and friends," (Gray, et al, 2014). The hosts continue on to say they value this aspect of the series because it shows the value of friendships and the complexities of relationships and how much it can take to find a balance. It is mentioned during the podcast that *Being Mary Jane* is premiering at a time that is parallel to the premiering of shows like *Bad Girls Club* and the different *Real Housewives* series. They felt this was an important series for the current generation to have and watch because of this contrast. As reality tv shows, *Bad Girls Club* and *Real Housewives* consistently show women with high tensions, fighting and in general negative situations, especially Black women. As they are shows that are described as "soap-opera style" reality shows, they have been known to exaggerate certain situations as a way of maintaining an audience and selling the stars, (Dominguez, 2015). *Being Mary Jane* made history at the time because it was the one hour scripted television series for the

television network, BET. The podcast hosts go on to say they felt appreciative of Being Mary Jane because the characters are real and show the flaws, behaviors, and emotions that people have in their actual day to day lives, showing “the ugly truth”. Because of this element, the hosts felt comfortable saying that their friends are just like the women in the show.

With the “Black Lightning Podcast” there was collective excitement among all four co-hosts about the show in general, but especially the pilot episode. They knew the first episode would set the tone for the rest of the series. They were initially worried about how the execution of the storylines and characters would be done, but the episode exceeded their expectations, enough to the point where it made them watch the episode several times by the time of the recording of the podcast episode, three times for one co-host. From the first scene of the show, they felt the series was going to be what they described as “Black as hell” simply because of the opening song choice. It was “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holiday which was first sung in 1939. This song brought a lot of controversy because it was about the dark nature of lynchings of Black Americans, making Holiday become a target by the FBI in order to get her to stop singing the song publicly. The song plays over the scene as the father in the show, Jefferson Pierce, is at a police station picking up one of his daughters for being arrested during a peaceful protest. The scene eventually progresses into Jefferson getting pulled over by police with his two daughters in the car and he is forced out of the car in the middle of a thunderstorm with no explanation. As this is happening, Jefferson yells at the police saying “this is the third time this month,” (Akil, 2018), highlighting on this scripted show a situation that happens everyday in reality. One of the co-host goes on to talk about how she noticed Jefferson’s youngest daughter was the one narrating this episode. This stuck out to her because with other superhero shows, it mostly centers male characters, but this was different because besides Holiday’s singing, the daughter’s voice is the first character the audience is introduced to, setting the tone that there will not be an entirely male centered perspective throughout the series. As she was watching the episode, it made the co-host say “yes Black girls,” because this was something she hasn’t really seen before with the current superhero shows on tv.

Of the three focus study participants, their ages were 19, 21, and 54, referred to as AR, LL, and RN respectively. All of them were able to recall the first time they watched Brock Akil’s works and what specifically drew each of them to it. Because of time constraints, we were only able to talk about *Girlfriends* for part of the session and *Black Lightning* for the second half. For AR and LL, both of them were younger when *Girlfriends* and *The Game* were originally on the air, so they viewed parts of it with their older generation family members. For AR that was with her mother and for LL that was with her grandmother. RN was able to offer a different perspective because she was the only participant that was able to actively follow and engage with *Girlfriends* at the time of its premier. She recalled being attracted to the series because “it was parallel to where I was in my life at that time” (RN, 2021) as well as the other people she knew in her life. As a Black woman working in a professional field herself, RN was attracted to the series because the characters were also working in their individual professional fields, saying “I hadn’t seen that before,” when it came to Black women being represented. She also acknowledged that there was another show featuring a predominantly Black cast which aired around the same time, *Living Single*. She followed by saying that *Living Single* was also a show that was considered different for the time because of that reason, but also acknowledged that what differentiated *Girlfriends* from *Living Single* was that *Girlfriends* was the “wide representation of Black women. There were less of the stereotypes you would see, that were still even present in *Living Single*” (RN, 2021). This representation is not only

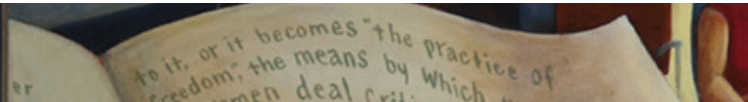


limited to how the characters look, but also how they acted. Brock Akil represents the concept that Black is not a monolith by showcasing different personalities and even highlighting areas that TV shows had shied away from previously.

As the focus group moved on to talk about one of Brock Akil's more current shows, *Black Lightning*, there was a shared consensus among the participants that they felt compelled to watch the series because it was centered around a Black superhero, which was still not commonly seen. The premier of the show followed in the path of the emergence of Black superheroes with the likes of *Black Panther* and Netflix's *Luke Cage*, but the presence of Black heroes still fell behind that of their white counterparts. For LL and RN, their favorite character is Jefferson Pierce, who also takes on the persona of the titular character. Both draw on similar reasons being that he is portrayed in a positive light, dispelling stereotypes as a Black man. LL states that as a principal, Jefferson is "supportive and really involved with his students and you don't see that a lot in education, especially with Black students" (LL, 2021). With the students responding enthusiastically to each question, Jefferson begins the affirmation, "Where is the future? Right here. Whose life is this? Mine. What are you gonna do with it? Live it by any means necessary," (Akil, et al, 2018-Present). LL shared that she really enjoyed this pattern because it continued in the positive light Jefferson was being portrayed as a Black male principal. Throughout the series Jefferson advocates for all of his students, wanting his school to be a place of love, support, and encouragement because he wants to save them from the violence that riddles their fictional city of Freeland. He emphasizes that they are people and are deserving of lives that don't involve prison, referring to the school to prison pipeline (Akil, et al, 2018-Present). As well as being portrayed as a loving principle, Jefferson is also seen as a loving husband and father, making this the primary reason why he is RN's favorite character. She describes him as "a Black man that is nurturing, supportive, and the implication is his children, it definitely is contesting the stereotype of the absent father as he is taking care of them" (RN, 2021). This was an important distinction for RN because she knew the absent father stereotype was not real, but the relationship Jefferson has with his children was something she rarely saw. She also noted that she is starting to see more Black men interacting and bonding with their children in the wider culture, recounting videos she's seen of them combing their daughters hair and having active roles in their children's lives. For AR, while she said she enjoys all of the characters, the one that stands out to her the most is Jefferson's oldest daughter, Anissa. As a "Black gay character," (AR, 2021), Anissa has become her favorite because this multileveled identity has not really been seen on television. For all three participants, they acknowledged the openness the series offered with sex and sexuality. One scene that stood out to everyone was when Jefferson's youngest daughter, Jennifer, went to her parents and explicitly told them she was ready to have sex and the day she would be having it (Akil, 2018). Their initial response was shock, but Jennifer was still met with support and appreciation that she went to her parents and felt she could trust them enough to share that. AR acknowledged this scene because she felt it worked towards destigmatizing sex in the Black community. RN supported this comment saying she felt sex was "taboo" talk about, especially for her generation when it came to casual sex. She continued on to share that when she was first told about sex, conversations were "ambiguous description[s] of sex and it [was] very exclusive," (RN, 2021), meaning only between a man and a woman and only occurring when love was present.

## Discussion

Throughout this research, I've only grown more appreciation for Mara Brock Akil because





there was a point she was told the characters she was creating would not sell. Noted by her work, she persevered and was able to sell these characters and stories because they were different from other series and representative of real Black people and that is what attracted her audience and continues to attract them. Brock Akil has stated multiple times that she was intentional in this sense of character development because she wanted to create characters that were flawed and never meant to be perfect because she wanted them to be human. Because these characters were not designed to be perfect, their development and growth was evident throughout seasons. This is something audiences were able to pick up on, as participants of the focus group shared that they resonated with several main characters of the series. The participants found this possible because they saw the growth in character development and relatability as characters were put into different situations. The emergence of podcasts reveals a subculture of fans that have taken Brock Akil's series to a heightened level of engagement. They come together and still have the same excitement every week as they talk about each episode. They felt a connection to these shows and had the desire to create a space for them and other fans to come together and engage with the content.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to explore how Black Americans engage with others who have seen acclaimed writer, producer, and show creator Mara Brock Akil's work as well as how they internalize what they see in her projects. Based on the literature review, content analysis, and focus group, three trends were discovered. With Brock Akil's work, she was able to create timeless storylines with relatable characters, foster viewer appreciation, and increase diversity and representation of people and topics. It was not merely one generation these shows attracted. I received a participant that was in her 50's. She was the only person in the group that was old enough to watch *Girlfriends* and did watch it as it premiered. She was able to still talk about what first attracted her to a show from over 20 years ago. From the rest of the study, there were people in younger generations that were attracted to the series for similar reasons and found the same amount of enjoyment from the storylines. A shared attraction of the shows was the centering of Black characters. They appeared to be enjoyable characters that a broad audience could actually relate to. A common thread noticed between the podcast's hosts and focus group participants was everyone's ability to talk about the characters as if they were real people and possibly their friends. People talked about their appreciation for these series because they offered visibility and allowed people to view pieces of their identities in the media. Together, these results conclude that Brock Akil's works have a lasting cultural impact that empowers those who view them.

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## UNDERSTANDING COVID-19 VACCINE HESITANCIES

*Written by Vivian Lu*

*Sponsored by **UPDATE***

### Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the world and with new virus variations posing unknown challenges, promoting the COVID vaccines to decrease virus spread and the death toll is a public health priority. Though the FDA approved vaccines have been shown effective and safe, significant COVID vaccine hesitancy has been identified in research across different populations in the U.S. This research examines the extent of COVID vaccine hesitancy across different socio-demographic groups in the U.S. and its contributing factors. Through an online survey involving a sample of 1000 U.S. adults we aim to understand the prevalence of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancies and the reasons why these hesitancies exist. In the project, we hope to determine if individuals are influenced by information sources such as where a person gets vaccine information from, and certain psychological factors including political ideologies and conspiracy ideation. Survey results will provide insights to tailor health communication campaigns to increase COVID-19 vaccine understanding, adoption, and adherence.



## Introduction

COVID-19 has started a worldwide pandemic. It has been a little more than a year since the outbreak in the U.S, but the death count continues to rise. Many doctors and health experts are administering vaccines in order to achieve herd immunity and prevent excess deaths. Herd immunity works by making it hard for a disease to spread, and can even prevent it from infecting those who cannot be vaccinated, like newborns (CDC).

Two companies, Moderna and Pfizer, have created a FDA approved vaccine that is readily being administered to health workers and long-term care facilities. In addition, Johnson & Johnson have also developed a vaccine that is about 70% effective. Despite promising results, vaccine hesitations remain. In fact, despite more information and continuous testing, about 20% of U.S. adults do not intend to get vaccinated and are ‘pretty certain’ more information will not change their mind” (Funk and Tyson 2020).

Vaccine hesitancy and delay can reverse progress in preventing the spread of the highly infectious coronavirus. In 2019, WHO has listed vaccine hesitancy as one of the top ten threats to global health. Assessing the attitudes and behavior of the vaccine will provide insight on why these hesitations exist, and further direct experts on addressing these hesitations when vaccines are available to the general public.

Previous surveys found a few common patterns in vaccine hesitancy. For example, participants were less likely to be willing to get vaccinated if they were non-Latinx black (Kreps, Brownstein et. al). Another study found that “black race was associated with a more than 6 fold higher chance” (Fisher, Bloomstone, et. al). Additionally, there are vaccine opposition groups that are “fundamentally led and funded by the right wing” (Malcolm).

There are several ways to help these populations overcome their vaccine hesitancy. A survey done in China revealed that 80.6% considered that their doctor’s recommendation of the vaccine was an important factor in vaccination decision making (Wang, J et. al). Thus, finding out what reasons and which groups are most hesitant to receive the vaccine is important for public health efforts to tailor their campaigns to increase COVID-19 vaccine understanding, adoption, and adherence.

## Literature Review

### *Vaccine hesitations in current research*

Vaccine opposition movements have existed since the nineteenth century in New England, when smallpox immunizations were carried out (Schwartz 2012). Compulsory vaccination created tensions between the public and health authorities, and still exist now. One of the main reasons for this is parental vaccine hesitancy. Parentals concerns rise from a variety of reasons including the popular misbelief of the idea that the measles vaccine is connected to autism, perceived external factors such as medial portrayal, and perceived efficacy of vaccine-induced immunity (Gowda and Dempsey 2013). A more recent study found that “an educational level lower than a bachelor’s degree and household income <400% of the federal poverty level predicted hesitancy about both routine childhood and influenza vaccines” (Kempe et. al 2020).



The effects of media exposure has been explored for many topics including health eating habits, beauty standards, and other behaviors. Vaccine receives less coverage on the media, but conspiracy theories still circulate among the US population. Social media is one outlet where information spreads like wildfire. A study done on HPV vaccine coverage on Twitter found that the most popular topics regarding the vaccine “were related to mainstream news media events and issues, safety concerns, and conspiracies,” and that “positive topics (reporting evidence and advocacy) had weaker correlations with coverage” (Dunn et. al 2017). Overall, there was “a strong correlation between HPV vaccine coverage and exposure to certain topics on Twitter, often negative topics that expressed concerns about safety or related to conspiracies” (Dunn et. al 2017). Vaccine coverage also varies with geography. Vaccine refusal in measles, mumps, rubella and varicella vaccines are often clustered (Lieu et. al 2015).

Another study found that organization on social media was also highly predictive of the belief that vaccinations are unsafe (Wilson and Wiysonge 2020). This may be because traditional media channels such as obtaining information from the TV, regardless of how much the channel is trusted, are likely adhering to sharing fact-based vaccine information linked to governmental, healthcare, or academic data and reports (Piltch-Loeb et. al 2021). Social media platforms did not have the same effect; in fact, it was found that those who are less likely to get the vaccine use social media as their only source of information (Piltch-Loeb et. al 2021).

## *Disparities and interactions with media patterns*

Social media has become more popular and influential on our lives in many different aspects. It is a way for us to connect with family, friends, and even get our information. The connection between social media usage and political participation has been studied deeply, but the relationship between getting vaccinated has not. Pew Research Center survey data found that social networking sites are crucial for racial minorities’ political participation, and show significantly higher levels of online political participation than White people (Wang 2021). And now, with an increasing amount of online activity, people who may not have internet access due to the digital divide, in which members of racial and ethnic groups are less likely to access the data and use social media, can bias inferences regarding media usage. (Campos-Castillo 2020). This means that those who analyze COVID-19 and try to track data through social media mapping have trouble due to underrepresentation of these minorities. Although it was found that respondents who identified as black, Latino, or other races and ethnicities were more likely to report posting COVID-19 content on social media than respondents who identified as white, the reason behind this is not clear (Campos-Castillo and Laestadius 2020).

## *Psychological and conspiracy ideation*

The increase of usage of social media can also lead to an abundant spread of fake news. Now with the pandemic, when important information is easily distorted, those who are more likely to believe in conspiracies may have trouble separating fact from fiction. Although there is a relationship between conspiracy ideation with compliance with COVID-19 prevention guidelines, this is an indirect effect. A higher conspiracy ideation leads to a lesser



trust in science, and which leads to a lower level of compliance with COVID-19 compliance measures (Phohl and Musil 2020). However, this paper will seek to understand the conspiracy ideation revolving around vaccines, and not about the disease itself.

## Research Questions

In this paper, we seek to better understand the confounding factors relating disparity, media, and vaccine hesitancy. Thus, we pose several research questions regarding these factors:

RQ1: Do information access and media choices influence individuals' beliefs and attitudes toward getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

RQ2: Do participants' beliefs in conspiracy theories and misbeliefs about the vaccine influence individuals' beliefs and attitudes toward getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

RQ3: Do racial and ethnic backgrounds influence individuals' beliefs and attitudes toward getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

\*collapse some of the options into not at all vs a big deal

## Methods and Procedures

A survey questionnaire assessing the attitudes and behaviors towards the COVID-19 vaccine was distributed. The survey was deployed on Qualtrics through an application named Prolific and was active from April to May 2021. The questionnaire could only be taken one time and was both computer and phone compatible. There were a total of 536 responses from people living in the U.S., and the questions asked about different interlinking factors such as media, media usage, and vaccine hesitancy.

## Results

Intention of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine was determined through whether someone has gotten or is scheduled to receive the vaccine. About 71% of the sample stated that they have gotten the COVID-19 vaccine or are scheduled to receive it. Of the other 29% who have not received the vaccine, a little under half the sample (43.9%) do not want to receive the vaccine in the next 3 months. Because this study is focused on tackling the vaccine hesitations of those who are not vaccinated, the data will refer to those who want to get the vaccine in the next 3 months and not those who have already received it or are scheduled to receive it.

### *Information access and media choices*

#### *Information access*

70.4% of the sample found reliable information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine easily, while only 16.4% found this task difficult. The rest of the sample was in the middle, finding it neither easy or difficult. Of those who did find information easily, about half (54.7%) intend to receive the vaccine in the next 3 months, compared to the 25.7% of those

who do not believe it is easy to find reliable information.

### *Understanding information*

There are similar findings for those understanding the information seen about the vaccine. About 15.2% found that it was difficult to understand the information they see, compared to 69.1% who found it easy to understand the information they are exposed to. Of those who found it easy, about 52.7% intend to receive the vaccine in the next 3 months compared to 25.0% who did not.

### *Information credibility and source*

Twelve different sources of information were measured in this study including left-leaning media (e.g., CNN, MSNBC), right-leaning media (e.g., Fox, New York Post), social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter), government and public officials (e.g., the President, White House), health and medical institutions (e.g., CDC, FDA), medical and health websites (e.g., WebMD, Mayo Clinic), research universities (e.g., Harvard, John Hopkins University), the World Health Organization (WHO), pharmaceutical companies (Pfizer, Moderna), an individual's health providers, an individual's friends, colleagues, and peers, and an individual's family members.

Information encounters as well as trust in different sources were measured in the study. The three information sources that most people receive information from is social media (41.8%), health and medical institutions (41.6%), and left-leaning media (41.3%). However, the trust in these sources vary: 8.9%, 62.5%, and 24.5% respectively. There is also high trust in research universities (60.9%), despite only 19.3% of the sample encountering information from this source. In addition, there is high trust in health care providers (59.0%) and WHO (50.6%), but only 21.4% and 21.9% of the sample encountered information from these sources. There is very little trust in right-leaning media as well (8.4%), but this may be explained by the percentage of the sample who lean toward Democrats (68.7%).

Of those who trust health and medical institutions, about 63.5% reported being likely to get vaccinated, while 41.3% reported not being likely to get vaccinated in the next 3 months. Compare this to those who are likely to get vaccinated for those who trust research universities (70.1%) and social media, a popular platform for information (56.3%), and those who are not likely to get vaccinated, 18.5% for those who trust research universities and 31.3% for social media. Another interesting thing to note is that of those who encounter COVID-19 vaccine information on social media, 34.8% are likely to get the vaccine, which is less than those who encounter information from health and medical institutions and research universities (56.4% and 65.4%).

When considering left and right leaning media, those who encounter left-leaning media are more likely (42.0%) than those who encounter right-leaning media to get vaccinated (31.0%). This pattern is similar for those who trust in these media, 76.9% of those who trust in left-leaning media report intending to get vaccinated in the next 3 months compared to the 63.6% who trust in right-leaning media.



## *Conspiracy theories and misbeliefs*

### *Misbeliefs*

The survey listed several common misbeliefs as statements and asked participants to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with those statements. Overall, those who held misbeliefs about the vaccine were less likely to report getting the vaccine in the next 3 months. For example, 71.2% of those who agreed that vaccine safety data is often fabricated reported not intending to receive the vaccine.

### *Trust in vaccine research*

Trust in vaccine research also relates to intention of receiving the vaccine. For example, 67.2% of those who agreed that they trust vaccine researchers intend to receive the vaccine, compared to 68.8% who do not trust the research and do not intend to get the vaccine. Many people in the sample agreed that vaccine researchers do not know the possible long-term effects of vaccines (65.5%), and 18.2% disagreed with this statement. Of those who agree, about half do not intend to get the vaccine (54.6%).

### *Conspiracy theories*

Belief in conspiracy theories was also assessed. Those who agreed with the listed conspiracy theories were less likely to report getting the COVID-19 vaccine. For example, 76.9% of those who believed that COVID-19 vaccine would affect women's fertility and 67.9% who believed the vaccine would enter your cells and change your DNA reported not intending to receive the vaccine.

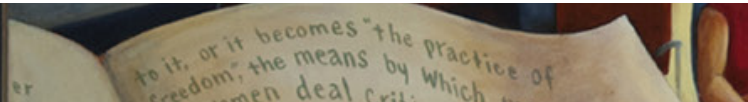
***Racial and ethnic backgrounds:*** RQ3: Do racial and ethnic backgrounds influence individuals' beliefs and attitudes toward getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

### *Race*

The majority of the sample are Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, White/Caucasian, and Asian. Asians reported the highest rate of intention to vaccinate (72.0%), while White/Caucasian people reported the lowest rate of intention to vaccinate (26.7%). Black people and Hispanic/Latino people reported similar rates of intentions to receive the vaccine (34.9% and 31.7% respectively).

### *Gender identity*

Men in this sample reported being more likely to receive the vaccine in the next 3 months (44.0%), compared to women (33.9%). There was one person who reported being agender, and they intend to receive the vaccine.





### *Household income*

There was not a huge difference between intention to receive the vaccine and household income. One noticeable data is that 49.1% of those in the income bracket in between \$30,000 and \$39,000 intend to get vaccinated, which is higher than the other brackets.

### *Health insurance*

Being covered by health insurance did not affect the intention to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

### *Religion*

Religion also did not greatly affect intention to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. However, for those who are non-religious, 45.0% reported not intending to receive the vaccine compared to 35.0% who do intend to receive the vaccine.

### *Political affiliation*

The majority of this sample identified as Democrats, or leaned towards Democrats. 54.8% of those who were Democrat or leaned toward Democrats reported intention of vaccination, compared to 12.0% of Republican or those who leaned toward Republicans.

## **Discussion**

Overall, media access and understanding that information is a factor that affects intention to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, while many do trust fact-based sources such as research universities and the WHO, not many encounter information from these sources. But when they do, they report being more likely to intend to receive the vaccine. Misbeliefs and conspiracy theories about the vaccine also predicted intention to get vaccinated. However, trust in vaccine research did not seem to affect intention. Similar to previous studies, Black and Latino people report the lowest rate of vaccination. In this sample, however, white/Caucasian people reported the lowest rate of intention to receive vaccination. In addition, political ideation and intention to receive the vaccine lines up with previous data: those who are Republican or lean towards Republican reported lower rates of vaccine intention compared to Democrats or those who lean towards Democrats.

As vaccine rates slow down in the US, but herd immunity is not reached, it is important to understand the reasons why. Many communities fall short of the recommended 70% of the population vaccinated, and with the new Delta strain, public health and other science experts are more worried now than ever.

There are a few limitations to this study. Although this study asked what specific sources people encounter and trust about COVID-19 vaccine, patterns of vaccine intention can be influenced by information people actively seek as well. In addition, the pandemic begun during a different presidency than today's, and the change in presidency could have

affected the responses that considered the trust in government regarding COVID-19.

Future research should account for these factors, and seek to explain other underlying causes of vaccine hesitancy. The way media affects our daily lives is extremely complicated, and may be complicated further as media usage becomes increasingly common and traditional media is used less often. Information spreads quickly, but different types of information may spread faster, and understanding what kind of information spreads quicker than others, why it does, and in which communities, may be important to understand in order to tackle vaccine hesitancy at a deeper level and implicating public safety announcements and encouragements to get vaccinated. By looking at the rate of vaccination outside of a traditional health approach, we can seek to understand vaccine hesitancy and the way it interacts with our psychology and media.

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# **PUSHED OUT OF EMPOWERMENT: EXPLORING HOW LATINX STUDENTS EXPERIENCE DISCIPLINE AT AN URBAN CHARTER SCHOOL**

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*Sponsored by **UPDATE***

## **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been increasing attention to the ways students of color have been policed, punished, and pushed out of high schools (Rios, 2011). The term pushout refers to the ways punitive school policies remove students from classrooms, exclude them from learning opportunities, and frequently push them out of school altogether (Varela, 2018). The notion of pushout departs from the deficit-oriented rhetoric of “drop-out.” While the notion of dropping out problematically centers blame on individual students for choosing to leave school, the notion of pushout focuses attention on school practices and zero-tolerance discipline policies that systematically push students out of school (Mireles et al., 2020). Research on school punishment and discipline reveals that punitive school policies frequently target students of color and serve as mechanisms that further marginalize students of color and increase racial educational disparities (Gastic, 2016). While punitive school practices are widespread across many school campuses, charter schools have been uniquely scrutinized for their use of “no excuse” policies and hyper-discipline. These practices have come under fire for forcing high achievement among some students while weeding out “low-performing” students through discipline, punishment, and expulsion (Waitoller, Nguyen, & Super, 2019). Presently, Latinx make up 26% of students enrolled in charter schools and are seen as a problematic demographic charter schools seek to address (Renzulli, 2019).



This research enters the conversation of charter schools and Latinx pushout by exploring the stories of former Latinx students who were pushed out of a high-achieving charter high school in the San Francisco Bay Area. While traditional narratives of pushout emphasize punitive policies, punishment, and expulsion, the participants in this study reported rarely being in trouble and few instances of overt punishment. Instead, this study found that pushout was much more covert and subtle. In this article, I describe this phenomenon of subtle pushout as being *quietly let go*. For the student in this study, being *quietly let go* meant feeling ignored, forgotten, and deprioritized for who they felt were higher-performing students. This occurred until they finally decided to leave school. In this paper, I center the perspectives of four students who were quietly let go from a high-achieving charter school. Their stories shift the dominant way of understanding school pushout and underscore a need for both charter and public schools to move beyond simply backing away from zero-tolerance punishment, and instead cultivating spaces of love and care among students they are meant to serve.

## Literature Review

### *Latinx students, school discipline, and high school dropouts.*

Latinx students make up a large portion of the students enrolled in K-12. In 2018, Latinx students were 25% of all students enrolled in K-12 schools in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2020). Latinx students also have the highest dropout rate of 10%. This is higher than the national average (6%) and other racial categories (US Census Bureau, 2020). One of the possible explanations for their high levels of dropout can be the zero-tolerance policies used by many schools. Zero-tolerance policies are serious types of school discipline that give students predetermined penalties without considering the circumstances or the situations that led up to the event (Castillo, 2014, p. 44). Castillo (2014) argues, “Rather than promoting a safe and secure educational atmosphere, harsh disciplinary policies create a culture of fear as students are in constant fear of being suspended or arrested.” (p. 48). These zero-tolerance policies have also been criticized for contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline (Winn, 2011).

Zero-tolerance policies are commonly used to target students from marginalized backgrounds. Research shows that Black and Latinx students are often disciplined for offenses that go unnoticed or unpunished with white students (Gastic, 2016). Latinx students that go to schools with zero-tolerance policies are three times more likely to be suspended, expelled, or referred to the judicial system than White students (Castillo, 2014). As a consequence, students lose classroom time and begin to feel disconnected from their school (Gastic, 2016). Winn (2011) argues that, in part, biased disciplinary practices might explain the lower academic performance of groups of students who arguably need the most support. This demonstrates the ways academic disparities are connected to disparities in punishment (Winn, 2011).

### *Latinx students and charter school discipline*

Charter schools were first initiated in 1991 in the state of Minnesota and then spread throughout the country. Charter schools are similar to public schools, however, they function with much more independence and autonomy. For a charter school to get started, a charter organization or Charter Management Organization writes a mission statement where they



delineate their budget, source of funding, and have a school location (U.S Department of Education). This must be approved by the local school district (CA Department of Education). While they need their approval, charter schools have more autonomy than district schools (Renzulli, 2019). In recent years, charter schools have exponentially grown in urban areas. Charter schools have grown in urban neighborhoods, and this can explain why Latinx students make up 27% of the students in the charter (Renzulli, 2019).

While proponents of charter schools cite increased competition and school choices and benefits to families of color (Berends, 2015), proponents of public education have widely criticized several aspects of the charter model. One critique has been their overt use of discipline. Many charter schools rely on “no excuse policies” to teach and address behavior (Waitoller, Nguyen, & Super, 2019). Many scholars have claimed that these strict protocols and high academic requirements are placed to force students to fit into the white middle-class norms (Waitoller, Nguyen, & Super, 2019). If a student is not disciplined, then they are driven away from the charter school by expulsion or they are encouraged by the school of alternative schools (Waitoller, Nguyen, & Super, 2019). Many scholars have also wondered whether charter schools push low-performing students. Some scholars have predicted that if they do push low-performing students out of their school it is probably because they have to maintain their high achievement levels for recruitment, it might be too expensive to educate low-performing students, and they also have accountability pressures (Zimmer & Guarino, 2013).

Overall, my review of the literature overviews the ways punishment and discipline are used to push students of color out of schools. Furthermore, while researchers have examined the ways no excuse practices have led to punishment and push out of students of color, this study adds to this work by examining the ways Latinx students experienced pushout through non-traditional disciplinary means. Past research has emphasized overt policing practices. While this is important, my research adds to this literature by studying the ways pushout occurs through subtle and less extreme versions of marginalization. As punitive school practices continue to be challenged and reformed, this research highlights the importance of examining subtle forms of pushout.

## Theoretical Framework

This article uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework in which to analyze the ways Latinx students experienced being pushed out of high school. CRT entered the field of education in 1995 with Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate’s landmark article “Towards a critical race theory in education.” This article highlights the ways race is undertheorized and not used to explain the social inequities in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe racism as endemic in United States society. It is crucial to examine race in the education system because school punishment is predominantly used on students of color (Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010). In recent years, scholars have been interested in school punishment because they realize it has larger consequences such as the school-to-prison pipeline. One of the pillars of the school-to-prison pipeline is the discipline gap where students of color are disciplined at higher rates in school (Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010). The higher use of discipline can then explain why students of color have bigger pushout rates.

Since this study researches the pushout of Latinx students, a group that is disciplined and pushed out at higher rates, a CRT framework is essential to focus on the ways of punishment and pushout a racialized phenomenon. CRT honors the power of storytelling

and testimonios as central tools in challenge dominant narratives of education (Cook and Dixon, 2013). The stories of people of color are needed in order to have a proper review of the educational system (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

CRT is important to this research because it explores the narratives of Latinx students who were pushed out of the school system. Exploring these narratives will help get a better idea of the mechanisms that are used to push students out of school. It is important to understand this because they currently have one of the highest rates of pushout.

## Methods

This project used a qualitative approach to understand the ways research participants experienced and made sense of being pushed out of school. My primary form of data collection was semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Siedman (2006) explains that the purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand the lived experience of other people and to try to understand how they make meaning of those experiences. Interviews are a powerful way to understand educational issues by using the lived experiences of the participants as the focus of the research. In approaching this project, two overarching research questions guided my data collection:

*How do Latinx students experience pushout from an urban charter school?*

*How did Latinx students understand and interpret their own story of leaving school?*

## Data Collection

This study is based on four semi-structured interviews. The interviews were each an hour long and all were audio recorded and transcribed. These interviews explored the participant's educational background. It also explored how the participants perceived being pushed out of their school. Once the interviews were transcribed, interview transcripts were analyzed through coding. Some codes from this analysis include family involvement in school, lack of discipline, different treatment, and school choice influence. These codes helped to shape the findings of this project.

## Participants

The participants in this research paper all identified as Latinx, and they attended Bay Charter Academy in the San Francisco Bay Area region. These participants were between 20 and 22. These participants were all in different grade levels when they left school. They were also part of different graduating classes. They attended this school from the years 2014-2018. Three out of the four participants attended public middle schools, and this was their first time at a charter school. One participant did attend a charter for middle school.

## School and Community

Bay Charter Academy is located in a large city and serves primarily low-income, first-generation Black and Latinx students. This school opened in the early 2000s and served roughly 400 students while research participants were students. This school brands itself as a college preparatory and markets itself as a gateway to attend college. Bay Charter Academy



only offers A-G courses, and students are required to apply to a four-year college to graduate. The school's graduation rate is about 94%, substantially higher than local public high schools in the city.

This school followed a portfolio model where students had benchmarks throughout the school year. The portfolio, also known as College Success Portfolio (CSP), consisted of different artifacts, such as essays, math projects, and creative projects. Each of those had to be proficient in order to present them. The advisory teacher kept the students accountable by checking which artifacts were proficient and which were not. At the end of the year, they presented in front of a panel. If a student did not pass, they had to stay in the same advisory until they passed. Students were able to move to the next grade classes even if they did not pass their presentations.

### Researcher Positionality

As a 20-year-old Latina who attended Bay Charter Academy, I entered this research with a detailed knowledge of the school setting and context. I am familiar with the structure of the school, and I am one of the success stories that this school highlights for recruitment. In part, my interest in this research stems from both feelings of curiosity as well as injustice. Why is it that I was able to graduate and attend a four-year university while some of my peers were not? In line with a Chicana feminist approach to research (Bernal, 1998), I embraced my experiential knowledge as well as followed my belief that my research participants, some of which are my friends, had valuable and important stories to share about our time in what is commonly praised as a high-achieving, social justice charter school.

### Findings

#### *Finding 1: Students wanted to succeed.*

There is a prevailing narrative that Latinx students and their families do not prioritize or value school. This narrative is used to justify the low graduation rates among Latinx students in the United States. However, counter to that narrative, the participants in this study expressed deep hopes of educational success. The students, supported by their families, wanted to succeed. With the guidance of their familial networks, the participants in this study were encouraged to attend Bay Charter Academy precisely because it was known to be a high achieving and academically rigorous school. In order to understand why these participants attended Bay Charter Academy, they were asked how they learned about the school and who encouraged them to attend.

Francisco assured me that his family cared about school and academic success. He stated,

My mom cared very much about my education. She would help me a lot with all my school projects and any homework that I had questions with or any trouble with. Studies were a big thing in my family because I come from a family where my parents weren't able to go to college and my grandparents weren't able to finish their schooling, you know, so for the college and school and education were big.

In this quote, Francisco expresses that his mom helped him with his assignments and



that education mattered to his family. While there is this misconception that Latinx families do not prioritize education, this participant shares that education plays an important role in many families. Many do not have the opportunity to go to college, and they still have hope that their future generations will have the opportunity to attend.

The fact that Francisco's mom was involved in their school projects shows that parents will make themselves available to help them in the ways they can because they want to see them succeed academically. The fact that this student reached out to their family for school help suggests that they wanted more support to ensure that they did the assignments correctly. The student did this because they cared about their academic success.

Another participant, Ana, answered that her brother had encouraged her to attend this school since he had had a negative experience at a public school and did not want her to go through that. Ana responded, "Maybe because of my brother's experiences, since he went to a public high school like [he thought] 'I don't want her to go through all this.' Like gangs and drugs and all that." While there is this notion that Latinx families do not prioritize academic success, it is evident that the participant's siblings encouraged her because they wanted her to have a positive experience in school. The fact that this participant listened and attended this charter school instead of her local public, which has a negative reputation, shows that she wanted to go out of her way to have academic success.

When they were asked why they had chosen this school, a participant named Antonio mentioned he had gone here because his middle school teacher had encouraged him. He said:

The reason why I attended Bay Charter Academy was that my counselor from middle school Miss Smith, did tell me 'The school is very small, so you'll be able to get that one-on-one help you know if you do need it, they have excellent programs there they have teachers available after school and before school'

Antonio was encouraged by others to attend Bay Charter Academy because this school branded itself as a school with a plethora of resources to help students succeed. He listened to this advice because they wanted to ensure that they had those resources to help them succeed. The finding that students wanted to succeed helps to disrupt the narrative that Latinx students and families do not prioritize education. Shifting this narrative helps us understand that the reason why these students did not succeed academically was that they did not provide adequate support to the educational dreams of these students. From the perspective of the students interviewed in this study, this school focused on supporting those students who they saw as already academically successful.

### *Finding 2: Feeling Unwanted*

Bay Charter Academy brands itself as a college preparatory school where all students have the opportunity to succeed. All students are given A-G classes and encouraged to apply to a four-year university. However, the testimonies of my participants shed light on issues of favoritism and the discretization of students that appeared to be struggling academically. They also reported that they felt teachers had negative impressions of them, despite rarely being in trouble.

In order to understand the participants' interactions with their teachers, they were



asked if they had noticed any favoritism, and they said they had. Antonio shared, "Some teachers would say 'I'll actually help you,' but once their favorite students came in, they wouldn't really pay much attention to you or help you; they would be like 'oh I'm busy'." In this case, Antonio was promised to receive support, but that did not happen if the teacher's preferred students came in. It is possible to see that this student was trying to receive support. The fact that the teacher helped others instead of him might suggest that this teacher had a bias against him. It is possible that the teacher thought that other students were more worthy of their attention.

This also happened to another participant. As stated under the school and community section, this school followed a portfolio model where the advisory teacher kept students accountable by checking the progress of their artifacts. This portfolio had to be proficient so students could present at the end of the year. This presentation determined whether someone moved to a higher advisory. The following quote is from Brenda, who felt lost and unaccounted for by her teachers.

That's when I realized teachers didn't care about me. When it came to benchmarks, 'cause they cared about everyone else being on time and making sure they had their stuff done, even if it was late. But when it came to me, nobody asked me.... what about me, I'm here.

The fact that Brenda was not held accountable shows that the teacher did not prioritize their needs. This happened because Brenda had lower grades. Teachers tied grades to the level of expectations for a student. This made students feel unseen and unwelcomed in the classroom. Once a student notices that treatment, it pushes them away because they do not want to be in an environment where they are treated as a second option.

Francisco was also asked if they ever noticed any favoritism in the class, he responded,

I remember a time in my math class I was asking for some help and she would go around and help the students with higher GPAs like Carmen and Karla. I believe that if she put more effort into the kids who actually needed more help, you know, things would have turned out better.

In this statement, a participant recalls an incident where they realized the teacher was helping students with higher grades. They also acknowledged feeling that they would have a different academic outcome if teachers would have helped those who needed more support.

This is another example where students felt deprioritized by teachers, who appeared to be more focused on students with higher GPAs. This is harmful to students because their effort is not acknowledged. This discourages them from trying in the classroom. As a result, their grade continues to lower. This is a cycle where low-prioritized students have pushed away from the classroom because of their GPA.

As shown in this section, these students were in the classroom trying their best to get support, but they were deprioritized since they did not have high grades. Unconsciously, teachers used grades to determine who to help in the classroom. Although this school brands itself as a school with equal opportunities where everyone takes the same classes, there are inequities happening in the classroom. . It is possible that they function this way to increase their scores, so they could continue to look like a high achieving school. These disparities discourage students from trying. This school creates conditions where students feel devalued.

### *Finding 3: Pushout was subtle*

In the current literature, there is an emphasis on punishment, discipline, and the school-to-prison pipeline. These issues are important to discuss, and they help to highlight how inequality is perpetuated in schools. However, among my research participants, I found that punishment and discipline were not the leading factors that students assigned to why they did not graduate from Bay Charter Academy. When the participants were asked if they had ever experienced any discipline most of them reported that they had not. Furthermore, the sole participant who did experience discipline mentioned that they felt discipline was not the primary reason why they left school.

When asked if they were disciplined while in school, Brenda responded, "No, I never got one of those. I never got a referral. I never got expelled or suspended". Additionally, Ana responded, "No, no, I never got in trouble, the only time I would get in trouble was for being late." As we could see, discipline was not the force pushing these students away from the school.

This was surprising because the traditional narrative of pushout includes hyper use of discipline. This is even more common within charter schools. Instead, I found that students were pushed out in a more subtle way, and the role and responsibility of the school were hidden. These students were pushed out because they were given too many responsibilities and the school did not advocate for their needs.

### **Cyber High**

Cyber High is an online platform that allows students to recover any missed credits. At Bay Charter Academy, students were assigned this their 12th-grade year. Some participants reported that they had to stay after school on Wednesday to work on it, while other participants said they were pulled out of their classes randomly. The participants were supposed to do Cyber High, plus their regular course load, and their senior presentation called College Success Portfolio (CSP). CSP was another example of the portfolio model this school followed.

The participants were asked to discuss how they left school. Two of the participants answered that Cyber High was the reason they were not able to graduate. Antonio responded,

I was focusing so much on Cyber High I didn't get to do my CSP, so my CSP ended up being my downfall. There was just a lot going on, and because of that they actually took away my privilege to walk the stage and basically get my diploma.

Here, Antonio describes focusing on making up missing credits and not getting the opportunity to present CSP. The fact that this participant was not given any accommodation shows how strict the school was. By failing to accommodate, they set unrealistic expectations. At this point, the fault is on the student because they are blamed for not finishing everything on time.

Ana also reported that Cyber High was the reason why she was not able to graduate:

I think it was like a week before actual graduation. Yes, the school told me, and it was because



of Cyber High. I wasn't able to complete it on time. When there was a month left before school finished, they told me, 'You have a chance you know, you just have to put in your work.' and I feel like I was doing it, but I guess not enough.

In this case, Ana was given a false sense of hope that she was going to be able to finish and graduate. She was working on Cyber High to ensure that she would finish it on time. The fact that the school assured her she could finish shows how the school once again did not set realistic expectations for them. Ana critiqued Cyber High and said:

Cyber high was different; it wasn't really like a class. Since it was like an online class I read and then answered something. Why am I being timed for trying to study something, you know? I had all my [CSP] slides. They were all done like it was ready, you know it was just Cyber High.

Ana did not think Cyber High was effective to help them earn credits. It is possible to see that these participants were trying to graduate, and they were close to doing it, but it was not feasible to finish everything on time. CSP and the regular course load was already heavy and adding Cyber High set unrealistic expectations. By doing this, the school was able to say that they gave the students the tools they needed in order to graduate. Since the student did not finish on time, that is on them. This takes the blame away from them. The school is still accountable because they did not create a system where the students could succeed.

### **Lack of Advocacy from School**

In many cases when students are struggling, the school and teacher will give them more attention to ensure that they are given the proper resources to graduate. The interesting thing at Bay Charter Academy was that they did not advocate for those students who needed support. The students in this study felt the school had given up on them because they were not stellar scholars.

In one case, Francisco said that he had a conversation with the principal and she told him he was at risk of failing the year. The participant was confused why this was happening since he was turning in his assignments. He knew that his grades were lower because the teachers were not inputting his grades. He asked the principal to have a talk with the teachers and this is how the conversation went:

I asked her that same day to have a talk with the teachers and she said, 'there's nothing I could do about it right now I'm very schedule up just keep trying your best,' and I said, 'okay that's fine I guess today is the last day I see you then' and I never went back to school after that.

In this case, Francisco advocated for himself because he realized he needed support. The staff denied it to him although they knew he was at risk of repeating the grade. A possible explanation for this is that they were uninterested in helping because they lost hope in the student and did not think it was worth their time to help them. This is unfair because their purpose as a school is to properly advocate for the needs of students.

Brenda also had a similar experience. The school reached out to her to understand why they were missing school. After they reached out to them, Brenda continued to miss school and they reported:



But I never received any calls. The principles never reached out to me via school email so to me that seemed more like they really didn't care as much as they said that they did. They never would reach out to those who really needed it, you know.

Brenda explained that nobody from the school contacted them to see why they were not showing up to school. She also reported that the school was not helping those students who needed the most support although they did say they did care. The fact that the school did not reach out to students who needed the most support demonstrates that their attention was focused on those who were considered high achievers. The school thought that since these students were low achieving students, they must not care about school, and for that reason, they should not be given the most attention.

### Quietly Let Go

While the popular narrative of pushout underscores discipline practices like suspensions, referrals, and expulsion, these were not the mechanisms that pushed the students out of Bay Charter Academy. Instead, the pushout was subtle, with all four students slowly opting to make the choice to leave school. While analyzing my data, I felt there was not a term that sufficiently explained this process. To help develop a more acute understanding of pushout, I offer the term *quietly let go*. I define quietly let go as the subtle, yet violent, process through which students are identified as not high achievers. As a result, students are slowly ignored and deprioritized. This form of pushout does not include no-excuses discipline or zero-tolerance policies that lead to expulsion and suspension. Instead, the school passively pushes out students by creating the conditions in which a student leaves on their own. Since the school did not suspend or expel the students, the school does not appear to be actively marginalizing and removing students, perpetuating the appearance of a supportive and high-achieving learning environment for all.

### Conclusion

In recent years, there has been increasing focus and condemnation of the pushout rates in urban schools. The traditional narrative of pushout focuses attention on high rates of suspensions, expulsions, and referrals. While this is important because it accounts for the structural forces pushing students out of school, this study uncovered a more subtle form of pushout. The subtle pushout where students are deprioritized since they are not considered high achieving students is known as *quietly let go*. This is significant because it adds to the current literature that focuses on violent pushout. Understanding this subtle pushout will help understand where schools are setting unrealistic expectations and ignoring certain students.

For educators, this research highlights the importance of identifying students who are struggling, and the need to prioritize and support their learning. Many times, the students themselves will not reach out for that support. Teachers must play an active role in including and supporting students, as opposed to the passive role of quietly letting them go. For administrators and policy makers, this research highlights the need to go beyond simply condemning zero-tolerance policies and punitive school practices. Instead, there has to be more attention on those schools that push students out subtly. When additional programs are given to help them graduate, such as Cyber High, analyze how realistic it is to give students



more responsibilities. In those situations, try to create accommodations to set the student for success.

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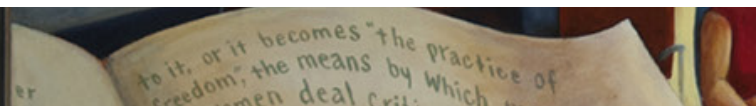
## LA PERSPECTIVA DE LOS HIJOS E HIJAS TRAS UNA SEPARACIÓN FAMILIAR POR LA DEPORTACIÓN

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### Introducción

En los últimos 25 años, las deportaciones han afectado a varios millones de familias. Se estima que 5.2 millones de jóvenes con ciudadanía estadounidense son de familias con estatus mixto (Capps et al. 2020). Esto significa que en el hogar hay al menos un miembro que no tiene ciudadanía estadounidense y al menos algún otro miembro es ciudadano estadounidense ya sea por nacimiento o por naturalización. Por lo tanto, en familias con padres o madres indocumentados de hijos con algún estatus legal en los Estados Unidos, hay más probabilidades de que los hijos estén en peligro de ser separados de uno o más de sus padres y por lo tanto expuestos a dificultades excepcionalmente graves. Hay probabilidades de que cuando un padre o madre es repatriada, la familia puede tomar la decisión de abandonar el país para reunirse como familia pero a lo largo del proceso de asimilación los hijo/as ciudadanos pueden decidir volver a su país natal (Caldwell, 2019). En esta situación las familias se ven aun más separadas, porque aparte del individuo que fue deportado, los miembros sin un estatus legal en los Estados Unidos que decidieron salir del país no pueden regresar. En otras circunstancias, la familia puede permanecer en el país después que el padre





o la madre sean deportados, dejando hogares con un solo progenitor (Brabeck y Xu, 2010). Esto de una manera perjudica el bienestar no solo del migrante deportado sino de toda la familia.

La idea de esta investigación es examinar y analizar el efecto de las deportaciones en las familias desde una perspectiva distinta a las que han sido el enfoque de la mayoría de los estudios hasta la fecha. Varios estudios previos se enfocan en las estadísticas de cuántos migrantes son deportados y el motivo por su repatriación forzosa, pero muy pocas elaboran el impacto de las deportaciones respecto a separaciones familiares (Lovato et al. 2018). Hasta la fecha los estudios sobre la separación familiar ocasionada por la deportación se enfocan casi exclusivamente en la perspectiva de los padres deportados y sus parejas que permanecen en los Estados Unidos. Estos grupos describen su situación y la de sus hijo/as. Detallan los cambios de comportamiento que observan en los menores/jóvenes luego de que su padre o madre fueran deportados. En algunos estudios se examina la situación en que los hijo/as se integran a México (Caldwell, 2019). Explican cómo algunos jóvenes deciden reunirse con sus padres pero sufren al tratar de asimilarse a un nuevo país. Imparten información sobre las dificultades experimentadas por sus hijos o hijas al asistir a una nueva escuela donde las clases son dictadas en español, al no contar con servicios sociales para ayudarles a integrarse, y al tener que ajustarse a un estilo de vida menos cómodo por un nivel menor de ingresos.

En otras ocasiones el resto de la familia decide permanecer en los Estados Unidos después que el padre o la madre es deportada. Por más que la separación familiar les cause dolor, a veces el único progenitor en los Estados Unidos se tiene que sacrificar al permanecer en este país por las oportunidades que se les ofrecen a sus hijos e hijas. En unos estudios el padre o la madre confirman que en este país sus hijos e hijas tienen la oportunidad de estudiar, de aprender el inglés lo cual les beneficiará en futuros empleos (Caldwell, 2019; Barros, 2019). Los hijos e hijas a veces deciden quedarse en este país por sus estudios; hay otros que se van a reunirse con el padre repatriado pero más tarde regresan y confirman que las oportunidades en Estados Unidos son mejores que las del otro país (Caldwell, 2019). Otra razón por la que las familias suelen permanecer en los Estados Unidos es por los beneficios económicos que les ayudan a vivir un estilo de vida más adecuado. Aunque pierden un porcentaje de ingresos por parte del padre o madre que fue deportado/a, al permanecer en este país sus sueldos son suficientes para ayudar no sólo con los gastos del hogar sino que a veces con los gastos del repatriado/a (Caldwell, 2019).

En este estudio, me enfocaré en las separaciones familiares con una atención particular a los menores/jóvenes que permanecen en los Estados Unidos sin un padre, madre o ambos. Analizaré los efectos psicológicos, económicos en las vidas cotidianas de las familias. En el caso de los efectos psicológicos, los hijos pueden observar a sus padres ser detenidos por agentes de inmigración o sentir que fueron abandonados por sus padres por no saber su paradero. Esto puede causar cambios en las relaciones con el padre que sigue en los Estados Unidos y al igual causar que sufren de trastorno por estrés postraumático, PTSD (Barros, 2019). Respecto a cuestiones económicas examinaré cómo la situación puede cambiar dependiendo de quien es deportado el padre o la madre. En los estudios se observa que cuando uno de los proveedores financieros del hogar es deportado la inestabilidad financiera empieza ser un problema. El ingreso que era proporcionado por el individuo deportado tiene que ser sustituido por la persona que se queda al cargo de la familia, o por uno de los hijos mayores. Este golpe económico puede provocar cambios en los roles de los menores y jóvenes dentro de la familia. Por ejemplo, puede provocar que los hijo/as asuman



roles que no son adecuados para sus edades. Los hijos mayores pueden asumir los roles de madre o padre, sustituyendo al padre que haya sido deportado. Los hijos menores pueden dejar actividades escolares para ayudar a sus hermanos mayores. Por lo tanto explicaremos los tipos de inestabilidades que se ven en la vidas cotidianas de estos menores y jóvenes tras una deportación.

En cuanto a los cambios de roles que asumen los hijos e hijas de los padres deportadxs, las fuentes publicadas enfatizan los roles tradicionales de género a la hora de reasignar las responsabilidades dentro de la familia después de la deportación. Por ejemplo, suelen presentar casos en los que los varones desempeñan el rol de proveedor mientras las jóvenes participan en las tareas domésticas. Sin embargo, esta investigación considera profundamente la situación en que se encuentra la familia y el tipo de rol que los hijos e hijas asumen. Dicho esto, el rol y las responsabilidades que asumen los adolescentes se determinan según el progenitor que es repatriadx y las responsabilidades que son dejados atrás por ellx. En algunos casos las hijas tienen que asumir el rol de proveedora para su familia y los hijos deben asumir el rol de cuidador; en ciertas situaciones ellxs pueden asumir ambos roles. Los hijos e hijas asumen el rol necesario para reparar un poco la dinámica familiar, sin importar los roles tradicionales que se inculcan en la sociedad.

## Metodología

Para entender las perspectivas de los hijos o hijas sobre las repercusiones experimentadas en sus vidas tras la deportación de uno de sus padres (o ambos padres), he buscado datos testimoniales de jóvenes con estas experiencias. La mayoría de las publicaciones sobre la separación familiar ocasionada por la deportación son estudios cualitativos publicados entre los años 2009 al 2020. Las fuentes académicas, como “The impact of deportation-related family separations on the well-being of Latinx children and youth” (Lovato et al. 2018), “Pauperización y emociones causadas por deportaciones en niñas y niños de familias mixtecas de estatus legal mixto en el Valle de Santa María, California, Estados Unidos” (Barros, 2019) y “Deportations experiences and depression among U.S. citizen-children with undocumented Mexican parents” (Gulbas et al. 2015) se basan en investigación etnográfica. Sus entrevistas, en algunas ocasiones citadas extensamente, ofrecen datos testimoniales de los hijos e hijas de padres deportados. Aunque en el contexto de entrevistas, estos jóvenes al contestar preguntas no tienen todo el control para expresar todos sus pensamientos, estas investigaciones ofrecen información interesante. También existen algunas fuentes mediáticas que incorporan datos testimoniales relevantes sobre la deportación y la separación familiar. De nuevo estas fuentes suelen basarse principalmente en entrevistas con los padres o las madres.

Las fuentes mediáticas y académicas suelen analizar este tema desde la perspectiva de los padres que no son deportados y permanecen en los Estados Unidos. La mayoría de estos padres enfocan su atención en los cambios económicos, cambios emocionales (psicológicos: depresión, estrés, ansiedad, etc.) que causan un bajo rendimiento académico y un cambio en las relaciones sociales para sus hijos. Algunos de estos materiales publicados también examinan el efecto de asumir un nuevo rol en la familia, como sustituir el papel del padre que fue deportado. En general, el efecto psicológico y los efectos económicos fueron los puntos que la mayoría de estas obras publicadas examinan.

Otra fuente de datos para entender las consecuencias de la deportación de padres o

madres para sus hijos que se quedan en los Estados Unidos es en el archivo Humanizando la Deportación. Humanizando la Deportación es un proyecto comunitario que ha ofrecido una plataforma para los migrantes que han sido deportados para contar sus historias. Por parte de la narrativa digital, que consiste en una historia personal narrada en primera persona acompañada por una variedad de materiales visuales, los migrantes repatriados cuentan sus experiencias incorporando asuntos que pueden ser ignorados en estudios académicos. La contribución de este proyecto es que el contenido de las narrativas no refleja preguntas predeterminadas por investigadores o periodistas, sino que los narradores comunitarios cuentan sus historias de acuerdo a sus propias prioridades y criterios (Irwin, 2020). De las 300+ narrativas digitales que esta plataforma ofrece, elegí cuatro narrativas testimoniales por su atención a las experiencias de hijos de migrantes deportados. Tres de estas narrativas digitales incluyen directamente el testimonio de los hijos e hijas. Son datos especialmente útiles porque de acuerdo a la metodología de esta plataforma, ellos son los autores y los directores de sus historias, y así tratan los temas que ellos creen que sean los más importantes. Aparte de ofrecer datos útiles sobre consecuencias económicas y psicológicas, estas narrativas digitales tratan más extensamente que en los materiales académicos el tema de los roles familiares y cómo a veces éstos cambian tras una deportación. Este material audiovisual brinda información que no suele aparecer en fuentes académicas o mediáticas pero que nos ayuda a entender el fenómeno desde la perspectiva directa de los jóvenes hijos o hijas de familias divididas por la deportación.

No obstante el valor del material testimonial de este archivo sobre las consecuencias sobre de la deportación, las perspectivas directas de hijos de padres o madres deportadas son escasas. Siguiendo pistas del índice temático del archivo, vi 46 narrativas digitales, pero solo cuatro contenían material sustancial vinculado a los temas de mi investigación. De ahí me di cuenta que la experiencia de mi familia también podría ser relevante; es decir que decidí añadir información de primera mano que ayudaría a ampliar mi investigación. Como parte de mi estudio, mi familia y yo colaboramos con Humanizando la Deportación para crear una narrativa digital donde mi madre, mi hermana mayor y yo compartimos nuestra experiencia. Soy no solo una investigadora sino también protagonista de mi investigación, y por lo tanto ésta incorpora mi propia perspectiva, el conocimiento que proviene de mi experiencia vivida. Crear esta narrativa digital nos causó reflexionar sobre el día que mi madre fue detenida y el día que fue deportada. Durante el proceso de elaborar nuestras perspectivas cada una de nosotras nos enteramos de cómo realmente nos sentimos aquel día, pensamientos que hemos tenido después de la deportación que nunca habíamos compartido ni siquiera entre nosotras. Al final de cuentas este ejercicio nos ayudó a acercarnos más como hermanas y como madre e hijas. Revivir esos recuerdos me ayudó bastante a entender este tema no solo como testigo sino también como investigadora. Entendí por qué la perspectiva de los hijos e hijas no suele ser examinada en estudios, ya que puede ser traumatizante contar la experiencia de eventos que uno a veces quisiera olvidar. A pesar de que fue difícil, después de terminar de grabar nuestra narrativa sentimos un alivio al poder contar una historia que siempre hemos ocultado. En conjunto, este estudio amplía la investigación de los impactos ignorados de las separaciones familiares.

### Efectos Psicológicos

Entre la literatura tanto académica como mediática ya publicada sobre las deportaciones y las separaciones familiares, las repercusiones psicológicas suelen ser las consecuencias principales estudiadas en las vidas de los hijos e hijas de los repatriados (Barros,



2019; Brabeck y Xu, 2010; Caldwell, 2019; Chaudry et al. 2010; Gulbas et al. 2015; Lovato et al. 2018; Ojeda et al. 2020; Sedensky, 2018; “La pesadilla de los niños”, 2012). Los problemas más comunes a través de las perspectivas de las madres o los padres que permanecen en los Estados Unidos tras la deportación de su esposa/o, son la salud mental y la salud emocional de los menores y jóvenes. Para comenzar las obras académicas, “The Impact of Detention and Deportation on Latino Immigrant Children and Families: A Quantitative Exploration” (Brabeck y Xu, 2010), “Deportation experiences and depression among U.S. Citizen-children with undocumented Mexican parents” (Gulbas et al. 2015), “The impact of deportation-related family separations on the well-being of Latinx children and youth” (Lovato et al. 2018), y “Pobrecitos los niños: The Emotional Impact of Anti-Immigration Policies on Latino Children” (Rubio y Ayón, 2016), examinan dos grupos: los hijos e hijas que tienen un padre o una madre deportada y los hijos e hijas de padres o madres expuestos a una deportación. Los investigadores analizan cómo las leyes anti-inmigrantes y deportaciones afectan el bienestar de los hijos e hijas y comparan los efectos psicológicos de los dos grupos. Ambos grupos expresan impactos emocionales; por ejemplo, angustia, estrés, llorar frecuentemente; pero aunque ambos exhiben resultados similares en varios aspectos, los hijos e hijas de las madres o los padres deportados suelen experimentar más efectos dañinos y particularmente duraderos (Lovato et al. 2018). Estos efectos psicológicos se pueden convertir en problemas significativos en la salud mental, los que pueden perjudicar las vidas cotidianas: en el aprendizaje, en las relaciones sociales o en la satisfacción en actividades que alguna vez encontraban agradables.

Está claro que el efecto psicológico puede variar dependiendo de la situación en que se encuentran lxs menores o jóvenes. Los hijos e hijas que ven a su padre o madre ser detenido/a por agentes de migración suelen sufrir de síntomas de “intrusión”, una condición en que después de un evento traumático, la persona constantemente experimenta de nuevo el hecho una y otra vez y en varias formas, tales como escenas retrospectivas y pesadillas (Barros, 2019). Al revivir este evento traumatizante, los hijos e hijas lloran con más frecuencia, surgen cambios de alimentación, y se corre el riesgo de que lxs jóvenes sufran de algún tipo de trastorno mental (depresión, ansiedad, trastorno por estrés postraumático). En las entrevistas, las madres o los padres repatriados expresaron que sus hijos e hijas lloraban durante las llamadas y les preguntaban cuándo se volverán a ver (Ojeda et al. 2020). Mientras tanto, las madres o los padres que permanecen en los Estados Unidos cuentan que sus hijos e hijas a veces intentan retener sus lágrimas durante las llamadas con los padres o madres repatriadas pero tan pronto como cuelgan empiezan a llorar y a veces se levantan por la noche llorando y gritando por los repatriados. Asimismo, las madres y los padres observan cambios en los patrones de sueño y alimentación; por ejemplo, las pesadillas que tenían sobre el arresto de su padre o madre los mantienen despiertos por las noches y por la mañanas los ojos de sus hijos e hijas amanecen inflamados por haber llorado tanto al recordar lo sucedido (Barros, 2019; Chaudry et al. 2010).

En cuanto a los hijos e hijas que no fueron testigos de la aprehensión de su padre o madre, se destacan efectos similares, pero ahora con sentimientos de soledad, enojo y resentimiento hacia ellxs, hacia las madres y los padres que permanecen en los Estados Unidos o lxs que fueron repatriados. Algunos de estos menores/jóvenes llegan a casa y escuchan la noticia de esta tragedia; unos no entienden la razón por la cual su padre o madre fue deportado/a, pero también hay algunos que no son informados del paradero de su padre o madre. En la gran mayoría de los casos, los menores son el grupo que no comprenden por completo el porqué su padre o madre son deportado/as ya que los progenitores no comparten la situación legal con ellxs (Barros, 2019). Lo anterior provoca que los menores



generan pensamientos negativos como de algunos niños que expresan en sus entrevistas: “papi ya no nos quiere,” “ya no me quiere mi apá, he is mad at me,” “mis papás se pelearon y por eso se fue mi apá” (Barros, 2019, p 219). Al tener estos tipos de pensamientos, las relaciones entre los padres, las madres, los hijos e hijas se debilitan porque culpan a uno por la separación familiar creando este resentimiento y enojo hacia el padre o madre (Barros, 2019; Ojeda et al. 2020). Asimismo, los hijos e hijas que a veces no saben el paradero de su padre, madre o ambos pueden sentirse abandonados. Aunque algunos quedan al cuidado de un familiar, hay otros que pueden quedar al cuidado del gobierno, Child Protective Services (CPS), disminuyendo la probabilidad de la reunificación familiar y aumentando el riesgo de un tipo de trastorno mental (Bass y Roybal, 2013; “La pesadilla de los niños”, 2012; “Padres deportados”, 2018). Estos efectos psicológicos pueden llegar hasta el extremo de intento de suicidio por sentir que fueron abandonados, al sentir que están solos y al sentir que nadie los comprende (Gulbas et al. 2015; Ojeda et al. 2020).

Mientras los investigadores se centran en las perspectivas de las madres o los padres, que sean los/las repatriados/as por autoridades migratorias o los/las que se quedan en los Estados Unidos tras la deportación de su esposa/o, en varias ocasiones las narrativas digitales incorporan la perspectiva de los hijos e hijas. *El muro separa a familias pero jamás sentimientos* (4a, 2017) y *Separados por leyes inflexibles, reunidos por amor inquebrantable* (4b, 2019) son las narrativas digitales de Emma Sánchez, en las que sus tres hijos incorporan sus experiencias al haber sido separados de su madre por doce años. Por otro lado, en *Mi historia de deportación* (220, 2019) Joseling Romero, una menor de edad e hija de padres deportados, narra su experiencia de no solo ser separada de sus padres sino también de ser testigo de su aprehensión. Ambas narrativas desarrollan el tema de los efectos psicológicos, como el trauma pero también sobre asuntos que a veces son ignorados.

A Emma Sánchez, le asignaban en el momento de su deportación diez años de “castigo” (periodo durante el que no tendría derecho de solicitar ninguna clase de visa para entrar a Estados Unidos) por haber permanecido en el país ilegalmente. Ella está casada con un veterano ciudadano estadounidense con el que tuvo tres hijos los que en el momento de su deportación solo tenían 4 años, 3 años y 2 meses de edad. A través de la narrativa, *El muro separa a familias pero jamás sentimientos* (4a, 2017) los tres hijos dan su perspectiva al ser separados de su madre a una edad temprana, lo cual les causó varios efectos psicológicos. Para empezar, el padre y los tres hijos cruzaban la frontera cada fin de semana para pasar el tiempo con Emma. Alex, el hijo mayor, cuenta que había cambios en el horario de dormir ya que a las tres de la madrugada se levantaba para esperar largas horas en las líneas fronterizas y poder llegar a tiempo a la escuela. Asimismo, Ryan, el hijo mediano, confirma que al despertarse temprano para esperar cuatro a cinco horas para cruzar la frontera, a veces llegaba tarde a la escuela y todavía se enfrentaba al estrés de completar sus tareas. Estas fueron algunas de las varias dificultades que tuvo al tener a su madre deportada. En esos casos, el cambio de horario de dormir no fue por las pesadillas de observar la aprehensión de la madre o estar despierto largas horas llorando y recordando la madre sino fue por el sacrificio de cruzar la frontera para reunirse con ella y luego retornar a su vida cotidiana a los Estados Unidos. Estas desveladas disminuían las horas de dormir, pero también perjudicaban sus estudios ya que llegaban tarde a la escuela y se enfrentaban con maestros que no consideraban la situación. Emma cuenta que para Ryan era estresante llegar a casa y no tener a quién recurrir cuando necesitaba ayuda con sus tareas; esto se le complicaba aun más ya que sufría de hiperactividad. Ryan afirma, “It's hard to get your homework done and the stress you have when you go to school and being tired and all that,” significando que su promedio se arriesgaba. Otro efecto

psicológico que Alex y Brannon, el hijo menor de Emma, confirman es la inestabilidad en sus hogares por no tener a ambos, padre y madre, juntos. Brannon cuenta que él ha sufrido once años por no tener a su madre a su lado y confirma que él no sabe lo que es tener padre y madre en un solo lugar ya que era un bebé en el momento de la deportación de su madre.

En la segunda parte, *Separados por leyes inflexibles, reunidos por amor inquebrantable* (4b, 2019), Emma cuenta que después de doce años pudo reunirse con su familia. Alex, Ryan y Brannon cuentan cómo sus vidas cotidianas han cambiado desde el regreso de Emma. Ryan afirma que sus niveles de estrés han bajado porque ahora tiene a su madre a quien recurrir. El hijo menor comparte que ahora ellos pasan más tiempo como una familia. Aunque estén reunidos, Emma confiesa que sus hijos la ven más como una mejor amiga que una madre, lo cual la entristece pero los comprende. A pesar de que la familia se haya reunificado en la segunda parte (4b, 2019), la narrativa incorpora información de un antes y un después de la deportación de una madre. Esto ayuda a los investigadores a comparar cómo los efectos mejoran al reunirse con un padre o madre deportado/a. Es justo afirmar que estos efectos psicológicos no desaparecen sino que poco a poco se van sanando, pero no son olvidados.

En la narrativa, *Mi historia de deportación* (220, 2019), Joseling Romero es una muchacha de 20 años que comparte la historia de su migración de Nicaragua. Ella y su familia emigraron a los Estados Unidos cuando ella solo tenía ocho años. Aunque ella fue indocumentada, Joseling sufrió una separación familiar que le causó trauma. Ella cuenta que un día por la mañana cuando ella y su hermana se preparaban para ir a la escuela y sus padres se preparaban para ir a trabajar, agentes de inmigración tocaron la puerta de su casa. Ella y su hermana observaron cómo los agentes de inmigración detenían a su madre, quien fue llevada a un carro de policía. Joseling afirma que no solo fue difícil estar presente en la aprehensión de su madre sino también de tener solo trece años y no comprender lo que estaba sucediendo. Fue más difícil observar cómo su madre fue tratada como una criminal; por ejemplo, fue obligada a utilizar un brazalete en su pie derecho. Ella es una de muchxs hijos e hijas que estuvieron presentes en la aprehensión de su padre o madre. Como Joseling cuenta, es traumatizante observar cómo un padre o una madre es apresada y tratada como criminal durante el proceso.

En, *Vivencias de las hijas de una madre deportada* (264, 2021), mi hermana Ana y yo contamos nuestra experiencia al asumir nuevos roles por tener a mi madre deportada. En ella, el efecto psicológico es percibido diferente a los que se identifican en las obras académicas pero coincide con la perspectiva de los hijos de Emma Sánchez. En mi perspectiva, yo fui la que contestó la llamada de mi madre aquel día que fue detenida por agentes de migración en su trabajo. A los 12 años no tenía la menor idea de qué hacer en ese momento: solo tenía el pensamiento de que iba a perder a mi madre. Esta experiencia no afectó mis estudios pero sí me afectó en el sentido de la preocupación, ansiedad, soledad, y en mi desarrollo personal. Yo a los 12 años tenía la mentalidad de necesitar ayudar a mi padre y mi hermana mayor en los quehaceres de la casa. Aunque seguí concentrándome en mi desempeño académico, me alejaba de actividades extracurriculares porque lo que siempre tenía en la mente era la necesidad de ayudar en casa.

Según cuenta Ana, mi hermana mayor, en la narrativa digital estaba embarazada de su primer hijo en aquel entonces, lo cual significaba que necesitaba el apoyo de mi madre. Para ella el efecto psicológico era emocional (estrés, tristeza y soledad), el que le causó problemas de salud durante su embarazo. Tuvo demasiadas complicaciones a lo largo de su

embarazo, lo cual requería que ella permaneciera relajada sin angustia o sentimientos que dañaban a su criatura. Por mucho que intentaba cuidarse, la tristeza y el estrés la vencían, especialmente cuando acompañaba a mi padre con el abogado. Ella tenía que llenar un documento de migración y eso le generaba un gran miedo, pues temía que una información inadecuada o mal escrita causara que mi padre también fuera deportado. Por ser la mayor ella sentía que tenía la obligación de aguantar todos esos sentimientos y hacerse la fuerte delante de toda la familia. Aunque las dos pasamos por lo mismo, cada una tuvo sus propios efectos psicológicos, los que dañaron mucho a nuestra salud mental.

### Efectos económicos

Una expulsión, además de causar problemas conductuales, físicos, o de salud mental también afecta la estabilidad económica de las familias que permanecen en los Estados Unidos. El impacto más dinámico en la economía es sin embargo las situaciones en que el principal proveedor del hogar es deportado ya sea el padre, la madre, o ambos. Como resultado se demuestra el cambio en las condiciones de vida de los hijos e hijas (Caldwell, 2019). Aunque hoy en día las mujeres suelen trabajar para contribuir en los gastos del hogar, las obras que examiné se enfocan en las expulsiones del hombre/padre (Barros, 2019; Ojeda et al. 2020; Caldwell, 2019; Chaudry et al. 2010). Las esposas de los hombres deportados se quedan como progenitoras solteras, obligadas a compensar los ingresos que se han perdido por tener sus esposos deportados (Barros, 2019). Incluso aunque la madre consigue dos empleos el dinero a veces no es lo suficiente para vivir el estilo de vida que tenían antes de la deportación del padre. Esto genera inseguridad alimentaria, inestabilidad de vivienda, y pérdida de pertenencias. Las consecuencias económicas pueden ir estrechamente ligadas a las psicológicas, puesto que debido a las situaciones anteriores, se producen relaciones más distantes entre las madres y los hijos e hijas.

Una madre que se quedó sola en el estado de California con su hija de seis años y su hijo de cuatro años cuenta de las dificultades que tuvo que pasar al tener su esposo expulsado. Ella afirma que ella y sus hijxs tuvieron que mudarse de su vivienda por no tener suficiente dinero para pagar la renta. A pesar de que recibía el apoyo familiar, la ayuda económica y estilo de vida del hijo e hija fueron modificados de varias maneras. Por ejemplo esta madre vivió, con un cuñado, hermano y tía pero fue incómodo ya que ella, su hija y su hijo tenían que dormir en la sala (Barros, 2019). En este caso se observa que el efecto económico suele causar problemas en las vidas de los hijos e hijas por no tener un hogar en que tengan su espacio, su privacidad sin tener el sentimiento de que estén invadiendo el lugar de otros. La inestabilidad de vivienda tiene aun más impacto si en los hogares hay otros menores/jóvenes que discriminan o agreden a los hijos e hijas de los repatriado/as con ciertos comentarios o actos físicos (Barros, 2019). En muchas ocasiones este tipo de comportamiento afecta aun más su salud mental porque aparte de ser separados de sus padres tienen que enfrentarse con estos actos hacia ellxs.

En otro estudio, los investigadores ofrecen datos donde las madres afirman que después de que sus maridos han sido deportados, ellas no tienen lo suficiente para los alimentos, ropa nueva, útiles para la escuela, niñera o para cubrir los gastos médicos (Ojeda et al. 2020). Estas familias son obligadas a dejar ciertos lujos que tenían cuando había dos proveedores. Los alimentos que tienen son disminuidos, si suelen comer tres veces al día pueden quitar un alimento, si comían carne todo los días ahora solo se come carne una o dos veces por semana, lo que a veces puede causar problemas de salud para los menores/jóvenes



al no obtener ciertos nutrientes (Chaudry et al. 2010). En estas circunstancias lxs adultxs o los hijxs mayores pueden sacrificarse en el sentido que ellxs no comen para darle de comer a los hijxs, hermanxs menores. Por el otro lado un hombre deportado confirma, “‘They have been deprived of many things, they can barely pay the rent,’ ‘they do not have new shoes, clothes,’”; esto también puede incluir ciertos ‘lujos’ como carros, teléfonos, cable, internet, etc. servicios/herramientas que ya no pueden ser pagados pero de una manera son necesarios (Ojeda et al., 2020, pp 7-9; Chaudry et al. 2010). La madre al trabajar demasiado para cubrir los gastos como consecuencia abandona a sus hijos e hijas por largas horas. En esta situación el efecto económico se observa de una manera distinta a los otros efectos. Las madres pueden dejar de participar en actividades familiares por trabajar horas largas causando cansancio (Langhout, 2020). No solo se debilita la relación de lxs hijxs con sus padres (o madres) repatriados sino también su relación con las madres (o padres) que permanecen en los Estados Unidos.

Para entender mejor este efecto económico, analizo la narrativa digital, *Salir adelante entre discriminaciones y bendiciones Parte I* (148a, 2019) y *Salir adelante entre discriminaciones y bendiciones Parte II* (148b, 2019) de Lupita Jiménez. En la primera parte de esta narrativa (148a, 2019), el efecto económico se observa desde la perspectiva de la madre que fue deportada y no de una madre soltera que permanece en Estados Unidos después que su pareja es deportada. Lupita vino a los Estados Unidos a los quince años, vivió aquí, donde ella tuvo sus tres hijos, por veinte años. Fue detenida un día, en un crimen que ella cometía sin darse cuenta, y de allí la trasladaron a un centro de detención. Esta deportación y separación familiar perjudicó demasiado al hijo mayor de Lupita. Cuando fue detenida su hijo de 20 años tuvo que dejar sus estudios para ponerse a trabajar y cubrir los gastos del hogar. Lupita cuenta que su hijo no solo se tenía que preocupar por la renta, las facturas sino también por el abogado, y los gastos de ella al estar repatriada. A diferencia de otros casos citados acá, esta narrativa ilustra cómo el hijo fue directamente afectado por la falta de ingresos al tener su madre deportada porque él se convirtió de dependiente en proveedor del hogar, responsable no sólo para sí mismo sino para su madre y sus hermanos menores. En la segunda parte de su narrativa (148b, 2019) Lupita explica cómo su hijo menor vivía con ella en Tijuana pero al asistir a una escuela él sufrió de bullying por parte de sus compañeros y maestros. Por lo sucedido, tuvieron que buscar una escuela privada donde el niño recibiera la atención necesaria para tener éxito. Esto agregaba más a la lista de gastos que el hijo mayor tenía que cubrir además de la renta de su madre y sus gastos. El problema financiero que la separación familiar provocó en esta familia fue aun más doloroso e impactante ya que el hijo mayor se quedó sin su madre, dejó sus estudios para ponerse a trabajar y volverse el proveedor de la familia. Sin su sacrificio, la familia hubiera sufrido aun más por no tener suficiente dinero para vivir una vida adecuada.

En la primera narrativa de Emma Sánchez (4a, 2017), la inestabilidad económica se observa en varias formas. Para empezar, cuando Emma se asentó en Tijuana, ella se llevó a sus tres hijos porque eran demasiado chicos para estar separados de su madre. Pero al cumplir los cinco años ellos tuvieron que regresar a los Estados Unidos con su padre porque en Tijuana no recibían atención médica y las escuelas no los aceptaban porque no tenían ciudadanía mexicana. Ella confirma que los trámites y el proceso para obtener doble ciudadanía eran costosos, y su marido no tenía los suficientes fondos para obtenerla para sus tres hijos. A lo largo de la narrativa, Alex, el hijo mayor de Emma, también cuenta que él se tenía que hacer cargo de sus hermanos en las tardes después de escuela porque su padre trabajaba largas horas. El padre trabajaba para pagar la renta, los gastos de Estados Unidos, y más aparte la renta y los gastos de Emma en Tijuana. Ryan, el hijo mediano, también cuenta que cuando



necesitaba ayuda en sus tareas, no contaba con la ayuda de su padre porque él trabajaba todo el día. El efecto económico en esta narrativa se nota en la necesidad del padre de trabajar largas horas o tener más de un empleo para cubrir gastos de dos hogares; pero también se nota efectos secundarios: el impacto en las relaciones entre el padre y los hijos. Aparte de no tener a su madre con ellos, los hijos también pasaban demasiado tiempo solos sin su padre.

Al igual que la narrativa de Emma y sus hijos, mi narrativa y la de mi hermana afirman que mi padre tenía que trabajar largas horas ya que él era el único sostén de la casa. Mi madre había trabajado como vendedora ambulante y en una fábrica para ayudar a mi padre con los gastos de la casa y para poder mandarle dinero a sus padres en México. Cuando mi madre fue deportada, mi padre se quedó como el único proveedor del hogar. Por esta razón, mi hermana Ana se encargaba de mí y de mis estudios. Por las mañanas ella me llevaba a la escuela y por las tardes ella me recogía y me ayudaba con mis tareas. Estando embarazada ella tenía que asistir a las conferencias o “back to school nights” en mi secundaria porque mi padre no tenía suficiente tiempo para ir o involucrarse en estas actividades. Por el otro lado, cuando mi hermana empezó a tener complicaciones en su embarazo yo tenía que ayudarla con los quehaceres. Yo lavaba la ropa de mi padre y a veces me levantaba temprano a ponerle lonche ya que él llegaba a casa tarde, y yo sentía la obligación de ayudarlo ya que él trabajaba demasiado para cubrir los gastos de la casa.

### Cambios de roles

Las repercusiones psicológicas y económicas han sido los aspectos fundamentales interrogados en las obras académicas publicadas con la excepción de Barros y Langhout. Los hijos e hijas que permanecen en los Estados Unidos después de que la madre o padre han sido deportados suelen asumir roles y responsabilidades que menores/jóvenes de sus edades no les corresponde en otras circunstancias. Ambos estudios, concluyen que lxs hijxs mayores generalmente asumen los roles que les “pertenecen”, es decir que los estereotipos de género determinan qué responsabilidades realizan (Barros, 2019; Langhout, 2020). Los varones usualmente se ponen a trabajar para ayudar con los gastos y las jóvenes cuidan a sus hermanos menores al igual que estar a cargo de los quehaceres del hogar (Barros, 2019). Varios de los adolescentes entrevistados por Barros afirman que sienten la necesidad de colaborar con las responsabilidades del hogar aunque impidan la realización de sus actividades cotidianas de su niñez/juventud. Alexis, un joven de veinte años cuenta, “de mí depende que mis hermanos salgan adelante, yo ya no podía soñar,” y Lili también cuenta, “desde que mi papá se fue ya casi no tengo tiempo para hacer la tarea, so, mi mamá está todo el tiempo trabajando y yo cuidando de mis hermanos” (Barros, 2019, p 212). El efecto económico juega un papel crucial en estos cambios de roles, como menciona Langhout; al perder a un proveedor, el progenitor que permanece en los Estados Unidos tiene que trabajar largas horas para cubrir los gastos, lo cual significa que tienen menos contacto con sus hijxs. Asimismo los hijxs mayores se convierten en los cuidadores principales de los hermanxs menores, afectando sus vidas cotidianas (Langhout, 2020). Los hijos e hijas no suelen asumir responsabilidades de esta índole. Al asumir estos roles el rendimiento escolar y el desarrollo personal son afectados porque son forzados ayudar en actividades que no les permiten enfocarse adecuadamente en sus estudios o en disfrutar su niñez/juventud. En otras palabras, estas familias tienen que adaptarse a estos cambios de vida y deben de distribuir nuevos roles a los miembros de la familia, causando dificultades en las vidas de estos menores/jóvenes.

Es notable que los cambios de roles de lxs hijxs de madres o padres deportadxs vistxs



en el material testimonial del archivo de Humanizando la Deportación van más allá de estos roles tradicionales del género. Los roles que asumen los adolescentes en estas narrativas no están determinados por el género sino más bien por el del progenitor que es deportado. En las narrativas, las familias Paulsen y Ortega, Alex Paulsen, el hijo mayor de Emma Sánchez, y Zuri Ortega, la hija mayor de Rosa Ortega, comparten sus perspectivas al asumir roles por ser los hijxs mayores de la familia. Asimismo, la narrativa Salir adelante entre discriminación y bendiciones *Parte I y Parte II* (148 ab, 2019), Lupita Jiménez habla por su hijo y de las responsabilidades que él asumió cuando ella fue detenida y deportada.

Alex Paulsen, hijo mayor de Emma Sánchez, asume un rol distinto al que se espera de acuerdo a Barros. Alex no tuvo que trabajar por las tardes o los fines de semanas ni mucho menos dejar sus estudios para ayudar con los gastos del hogar; al contrario, a partir de la deportación de su mamá él tuvo que cuidar de sus hermanos, Ryan y Brannon. Él explica que al tener su madre deportada y tener su padre trabajando horas extras para cubrir doble renta, tuvo la obligación de ocuparse del bienestar de sus hermanos. Ryan Paulsen, el hijo mediano de Emma Sánchez, declara, “When you have a lot of homework and you don’t understand a subject or two, you only have your older brother to help you with your homework since your dad is working and your mom is not there to help”, evidenciando la manera en que Alex asume el rol de cuidador. En otras palabras asumió el rol tradicional de madre para sus hermanos. Como el hijo mayor Alex no tenía otra opción que colaborar y aunque se le hizo difícil, se le escucha en la voz que lo hizo con la intención de reducir el estrés para su padre. Hay que tomar en cuenta que a lo largo de la narrativa también se ilustra que al asumir el rol de madre, Alex tuvo que sacrificar varias experiencias que un joven de su edad usualmente realiza al encontrar aficiones y pasiones. De acuerdo con las imágenes en la narrativa y el testimonio de Emma los triunfos de Alex son distintos a los triunfos de Ryan y Brannon. Los logros de Alex solo involucra el rendimiento académico; en cambio los logros de Ryan y Brannon incluían el rendimiento escolar pero también incluyen actividades extracurriculares como el deporte y clases de música. De una manera esto muestra que al asumir un rol de madre o padre, el hijo o la hija dejan a un lado algunos de sus sueños con el objetivo de reparar un poco la dinámica familiar.

En el caso de Zuri Ortega, ella también asumió el rol del género opuesto, realiza el rol usualmente desempeñado por el padre. Aunque su narrativa testimonial fue corta, Zuri aporta información importante sobre el efecto de cambio de roles. Al ser la hija mayor sus responsabilidades incluyen participar en el desarrollo y en las vidas de sus hermanxs. Zuri cuenta que ahora, con la deportación de su padre, es ella la que tiene que ocuparse por sus hermanxs, ya no es el padre quien comparte la felicidad al iniciar el año escolar o el que va de compras para la familia durante las fiestas navideñas. Además de tomar parte de estas actividades, la narrativa digital muestra una foto de Zuri en uniforme de trabajo, lo cual significa que ya no solo era un apoyo emocional sino también una de las proveedoras del hogar. De una forma ella afirma que asume estas responsabilidades porque se sentía forzada debido a la circunstancia en que ella y su familia se encontraban. En la narrativa, se puede sentir que Zuri no solo compartía su historia sino más bien se quejaba de ser expuesta a este tipo de vida. A pesar de que su actitud es distinta a la de Alex Paulsen, quien no se queja de sus responsabilidades adicionales, ambos dejan a un lado una parte de sus sueños, ponen en pausa algunos aspectos de sus vidas, para asegurar el bienestar de sus seres queridos especialmente los menores.

En el caso de la narrativa, Salir adelante entre *discriminaciones y bendiciones Parte I y*

*Parte II* (148 ab, 2019), Lupita Jiménez es una madre soltera con tres hijos varones. Ella cuenta su perspectiva pero también cuenta la perspectiva de su hijo mayor quien asumió más de un rol a partir de su detención. Durante la detención y deportación de su madre, este hijo sólo tenía veinte años y estaba asistiendo a la universidad. Desafortunadamente, él perdió a la única proveedora de la casa, ocasionando que tomara la decisión de abandonar los estudios para convertirse en el primer y único proveedor de su familia. Los primeros gastos y responsabilidades que asumió el hijo mayor consistían en comprar productos higiénicos para su madre, conseguir y pagar abogados que llevaron el caso de su madre. Al ser repatriada a Tijuana, el hijo menor de Lupita se muda con ella, lo cual causó que los ingresos aumentaran para el hijo mayor. Por ser un ciudadano americano y no poder hablar muy bien el español, el hijo menor sufrió de maltratos por parte de sus compañeros y maestros en la escuela pública a la que asistía. Lupita y su hijo mayor tuvieron que buscar una escuela de paga donde el menor recibiera la atención necesaria para triunfar en el aula. Al ocuparse del bienestar de su hermano menor, los gastos ya no solo incluía la renta de Lupita sino también los pagos escolares. Aparte de los gastos de Lupita y el hijo menor, en los Estados Unidos el hijo mayor se ocupa de sus gastos de su segundo hermano. Aunque Lupita nunca menciona la reacción o la perspectiva del segundo hijo, se puede suponer que él se queda con su hermano mayor para ayudar o para seguir con sus estudios. Al ser así, el hijo mayor no solo se volvió el proveedor de la familia sino que también tuvo que asumir el rol de madre para su segundo hermano quien permaneció en los Estados Unidos con él. Al tener una madre deportada el hijo mayor no solo dejó los estudios sino que también consiguió un trabajo que a lo mejor no es de buena paga como los empleos que él hubiera podido obtener con un título universitario. Asimismo, él no tuvo otra opción que intervenir para reparar la dinámica familiar al igual que proveer a la familia con los ingresos necesarios para continuar el estilo de vida que tenían antes de la deportación.

Por otro lado en la narrativa, *Vivencias de las hijas de una madre deportada* (264, 2021), Ana y yo compartimos nuestras perspectivas al asumir nuevos roles y responsabilidades. Ana es la tercera hija de la familia y cuando mi madre fue deportada, aun vivía con mis padres debido al hecho de que estaba embarazada de su primer hijo. El rol de madre primeriza se le tuvo que adelantar, porque ella tuvo que ocuparse de mí ya que solo tenía doce años. Llevaba adelante sola, el trabajo del hogar, la responsabilidad de mi bienestar y el rendimiento escolar. Me llevaba a la secundaria todas las mañanas, asistía a las conferencias escolares y me ayudaba con tareas y proyectos grandes de la escuela. Por la ausencia de mi madre Ana también tuvo que tomar el rol de llenar formularios, y asistir a citas con el abogado que lleva a cargo el caso legal de mis padres. Ana tuvo complicaciones durante su embarazo, por lo cual era necesario que ella guardara reposo. Al tener a Ana en condiciones críticas, yo asumí algunos de los roles de mi madre. Ana me enseñó cómo hacer los quehaceres del hogar, y al aprender tuve que limpiar la casa a diario, ocuparme de mi padre en ponerle el almuerzo y mantener su ropa limpia, especialmente la del trabajo. Al asumir estos roles yo no pude participar en actividades extracurriculares aunque Ana me animaba que lo hiciera. Yo sentía la responsabilidad de aportar la ayuda necesaria para el bienestar de mi hermana Ana. Estos cambios de roles no tienen límite; los hijos e hijas asumen los roles necesarios aunque sacrifiquen sus estudios, su bienestar y sus sueños. Esta repercusión requiere la misma atención que han recibido los efectos psicológicos y económicos porque las tres interfieren con la salud mental y la salud física de los hijos e hijas de los repatriados.



## Conclusión

A través de esta investigación se analizaron los efectos de la separación familiar ocasionada por la deportación, con una atención particular a los y las menores/jóvenes que permanecen en los Estados Unidos sin un padre, una madre o ambos. Dado que estudios previos se centran en la perspectiva de las madres o los padres que son repatriadxs o los que se quedan en los Estados Unidos, y enfatizan principalmente los aspectos psicológicos y económicos, esta tesis se enfoca ante todo a las experiencias de lxs hijxs. Una fuente prometedora para comprender estas experiencias se trata de un recurso no previamente estudiado respecto a estas cuestiones, las narrativas digitales. Para este trabajo, el corpus se integró con casos extraídos del proyecto Humanizando la Deportación, el mayor repositorio digital sobre el tema. En el varias narrativas digitales incorporan directamente las perspectivas de los hijos e hijas de padres/madres deportadxs. Ellxs aportan información sobre los efectos psicológicos y económicos. Una lectura audiovisual atenta de este material permitió identificar ese aspecto prácticamente ignorado en investigaciones previas, el de los cambios de roles.

Aunque las obras publicadas proveen algunas perspectivas de los hijos e hijas, los testimonios escritos aportan elementos más allá de la información redactada. Las narrativas digitales capturan, de otra manera, el impacto de la separación familiar, al ofrecer otro tipo de información vía sus recursos visuales y auditivos. Los datos testimoniales de los hijos e hijas confirman el impacto de las separaciones familiares en las vidas cotidianas de los hijos e hijas de los adultxs deportadxs. Brindan no sólo el qué de las historias, los hechos que son contados por lxs hijxs, sino también el cómo: el tono de su voz, sus dubitaciones, sus quiebres y sus silencios. También la representación visual de estos testimonios ofrece datos útiles para la interpretación de los sentimientos y las experiencias de estos menores/jóvenes por ejemplo a través de fotografías que retratan la vida familiar antes y después de una deportación, o los cambios en el volumen de la voz de los hijos e hijas, cuando contaron lo que les ocurrió. Es decir, mediante el análisis de las narrativas digitales puede tomarse en cuenta con más precisión de qué manera es impactada la psicología de estos y estas jóvenes, quienes tiempo después demuestran, ante las cámaras y la grabadora, un amplio rango de emociones (sus sentimientos de tristezas, enojo, ansiedad, entre otros).

Estas narrativas digitales también aportaron datos cualitativos significativos para el análisis de los cambios de roles que los hijos e hijas asumen después de que el padre o la madre es deportadx. A través de los testimonios, los roles tradicionales de género son desafiados porque se pudo concluir que los roles y responsabilidades que los adolescentes asumieron no fueron determinados por los estereotipos de género sino más bien por la estructura de la organización familiar. Los hijos y/o las hijas asumieron roles de los progenitores que fueron repatriadxs y asumieron responsabilidades necesarias para llenar el hueco que causó la deportación. Suelen ocupar la posición vacante, ya sea como un proveedor, una cuidadora, un tutor o una fuente de apoyo emocional para los hermanxs menores. Mi investigación muestra cómo los roles tradicionales son más bien un patrón normativo que se resquebraja dependiendo de las necesidades de las personas y de sus vínculos afectivos con otros miembros de su familia. Lo anterior implica la posibilidad de profundizar más en las consecuencias de la separación de las familias y los cambios de roles en los hijos y las hijas, desde los estudios de género.

Basándose en estos hallazgos, futuros estudios deberían de seguir la investigación



de los efectos de estas separaciones familiares con la atención en estos menores/jóvenes que permanecen en los Estados Unidos. Más importante, hay que estudiar más extensivamente los cambios de roles que los hijos e hijas asumen. Estas investigaciones son necesarias para entender mejor el impacto de las separaciones forzadas de las familias y comprender cómo podemos ayudar a estos menores/jóvenes, sea vía el estado y sus políticas públicas, sea mediante iniciativas ciudadanas.

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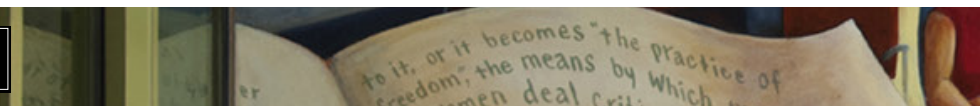
## THE EFFECT OF WARM SIBLING INTERACTIONS IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

*Written by Elsie Villanueva*

*Sponsored by Jonah Cox, Ph.D.*

### Abstract

Family dynamics play an integral part in shaping an individual. This study seeks to assess how parental hostility affects educational outcomes, also looking at the impact of sibling warmth. We draw our data from the Iowa Youth and Family Project (N= 415), a longitudinal study began in 1989 when the target children were in 7th grade and continuing through young adulthood. Our study takes the evolutionary developmental perspective to analyze how parent hostility and sibling warmth play a role in educational attainment. After running a regression analysis our final model ( $F = 4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .35$ ) confirms that high sibling warmth may act as a mediator against parent hostility and can increase the number of academic years completed. Furthermore, this model indicates that Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender ( $B = -2.62$ ,  $p = .012$ ) and Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender x Siblings Gender ( $B = 2.66$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ) are the most significant factors when taking gender between parents and target children into account. Thus indicating that the evaluation of family dynamics must be carefully studied and evaluated to find best modes of support against parent hostility to academically support individuals in their social and academic development.





## Introduction

Educational attainment has since been made an integral part of the American society, often times implying social wealth and a symbol of a successful future. Acquiring higher education is affected and correlated by a variety of factors including parent's education, academic success in secondary school, and arguably, the ability to complete an impressive college application. However, before one can even begin to think of reaching higher education, they must complete primary and secondary school that determine their academic or career trajectory. These trajectories are impacted by students' daily interactions with peers, parents, caregiver, mentors, teachers, and any other individuals or organizations in their proximal environment. Our following aims to specifically evaluate the relationship between parent to child and child to sibling and how these relationships play a role in the number of years an individual will accomplish in academia.

While there are many ways to evaluate the development of a human experience, we view the function of parents, children, and education through the evolutionary perspective. The earliest form of the evolutionary perspective was rooted in Darwinism that focused on the physical characteristics of animals that made them the best fit for their environment, therefore increasing their likelihood of reproduction (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2000). When incorporating Darwinism into a modern perspective of evolution, in addition to physical characteristics, it stresses the actions and interpersonal behaviors that affect one's survival (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2000). Moreover, this perspective argues that in the transition from childhood in adolescence, individuals are rapidly learning to distribute their energy and resources for maximum survival rates.

At the start of a human life, babies naturally gravitate towards their parents for safety, support, and protection. There are different forms of attachment styles that correlate to specific parenting styles. Parenting and attachment styles are associated to how individuals react to common life challenges, such as transitions into high school or moving away from college. Establishing and maintaining a secure attachment between parent and child is the most desired attachment style associated with authoritarian parent style; reaping the benefits of comfort, ease, and high self-esteem (Doinita & Maria, 2015). On the other hand, acquiring a fearful, preoccupied, avoidant attachment styles occur when parents use permissive or authoritative styles, all of which were associated with lower self-esteem in adulthood. The relationship between parent and child are significant not only for the self-esteem in the long run; this relationship sets the stage for a child's secure or insecure relationships in their adolescence and adulthood.

The transition from childhood in adolescence involves many changes including puberty and stronger desire to belong amongst their peers. Previous research conducted by Burnett et al. (2015) focused on how intimacy and friendships benefit individuals in their cognitive and social development in their transition into adulthood. Furthermore explaining the reasons why it is so important to maintain secure attachments and relationships with their fellow peers, as opposed to their parents. On the other hand, Lippold et al. (2018) explore the possibility of extreme peer orientation. Extreme peer orientation is not perceived as the desirable or align to normalcy in peer relationships because these peer relationships typically lead to delinquency or substance use. In this specific study, participants who experienced extreme peer orientation are associated to negative life trajectories and lower performance scores against their peers in academia.



Expanding on the evolutionary developmental perspective, Hentges & Wang (2017) include the idea that individuals are living slow and fast life trajectories. Those living slow life trajectories make long-term decisions that they believe will secure their survival in the future. On the other hand, slow life trajectories reside in unstable environments that motivate individuals to make decision that will reap immediate benefits. Utilizing the Maryland Adolescent Development Context Study (N = 1,482), they establish the Developmental Cascade Model (Hentges & Wang, 2017). This model depicts that harsh parenting including hitting, yelling, and other forms of physical abuse towards the child will motivate children towards extreme peer orientation. Thus, these children participate in early sexual behaviors and delinquency, and ultimately negatively affecting their educational attainment.

**Purpose** All of the parts discussed above, lead to three overarching objectives, that our following study hopes to answer. The first objective is understanding the negative effect of parent hostility on middle school- aged youth. The second is understanding the positive effects of sibling warmth and possible mediating characteristics against parent hostility. Thirdly answering the question: how does sibling warmth support resilience in academia against youth experiencing parent hostility? Lastly, if sibling warmth enacts as a buffer against parent hostility, is it different for parent to child gender dyads? To further explore all of the objectives previously listed, we modelled our own study against Hentges & Wang (2017).

We hypothesize that parent hostility is going to decrease educational attainment and sibling warmth will increase educational attainment. Furthermore, the negative parent hostility on educational attainment will be diminished with increased sibling warmth.

## Methods

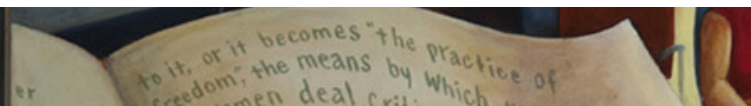
To further explore all of the objectives previously listed, we modelled our own study against Hentges & Wang (2017)- described above. There are differences in our study which include the sample size studied, sibling warmth will be an additional predictor variable, and educational attainment will be measured by the number of years acquired. The most significant difference being that in our own model, sibling warmth will possibly be a buffer against extreme peer orientation.

### *Participants*

Beginning 1989, the Iowa Youth and Families Project was established to explore the financial difficulties of rural families living in Iowa (Conger & Conger, 2002). Starting with a cohort of four hundred and fifty-one adolescents (Mage = 12) and their families. While this study became a cross-sectional study in 1991, however for this particular study, only the first cohort was used. All the families in the first cohort fulfilled the criteria of being a two-parent household, lived in rural Iowa, and the target child had a sibling within four years of age. Whether or not that sibling was younger or older did not matter, but was taken into account; additionally it did not matter that they had other sibling the focus was on target child and their sibling. While it was not a criteria, this cohort was comprised of entirely European-American families.

### *Predictor Variables*

To explore the negative effects of negative hostility, the first variable measured was



parent hostility. It was previously measured on a 9-point Likert scale developed by the Center for Family Research in Rural Mental Health (Melby & Conger, 1996) Additionally, to explore positive effects on sibling warmth. It was also measured on a 9-point Likert Scale, with 9 implying the highest form of sibling warmth (Melby & Conger, 1996). Both parent hostility and sibling warmth had strong inter-rater reliability. Additionally, these scores were acquired from both surveys completed by target children, sibling within four years of age, and their parents; as well as recorded video interactions between parents, children, and sibling.

### *Outcome Variable*

To determine whether parents and siblings had an interacting effect on one's education the outcome variable is educational attainment. As opposed to measuring educational attainment by completion of higher education or acquiring higher education, we thought it best to define it as the target child's educational attainment at twenty-five years of age.

### *Control Variables*

To strengthen the validity of any association between the predictor and outcome variables, our study controlled for the family's per capita income, both parent's education level, the target child's seventh grade GPA, and the monthly gap between sibling and the target child. All of these values were gathered from the first surveys completed by families. The gap between sibling and target child is important to the evolutionary developmental perspective pertaining to resource allocation. The closer in month that a sibling is to the target it is understood that these children are competing for the same resources such as a mother's attention; as opposed to an additional resource or buffer for the target child (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2000).

### *Statistical Procedures*

To evaluate the large data set, we utilized SPSS Statistical Analysis Tool. In analyzing the data, we began by reverse coding parent hostility, simply to view these interactions with ease. Then, creating multiple interaction variables. By multiplying individual against another allowed us to evaluate whether or not the multiplied variables were significant in determining educational attainment. There were many interactions between the variables listed above, however I will continue by focusing a few of these interactions. These interactions were focused on Father's Hostility, Mother Hostility, Sibling Warmth, Gender, and Siblings Gender. Having prepared all the interactions and reverse coded parent hostility, we ran a hierarchical regression analysis that accounted for all the predictor, outcome, and control variables.

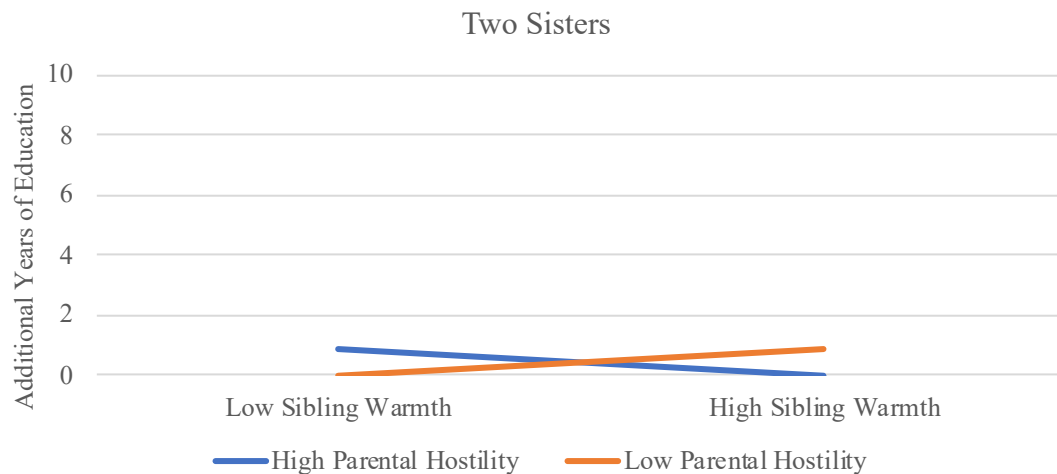
## **Results**

Overall our regression model was significant ( $F = 4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .35$ ). After the first analysis, we determined that the following interactions were significant. These interactions focused on Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender x Siblings Gender ( $B = 2.58$ ,  $p = .021$ ), Father Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender x Siblings Gender ( $B = -1.25$ ,  $p = 0.043$ ), Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender ( $B = -2.54$ ,  $p = .013$ ), Father Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender ( $B = .89$ ,  $p = .047$ ). In this evaluation is important to mention that Father's Hostility, Mother Hostility, Sibling Warmth, Gender, and Siblings Gender were not

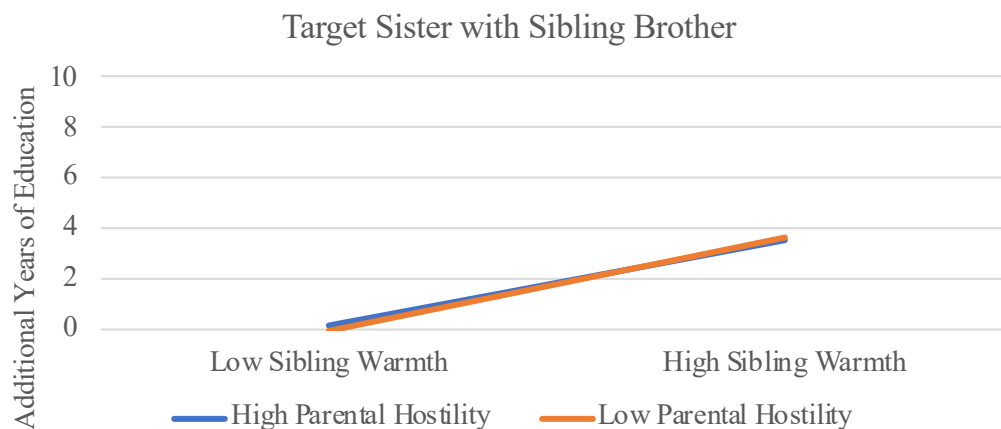


independently significant ( $p > .05$ ).

Given that the interactions created were significant, we further explored the possibility of gender being a significant factor in mediating educational attainment. In this evaluation it was determined that only Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender ( $B = -2.62$ ,  $p = .012$ ) and Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender x Siblings Gender ( $B = 2.66$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ). Moreover, the interactions between siblings gender can be seen and further discussion in Figures 1-4.

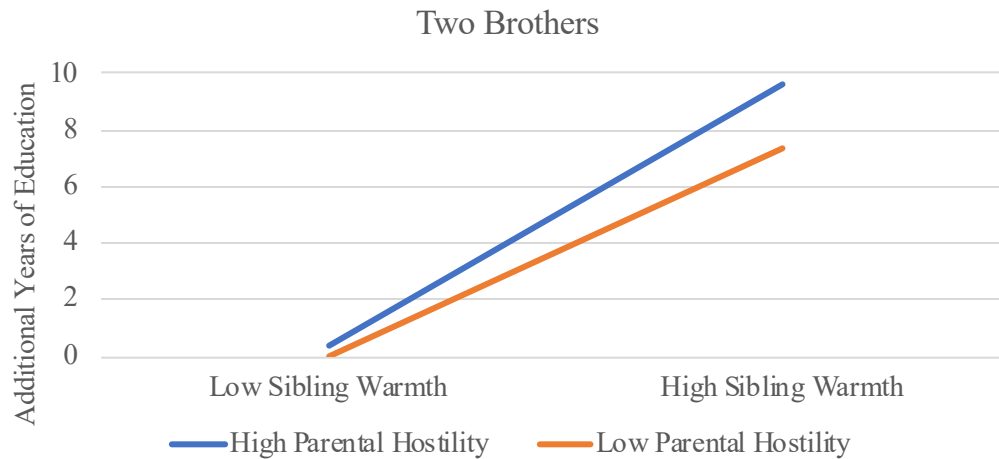


*Figure 1*, This figure depicts the interaction between two female- identifying sisters. It indicates that there is little difference in educational outcomes under the circumstance that parent hostility is present.

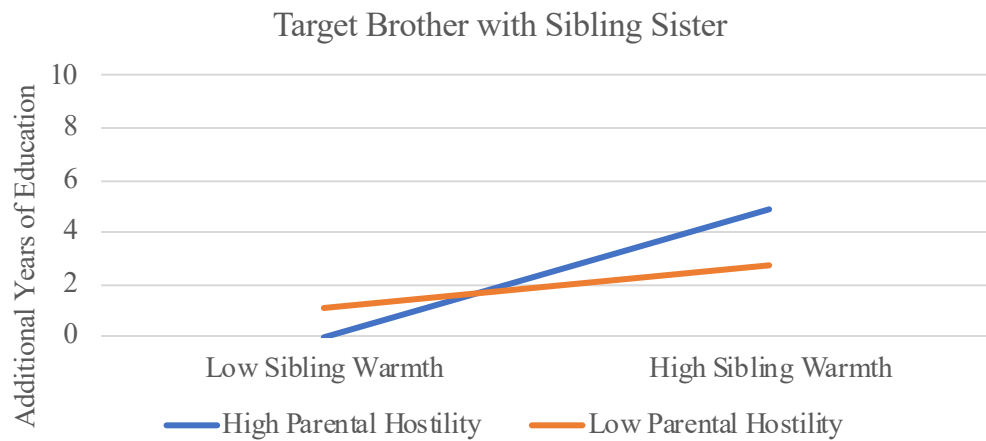


*Figure 2*, This figure portrays interactions between a female target child and male target child. This depicts the notion that in the presence of low or high parent hostility, high sibling warmth is positively associated with at least 3 additional years of academic completion.





**Figure 3**, This graphs depicts the relationship between two male siblings. This indicates that in the presence of high parental hostility, high sibling warmth may act as a stronger buffer. Results are similar in the presence of low parent hostility and high sibling warmth.



**Figure 4**, This final graph depicts the relationship between a target male child and a female sibling. In the presence of high parent hostility, high sibling warmth acts as a strong buffer and adds more years of education to the target child. Low parent hostility reaps similar results, however the buffer of sibling warmth is not as strong.

## Discussion

As developmental trajectories of a single individual is largely impacted by those in

their proximal development and can be explored through a diverse set of perspectives. For our study we Overall, the model ( $F = 4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .35$ ) we established using the Iowa Youth and Families Project, first cohort data set, was significant in explaining the negative effects of parent hostility, the positive outcomes of sibling warmth, and how these variables interact to predict one's educational attainment. We reject our first hypothesis, as neither parent hostility nor sibling warmth are independently significant in determining educational attainment. However we fail to reject our last hypothesis, as Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender ( $B = -2.62$ ,  $p = .012$ ) and Mother Hostility x Sibling Warmth x Gender x Siblings Gender ( $B = 2.66$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ) were significant when taking into account parent to child gender differences.

Given these results, it is recommended that practitioners, social workers, and all those involved with improving family dynamics, carefully evaluate each family and family member individually. The modes of each gender dyads between parents and children or between siblings vary vastly; however these interactions have a significant effect on one's educational attainment, and likely other aspects of their development as well.

In the future, research should explore how these results change within different cultures, as our population was primarily European-American. Additionally, how sibling interactions might change if siblings are part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Lastly, exploring how varying family structures such as single-parent households or transnational families may affect the family dynamics.

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this study would not have been possible without my mentor Jonah Cox, PhD; who supported this project with unconditional loyalty. I would also like to acknowledge Raynell Hamilton, Jeremy Prim, and the Mentorship of Undergraduate Research in Agricultural, Letters & Science for establishing a space for collaboration between students to students and students to faculty members. Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to all the families in the Iowa Youth and Families Project who consistently completed the surveys and interviews for the accumulation of the large data set we had access to. Thank you!

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## ROLE OF PARENT-CHILD TALK DURING BOOK READING ON HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY WITH SPANISH-ENGLISH DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN HEAD START PROGRAMS

*Written by Yuliett S. Olivas-Gonzalez*

*Sponsored by Yuuko Uchikoshi, PhD, UC Davis Education Department*

### Abstract

Studies in early language development with dual language learners (DLLs) have focused on their English oral proficiency. However, more research is needed about their home language (L1) proficiency. Studies with monolingual English-speaking families show that interactive parent-child book reading is effective on children's language development. Use of Inferential talk has more cognitive demand compared to referential talk and has led to improved vocabulary in monolingual children, but more research needs to be done with DLL children who may be exposed to primarily L1 at home. This study examines the types of talk parents use when reading to their DLL preschool-aged child and the child's responses during book reading time. Data was collected with 16 Mexican-American parent-child interactions while reading "Frog, where are you?" in their L1. Families were from immigrant backgrounds and the children were enrolled in Head Start programs. All book-reading interactions were



transcribed and coded for types of utterance. Preliminary results suggest that parent talk varied in both quality and quantity among parent-child interactions. Children's talk was limited across all parent-child interactions and parent talk did not appear to lead to a higher total of children's responses. Implications and recommendations for families will be discussed.

### **Parent-Child Interactions & Book Reading**

According to Luo & Tamis-Lemonda, book-shared reading between mother and child interactions can be used to examine the quality of speech reciprocity. Book-shared reading is known to be an important context in the language and literacy development of preschool aged children. By examining the quality of the narrative contributions, Luo & Tamis-Lemonda looked at the association between maternal talk and child narrative cognitive levels. Their study consisted of 235 mothers and their four-year-old children, were examined for the quality and quantity of contributions and responses during their interactions. All mothers were from ethnic and low income backgrounds, making the study relevant to the population looked at in Mexican-American immigrant families. Mother and child narrative contributions were coded for quality of responses, with an emphasis on referential, behavioral, and inferential questions and contributions. All utterances for code from lowest to highest cognitive demand; referential, behavioral, inferential respectively. Findings of the above study suggested that parent talk cognitive levels tended to have a stronger sequential association with child talk contributions at similar cognitive levels. The findings also showed the strong association of reciprocity during book-shared reading among mother and child interactions. We took a similar coding scheme used by Luo & Tamis-Lemonda to see the association of parent-child interactions among our participants and implemented it in our smaller study allowing us to look at responses through a similar lenses.

An additional article, by Hoff et al., looked at the quality of mother and child interactions by looking at the influence of their language proficiency. This study consisted of 60 maternal parent-child interactions with their two-year-old children, where the mothers varied in native and non-native English proficiency and native or non-native Spanish proficiency. The study inferred that the language proficiency of individuals would influence the quality of the speech directed during the interactions. Children's language development is known to be influenced by quantity and quality of directed speech, which this study attempts to look at. Through looking at the interactions, the types of speech and quantities were measured and counted by word types such as verbs and subject nouns to test for quality of speech. Information was gathered from the mothers to identify their native language proficiency, which ranged from "good" to "limited". Findings confirmed that language proficiency of the mothers consisted of the produced speech of the child based on the types of words that were said during the parent-child interactions. Parent interactions provide a great amount of language exposure to children and the findings suggested that parents with non-native proficiency provided less growth compared to native speakers that were native in either English or Spanish. In our study, we looked at similar relationships between mother and child responses and their interactions in Spanish.

### **Purpose of the Present Study**

Based on current literature, it is important to pose questions that look at home language (L1) proficiency and DLL children who may be exposed to primary L1 languages at home. The questions are the following: 1. What are the different types of talk that Spanish-



speaking parents use to read to their children. 2. What are the different types of talk that DLL uses during shared book reading? In addition, 3. Does higher cognitive parent talk increase child interaction and/or the quality of DLL child responses? In order to answer these questions, we looked at Spanish-speaking parent child interactions during book shared reading and analyzed that data.

## Method

### *Participants*

Research participants were recruited from head start programs in Sacramento, CA. Parents and families were introduced to the research project through flyers and contact information was gathered. Parents and children were screened to meet eligibility requirements for the research. Parents were all from immigrant backgrounds and identified as Mexican-American. Children varied in pre-school ages and were enrolled in head start programs at the time of recruitment.

### *Materials and Apparatus*

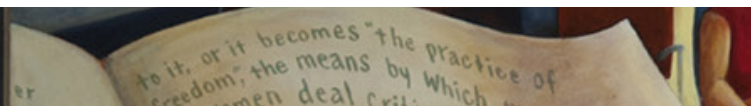
The study consisted of parent and child interviews as well as parent child interactions. Data was collected from 16 Mexican American parent-child interactions during book reading “Frog Where Are You?” in Spanish. “Frog Where Are You?” was an illustration only book, data was collected during the filmed book reading interaction. All interactions, and responses were transcribed. All parents were mothers, and were asked to read the book to their child in their preferred language. All mothers chose to read to their child in their primary language, which was Spanish.

### *Procedure*

All transcribed interactions were coded for different types of talk relevant to research that influenced the research project. Types of talk varied from yes/no statement, yes/no questions, parent referential statements and questions, parent behavioral statements and questions and parent inferential statements and questions. Other types of talk included child referential statements and questions, child behavioral statements and questions, and child inferential statements and questions. Types of talk were also coded for “other” categories following the coding scheme guideline used in the research project. Parent and child responses and contributions were examined for quantity and qualitative demand based on the different types of talk. The three main categories focused for quality and quantity as mentioned above were referential, behavioral, and inferential. Referential statements and questions during book reading describe the name, feature, or location of objects in the picture. Referential categories are seen as contributions with lower cognitive demand. Behavioral categories are those that describe the story’s character’s actions in the picture, which are contributions with moderate cognitive demand. The category coded with the highest cognitive demand were inferential statements or questions, which consisted of inferences about the book, interpretations, internal states and/or deductive thinking.

## Results

To summarize the findings presented in the graphs below, parent talk varied in both



quality and quantity among all 16 parent-child interactions. As shown in Figure 1, there were more parent statements in the parent child interactions compared to the amount of questions that were asked throughout book reading. On average in Figure 2, there were more parent inferential statements than both referential and behavioral statements across all parent child interactions. When comparing the amount and types of questions in Figure 3, there were more referential questions than both behavioral and inferential questions. When looking at the child responses, child talk was low across all parent child interactions as seen in Figure 4. There was more interaction on the parent side then compared to the child side. The parent child interaction with the highest inferential statements and questions was also the parent child interactions who had the highest amount of child responses, as shown in Figure 5. Overall parent child interactions varied in the quantity and quality of responses during book shared reading with inferential responses playing a role in the quality of child responses.

Figure 1

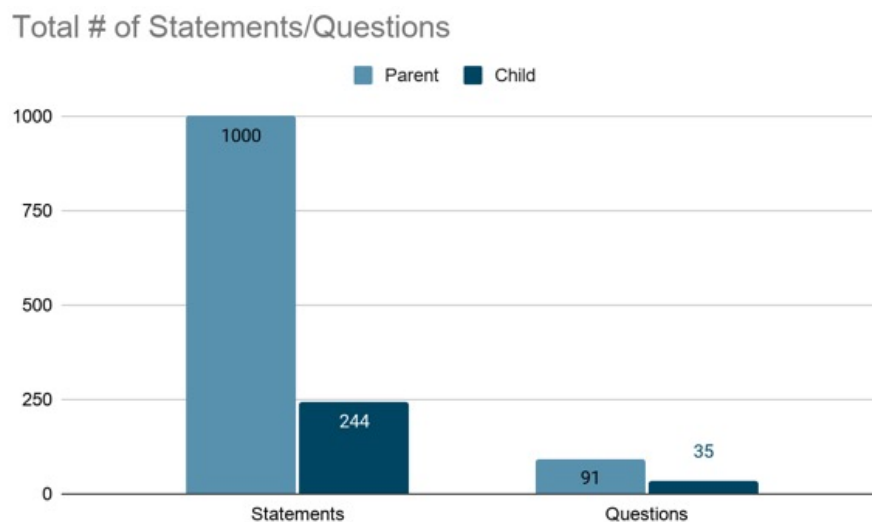


Figure 2

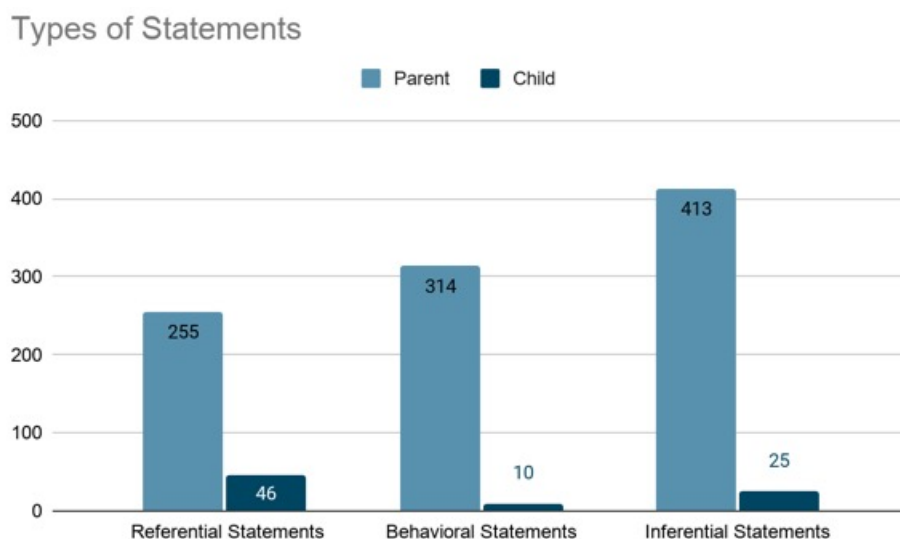


Figure 3

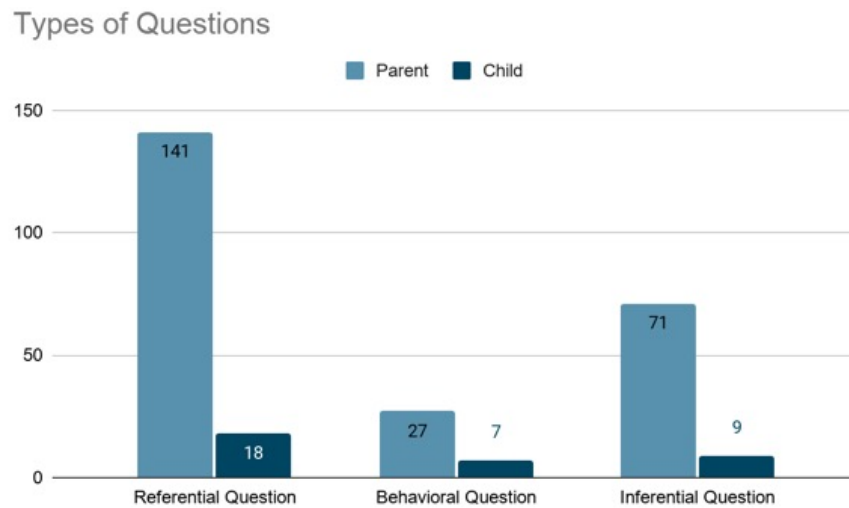


Figure 4

Parent Child Interactions with the Highest Child Responses

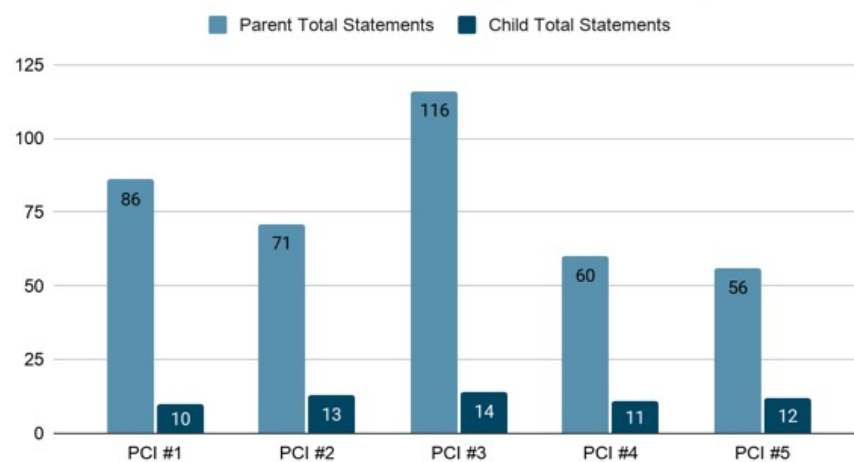
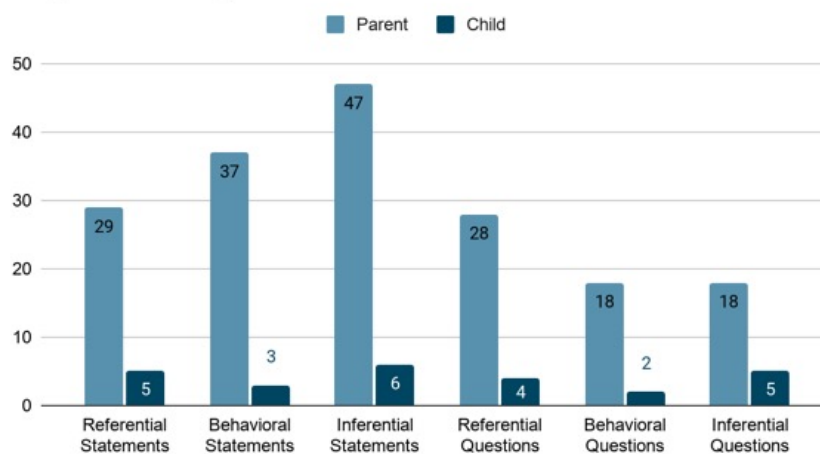


Figure 5

Responses of Highest Parent-Child Interaction





## Discussion

Book reading interactions can be used to support early language development in Spanish-English Dual language learners by recommending parents to use more engaging inferential talk. Book reading using more inferential statements can add higher cognitive responses in Spanish-English DLL's. Parents can encourage children to talk more by asking more behavioral and inferential questions using book shared reading interactions. Overall parent child interactions varied in the quantity and quality of responses during book shared reading with inferential responses playing a role in the quality of child responses.

## Limitations

This small study could have limited the relevance of the results used from a large study. An illustration-only book "Frog Where Are You?" was used for parent-child interactions, where a study conducted with a different book could have different results. All parent child interactions were done with mothers, studies using a father-interaction or a male figure could produce different results. In general, children in the study ranged in preschool ages which could change the difference of responses made by each child.

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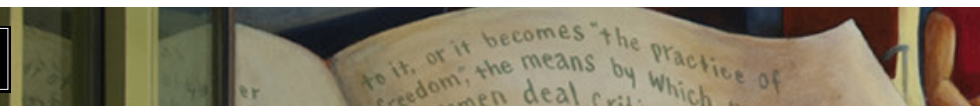
## THE USE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES IN ADDRESSING INCARCERATION AND RECIDIVISM

*Written by Brittany Villalpando*

*Sponsored by **UPDATE***

### Abstract

In California, the topic of incarceration and recidivism has long plagued marginalized communities for generations. A multitude of attempts at reform has brought both success and failure. There has been a disconnect between activists and policymakers on how to address this crisis. Currently, there has been documented evidence and research on already established alternative routes to addressing the issue at hand, however, a new approach has been producing promising results. The work conducted by one Sacramento based organization called Self Awareness and Recovery utilizes their original Self Awareness and Recovery Model as a tool to bring effective change within their community. The use of lived experiences and trauma-informed care from Self Awareness and Recovery have laid a path in the right direction to improve the lives of “at-risk youth” and formerly incarcerated individuals within Sacramento County. This study aims to unveil the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated youth and adults by collecting personal testimony through one-on-one interviews. The findings from this research will contribute to connecting activists and policymakers, to create an effective reform to incarceration and recidivism.





# THANK YOU



