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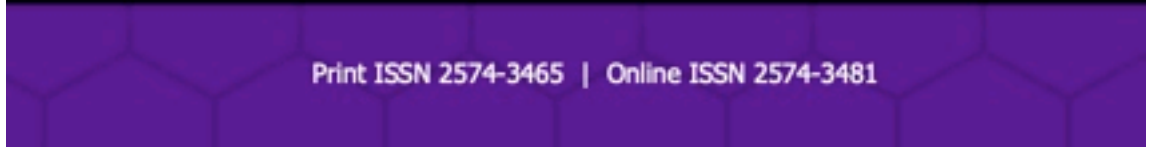
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**An Unequal Toll:
The Color and Class of COVID-19**



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An Unequal Toll: The Color and Class of COVID-19

Guest Editors
Dr. Natasha Ramsay-Jordan
Dr. Andrea Smith

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The *Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress* (JUMP) features narratives, theoretical and empirically-based research articles, reflections, and book reviews relevant to the progress of minority and underrepresented populations in and across social and national contexts. The Journal encourages the submission of manuscripts by scholars and practitioners in any relevant academic fields, including sociology, psychology, higher education, philosophy, education, and cultural studies. JUMP is indexed in major databases.

An interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed publication dedicated to sharing knowledge about the progress of minority and underrepresented communities in and across different social and national contexts, the *Journal of Underrepresented and Minority Progress* (JUMP) aims to advance knowledge about the progress of marginalized communities through theoretical and empirically-based research articles, book reviews, narrative essays, and reflective writing about positive changes and challenges, emerging policies and practices.

The journal is international in scope and includes work by scholars in a wide range of academic fields including psychology, religion, sociology, business, social work, anthropology, and philosophy. The journal's audiences include scholars and researchers of social sciences focusing their work on issues such as ethnicity and race, caste and class, religion and spirituality, gender sexual orientation, power and privilege, wealth and income, health and wellbeing, beliefs and value systems, and intersections of these issues.

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COVID-19: How Will Historically Underrepresented Groups Fair in the Job Market?

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ABSTRACT

The inability of college students to traditionally interact with post-secondary personnel might have unintended limitations on career readiness and post-graduation outcomes. Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) persists as a healthcare concern; however, it has and continues to impact various sectors. In higher education, the global pandemic has affected university operations from in-person to virtual based support. However, little is known about the unintended consequences of collegiate support services' virtual operations, such as career services. This conceptual paper will objectively analyze the potential inequities of the COVID-19 pandemic on job prospects and social capital for students of color. Recommendations for the economic and social factors are discussed. In addition, this paper may contribute to disrupting the overlooked consequences of offering college services remotely.

Keywords: COVID-19, employment, social capital, underrepresented students

INTRODUCTION

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has disrupted every industry and changed how college students and graduates perceive job opportunities and navigate the job market. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that over 215,000 Americans will die from COVID-19 by October 15th. Additionally, millions of people are jobless, increasing the unemployment rate to 13.3% in May 2020 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Recent unemployment figures have surpassed the Great Recession's peak and have impacted women and Black populations at higher rates (Kochhar, 2020). Rising cases and deaths led most higher education institutions to take unprecedented actions to transition campus operations and courses to virtual formats quickly. These current uncertain times require examining the higher education landscape and how minoritized student populations may be impacted.

Pursuing a college education is often tied to the goal of attaining a high paying job (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, the 2019 Higher Education Research Institute Freshmen Survey revealed that 83.5% of freshmen choose to attend college to access better-paying jobs (Stolzenberg, et al., 2020). College graduate employment has traditionally been linked to college career centers but is also associated with relationships built with faculty and administrators. The impact of COVID-19 on the employment outcomes of current college graduates is not yet known.

Research has pointed to the influence that faculty have on student success (Museus & Neville, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Persistence is shaped and impacted by faculty interactions and their notions of care (Guiffrida, 2005; Museus & Neville, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Scholars have reported that students of color found college classroom environments unwelcoming (Museus & Neville, 2012; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Furthermore, Guiffrida (2005) found that Black students may not reap the benefits tied to faculty interaction in a traditional campus setting. This is particularly important as faculty relationships impact social capital in terms of access to scholarship, internship, and career opportunities (Parks-Yancy, 2012). Today, in this new virtual mode of learning and engagement, it may be more difficult for underrepresented students to build critical relationships that could lead to the high-paying careers they initially seek.

Although research on the impact of COVID-19 in higher education is emerging, we find it imperative to explore this topic to shed light on the potential widening of White and minoritized college students' disparities. This conceptual paper adds to the body of literature that centers on understanding college students' experiences of color. Further, this paper takes

a unique approach in examining how COVID-19, remote class instruction, and operations could potentially impact social capital production. This conceptual article draws from Yosso (2005) work that explores cultural capital among marginalized groups. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model expands Bourdieu's (1977), which centered on social capital ideas related to class and whiteness. Consequently, interpretations of Bourdieu's (1977) work led to the use of a deficit lens to view the capital students of color possess; however, Yosso (2005) counters that narrative.

This conceptual paper argues that remote instruction will have unintended implications on student success and graduate employment outcomes, particularly for minoritized student populations. We begin by discussing the important role that staff and administrators play in fostering student success, then exploring aspects of cultural capital and how it relates to employability. The remainder of this paper focuses on discussion, implications, and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As we consider navigating an emerging scenario such as COVID-19, practitioners should rely on literature to ground decision making. Early reports highlight a widening achievement gap for students of color who are navigating how to keep up academically. School systems report staggering numbers of students who do not have computers at home or reliable internet (Rothstein, 2020). As such, approaches to meet students' needs in a remote environment present compounding challenges that need to be explored, particularly as it relates to Black student needs. Delgado (2003) provides a precise charge to challenge the academy to consider that race is a struggle that must expressly be addressed to make meaningful experiences. Therefore, the authors' mused-- how can administrators meet student needs when the crux of institutions functionality has radically shifted?

Role of staff

The authors acknowledge that COVID-19 presents several challenges to higher education, particularly in terms of moving from in-person instruction to remote learning. However, administrations must be agile in response to address marginalized student needs holistically. One recommendation is to recognize students of color may struggle with persistent self-doubt in what we now would describe as a traditional in-person environment (Rice et al., 2013). Student self-doubt suggests students may not ask for help or recognize help is available to them. Similarly, a research study found that unless students have a stake in the outcome, their chances for

disengaging increases, which is particularly relevant in online settings (Maurino, 2007). Bell (1992) found that while students of color may feel disconnected from the institution, they will learn from those who will teach them. Thus, fully activating and leveraging relationships between students and administrators and/or students and faculty is critical now more than ever.

Academic motivation of minoritized students is an emerging topic of interest; the academy has not collectively addressed race related to student success; however, psychological literature documented the importance of noncognitive factors as powerful resources to utilize (Roksa & Whitley, 2017). We mention the lack of understanding of the disparity of information about students of color and challenge readers to think of these concerns as more than a thought exercise rather as an opportunity to close these gaps. Educational access, persistence, and graduation of students of color draw on an interdisciplinary accession to problem-solving (Yosso, 2005). One crucial factor to consider is transitional challenges to college, which are exacerbated by negative racial environments that are ever-present for Black students (Fischer, 2007). The authors would venture to surmise COVID-19 further complicates any policy development.

Community Cultural Wealth Model

The need to reevaluate delivery of engagement with Black students is paramount during the pandemic, which is no surprise given the difficulties involved with engagement prior to COVID-19. Navigating the hierarchical structure of higher education has historically presented exclusionary practices (Lang, 1984). As the academy reports out successes, the structure continues to present residual effects of gatekeeping. Critical race theory (CRT) examines the effect of racism, whether social structures, praxis, and discourse are implicitly and explicitly designed to be racist (Yosso, 2005). Utilizing a CRT lens provides an immediate source to interpret the preliminary gaps the academy is seeing during the pandemic. This critique keeps higher education institutions honest to acknowledge unintended or more directly unintentional barriers that remote instruction and operations present. CRT critique of higher education challenges administrators to discuss and answer what these barriers are critical. Yosso (2005) further developed CRT and designed a model that captures the talents, strengths, and experiences that students of color bring with them to their college environment. Yosso's (2005) model assesses the intersection of race and access to resources. Thus this model will be utilized to help frame the response to students' education in a remote setting.

With these concerns in mind, it is imperative to center decisions within a framework that focuses on the complexity of race, educational

disparities, and access by employing Yosso's (2005) advancement of the community cultural wealth model. This framework is an anti-deficit model that recognizes and celebrates various forms of capital that students of color bring to college settings. Yosso (2005) accounts for the following capital: familial, social, navigational, resistant, linguistic, and aspirational. This framework fundamentally challenges and assesses systems that do not account for students' experience, which is necessary as we consider adverse impacts in a remote environment: "*Social capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources; [these] peer and other social contacts. *Navigational capital* refers to the skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79-80).

Additionally, Yosso (2005) conceptualized this model to account for the talents, strengths, and experiences that students of color bring with them to their college environment. The significance of activating social and navigational capital for students is to allow them to see their potential. Academic environments are strongly encouraged to be designed to allow students to build the skills (Schoenacher, 2009). These skills are crucial as it promotes information sharing, making connections, and developing relationships. As previously mentioned, relationships play an important role in Black student success. Relationships are essential because this requires the student to trust that the exchange will be reciprocal. Creating pathways to build these positive relationships further creates socialization where all parties (students, faculty, staff, administrators) are attuned and aligned to student success (Yosso, 2005). The navigational focus has to then shift from the student's motivation to institutions ensuring they sufficiently constructed access to staff and other beneficial resources in a remote environment.

Future Gains

It is important to note that students can often access academic resources, employment opportunities, internship, or scholarship information through the relationships they have forged with faculty and staff. Social capital can be leveraged for a number of student needs such as career, campus organizations, university's career resources, etc. (Parks-Yancy, 2012). These interactions create opportunities for students that have lasting positive effects and improve their overall academic experiences. To lessen the gap in a remote environment, institutions must consider remote instruction could alter student efforts and their social capital resources (Rosenbaum et al., 1999). To put it plainly, social capital affects college students' ability to achieve their career goals (Guiffrida, 2005; Museus & Neville, 2012). Researchers Singh et al.

(2008) found that social interactions and work experiences affect career trajectories throughout work life. Subsequently, it is important not to treat academic success and career readiness as two separate college students' experiences. Much like academic success, employability is an important outcome. Employability focuses on self-management and strongly urges students to take responsibility for integrating in and out-of-class experiences when they begin to look for work (Helens-Hart, 2019). This begs the question of how we can engage students NOW when we no longer can encourage students to visit our office or recommend resources based on the in-person meetings.

In summary, faculty and staff have unique roles that have benefitted students of color employability. Even in traditional settings, relationships with college administrators have been complicated for students of color to cultivate. Now that colleges have moved to remote operations, it is expected that the gaps are exacerbated, thereby causing additional barriers to increased social mobility and employment opportunities. These challenges should be of particular interest to institutions, given the increase in accountability for student success. In order to address this issue, one must engage in discussions and share implications for institutional agents of social capital.

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

The need to support underrepresented collegiate student populations with career services is critical. For many years, professionals in the field have developed strategies to increase student job searchers' social capital through in-person mentoring (Amundson et al., 2009; Engelland, 2000; Miller & Brown, 2005). Yet, COVID-19 has significantly impacted the delivery of face to face support services. With the reduction of place-based in-person support tied with concerns for supporting underrepresented students, the challenge now becomes how career services can enhance its delivery. Earlier iterations of professional competencies emphasized developing programs to assist said students. However, there is a need to develop career service competencies and pedagogical practices that can support learners without regard to the location for which they receive services. That is how are professionals able to help students on and off the campus? Furthermore, in supporting students with career services, it requires further developing professional competencies that will allow professionals to be effective facilitators of support in the era of click and connect. Thus, in addressing the aforementioned problem, we set out to explore how professionals can promote career support in a virtual environment for underrepresented students, particularly Black students. It should be noted that the remainder of this section will be divided into three

distinct categories of thought. First, we will review salient work that speaks to how Black college students can be supported. Another area for which we will provide insight is on best practices for engaging students in virtual environments. Finally, we will share literature where researchers analyzed providing career services in a non-traditional manner. The approach to providing the information mentioned above will offer various viewpoints on how this current work might discuss and possibly validate a series of standards that can be used in virtual environments as guidance for future career resource strategies for African American students.

Studies in recent decades have explored the experience of educated Black students (Gray et al., 2013; Hurtado et al., 1998; Solorzano et al., 2000). The shared empirical research shows that African American students' college interactions are full of issues related to microaggressions, societal changes, integration, and a sense of belonging, particularly at Predominantly White Institutions. Despite those generally poor perceptions, researchers formed a common consensus regarding how African American students' support must be systematized and constructed utilizing an asset approach framework. With this in mind, a real commitment to helping Black students would mean introducing a system-wide commitment. In response to learning adjustments pertaining to COVID-19, researchers at the Learning Policy Institute report that educators must reflexively approach online learning through deeply cultivating relationships with students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Additionally, since in-person interactions are limited, educational facilitators must prioritize authentic, culturally informed approaches to engage students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In this way, the emphasis is placed on approaching and impacting students so that it will be specifically resolved to engage with their support because it satisfies their needs compliantly. Finally, empirical literature suggests there can be efficiency in online career counseling (Pordelan & Hosseinian, 2020).

Interest in helping Black college students with respect to job counseling in a digital world as a result of a pandemic indicates that improvements to in-person support must be modified. Focusing on helping students immersed in the current standard post-secondary environments, virtual, often means the adjustments must involve changing the way activities are leveraged. As a result, the authors discuss a variety of implications relevant to activities that may empower both students and practitioners. First, practitioners must appropriate knowledge that critically reflects supporting students while enacting practices that speak to the student. That is, practitioners must ask themselves whether their approach helps the student or whether it is hurting the student. Note, too, that such approaches, once

adopted, must be systematized to maximize impact. Additionally, practitioners must approach their work by integrating an asset-based approach. Finally, while there are no specific models for career services online, there are studies that identify the benefits of providing career counseling online (Venable, 2010; Young, 2019). As such, clinicians' approaches to assisting under-represented students with career support programs should be rooted in the tradition of strategic thought and asset-consciousness and geared towards promoting positive relationships.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper sought to discuss the unintended inequities of the COVID-19 pandemic on job prospects and social capital for students of color. Social capital involves gaining access to networks, knowledge, and opportunities (Museus & Neville, 2012; Parks-Yancy, 2006; Parks-Yancy, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Students of color arrive on campus with many cultural capital types that researchers and practitioners have not traditionally valued (Yosso, 2005). By and large, underrepresented students have benefitted from additional social capital that is transferred by faculty and university administrators. On the other hand, race and gender have impacted access to social capital and potential returns (Parks-Yancy, 2006). Specifically, Parks-Yancy (2006) found that limited access to social capital produced inequities that start from the first career post-graduation with lifetime earning implications. As such, graduates' success will depend on innovative collaborations with faculty and other university departments to introduce students earlier to how career services help them accomplish their career goals.

Schoenacher (2009) believes that social capital can be fostered between students through online course discussion threads. Yet, Mays (2016) reports that student to student relationships are difficult to facilitate in online courses, preferring the natural interactions built-in face-to-face classes. Furthermore, Mays (2016) found that online courses failed in cultivating relationships among students due to limited communication and no immediate interaction. Participants reported fewer connections with classmates and less sense of community (Mays, 2016). Falconer and Hays (2006) revealed that Black students are largely unaware of their university career services departments. While this research was conducted prior to the recent response to COVID-19, it may provide some insight into students' current experiences. Awareness of the challenges and divisions created through online instruction calls for deepening relationships throughout campus to reach students in desperate need of services to increase their social capital. This requires

unconventional approaches to reach students and a desire to cultivate a career readiness culture that exists beyond university career centers.

Given the added barrier of awareness through virtual operations, career services must work to find innovative ways to connect with underrepresented students. Collaborating with student organizations that support underrepresented students to host events will help career services to broaden their reach. Leveraging technology to host virtual mentorship opportunities, virtual networking events, and increasing career services staff competencies of unique challenges faced by underrepresented students are all important pieces to increasing social capital. Engaging in practices that proactively reach out to underrepresented students instead of waiting for students to seek out the assistance of career services will prove beneficial. Additionally, Falconer and Hays (2006) found that the students' motivation to persist and discuss career interests were propelled through their peer friendships. As such, in addition to impacting career outcomes, it is likely that virtual operations will negatively influence retention since there are barriers to building peer relationships. This begs how colleges ensure that relationships are fostered that can benefit both career outcomes and matriculation?

Falconer and Hays (2006) also reveal that Black students have a stigma about seeking help, which would prevent them from building relationships with faculty members and even seeking assistance from university career centers. Faculty members also have an obligation to check biases on the abilities of underrepresented student populations. Furthermore, faculty must educate themselves about students' uneasiness to approach them when they need assistance and take proactive steps to build relationships with students and model positive faculty/student relationships. Guiffrida (2005) calls on faculty to adopt the ideas of "othermothering," which goes beyond providing students with knowledge and access to contacts. Othermothering involves a more profound sense of caring for college students, particularly Black and underrepresented students. As such, faculty should initiate conversations, refer resources, and inform underrepresented students about opportunities when appropriate. Response to COVID-19 does not absolve faculty and practitioners from centering underrepresented students' success and carefully analyzing how institutions' actions impact them.

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#FreeGrace and the Racialized Surveillance State of COVID-19 Learning

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ABSTRACT

On July 14th, 2020, ProPublica published “A Teenager Didn’t Do Her Online Schoolwork. So a Judge Sent Her to Juvenile Detention”, a story about “Grace”, a fifteen-year-old who was sent to a detention center for remote learning infractions. While the larger story involves injustices of the legal system often experienced by minoritized students, there is also a smaller indictment. The surveillance technologies embedded in educational technology tools that allowed learning to continue during the onslaught of COVID-19 can have disproportionately negative effects for minoritized students. Using Grace’s story, I examine the connection between surveillance and racial capitalism in relation to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, implications of the converged state of pandemic learning and possible solutions are discussed.

Keywords: COVID-19, racial capitalism, remote learning, surveillance capitalism

INTRODUCTION

On July 14th, 2020, the website ProPublica published “A Teenager Didn’t Do Her Online Schoolwork. So a Judge Sent Her to Juvenile Detention”, a story about “Grace”, a fifteen-year-old who was sent to a detention center for violating the terms of her probation. As described in the article, Grace was raised by a single mother, Charisse, and their relationship

became contentious when Grace entered her preteen years. According to ProPublica “Charisse turned to the police for help several times when Grace yelled at or pushed her. She said she didn’t know about other social services to call instead” (Cohen, 2020a, para. 21). Grace participated in a court diversion program but was later involved in another altercation with her mother that resulted in an assault charge and then was charged with larceny for a school theft caught on surveillance cameras (Cohen, 2020a, para. 25). In May 2020 at the height of school shifts to remote learning due to COVID-19, Grace was sent to a detention center for violating the terms of probation. Due to the charges, she failed to complete her online coursework (Cohen, 2020a, para. 3). There are several factors that confounded experts and advocates about Grace’s case including the seeming disregard of evidence pointing to widespread student absenteeism (Goldstein et al., 2020); a disregard for “recommendations from the legal and education communities that have urged leniency and a prioritization of children’s health and safety amid the crisis” (Cohen, 2020a, para. 5); a disregard of Grace’s Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis and the impact of suddenly switching to remote learning and finally a disregard that Grace’s residence was “in a predominantly white community and in a county where a disproportionate percentage of Black youth are involved with the juvenile justice system” (Cohen, 2020a, para. 5). Grace was found “guilty of failure to submit to any schoolwork and getting up for school” and was called “a threat to (the) community” (Cohen, 2020a, para. 10) due to her previous charges.

Grace’s story is a cautionary tale of the convergence of racial and surveillance capitalism in a neoliberal education, ushered in by the response to a global pandemic. Schools serve as sites of capitalist reproduction and are beholden to neoliberal market logics. In the same way marketing depends on personas to tailor user experiences, learning analytics in digital classrooms work to create student profiles under the guise of creating more robust user experiences. The pandemic provided the perfect opportunity for the convergence of racial and surveillance capitalism in a neoliberal education state. The surveillance technologies embedded in most remote and online tools that allowed learning to continue during the onslaught of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) can have disproportionately negative effects for minoritized students. Using Grace’s story, I will examine the problematic connection between surveillance and racial capitalism as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic remote learning. Then, I will discuss the implications of the converged state of pandemic learning and possible solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The School-to-Prison Pipeline and Criminalization of Young, Black Girls

Grace's story fits into a larger narrative of the complex relationship between school discipline and the juvenile justice system. According to Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams (2014):

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is a construct used to describe policies and practices, especially with respect to school discipline, in the public schools and juvenile justice system that decrease the probability of school success for children and youth, and increase the probability of negative life outcomes, particularly through involvement in the juvenile justice system. (p. 546)

An integral piece to the school-to-prison pipeline is this idea of "criminalization of school discipline" (Brent, 2016; Hirschfield 2008; Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011) which involves, as Brown et al. (2020) describes, "adopted approaches, such as security measures and punitive sanctions, that reflected an emphasis on punishment rather than education" (p. 406). Research has shown that students of color are disproportionately affected by school disciplinary actions (Leiber, 2002; Annamma et al., 2014; Archer, 2009; Dutil, 2020). Similar to Grace's experience, minoritized students who are involved in the school-to-prison pipeline find it difficult to exit. They rather they continue a cycle of school punishment and juvenile delinquency (Mendoza et al., 2020), which reinforces the criminalization of students of color.

In Teen Vogue, Pressley, the study by Annamma, and Thompson (2020) cites data from the Department of Education on how Black girls are more likely to be suspended from school and arrested than their white counterparts, specifically stating that "Grace's story is part of a larger pattern of criminalizing Black girls for minor misbehavior at school" (para.1). Epstein and Vafa (2020) highlight "at least three patterns of discriminatory treatment that were in play in Grace's case" (para. 9): "First, girls are often classified as aggressors—even when they're defending themselves or responding to family chaos" (para. 10); "Second, judges typically fail to consider the trauma at the root of many girls' behavior" (para. 11); and "Third, judges often justify detention of girls 'for their own protection'" (para. 12). This phenomenon has been broadly attributed to how Black girls are socially constructed, normed to whiteness and the effect of intersecting raced and gendered identities (Annamma, 2015; Blake et al., 2010; DeBlase, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1998) which oftentimes leads to "excessive surveillance and punishment" (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 5). While Grace's larger story involves the school to prison pipeline often experienced by minoritized

students and the injustices of the legal system as it relates particularly to Black female students, there is also a smaller indictment.

Racial Capitalism

In discussing the judge's decision to detain Grace, U.S. Representative Brenda Lawrence was quoted saying that she “wanted to ensure this case is not a glaring reminder of the disproportionate realities faced by minorities in the criminal justice system” (Cohen, 2020b, para. 18). In “Virtual suspensions. Mask rules. More trauma. Why some worry a student discipline crisis is on the horizon”, Belsha (2020) discusses the growing concern over student disciplinary policies related to pandemic remote learning and more specifically the racialized impact. Belsha (2020) states, the increased attention to student misbehavior has advocates and many parents very worried that students who were disproportionately removed from classrooms before the pandemic — namely Black and Native students, and students with disabilities — will bear the brunt of these new consequences, undermining schools' promises to provide students from hard-hit communities with extra social and emotional support. (para. 4)

These concerns highlight the racial impact of COVID-19 learning plans and bring attention to the disparate impacts of crisis, education and racial capitalism. Gilmore (2017) states that “Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it” (p. 240), a statement supported by extensive research regarding racial capitalism (Hartman, 2016; Hudson, 2017; Johnson 2013; Kelley 2015; Robinson, 2000 [1983]). Leong (2013) provides a useful summation of racial capitalism stating, “racial *capitalism* — the process of deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another — occurs when racial capital is exchanged in the market” (p. 2190). Racial capitalism uses race to create value in economic systems. Pirtle (2020), in her discussion of racial capitalism as a “fundamental cause of pandemic inequities” (p. 504), suggests racial capitalism “influences”, “increases”, “restricts” and “shapes” health responses to COVID- 19 (p. 505, 506). Racial capitalism also influences, increases, restricts and shapes educational responses to COVID-19. The valuing of racial identity that is at work in racial capitalism is first recognized through social capital and then actualized in economic value. If the goal of a neoliberal capitalist education system is to create valuable future laborers, then all tools to create and reinforce value are utilized. These can be physical tools such as technology but also social tools such as stereotypes and reified racial norms. Race is a commodity as much as it constructs value. The more value is assigned to a racial identity, the more

measures are deployed to protect that value and ensure the best possible educational experience. Conversely, those students who have been assigned a lower value are controlled and surveilled not to disrupt the others.

Surveillance Capitalism

In discussing Grace's case, Michigan lawmakers stated, "While Grace has faced many personal challenges in her young life, it was her lack of completion in online coursework that the judge cited as the definitive reason for sentencing Grace to juvenile detention" (Cohen, 2020d, para. 9). After the initial pandemic onslaught, a rapid shift to remote learning was necessary in order to ensure that the United States student population by and large continue learning with the least amount of disruption possible. In doing so, school systems relied heavily on technology to facilitate this transition, bringing to the forefront not only issues of digital access but also issues of surveillance, monitoring, and control. Surveillance capitalism, a phrase recently popularized by Zuboff (2015, 2019) describes surveilling, controlling and capitalizing on individual data for profit. As Barassi (2020) notes, "every little detail of everyday life is captured, archived and turned into a data point. One of the big changes brought by surveillance capitalism is the introduction of the cultural belief that data offer us a deeper form of knowledge" (p. 1549). Surveillance capitalism offers the same social reward of racial capitalism in that it has the ability to assign value that can then be transformed into economic capital. The data that is captured through surveillance works to construct a value persona that is then utilized for economic gain. Zuboff (2019) further elucidates:

Now in the first decades of the twenty-first century the distinct social, political, and economic interests of "users" have yet to be carefully distinguished from the de facto conditions of experiential dispossession, datafication, control, and commodification introduced by surveillance capitalism, reified in its behavioral futures markets, and enforced by its unique and ever-widening instrumentarian power. Unless this latency is evoked into new forms of collective action, the trajectory of the digital future will be left to the new hegemon: surveillance capitalism and its unprecedented asymmetries of knowledge and power. (p.25)

Hegemonic forces are not neutralized under a surveillance capitalistic regime, rather the power differentials are increased further stratifying "those who 'watch' and those who are being watched" (Sangiovanni, 2019, p.214). Further, Foucauldian notions of panopticism, micromanagement and

surveillance to train the body work to maintain and produce value that can then be used as capital (Lewis, 2006). Fuchs (2013), further explains:

Surveillance has become a ubiquitous phenomenon. Capitalist society is based on the instrumental and competitive logic of accumulation that stratifies society and, as a result, creates economic, political, cultural, social and ecological problems. Surveillance is connected to these ongoing stratification processes. It is the collection of data on individuals or groups to control and discipline their behavior. (p. 684)

The emphasis in this quote brings us to a series of questions regarding these surveillance technologies and their deployment in schools. First, how does the pandemic shift to remote learning shape educational technology deployment? Second, what disparate impacts are occurring as these surveillance tools work to create value profiles based on both digital data and informed by racial norms? And finally, as Lewis (2006) asks us to consider, “How do surveillance technologies act as instruments of disciplinary power, and how do the resulting social relations replicate and challenge norms and behaviors beneficent to sustaining capitalism?” (p.267). Teräs, Suoranta, Teräs and Curcher (2020) suggest: “An urgent task in the COVID-19 pandemic is to actively engage people, networks, projects, research, and public discussions to promote critically and reflectively informed praxis” (p.874), which means deconstructing the convergence of racial and surveillance capitalism.

THE CONVERGENCE OF RACIAL AND SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM IN COVID-19 LEARNING

In Grace’s case, two key points were instrumental in her punishment: 1) she was found “guilty on failure to submit to any schoolwork and getting up for school” and 2) she was called a “threat to (the) community” (Cohen, 2020b, para. 23). Those indictments point to the convergence of racial and surveillance capitalism due to the COVID-19 learning environments. In an April 2020 New York Times article reporting on pandemic learning and chronic absenteeism, the authors stated, “with the vast majority of the nation’s school buildings closed and lessons being conducted remotely, more students than ever are missing class — not logging on, not checking in or not completing assignments” (Goldstein et al., 2020, para.1). To address this issue, school districts escalated their existing policies to control for truant behaviors. Oftentimes, this includes using technology tools as tracking devices to ensure compliance. This highlights the frustration that researchers have expressed with educational technology processes failing to deliver (Cuban et al. 2001; Selwyn 2010; Teräs et al., 2020). The conclusion is often

made that more technology and by default more data is needed. In a surveillance capitalist framework, where does educational technology fit into? Widespread and mandatory deployment of educational technology works to scale personalized conditioning technologies of behavior. By using surveillance mechanisms embedded in learning analytics to create profiles, educational technologies reinforce racial capitalism and assign value to learners through data. These profiles are then used to adjudicate school disciplinary proceedings as well as to either monitor student progress towards becoming a more valuable laborer in a neoliberal marketplace. Or they can be used to mitigate the influence of those students whom the data deems less valuable through enforcing policies that remove the student from the learning environment. This phenomenon is larger than just the convergence of race and surveillance in a capitalist society. The crossroads where racial and surveillance capitalism meet is a site of reinscription of racial stereotypes, and norms through tracked data to assign value. Reidenberg and Schaub (2018) state:

While certain learning analytics applications, such as learner-oriented dashboards, may primarily aid self-assessment or provide personalized recommendations, others depend on the creation of information profiles or stereotypes from student data and on matching students to those profiles, for example, to enable early warnings about at-risk students. These stereotypes are inherently predictive and are not necessarily descriptive of the particular students who will be affected by the profile. (p. 270)

What is most egregious in this scenario is that in global pandemic moments such as COVID-19, digital and technological agency is stripped from students and their only path to continued learning is through the doors of racial and surveillance capitalism via educational technology. Reporting on pandemic learning, Fox (2020) cited experts' warnings: "Racial and economic inequities have long existed in America's school systems, and it's about to get worse." (Fox, 2020, para.1). She also cited a June 2020 report from McKinsey and Company that details not only the significant potential learning loss for Black students if remote instruction continues into 2021, but also potential earning power losses across racial categories. The report highlighted that Black students are forecasted to have an earning reduction almost double their counterparts (Fox, 2020, para.12). This analysis of future economic impact supports the notion that the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism work to devalue minoritized students. Unfortunately, once devaluation has occurred, the same technologies that promised freedom through education, become a carceral state and "culture of surveillance-spectacle" (Kress, 2011,

p.17). In summary, the consequences of being devalued in a converged racial and surveillance capitalistic state are longstanding.

While not the focus of this article, it is important to mention the effect that disability has on minoritized students who are caught in the trap of a racial and surveillance capitalist system. In Grace's case, it was noted that her diagnosed ADHD caused a lack of motivation to participate in her remote schooling during the pandemic. Further, her normal resources that were available in physical school settings were discontinued in the pandemic learning environment. However, because of her prior criminal activities and the logics of racial and surveillance capitalism, her value profile was lowered, which paved the way for her re-entry into the school-to-prison pipeline via a juvenile delinquent center. Pressley et al. (2020) reiterate this idea stating "This is a systemic issue. Anti-Blackness and white supremacy are dependent on ableism and suggest that the behavior and thinking of Black disabled girls are so damaged that they can only be fixed by physical coercion or jail" (para. 8). The social tools of racial capitalism and the technological tools of surveillance capitalism against the backdrop of decreased resources because of a global pandemic seem to work almost perfectly to construct a perpetual pipeline of devaluation which is almost impossible to escape from. In light of this, how can underrepresented and vulnerable student populations withstand Big Data's algorithmic profiling and racism's disposability?

FREEING GRACE

It seems fitting to conclude this paper with a conclusion of Grace's story and use it as a way to elucidate possible ways to combat the negative effects of converged racial and surveillance capitalism in the midst of COVID-19. Once the ProPublica article was published, it brought intense media attention and support for Grace's case. ProPublica published another article the following day discussing the widespread call to #FREEGRACE (Cohen, 2020b). A third article was subsequently published with the headline "The Michigan Supreme Court is reviewing the case of a teenager incarcerated after not doing online schoolwork during the pandemic" (Cohen & Khan, 2020). The visibility of Grace's story sets forth a rallying cry seeking justice not just for Grace, but for others who were and could be imprisoned by the pandemic-convergence of racial and surveillance capitalism. Even though experts, advocates and research pointed to the injustices of Grace's situation, on July 20th 2020, ProPublica published yet another follow-up story: "Judge won't free Michigan teenager sent to juvenile detention after not doing online schoolwork" (Cohen, 2020c). The presiding Judge, Mary Ellen Brennan, is quoted, stating "I think you are exactly where you are

supposed to be” You are blooming there, but there is more work to be done” (Cohen, 2020c, para. 2). This ruling prompted a fifth ProPublica story: “Prosecutors say they support releasing girl who was detained for not doing her schoolwork”, discussing the prosecutor’s statement in support of Grace’s release, as well as the plea to the Department of Education and Department of Justice by lawmakers on Grace’s behalf (Cohen, 2020d). Finally, On July 31st 2020, ProPublica published “Grace, Black teen jailed for not doing her online coursework, is released”, which stated that, after spending 78 days in a juvenile facility, Grace was allowed to return home (Cohen, 2020e). ProPublica wrapped its reporting on this story with an article, “Case closed: Michigan judge removes Grace, Black teen jailed for not doing online schoolwork, from probation”, published on August 11th 2020 (Cohen, 2020f), thus, signaling the end of Grace’s juvenile detention journey, but the beginning of moving forward. ProPublica provided an update to readers on October 31st 2020, “Out of jail and back in school, Grace finds her voice” (Cohen, 2020g) she not only survived her experience, but is thriving academically and socially, showcasing how with community support from her teachers, counselors, lawmakers and community.

Grace’s story highlights the importance of “a whole child approach to education” (Gaícra & Weiss, 2020) which is the ultimate consideration that freed Grace. Grace’s teachers and counselors urged the court to consider “the full range of skills that matter for and define a child’s development and education” (Gaícra & Weiss, 2020, p. 30). Grace’s freedom was also in part due to lawmakers’ willingness to “acknowledge and address the impacts of poverty and of racial and economic segregation on students’ capacity to learn and on teachers’ abilities to do their jobs” (Gaícra and Weiss, 2020, p. 30). Gaícra and Weiss (2020) suggest “School systems and their community partners must also establish a flexible set of strategies to offer wraparound supports—such as health clinics, community gardens, and parenting classes” (p. 30). Finally, the hashtag #FREEGRACE on social media, which galvanized a national response, showed the power of digital collective action in rallying the educators, lawmakers, and the community on Grace’s behalf.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

In discussing zero-tolerance policies and school social control tactics, Sellers and Arrigo (2018) suggest that “a primary outcome of neoliberal economic policies is the removal of social safety nets and the adoption of more conservative and punitive responses to social ills” (p. 61). O’Connor (2010) questions how neoliberalism can function as “ideology, policy and a form of governance” (p. 692) and the U.S school system provides an answer.

The political ideology that informed increased school disciplinary measures was a reaction to the demand for schools to function as sites of neoliberal capitalist reproduction. Surveillance and control were increased to shape students into valuable participants in the neoliberal economy (Sellers & Arrigo, 2018). Mendoza et al. (2020) note that increased surveillance and control exposed inequity and difference across class divides by categorizing, preparing, and socializing students into their expected role in the postindustrial labor market” (p. 526). COVID-19 then exacerbates these inequalities as a “pandemic-stricken world is especially vulnerable to capitalist market mechanisms” (Teräs et al., 2020, p.6). As the pandemic shuttered schools around the country, school-districts increasingly turned to technological solutions to keep learning in motion. However, research has shown that technology is not neutral (Benjamin, 2019; Nakamura & Chow-White, 2013; Noble, 2018). While the use of technology-mediated instruction can serve as a bridge for the digital divide in efforts to achieve learning continuance, it also can serve as a bridge for students to enter into the neoliberal labor market. However, COVID-19 responses to learning have shown that as more technology is provided to bridge digital divides, more surveillance and control measures are needed to ensure that students are adhering to the attendance, grading, academic honesty standards and policies, with impacts exacerbated across racial and class lines.

Using Grace's story as background, the main focus of the paper involved deconstructing the smaller indictment of how racial and surveillance capitalism converged in the pandemic shift to remote and online instruction and the disparate effects for minoritized and underrepresented populations. In a neoliberal education state, racial capitalism and surveillance capitalism work in tandem to extract, accumulate and stratify value from students in preparation for the postindustrial workforce. More specifically, the surveillance technologies embedded in educational technology work with racial capitalist logics to create profiles that are then used to control and even adjudicate students who are considered to have “no market value and [are] identified as flawed consumers because of their associations with crime and poverty” (Sellers & Arrigo 2018, p. 66). Grace’s story reminds us that we, as educators, leaders, and community members, must actively seek justice for students trapped in the converged racialized surveillance state of the COVID-19 learning. As Annamma (2018) writes, “This expansive notion of justice is built around interdependence; relationships with each other resist neoliberal principles of placing the value of people based on what they produce” (p. 18).

#FREEGRACE was not only a call for justice for Grace but is a call for justice for all underrepresented and vulnerable students.

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COVID-19 Crisis Management at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): A Contemporary Approach to Governance and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has forever changed the trajectory of higher education institutions and the delivery of their services, particularly at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This unprecedented pandemic necessitated HBCUs to undergo rapid, significant alterations to their academic, instructional, and technological infrastructures in order to remain operational and to continually provide students with academic support services and a conducive environment for higher learning. Therefore, how HBCUs approach the strategic transformation of their campus operations with limited resources in order to remain competitive is vital to their organizational continuity. Considering these challenges, this study examined the role of crisis management as well as investigated the efficacy of decision-making processes of the governing boards and leadership at four (4) HBCUs.

Keywords: COVID-19, crisis management, decision-making, governance and leadership, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

INTRODUCTION

The higher education landscape in the United States has been changed forever by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately and adversely affected segments of the underrepresented population; Black, Hispanic, and American Indian or Alaska Native people (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), these disproportionate effects are clearly demonstrated in the public health data, which highlights Black Americans are 4.7 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 2.1 times more likely to die from COVID-19 (Coronavirus) than their White counterparts (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). These stark statistics engender additional challenges for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and necessitate effective governance and leadership to address the transformational implementation of new academic, public health, and technological measures to adequately serve their majority Black student populations. The authors believe that the success, operability, and effectiveness of HBCUs are inextricably linked to educational outcomes for many underrepresented minority groups. Consequently, as HBCUs attempt to navigate the vicissitudes of this public health pandemic, the strategies and practices of crisis management should be integrated within decision-making processes at these institutions.

COVID-19 and Higher Education

The COVID-19 pandemic propagated a novel, unpredictable, unprecedented, and time-sensitive public health crisis, for which most higher education institutions, including HBCUs, were vastly unprepared. Public-state funded HBCUs have historically and contemporaneously faced endemic problems as higher education institutions with their collective inadequate funding history, distinct missions, and unique student population demographics (Thurgood Marshall College Fund, 2019a). According to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (2019b), HBCUs disproportionately enroll “low-income, first-generation and academically underprepared college students” (p.1), which comprise a significantly underrepresented demographic at non-HBCUs across the country (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). These issues, coupled with the COVID-19 crisis, have placed HBCUs at a crossroad, where their success and sustainability to remain open hinges on effective governance and executive leadership (Nelms & Schexnider, 2020). Furthermore, as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, HBCU leaders across the country are advocating for additional federal financial support. These funds are needed to defray the augmented operational costs associated

with addressing this public health crisis, which could have detrimental effects on the institutions' viability (Valbrun, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

In this study we examined whether governing boards and leadership at public state-funded Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were effective in their decision-making in the midst of COVID-19. It is important to contextualize the distinction between governance and leadership in the realm of higher education. Although there is no single or generally accepted definition of governance, one commonly given definition is: the way issues affecting the entire institution, or one or more components thereof, are decided (Kezar et al., 2006). In addition, governance has been described as structures, legal relationships, authority patterns, rights and responsibilities, and decision-making patterns (Kezar, 2014). Leadership, on the other hand, is defined as the action of leading a group of people or an organization, which in higher education represents upper administration on the institutional level (Astin & Astin, 2000). Therefore, leadership, especially the ways in which leaders are chosen, the expectations that are placed on them, and how they manifest their authority, can provide extraordinary insights about the implementation of policies at these institutions (Alexander et al., 2020). Considering these challenges, this study seeks to investigate the role of crisis management within the governance and leadership framework of HBCUs and its impact on the efficacy of decision-making processes at these institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background on Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Historically Black Colleges and Universities were founded mostly in the early 19th century, with the clear mission to provide a quality education for Black Americans at a time when they were not allowed to embark on their educational pursuits at a predominantly White institution (PWI) (Thurgood Marshall College Fund, 2019). Section 322(2) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA), defines HBCUs as:

“any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, p.1)

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are currently 101 HBCUs in the nation, with 50 private institutions and 51 public state funded colleges and universities, 89% of which are primarily located within the south/south eastern part of the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). These institutions educate and prepare over 228,000 students each year to be future leaders and scholars in their respective fields (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Richards and Awokoya (2012) posit that most HBCUs already face uphill battles with a collective perception of being low performing institutions who tend to lag behind their non-HBCU counterparts in a plethora of critical areas, including graduation and retention rates, as well as financial challenges. In addition to the aforementioned, HBCUs also face woes related to accreditation issues, while having to contend with and constantly quell questions about their relevance and sustainability in contemporary society. With factors such as institutional performance and effectiveness currently pinnacling the priority list in higher education, HBCUs' governance and leadership practices have been under significantly more scrutiny in recent times (Commodore & Owens, 2018).

HBCUs Governing Structures, Governance and Leadership

HBCUs have always had a unique mission and played a pivotal role in educating Black Americans. Along with this mission, whether public or private, HBCUs have had to meet this challenge while being grossly underfunded dating back to their founding (Nelms & Schexnider, 2020). Given that governance structures play a pivotal role in how colleges and universities are funded, and are unique from state to state, it is important to understand the governing structures of public, state funded HBCUs. A study conducted by Freeman, Hilton and Lee (2015) provides an excellent framework explaining the state-supported governing structure of HBCUs across the country. Overall, there are three (3) separate governance structures: 1) statewide; 2) local; and 3) shared. The Statewide Governance structure is comprised of a single, state-level board, typically by a Board of Regents that is responsible for governing multiple institutions. Statewide governing boards have the power to hire presidents and chancellors; set policies and procedures governing all institutions; approve the development of new degrees and programs; set financial priorities for each campus and provide coordination for the entire system of colleges and universities (Freeman et al., 2015). Statewide governing board members are frequently appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate or some legislative body. This statewide governing structure exists at 26 HBCUs across ten states. Southern

University and A&M College is the only system-level board in the world that governs multiple HBCUs (Freeman et al., 2015).

The Local Governing Structure is comprised of a single institutional board that provides oversight of all aspects of the institution. They are responsible for the hiring of the president, setting policies and procedures, ensuring financial fidelity, and have the authority to create new programs and degrees. The Shared Governance Structure is comprised of a bicameral statewide and local board. Twenty five percent of HBCUs follow this structure and institutions in this category have an institutionally based governing board that have the responsibilities to choose the president and ensure financial fidelity (Freeman et al., 2015).

Currently, due to COVID-19, HBCUs lacking financial resources have been forced to recognize the need for effective governance and leadership in order to make good decisions regarding how they will move forward and adjust to the new normal to sustain themselves and remain competitive. Recently, HBCU Presidents and leaders met to discuss the future of HBCUs post-COVID-19 and concluded that they must rebrand themselves and consider reimagining their financial and business models after the pandemic (Blanco, 2020). Additionally, current literature suggests that COVID-19 has totally disrupted the traditional mode of instruction at HBCUs, which has created untenable situations that will require effective governance and leadership (Nelms & Schexnider, 2020). This study will provide insight and approaches to strengthen and improve HBCU governance and leadership through crisis management.

Crisis Management Models

“Normality is our natural nest, stability our beloved home and certainty our paramount aspiration” (Topper & Lagadec, 2013, p.1). Unfortunately, uninterrupted normalcy is a figment of the imagination; a fallacy that all too often emerges, engulfs, and eviscerates the stability that organizations thrive on. Traditionally, organizations were cognizant of the crises that need to be addressed, such as natural disasters and egregious organizational misconduct, however, over the past decade the number of incidents related to workplace violence and domestic terror attacks have significantly increased (Lerbinger, 2012), and most recently with COVID-19, a new global pandemic has been added to the fray. While there is no singular approach, model, or theory for crisis management, the body of research concurs that crises typically have the following characteristics: significant, high impact, ambiguous, urgent, and involve high stakes (Coombes, 2015; Heath 2010; Simola, 2014).

According to Otto Lerbinger, as crises increase in number, visibility and calamity, organizations must accept the reality that crisis management must be factored into their decision-making processes (Lerbinger, 2012). This requires leaders at HBCUs to augment their existing practices with tenets of a model that will help them effectively respond to new challenges. One of the earlier definitions of what constitutes a crisis was provided by Pearson and Clair (1998): “An organizational crisis is a low probability, high impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effects and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (p. 60). Lerbinger (2012) emphasized contemporary society has endured several biological crises in the form of highly communicable and deadly viruses, including SARS, H1N1, Ebola. The emergence of COVID-19 is a prime example of how the field of crisis management, along with its theories and models must be quick to evolve as new crises continually emerge.

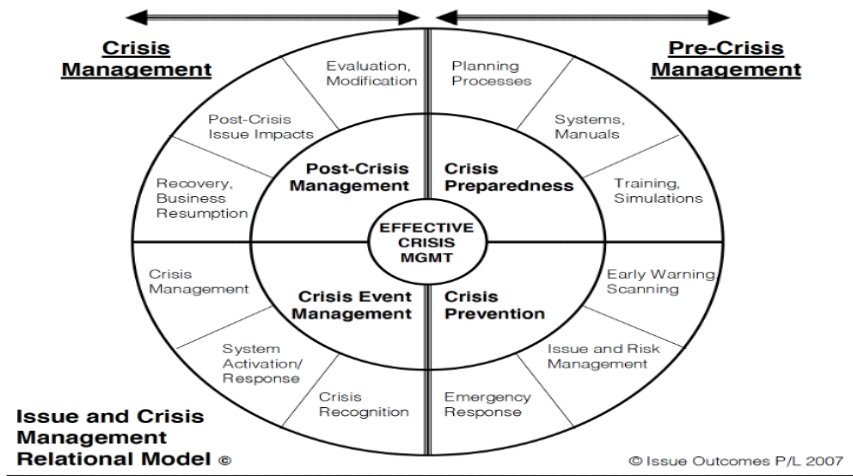
Over 34 years ago, the practices that encompass contemporary crisis management models began to take form and structure with the seminal work of Fink (1986). This scholar promulgated a four-stage crisis model comprising the prodromal, acute, chronic, and resolution stages (Fink, 1986). Building upon Fink’s work, several other theorists emerged who have propagated conceptual frameworks in the field of crisis management. Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt’s (1996) model suggested the stages of birth, growth, maturity, and decline, and focused on the aspects of issues management, planning-prevention, crisis, and post-crisis management. In 2007, Tony Jaques proposed a new Issue and Crisis Management Relational model that is both distinctive in its nature and structure. While previous models viewed crisis management as a linear and quite sequential process, Jaques’ model prioritizes fluidity of decision making among the four elements of Crisis Preparedness, Crisis Prevention, Crisis Event Management, and Post-Crisis Management (Jaques, 2007). The researchers will be using the Issue and Crisis Management Relational Model for this study.

Issue and Crisis Management Relational Model

Within the Issue and Crisis Management Relational Model, crisis management is viewed as a continuous discipline based on clusters that are both integrative and non-linear (Jaques, 2007). Jaques’ (2007) Relational Model addresses both trigger events and underlying causes of crises as well as a focus on the importance of crisis communication. This model is predicated on a “holistic view of crisis management” and underscores the importance of post-crisis activities for preparing to manage future crises

(Jaques, 2007, p.6). In this model, each element is accompanied by clusters of activities and processes, some of which may overlap and occur simultaneously (Jaques, 2007). Figure 1 illustrates the Issue and Crisis Management Relational Model with its four main elements and related activities.

Figure 1
Issue and Crisis Management Relational Model



Source:(Jaques, 2007, p.6)

In the Relational Model, two main elements occur in the Pre-Crisis Management phase: 1) Crisis Preparedness and 2) Crisis Prevention. Crisis Preparedness consists of the following practices: Planning Process, Systems Manuals, and Training, Simulations. Whereas Crisis Prevention involves Early Warning Scanning, Issue and Risk Management, and Emergency Response activities. Jaques (2007) elucidates the interconnection and overlap that can occur among cluster activities, for example, Early Warning and Crisis Recognition. The Crisis Management phase entails Crisis Event Management and Post-Crisis Management. Crisis Event management consists of Crisis Recognition, System Activation/Response, and Crisis Management. Post Crisis Management involves Evaluation and Modification, Post Crisis Issue Impacts, and Recovery, Business Resumption. Table 1 provides the definitions of each activity.

Table 1*Issue and Crisis Management Relational Model Description*

Phase	Element	Cluster Activity	Description
Pre-Crisis Management	Crisis Preparedness	Planning Process	Putting planning in place, assigning roles and responsibilities, establishing process ownership.
		Systems Manuals	Crisis management infrastructure, equipment, "war rooms," resources, documentation.
		Training, Simulations	Familiarization programs, testing, table-top exercises, and live simulations.
	Crisis Prevention	Early Warning Scanning	Processes such as audits, preventive maintenance, issue scanning, social forecasting, environmental scanning, anticipatory management, future studies.
		Issue and Risk Management	Identification, prioritization, strategy development, and implementation.
	Crisis Event Management	Emergency Response	Infrastructure, documentation, and training.
		Crisis Recognition	Transition from emergency, objective assessment, early recognition.
		System Activation/Response	Activation process, effective mechanisms for call out, availability of back-ups, systems redundancy.

	Crisis Management	Strategy selection and implementation, damage mitigation, stakeholder management, media response.
Crisis Management	Recovery, Business Resumption	Operational recovery, financial costs, market retention, business momentum, share price protection
	Post Crisis Issue Impacts	Coronial inquests, judicial inquiries, prosecution, litigation, reputational damage, media scrutiny.
	Evaluation and Modification	Root cause analysis, management assessment, process review, implementation of change.

Source:(Jaques, 2007, pp.8-12)

In his description of the cluster activities, Jaques (2007) underscores the importance of the level of action, engagement, and commitment from senior leadership in both the Pre-crisis management and Crisis Management phases. Crisis Management activities should not occur in silos, and leadership ought to prioritize the crisis communication mechanisms, selection of team members, and necessary resources to achieve crisis management goals (Jaques, 2007).

Board Responsibility for Crisis Management

In addition to the Relational Model, Jaques (2017a) also promulgates the important notion that board members have a unique responsibility to engage in crisis management best practices to mitigate severe risks to their organizations. Essentially, poor crisis management can have egregious effects on organizational reputation and financial performance (Jaques, 2017b). In the current climate, stakeholders have high expectations related to board member decision making and demand higher levels of transparency and accountability from university leadership (Jaques, 2012; Jaques, 2017a;). Consequently, university board members and senior leadership must partake in Crisis Proofing to address the aforementioned concerns. Crisis Proofing is an emergent concept that eschews the practice of responding to crises when

they occur and posits that board members must work to prevent crises from happening in the first place (Jaques, 2017b). As HBCUs navigate the process of addressing the modern calamities associated with COVID-19, board members, and senior leadership must develop the requisite crisis leadership and crisis management capacities that will engender true organizational impact.

RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative content analysis was used as the method of inquiry for this study. The significance of this study lies in its attention to an examination of an underrepresented area of research in higher education. Content analysis is described as the systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective (Krippendorff, 2013). For the purpose of this study, content analysis entails the subjective interpretation of the content of data through the methodical categorization process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Yanovitzky & Weber, 2020; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The authors chose content analysis because it offers an adaptable and pragmatic method for examining decision making practices related to crisis management at HBCUs. The classic steps for content analysis were followed for this study, including formulating the research question, selecting the sample to be analyzed, defining categories, determining the coding process, and analyzing results (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Research Question

The research question formulated for this study is: How effective were the decision-making processes within governance and leadership frameworks at public state-funded HBCUs in the wake of COVID-19?

Sample

The researchers purposely sampled a total of four (4) public state funded HBCUs located in the southern part of the United States to assess the efficacy of their crisis management decision making in the wake of COVID-19. These universities were chosen because of their unique Board governing structures. Within the state of Georgia, two (2) HBCUs were selected: Fort Valley State University and Savannah State University. Two additional universities, Grambling State University and Southern University and A & M College located in Louisiana were utilized for this study. Using the primary research question as a guide, seventy-five (75) documents relevant to university decision-making were reviewed, including university board

minutes, university press releases, strategic plans, hazard mitigations plans, videos, and emergency response website data.

Categories

The documents were analyzed based on the key variables of Jaques (2007) Issue and Relational Crisis Management model areas of Crisis Preparedness, Crisis Prevention, Crisis Event Management, and Post-Crisis Management and coded for concepts and occurrences related to essential cluster activities (See Appendix).

Coding Process

To code the data, the researchers used a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti can search, code as well as relate data from text, audio, video, and images (Thompson, 2018) and has the capability to coalesce data into cases and create memos and codes that are grouped thematically (Bassett, 2010). This study implemented the deductive approach and used a priori coding. The coding categories were established prior to the analysis based on Jaques (2007) Issue and Relational Crisis Management model cluster activities (see Appendix). For this study, the researchers opted to code for the frequency of these key terms.

Analysis of Results

The researchers used Atlas.ti to produce a word cloud of emergent themes, co-occurrence theme table (see appendix) to analyze themes that emerged from the study. The findings presented were obtained by coding and analyzing data from four (4) HBCU campuses, which consist of different and unique leadership and governing board structures from state to state in order to answer the research question of this study.

Fort Valley State University Background

Fort Valley State University is an 1890 land grant institution located on 1,365 acres in Fort Valley, Georgia and was founded as the Fort Valley High and Industrial School (FVHIS) in 1895 by eighteen men, at least half of whom were former slaves (Fort Valley State University, 2020). Fort Valley State achieved university status in 1996, and from 2014-2016 was recognized as one of the top producers of African American students in math related undergraduate degrees. Fort Valley State University is a part of the University System of Georgia, consisting of thirty-five public colleges and universities located in every key region of the state (Fort Valley State Faculty Handbook,

2020). Within this system, Fort Valley is recognized as a senior state university. The university's leadership consists of a President, Provost & Vice President of Academic Affairs; Chief of Staff; Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Vice President of Business and Finance, Vice President of University Advancement, and Vice President of Economic Development and Land grant Affairs (Fort Valley State University, 2020). It is considered to be part of a statewide governing structure, with a consolidated superboard comprised of 35 colleges and universities in the State of Georgia (Fort Valley State University, 2020).

Savannah State University Background

Savannah State University is located in Savannah, Georgia and was founded in 1891 as a result of the 1890 Second Morrill Land Grant Act (Savannah State University, 2020). Today, Savannah State University has over 3,600 graduate and undergraduate students, 174 full time faculty members and offers associates, bachelors, and master's degrees in the fields of Business, Arts, Sciences and Education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Savannah State University is also part of the University System of Georgia, a statewide consolidated superboard consisting of thirty-five public colleges and universities located in every key region of the state (Savannah State University Faculty Handbook, 2020). The Savannah State University leadership consists of a University President, Interim Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, Interim Vice President for Business & Financial Affairs, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Vice President for University Advancement, Dean of Students, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, and Vice President for Marketing and Communications (Savannah State University, 2020).

Grambling State University Background

Grambling State University opened on November 1, 1901 in Grambling, Louisiana, as the Colored Industrial and Agricultural School. Grambling State University is a part of the University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors consisting of nine (9) public colleges and universities located in every key region of the state (University of Louisiana System, 2020). The University of Louisiana System is one of the largest higher education systems in the country consisting of a public, multi-campus university system dedicated to the service of Louisiana and its people. The system includes Grambling State University, Louisiana Tech University, McNeese State University, Nicholls State University, Northwestern State University, Southeastern Louisiana University, University of Louisiana at

Lafayette, University of Louisiana at Monroe, and University of New Orleans. The Grambling State University leadership consists of a President, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Vice President/Athletic Director, Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Research and Economic Development, and an Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer (University of Louisiana System, 2020). Grambling State University is part of a consolidated statewide governing board, which makes it one of the most unique systems in the country.

Southern University & A & M College Background

Southern University and A & M College is located on a 512-acre campus in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and was originally chartered in January 1880 by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana based on a bill sponsored in 1879 by three key individuals: Pickney B. S. Pinchback, T. T. Allain, and Henry Demas (Southern University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2020, p.1). Southern University and A&M College System is the only Historically Black College and University (HBCU) system in the world with locations in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Shreveport (Louisiana Board of Regents, 2020). Southern University and A&M College's leadership consist of a President/Chancellor, Executive Vice President, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs & Enrollment Management, Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Vice Chancellor for Research and Strategic Initiatives. The Southern University System is a statewide governing structure, comprised of four separate institutions within a coordinating system.

RESULTS

This study examines whether the utilization of a crisis management model impacts the effectiveness of the decision-making processes within governing boards and leadership at public-state funded HBCUs in the wake of COVID-19.

Crisis Preparedness

In the area of Crisis Preparedness, HBCUs had to make many decisions in a short period of time, which required the following: developing a COVID-19 task force, assigning duties and responsibilities within their institutions, conducting meetings, and planning of campus operation. These activities required decision-making and approval from university leaders and university board members. The most salient theme that emerged was planning campus operations to ensure the health and safety of everyone on campus. Secondly, to effectively mitigate problems during COVID-19, all HBCU

institutional leaders spent a large amount of time and effort assigning roles and responsibilities to qualified personnel to prepare and manage classroom infrastructural changes, so students, faculty and staff could return to their respective campuses after the national lockdown was over (University System of Georgia, 2020; University of Louisiana System, 2020; Southern University System, 2020). In addition, university leaders and governing boards were tasked with the responsibility of financially supporting the purchase of necessary technology and equipment to transition from face-to-face to remote or hybrid learning in the midst of COVID-19. Additional findings also suggest that how HBCUs responded to the COVID-19 crisis was of critical importance. With respect to emergency response to COVID-19, findings indicated that fifty percent of the HBCUs were quick to begin operating on-line classes and providing remote campus operations to attempt to recover from the unprecedented pandemic, while the other fifty percent lagged behind for financial reasons (University System of Georgia, 2020; University of Louisiana System, 2020; Southern University System, 2020). In addition, the data showed that online training simulations were facilitated for faculty and fifty percent of the HBCUs mandated Quality Matters training for faculty to ensure quality online teaching to maintain academic excellence at their institutions. These findings indicate that overall, the leadership and governing boards were effective in their decision making in the area of Crisis Preparedness.

Crisis Prevention

In the area of Crisis Prevention, findings indicated that half of the HBCUs studied had a crisis management plan in place before COVID-19, while the other fifty percent did not (University System of Georgia, 2020; University of Louisiana System, 2020; Southern University System, 2020). Findings also indicated that the HBCUs university leaders from all institutions developed partnerships with health care providers for emergency response purposes to address and implement COVID-19 testing protocols and telehealth procedures for faculty, staff, and students to return to their respective campuses. In the area of risk management, all of the HBCUs campuses had problems with the purchasing of proper PPE due to logistical and financial constraints, as well as challenges with the required personnel for the cleaning and sanitization of the buildings (University System of Georgia, 2020; University of Louisiana System, 2020; Southern University System, 2020). One major finding in the area of Crisis Prevention was that only one (1) university prior to COVID-19 had an Emergency Management Office (EMO) to manage and recover from any type of emergency or disaster and was ready

to keep faculty staff and students informed on the latest development related to COVID-19 (Fort Valley State University, 2020). This discovery suggests that university leaders at this HBCU had vision as it relates to crisis management. Additionally, findings showed that fifty percent of the HBCU campuses had to prioritize preparing classroom infrastructures on campus to accommodate a hybrid learning environment for students returning to campus in the Spring 2020 semester. (University of Louisiana System, 2020; Southern University System, 2020). Findings also indicated that HBCUs had academic issues related to accommodating students without access to a computer or internet service and effective ways to transition personnel back on their campuses. To further mitigate the crisis and the spread of COVID, all of the board meetings across HBCUs were telephonic or virtual board meetings. These findings show that although HBCU governance and leadership made good decisions, the utilization of a crisis management model would improve their efforts and decision-making process in the area of Crisis Prevention.

Crisis Event Management

The crisis event management analysis showed that one hundred percent of the HBCUs university leaders, with board approval were mandated to develop COVID-19 task force committees to address and implement COVID-19 testing protocols for faculty, staff, and students focused on supporting its institutions continuing to return to safe in-person instruction. All these decisions were directed by the university institutional leaders and then approved by their respective governing boards (University System of Georgia, 2020; University of Louisiana System, 2020; Southern University System, 2020). With respect to emergency response and mitigation practices, seventy-five percent of the HBCUs were quick to begin offering face to face, hybrid, and/or virtual on-line classes, while providing remote and on-campus operations (University System of Georgia, 2020; University of Louisiana System, 2020). Findings also indicated that one hundred percent of the HBCUs in this study were concerned about accreditation requirements due to COVID-19.

Since COVID-19 shifted most of the courses to online, many HBCUs are now forced to find other ways to assess student learning to meet accreditation requirements (Wood, 2020). One other important finding was that half of the HBCUs handled their COVID-19 mitigation practices differently. These institutions continued to use the age of sixty-five as its measure of people at risk for evaluating requests for alternate remote work arrangements, although the CDC no longer considered a minimum age for those at risk (University System of Georgia, 2020). These findings indicate

that university leaders and governing board members were effective in their decision-making in the area of crisis event management; and able to do what was in the best interest of their institutions and carry out their fiduciary duties and responsibilities to protect the interests of shareholders, which represents effective good governance (Association of Governing Boards, 2020).

Post-Crisis Management

Post-crisis management involves root cause analysis, management assessment, process review, and implementation of change (Jaques, 2007). Amid COVID-19, HBCUs have been forced to embrace and implement change quickly. Findings in this study indicate that budget and finance issues during COVID-19 were the most prominent problems HBCUs faced. Due to COVID-19, many HBCUs are confronting possible closures due the potential inability to financially recover from this crisis (Wood, 2020). Moreover, finance forecasting related to opening and closing of campuses, instructional teaching method offerings, and other operational matters decisions were made by the university leaders, appointed task force members and governing board members (University System of Georgia, 2020; University of Louisiana System, 2020; Southern University System, 2020).

Findings also show that assessments and feedback from task force members for evaluations and modification of campus operations were continuous; due to their decisions and recommendations to university leaders and governing board members during COVID-19, HBCUs have been able to sustain themselves and remain open. For example, one HBCU's administration implemented a phased plan to bring faculty and staff back to campus and appointed a COVID-19 preparedness & response team to implement damage mitigation procedures for future crises on campus (University System of Georgia, 2020). These findings suggest that HBCU leadership and governance have not been optimally effective in their decision-making related to implementation of change and Post-Crisis Management.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, "new federal mandates, state performance-based funding formulas, global competition, and budget constraints" (Johnson, 2019, p.23) as well as the presence of COVID-19 have placed multifaceted demands on HBCUs. The tenor, nature, and structure of COVID-19 related changes to HBCU operations were placed in the hands of HBCU senior leadership and governing boards, who, like in most of the country, were themselves grappling with the onslaught of new public health mandates resulting from the pandemic. Due to the lack of resources, and the inability to

recruit and maintain strong leadership, many HBCUs have been slow to adapt to change (Commodore & Owens, 2018). Overall, the findings in the study suggest that HBCU leadership and governance have made effective decisions in the areas of Crisis Preparedness, Crisis Prevention. However, in the areas of Crisis Event Management, and Post-Crisis management, HBCU leadership and governing board members' decision-making related to evaluating requests for alternate remote work arrangements and implementing change were not optimal.

IMPLICATIONS

Overall, amid COVID-19 it is evident that the use of a crisis management model can successfully improve the effectiveness of the decision-making processes within governance and leadership at public state funded HBCUs. The findings of this study delineate the need for HBCU leadership to incorporate the strategies and activities from an effective crisis management model (Jaques, 2007) to adequately develop their ability to create and implement policies when serious calamities or challenges occur. The change in status quo that will be required for HBCUs to achieve the aforementioned goal is easier said than done. However, the future of underrepresented minority students at these institutions is heavily dependent on strong, committed, and comprehensive leaders who are willing to utilize the gamut of resources at their disposal. As a corollary, HBCUs have proven to be resilient and the authors believe that with the right approach governing boards and leadership at these great institutions can accomplish these herculean tasks.

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We are no one's shrinking violets: Black women educators demand more in the time of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to center the perspectives and experiences of five Black women educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. We use a lens of Black Feminist Thought, which is based in the everyday experiences of Black women, to present our narratives. Our study uses personal vignettes and cross-case analysis to identify key issues emanating from COVID-19—particularly those pertaining to our social locations as Black women educators across the spectrum of public education (e.g., elementary, high school, comprehensive university, research university). This study provides a supportive environment for voicing stories and developing useful strategies for coping with issues related to our social locations, including shifts in education and society.

Keywords: Black Feminism, Black Feminist Thought, Black women educators, counter-story, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

"A Flower...a flower is relatively small compared to the rest of the universe. Everyone has many associations with the flower...Still in a way, nobody sees a flower really. We haven't taken time to look and to notice. To see takes time." - Ava DuVernay

The United States of America has a profound history of sacrificing the safety and needs of some for the benefit of select others. It is apparent, perhaps now more than ever, how this sacrifice has materialized into the marginalization of minoritized groups and made it socially acceptable to ignore some of their most basic human needs, specifically Black women's needs. It is important to note that as authors, we identify as Black women and use the pronouns "our", "we" and "us" throughout this article to acknowledge our positionality and social locations when referring broadly to Black women and Black women educators more specifically. Our decision to include ourselves, through our language, in this article follows in the tradition of Black feminism (Collins, 1991; Evans-Winters, 2019; Walker 1983) and is an intentional act to produce qualitative research that recognizes and validates the individual and collective experiences of Black women.

In the same way that renowned writer, director, producer, and distributor Ava DuVernay speaks of "the flower" in the opening quote, the experiences of Black women in the United States of America have been overlooked by social policies that neither focus on, nor attend to the issues of our concern. For example, a lack of access to quality healthcare and the disproportionate impact of maternal morbidity and mortality rates (Howell et al., 2018) for Black women has been examined in relation to healthcare workers' implicit biases (Noursi et al., 2020). Also, the tragic ending of Breonna Taylor's life, a Black woman who police ambushed and murdered in her own home (North & Cineas, 2020) is a recent and concrete example of the disrespect and disregard that has cost us our lives. In the wake of global pandemics, one caused by COVID-19, Black women faced a reality that our social positioning was further compromised and complicated in ways that many of us are still processing. However impacted Black women were (and are) by the effects of COVID-19 and the myriad of social injustices that we regularly experience, as authors we continue to be present in our families, in our careers, and in our lives. It is from this place that we enter into conversation—as five Black women who also serve in the world as professional educators. In this article, we speak for ourselves. We explore our personal challenges and triumphs, and work to center our unique perspectives amid a national and global crisis. Through the sharing of our individual stories, we seek not to represent Black women as a monolithic group, rather

to recognize the nuances of our experiences while also identifying commonalities among our different perspectives that may serve to inform our future actions. In this article, we explore our personal and professional perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic with the goals to 1) center the experiences of five Black women educators; 2) illuminate, from our perspectives, the unique challenges of supporting students who are members of historically marginalized and minoritized communities; and 3) give voice to our own stories as a way of coping with our individual and collective circumstances. As a collective of five Black women educators, it is our hope to shed light on our unique positionality in ways that others may come to understand our joys and struggles.

Black women educators have a long history of caring for our students and our communities through service and empowerment (Muhammad et al., 2020). History indicates that Black women educators have been attuned to social and political struggle and have actively participated through our content expertise and pedagogy in uplifting Black people and advancing agendas of freedom and social justice (Beauoeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Perkins, 1983; Smith, 2019). Some examples include historical African American women's literary societies that functioned as intellectual spaces where Black women cultivated social and political activism (Muhammad, 2012). Similarly, Mary McLeod Bethune and Septima Clark demonstrated Black women educators' commitments to utilizing education as a pathway to liberation by advocating for voting rights and other social issues (Bethune, 2001; Brown-Nagin, 1999; Hanson, 2003).

Historically, Black women educators' voices have been silenced and omitted from narratives on schools and schooling; yet, Black women, regardless of circumstance, have remained ever-present, working and thriving in schools (McClusky, 2014). Currently, research and scholarship focused on educators often omits or erases the experiences of Black women leaving this area of scholarship void of our perspectives (Dixson & Dingus, 2008). We often remain more marginalized, particularly at the intersections of race, gender, and social class than Black men and White women (Crenshaw, 1989). During the time of COVID-19 when social stratifications have widened and people of color are disproportionately and negatively affected, Black women bear the brunt of negative outcomes at the hands of a healthcare system that is already least responsive to our needs (Wilson, et al., 2020). Ultimately, we seek to know: *What are our unique experiences as five Black women educators during the COVID-19 pandemic?* We follow in the footsteps of countless women before us who have refused to be silenced, such as Maya Angelou, Angela Davis, Rosa Parks, Daisy Bates, Shirley Chisholm, and

many contemporary Black women. In making our stories known we hope to inspire other Black women to do the same.

WHO WE ARE

We are five individuals who identify as Black/African American and woman. Additionally, we currently work as professional educators. We have varied educational backgrounds, job experiences, and other social locations (ex; social class, religion, sexuality, etc.) yet there is much that we share in common. We each have experience teaching in K-12 public school systems, have advanced degrees in the field of education, and have experience teaching in the Southeastern region of the United States. Adrian is a recent graduate of a Doctor of Education program in the area of curriculum and instruction and she is currently working as a high school English teacher in a public school. Chrissy is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education while simultaneously working as an elementary educator. Arkeria earned her Doctor of Education degree in elementary education with a focus on curriculum and instruction and is currently working as an elementary educator. Mia and Francheska are both recent graduates who have earned their Doctor of Philosophy degrees in early childhood and elementary education. Mia currently works as an assistant professor and Francheska as an instructor, both at post-secondary institutions. It is important to share that we are not strangers to one another. Chrissy, Mia, Adrian, and Francheska attended the same institution for their graduate work, and Arkeria and Francheska have previously worked together as public school teachers. Throughout our various relationships as sister scholars, we have often discussed the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and our positionalities as Black women educators. Our ongoing conversations prompted the blueprint of this work. Thus, our familiarity with one another, either directly or through another co-author, supported our collaborative efforts and willingness to be vulnerable in our writing.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Overview of Black Feminist Thought

To center our experiences as Black women educators working during the COVID-19 pandemic, we needed to ground our work in a theory that seeks to find truth and power in Black women's stories, knowledge, and work. Therefore, we ground this work in Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000), which is a critical sociocultural theory that recognizes Black women as authorities on our own experiences, and aims to produce ideas about the social world through the self-definition and agency of Black women. As BFT places Black women at the center of analysis, it uses a critical approach to

render Black women's experiences, methods of empowerment, and resilience valuable—regardless of the marginalized intersections of their identities and the dominant silencing of their voices (McClusky, 2014). In this study, we rely heavily upon a distinguishing element of BFT which is its equal concern for the oppression, resistance, agency, and self-defining mindsets and actions of Black women (Alinia, 2015). Black women's actions of resistance often directly oppose societal boundaries that are imposed upon us, and BFT allows us to center our own knowledge and wisdom by considering our responses—the contours of our ways of living and being in the world.

Black feminist thought mandates social analyses that recognize power as interconnected and multifaceted (Dotson, 2015; Pérez, et al., 2017). There are five distinguishing features of BFT, which include a focus on both the oppression and activism of Black women, the significance of social change toward equity, Black women's collective experiences that create a group conscious and collective memory, the defiance of a monolithic conception of Black womanhood, and a matrix of domination constructed on social conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and sexuality (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 2000). While we operationalize each distinguishing feature of BFT in this paper through providing and synthesizing examples from our own lives, we focus our analysis on the matrix of domination and discuss it in more detail in the next section.

Matrix of Domination

The matrix of domination as outlined in the theory of BFT centers around social locations of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality (Collins, 1991). The matrix itself is useful for considering the complexities of how power is organized as well as it operates. As an example, we are able to recognize the duality of roles as the oppressed, activist and oppressor that some Black women encounter through their lived experiences (Hancock, 2016). According to BFT (Collins, 2000), power is multi-faceted and can be conceptualized through several domains: structural, disciplinary, interpersonal and hegemonic. The domains of power are not mutually exclusive and organizing rules, policies and ideologies may simultaneously be part of multiple domains. We used the domains of power to inform how we thought about our experiences during the onset and the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. They guide our exploration as we share our individual and collective narratives about our government, our employers, our families, and our most inner thoughts and feelings during this time. We consider the following domains of power in our work:

1. The structural domain guides us to consider how we may experience subordination through the regulation of citizenship and rights in institutionalized spaces.
2. The disciplinary domain urges us to explore how we manage oppression and power relationships that are aimed to silence our voices and render them less valuable.
3. The interpersonal domain connects us to the routine and everyday interactions that we experience with others.
4. The hegemonic domain represents the systemic ideologies and practices that reinforce and normalize White supremacy and the othering of minoritized groups (Alinia, 2015).

As we consider each of these power domains, BFT creates a space for our stories and experiences to expose how domination is organized and operates in both personal and institutionalized spaces such as schools. Furthermore, recounts of our experiences during COVID-19 become sites of resistance as we counter dominant narratives that may not accurately reflect our experiences as Black women and educators. In this article, we join together to collectively share how we are situated among the domains of power. We also shed light on the work that we do for ourselves and for our students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes ethnography research methods, for we follow the assumption that research is not distinguishable from the Self (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Who we are and what we can be—what we can study and how we write about that which we can study—are always tied to our knowledge systems (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). In this work, we prioritize our common knowledge system of Black womanhood to write ethnographic narratives that showcase our vulnerabilities, emotions, thoughts, relationships, and interpretative decision making as we reflect on the impact of COVID-19 and our roles in the field of education. We view narratives as verbal action. As we tell our stories from diverse perspectives, we seek to explain, inform, complain, confirm, and challenge the status quo. We emphasize our voices in ways that draw attention to what we communicate and how we communicate it as well as to our individual positions and social locations from which we speak (Chase, 2005).

Specifically, we use counter-storytelling to describe our realities as Black women educators in an effort to help readers bridge the gap between their worlds and ours (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counter-storytelling is described as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Further,

counter-storytelling can facilitate the building of community among racially minoritized groups by showing that we are not alone and that we can learn from the lived experiences of others (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose 2013). We employ our personal narratives as first-person counter-stories representing the experiences of five Black women educators positioned at different places along the education continuum spanning in social locations from elementary school to higher education. Thus, the results are presented in five vignettes in which each Black woman educator's counter-story is told from a unique perspective. Ava DuVernay reminds us "To see takes time" and in this spirit, rather than summaries, we have included each author's full vignette.

We took our study a step further by conducting a cross-case analysis of our vignettes to facilitate the comparison of commonalities and differences amongst our viewpoints. During first cycle coding, the first and second authors independently read and re-read the vignettes to develop inductive, initial codes using the elemental methods of descriptive and In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2015). Descriptive coding summarizes in a word or short phrase the topic of a section within the vignettes. Whereas, In Vivo coding can be thought of as "literal coding" or codes that refer to the actual language found in the vignettes. The authors then compared and discussed the codes and built consensus on what constituted a code (e.g. vulnerability). This coding agreement was then applied to the vignettes. At the next level of analysis, the meaning units identified during first cycle coding were layered with deductive, a priori codes developed using the language of the domains of power represented in Black Feminist Thought. For example, all meaning units within the vignettes coded as *vulnerability* were reexamined for explicit and implicit connections to each of the domains of power. During the final stage of analysis, the vignettes were revisited to ensure that all salient meaning units were captured and coded. Each researcher maintained analytic memos to promote researcher reflexivity throughout the coding process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The analytic memos encouraged conversations about our roles as researchers and the research relationship. We consistently discussed our own assumptions and how these preconceptions affect research decisions. Importantly, this work allowed us to achieve *cultural intuition* (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as we nurtured our personal and professional experiences, uplifted the theoretical literature of Black women, and engaged in an analytic process in which we stood in a central position of the research and analysis.

OUR STORIES

Adrian: A Strong Pillar in Trying Times

Two years ago, while working on my dissertation, I asked my research participants the following question: What does it mean to be a Black woman teacher? While I don't remember every detail of their responses, I do recall the warmth they projected as they shared their thoughts, the pride they felt to voice their purpose, and the joy they exuded as they acknowledged their roles. I remember that they expressed power in being Black women teachers who become symbols of possibilities and dreams realized for Black and Brown students. I mention this here because I, too, am a Black woman teacher. I have since completed my research, but the power in my participants' words still resonates with me today.

The intersections of my identities have always contributed to how I navigate schooling, and the roles that I play in schools where I teach. This year, however, my identity was pushed front and center as I watched race and identity take center stage in discussions across our nation. In March of 2020, the world shut down due to COVID-19. Where I once left my home each day to educate young minds, by March, I was required to stay home for safety. As a country, we were instructed to socially distance ourselves and we paused our everyday lives for the sake of our health. But, as I began to teach and work from home, an alarm sounded across the Black community. As the world paused to combat COVID-19, the screams, yells, and piercing silence of Black bodies reverberated around the world due to brutal violence at the hands of law enforcement, and Black death. So, as the world stood still for "safekeeping," another virus was centered in our neighborhoods and on our news stations—racism in America.

As a Black woman teacher, watching protests during COVID-19 became painful reminders of our realities as Black folk in America, our positioning in society, and denial of our rights to humanity. As I watched crowds gather to demand justice and fight for Black humanity, my heart wept with frustration. And, I swelled with concern for the safety of myself, my family, and the Black bodies in our schools. As I sit and reflect on the responses of my participants of what our existence as Black women in schools means, I am reminded of their passion, and their commitment to humanizing students. And, today, as I write this piece I add to their sentiments by saying that our job is also to protect and harness Black joy.

As a teacher, on a "normal" day, I would usually go into my classroom, harness creativity, and encourage my students to see the potential in who they are and can be. But now, while teaching through the lens of my computer screen, I think critically about my purpose and presence in

education. I think about how to teach my students about navigating schooling when we have a heightened awareness of our Black skin. Now, more than ever, I feel the weight of my purpose and presence—especially for my students who are Black and Brown, and are watching the symbolism of their skin determine their rights to breathe, sleep, and exist peacefully. I am informed by the intersections of my identities and my dark skin which place me in an inimitable space, where I not only experience the world through a unique lens, but am in a position, as a teacher, to educate and empower minds from that perspective. As a Black woman, teaching during COVID-19, my gender, my Black skin, and my knowledge makes me essential in the advancement of our society and in reminding my students of the power and joy of their beings—regardless of how systems in America personify their skin.

Chrissy: A Seat at the Table

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

— Shirley Chisholm

Although we [Black women in America] live in a country tainted by structural and institutional racism, we have a right to be here and to have our say in the direction of this nation. As a Black woman in America and a teacher of Black children, I am tired of teaching my students how to carry the weight of it all. I am tired of teaching them how to process a pandemic and being Black in America. While structural and institutional racism is nothing new, I am tired of teaching my kids how to be resourceful when their more privileged, often White, peers have all of the resources at their fingertips. My students have seen their lives ripped apart because of COVID-19. When our governor pushed for the city to open, I witnessed families struggle to meet their basic needs.

We continually hear a narrative that virtual learning creates equitable opportunities for all children. However, those opportunities should not be considered equitable when, nationwide, students have lost housing and are further experiencing food insecurity while those in more affluent areas are receiving brand new computers and one-on-one in-class intervention in addition to private tutoring at home. How are these experiences considered equitable when some students are forced to go to work with their parents to ensure they will have Wi-fi and free food while others simply have to wake up and head to their “work from home space” in a second or guest bedroom?

Inequities such as poverty and access to healthcare have led to reported increases in student absences, decreases in assignment completion, and an overall set up for failure. I am tired. I am tired of reading NewsELA

articles and picture books like *Something Happened in Our Town*, to help my students process yet another murder of a Black man or woman. I am tired of logging into a Zoom meeting seeing the exhaustion on my students' faces because they were up all night due to the fear of their favorite items being taken, like their lives Pre-COVID. I am tired of forcing my students to take another state mandated test when they have not received nearly enough resources and instruction to feel successful. I understand we are all doing our best to survive in this current predicament, but some of our policy makers and superintendents just HAVE to do better.

Arkeria: A Mother's Plea

I don't know how many times I've heard "Find the strength God gave you!", in my lifetime. These "words of encouragement" have become a painful reminder of the lack of value Black women hold in America's society, inside and out of our communities. Hear me out. I have traumas surrounding many of my successes. Many of the things that warranted the statement above essentially affirmed or denied my greatness or the lack thereof. From grade school, through molestation, undergraduate, near death, rape, childbirth, master's degree, earning my doctorate, 2nd childbirth, loss of employment, starting businesses, homelessness, loss of my mother, COVID-19, and with many blessings in between, people expected greatness from me. They were not used to me, nor would they accept me, in any other form but that which represented strength. Yet, one day I broke! Depression set in, and this Black woman, this Black mother, this Black business owner, this Black educator had nowhere to go to recover. So, I kept going.... with the strength God gave me.

Historically, the concept of motherhood has been of central importance in the philosophies of people of African descent. It has been central to my life as well, but not without a cost. Being an African American single mother to a 17-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son, I have not lived one day of parenthood without sacrifice. As mothers, we are sacrificing our lives each day to protect and provide by any means necessary for our Black children. We are haunted with the daily reports of killings of our Black and brown girls and boys. We are faced with healthcare biases when in need of medical treatment in our hospitals. We are terrified by the lack of care public education systems continue to demonstrate within their policies and laws. And during COVID-19, there has been no consideration for the Black mother that has to choose between the well-being of herself and her children or her job.

What was proposed to teachers in my circumstance was that if asked to return to school for face-to-face instruction during the pandemic, we would be allowed to bring our children to work with us if we were unable to send them to school. So, as mothers, in order for me to keep my job, I would have had to not only expose myself to the dangers of contracting COVID-19 but also expose my children for the sake of "educating" as well.

As a homeschool parent for many years before returning to the classroom, I know that education *can* happen in the confines of your home with willingly invested parents and the proper online access. My local school district received millions of dollars to upgrade its technology platforms and provide adequate access for all students within the district. Distance learning programs across the globe have proven that this way of life and learning can work. To give teachers no other option in America but to die by the hands of lawmakers and stakeholders is disgusting to say the least. Both my son and I suffer from underlying health issues, so not to be considered in these school board decisions breaks my heart. We are afraid, as mothers, that we are not able to protect our children. We are afraid, as educators, that we will not be able to uplift and inspire our students. As Black people, we are traumatized by the constant fight for our right to humanity.

As Black women and mothers, we give it our all, yet we are overwhelmed with the demands to somehow dismiss our personal lives in order to graciously consider each and every child's personal life "for the sake of education". Why are we asked to "mother" students with care but not allowed to "mother" our own? Why are we then crucified for not being there 100% for our own children when the demand of our jobs and the pressures to be all and do all are placed on our shoulders? We are not allowed the space to breathe, to heal, to be Black freely! We are not given the grace, the support, the financial stability. No matter what, we are supposed to fight through societal traumas and workplace expectations without complaint or hesitation. Black women, Black mothers, and Black educators would like to see themselves as valuable in American society, the Mothers of Civilization—not disrespected, but protected.

Mia: A Degree of Tenderness

May your streets be paved with gold
Hope my whole hood make it home
'Cause the world can be toxic
'Specially when your skin look like chocolate
At one point they sold us for profit
But we made it out of the gauntlet, we chosen
- Tobe Nwigwe, *Make it Home*

The Dean of the College of Education at my current institution is what I would call a proud and critically conscious Black woman. I mention this because, optimistically, I see her as a mirror of my own future. During our first college-wide faculty meeting at the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester, the Dean mentioned that we are amid three pandemics—the COVID-19 health pandemic; the racial injustice and systemic oppression pandemic as police brutality continues to roil Black and Brown people; and the economic pandemic resulting from the tight restrictions on movement to halt the spread of the virus. As I reflect on this rife triad and its effects on my life and my students' lives, I am reminded of how golden and resilient Black people are.

My “homeboy in my head” and fellow Igbo descendant, Tobeckukwu Nwigwe whose lyrics I reference above, is a transcendent rapper and artist I credit significantly for helping me cope and stay optimistic while encouraging others—especially my Black folks— during these trying times. More than ever before, I have taken on the job of motivator, empathizer, and counselor in my role as a Black woman teacher educator. I instructed school-based courses with a culturally diverse group of preservice teachers preparing to teach in urban schools during the Spring and Summer 2020 semesters when remote learning was mandated. Many of the preservice teachers in my courses were not from the city and lived alone. Others had children, and some were not accustomed to virtual learning. Coupling the effects of the health pandemic with the racial injustice, protests, and riots taking place in our own city, I felt it was vital to address the current state of our society while cautiously considering the best ways to approach and navigate the unique perspectives of my students and their emotional tolls. Was I teaching a social foundations course on educational equity? No. I was actually teaching courses on early literacy instruction. However, it was essential that I gave my preservice teachers the degree of tenderness we all needed. We were all stripped of our traditional ways of being and as a responsive practitioner I could not ignore that. Course planning became arduous as there was so much to consider. The pressure of being known as a Black, critical educator also began to mount, for I did not have all of the answers to address our current reality. Through teaching with tenderness, I was able to model an embodied way of being that allowed us to admit what we knew and did not know; to listen thoughtfully to one another; to consider perspectives that we might have thought of as outside of our worldviews; to make room for emotions; to shed light on experiences that we have left unspoken; to form alliances; and to “see justice as key to our survival” (Thompson, 2017, p. 1).

A few of my Black students reached out to me for support. I gave them my time, without thinking twice about it, and continuously expressed to

them, “Y’all, we are golden.” It was therapeutic for me to watch them stay the journey and thrive throughout the spring and summer semesters when the entire teacher preparation program was full of uncertainty. Thus, our Zoom check-ins were mutually beneficial and served as a safe space for us all. We still meet virtually occasionally. As our busy schedules intensify, our check-ins can be thought of as an analogy to the common question of care, “Did you make it home?”

I am now an assistant professor at a new institution and in a new city since graduating from my Ph.D. program in May 2020. As I continue to grow in my role as a Black woman teacher educator, I will uphold what I learned this year. That is, teaching is ever-changing. Teaching is taxing, so I must seek ways to deal. Teaching requires tenderness. And most importantly, as one who seldom has representation in higher education, teaching teachers should be an authentic yet therapeutic experience in which I share myself with students willingly, for it may benefit them in ways I have not imagined.

Francheska: My Sister, Myself

I struggled to write this vignette because it was difficult for me to simplify what was and still is a very surreal and unsettling experience. I began drafting this document, first through a free-write that included a combination of my thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to events that have transpired over the past 6 months:

Girl, let’s talk writing a dissertation during a pandemic. The anxiety, the regret and panic have never been more real. There were several times when I thought that I should just throw in the towel. Better that than being run into the ground by systems. Music got me through. It still does today.

I realized that few things matter more than family and that my health is a gift, a blessing and should never be taken for granted.

I cried. A family friend died. I consoled family members. Tried to be there for others then realized I needed to be there for myself.

I gave myself permission to record my stream of consciousness as I engaged in what I realized was my first attempt to process my experiences through writing. As I continued to write, somewhat with the goal of narrowing my focus for this vignette, I kept revisiting the question—What does it mean to live in this body? What does it mean, right now, to live in *my* body?

I have a Black body, one like my mother and my great-grandmother. And I am also more than my body. To my family, I am a daughter, sister, and friend. To my colleagues, I am an instructor and a recent graduate with my Ph.D. in education. It is in this context, as a doctoral student, that I find recent evidence of my embodied experiences and the coping mechanisms that I find useful for discussion in this article.

What does it mean, right now, to live in my body? I pondered this question in light of my role as a doctoral student working through drafts of my dissertation. Living in my body meant that I did not have time. There was no time to be afraid of COVID-19 or too concerned with the fact that it has further exacerbated inequities in social systems that have existed for over a century. There was no time to prioritize my mental and physical well-being given the abrupt halt of most social interaction and physical activity. There was no time to process the images of violence against Black bodies, Black women's bodies, that were plastered across news channels, newspapers, social media and the like. There was no time to grieve and I felt guilty for my innate desire to seek relief. After all, who was I to seek escape when the families of Atatiana Jefferson, Sandra Bland, George Floyd, Philando Castille, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others did not have that choice.

I felt incredibly conflicted. All at once my dissertation research, which focused on Black women educators' experiences in life and in educational spaces, seemed both inconsequential and of the utmost importance. How could I focus on writing a stupid document at a time like this, and also how could I not share the important stories of the Black women who worked alongside me as participants? After I resolved to finish my dissertation and my program as planned, I simultaneously admitted to myself that I was not okay.

I was saddened, angry, and frustrated. My interpersonal relationships with White colleagues and acquaintances were strained. I was afraid, and also felt like I needed to be strong for my family. I believe that acknowledging my feelings allowed me to open myself up to different ways of coping during this time.

GirlTrek, a movement started by Black women, is one source from which I drew inspiration, joy, and relief as I created my own path toward healing. Specifically, their focus on joy as an act of resistance stood out to me during this time. Morgan Dixon and Vanessa Garrison, co-founders of the GirlTrek movement, advocate for walking as a path to wellness and healing for Black women. They recorded "Walk and Talks" in a podcast format, and I listened to these recordings as I began to walk for 30 minutes a few days per week.

As a result of my walks my mood improved, I felt physically lighter and more agile. I enjoyed communing with nature (sunlight was key), and I even talked about the content of the “walk and talks” with friends who were also listening. I credit this movement as one of the reasons that I was able to begin to heal myself and find new ways to build community during this difficult time.

I have learned that I need community, particularly the community of other Black women. Vanessa and Morgan spoke so candidly about their experiences particularly during COVID-19 and also beyond. They talked about their ancestors, our ancestors, and the strengths that we carry as a part of our heritage, but more importantly to me they spoke about the need to reclaim joy, to make space for rest and to know that struggle is not my inheritance but that I can choose to relax and be grateful even in these uncertain times. Today, I know that I am enough and that my pain and my joy matter. I am grateful—currently for the opportunity to share my story through writing in this article.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Our counter-stories, represented here as five vignettes, reveal themes central to Black women’s identities as educators at various social locations across the field of education. As we analyzed the nuances of our unique perspectives, Black Feminist Thought and the four interrelated domains of power provided an important reminder that our experiences and identities are inevitably influenced by the organization of power relations in our society (Collins, 2000). We begin our discussion of the analysis at the interpersonal domain of power, which exposes our current reality through our vignettes, including our personal and professional routines and relationships. Inherent in all of our stories is the idea of *vulnerability*. Whether explicitly stated or implicitly observed, each of us expressed various emotions and experiences, and exposed layers of ourselves as an act of solidarity. The theme of *ultimatums and sacrifice* also revealed itself as a part of our interactions with others and adjustments to Self. In our roles as Black women and Black women educators, we have grown more accustomed to an increased degree of selflessness by choosing to give up our time and resources in an effort to ensure the well-being of our families, our students, and their loved ones. Collins’ (1991) refers to this idea as *othermothering* which “consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African American women experience with one another, with black children, with the larger African American community, and with self” (p. 176). Each of the vignettes express the theme of *othermothering* as we all willingly accepted the responsibility of

caring for Black children, teachers, and communities with hopes of prosperity in humanity. As a result of our altruistic ways, *fatigue and exhaustion* were often indicated as we worked overtime—mentally, physically, and emotionally—to meet the demands produced by the uncertainty within our classrooms and society. We responded to our fatigue with a deliberate *attentiveness to our recovery*; however, the level of action towards our recovery varied. Some of us acknowledged that healing was needed yet struggled to find time to prioritize the matter. Others of us sought out methods of recuperation from our exhaustion, which led to the theme of *mindful coping*. Resistance in the form of joy, liberation, and self-preservation; musical therapy; and spaces designated for Black people to gather safely are all *mindful coping* methods identified throughout our stories. We also commonly experienced a *heightened awareness and responsiveness* to our positionalities as Black people, women, educators, and researchers. There are countless moments throughout the vignettes in which we are honest with ourselves and others in ways that allowed us to begin seeking solutions. Likewise, the idea of *heightened awareness and responsiveness* also pertains to our relationships with students and their families. Threaded throughout the vignettes are examples of our moment-to-moment decisions based on our communities' and society's rapid changes and staggering events. We strategically planned our pedagogical moves as we acquired new information and observed our students keenly. In different ways, we each emphasized the unique worth of the Black woman educator. Our stories indicated how valuable we are to those around us. At the same time, many of us recalled experiences that initiated recognition of how valuable we are to ourselves. As we wrap up the explanation of how our vignettes showcase the interpersonal domain of power, it is important to mention that *recognition of our value* occurs along a spectrum—varying from those who value us to rules and systems that neglect us.

The disciplinary domain of power manages the oppression and organizational practices of the social institutions—the schools and communities—that we serve (Collins, 2000). Our stories specify the depth of oppression experienced by Black women educators, as we yearned for the same recognition that we received from our families and our students on an institutional level.

Even though our professional positions bestowed *multiple responsibilities and high expectations* upon us, we all consistently described a lack of *recognition of our value* within the workforce. Our vignettes expressed that Black women educators are more than teachers. Society expects us to function as counselors, sources of empowerment, and critical

thinkers with no permission to be anything but strong. Subconsciously, we often *sacrifice* our wellness to uphold the unspoken rules and societal assumptions of what we should be. We communicated our awareness of the *role of governance* and discussed ways that we might find ourselves relegated in our professional lives for critically considering and acting on the systemic inequities present in our society. From the perspective of the structural domain of power that explores how Black women regulate within the subordination of their social locations, we found that regulation occurs through *varying emotions*. Many of us responded to our emotions by attempting to transform our social locations—altering the curriculum, choosing joy and optimism, or demanding that those in power enact change. The hegemonic domain of power upholds the ideologies and practices in schools and society that reinforce the often negative assumptions of Black women educators to justify oppression (Alinia, 2015). Collectively, our stories defy negative stereotypes imposed on Black women. These stories are about *us*. They represent a raw look at our lives in the midst of COVID-19, ongoing social injustice, and an economic plummet. Despite our circumstances, our stories represent our actions to choose self-definition over societal assumptions. We decided to unpack hegemonic ideologies and construct new knowledge about what it means to be a Black woman educator.

CONCLUSION

We are charged, by the foundations of Black Feminist Thought, with the call to examine both oppressions and activism as part of the experiences of Black women. The vignettes in this paper reveal elements of activism through the participants' narratives of *attentiveness to our recovery*, *mindful coping*, *heightened awareness of our responsiveness*, and *recognition of our value*. Through our vignettes we demonstrate that Black women are not simply acted upon in the world but we are active participants in creating the world we wish to see.

The *vulnerability* of participants who shared our experiences through vignettes allows for the visibility of the collective consciousness that Collins (2000) identifies as one of five defining features of Black Feminist Thought. The vignettes also provide evidence that although we, Black women, have a collective consciousness through our shared experiences of *fatigue and exhaustion* and *ultimatums and sacrifice*, we are not a monolith and exist in the world at various intersections although we share in common our race and gender.

When presenting the stories and experiences of Black women, it is essential to attend to the dualities of the social injustices that we

endure while also recognizing the significance of our contributions of resistance, agency, self-definition and activism. It is equally as important to recognize the complexities of the presentations and dynamics of power within U.S. society. Black Feminist Thought, as a critical social theory, provides the framework for an examination that honors the duality and complexities of Black women's experiences and U.S. power structures, and grounds the authors' endeavor to represent our own stories.

In this article, we consider not only our individual experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also a collective narrative of Black women's joys, triumphs and struggles. The counter-stories in this article provide insight into our individuality, our collective consciousness, and our resilience. We have taken the time, as Ms. DuVernay suggests, "to look and to notice" how these experiences have impacted us and our communities. During this pandemic we refuse to shrink or shy away from our responsibilities to our families, our education, our professions, and most importantly ourselves. Yet, we also demand, as evidenced by the theme of *recognition of our value*, to be seen and we refuse to remain invisible—in the margins. We matter. And as we find ways to cope and sustain our livelihood as Black women and as educators, we require more. Period.

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Empathizing with Black Women’s Experiences at the Intersections of Collective Trauma, Isolation, Anxiety, Depression, and HIV/AIDS amid a Global Pandemic: Narratives of Two Community Based Organization (CBO) Service Providers

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ABSTRACT

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in the United States toward the close of 2019. CBOs were forced to either change their hours of operation or completely close their doors to avoid further widespread dissemination of the virus. The abrupt changes among CBOs posed some challenges for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), especially Black women living with HIV/AIDS (BWLHA). For this reason, this study aimed to explore the impact of the global pandemic on BWLHA receiving services from CBO service providers. A qualitative inquiry was used to examine the narratives of two CBOs’ service providers (i.e., Narrators 1 and 2). Hill-Collins's (1990) Black Feminist Theory was utilized to frame the research. Three approaches to narrative analysis also were employed to analyze participants' stories. Such narratives helped to underscore the trauma experienced by BWLHA. The stories also reflected feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression among the women. Meditation and advocacy were forms of learning provided for the women. The participation in "sister circles" was recognized as a system of support. Implications for practice suggested that CBOs' service providers develop collective trauma care plans that are comprehensive, specific to client’s needs, and informed by adult learning principles to help BWLHA navigate trauma events.

Keywords: anxiety, care plans, BWLHA, CBOs, collective trauma, depression, pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

While working through the needs of individuals affected by HIV/AIDS related issues, service providers were confronted with an unexpected pandemic. The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in the United States in 2019. Moreover, COVID-19 claimed the lives of over 200,000 Americans within a matter of months (Cooper et al., 2020). Because of the potency and unpredictability of the virus, the pandemic is believed to be the most cataclysmic in modern day history (Haleem & Javaid, 2020). In response to the uncertainty of the virus and its transmission, people were asked to shelter in place. Over time, the number of such orders increased (Hsiang et al., 2020; Pinto & Park, 2020). In response, CBOs were forced to either change their hours of operation or completely close their doors to avoid further widespread dissemination of the virus. The abrupt changes among CBOs posed some challenges for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), especially BWLHA. Since Black women have the leading cases of HIV/AIDS in the United States, it was essential to focus our attention on this populace of women.

The effect of stigma on Black women's treatment and care has been well documented in the literature (Sangaramoorthy et al., 2017; Whiteside et al., 2014). There is also a significant amount of literature on Black women's risk for HIV/AIDS (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). However, there is a limited amount of literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on BWLHA and how the virus disrupted services for this populace of women. There is also a limited amount of literature on CBOs' support (e.g., treatment and care) efforts for BWLHA during the pandemic. We designed this research to fill these gaps through sharing the narratives of two service providers at two different CBOs who provided services to BWLHA. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the global pandemic on BWLHA receiving services from CBOs. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How has the pandemic disrupted CBOs' HIV/AIDS efforts (e.g., treatment and care) for BWLHA?
2. How has the global pandemic affected the health and well-being of BWLHA?
3. What strategies and resources do CBO service providers offer to BWLHA to strengthen and protect their health during a global pandemic?

This article is organized as follows: (a) centering Black women's experiences, (b) a literature review, (c) research methods, (d) personal narratives, (e) findings and discussion, (f) conclusion, and (g) implications.

Centering Black Women's Experiences

For this research, Black Feminist Theory (BFT) was used to center the women's experiences at the intersections of Black, female, poverty, ageism (Hill-Collins, 1990), and HIV/AIDS from the perspectives of CBO service providers. A tenet within BFT is that Black women's experiences cannot exist separately from their intersectionalities (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 5). Acknowledging these intersectionalities helped us to understand the experiences of BWLHA amidst a global pandemic. However, according to Barritau (2006), some argue that there is no need for BFT because of the homogeneous impression of global *sisterhood* and the idea that feminist agendas are adequate for framing Black women's experiences. To challenge these ideologies, several authors have argued feminist frameworks are not sufficient to effectively explore the realities of Black women (Barritau, 2006; Carter-Francique, 2013; Opara, 2017). Moreover, feminist theories have suppressed Black women's ideologies. As such, we used BFT to centralize the experiences of BWLHA as told through the narratives of service providers at CBOs who work closely with BWLHA.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature selected from multiple databases informed the development of the literature review. This literature review is organized as follows: (a) Black women's risk or HIV/AIDS, (b) Black women living with HIV, and (c) CBOs.

Black Women's Risk for HIV/AIDS

In the literature, Nydegger et al. (2020) named violence as a primary factor in women's increased risk for HIV/AIDS. Violence can be viewed as occurring at multiple levels, including structural (Nydegger et al., 2020) and intimate partner violence (Gilbert et al., 2000; Weaver et al., 2015). Intimate partner violence can include acts of forced or coerced sex with an HIV-infected partner (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2013). Kouyoumdjian and colleagues (2013) conducted a systematic literature review and found a correlation between intimate partner violence and HIV risk among Black women. Poverty, gender inequality, racism, and homelessness can be categorized as structural violence (Nydegger et al., 2020; Riley et al., 2007). For Black women living in poverty, the promotion of education or behavior change may be insufficient for HIV prevention, as Black women's lives often intersect with exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and violence. Davis and Tucker-Brown (2013) identified sexual oppression, sexualized images, poverty, racial segregation, and incarceration as social determinant factors that place Black women at risk for HIV/AIDS. Davis and Tucker-Brown (2013) further indicated the persistence of social inequalities dating as far back as slavery have always placed Black women at a disadvantage, making

it difficult for them to create a life filled with economic security. Moreover, ongoing economic deprivation and other social determinant factors have contributed to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among Black women.

Black Women Living With HIV/AIDS

In the United States, one in 54 Black women is living with HIV compared to one in 941 White women (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2019). African Americans constitute only 13% of the U.S. population, yet Black women represent 65% of the women living with HIV in the United States (Fletcher et al., 2016). BWLHA have unique and specific health needs (i.e., microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem; El-Bassel et al., 2009) though they are often left out of the conversations on HIV/AIDS related issues (Black Women's Health Imperative, 2019; Rao et al., 2018). Individuals tend to associate HIV/AIDS with homosexuality despite its increased prevalence among Black heterosexual women, further marginalizing BWLHA.

There is a consensus that as of 2017, Black women accounted for 59% of the newly diagnosed cases of HIV in the United States (CDC, 2018; Geter et al., 2019), whereas White and Latino women accounted for only 20% and 16%, respectively. Findings from a qualitative study revealed, without negating other documented adversities, stigmatization has the greatest impact on BWLHA (Fletcher et al., 2016). Some authors have described stigma as occurring at multiple levels, including interpersonal, community, and institutional (Fletcher et al., 2016; Sangaramoorthy et al., 2017). Interpersonal stigma is associated with experiences within one's direct social environment; community stigma intersects interpersonal relationships and the wider community; and institutional stigma is operationalized in larger structures such as regulatory institutions, including healthcare systems, reformatories, and the workplace (Fletcher et al., 2016). Black women's lack of engagement in treatment and care is largely the result of HIV associated stigma, which leads to reduced care and treatment, preventive behavior of poor quality, negligent behavior toward care and retention, poorer medical and psychological care, negligent behavior toward testing, diminished feelings toward status disclosure, and reduced uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) (Fletcher et al., 2016; Whiteside et al., 2014). The deleterious effects of stigmatization among BWLHA beckon the attention of leaders of CBOs for prevention, advocacy education, and care (Operario et al., 2020).

Community-Based Organizations

To offer a comprehensive approach to care, some CBOs employ a workforce comprising social workers, case managers, navigators, and health educators to help BWLHA access testing, medical professionals for PrEP, or other medicinal supports, including primary care for those women who may test positive for HIV, and support services for at-risk women who have the

propensity to fall out of the care continuum (Black Women's Health Imperative, 2019). Gailbraith (1995) indicated members of the CBOs' workforce serve in the role of adult educator to the clients they serve by providing formal, nonformal, and informal learning across the lifespan.

According to Wilson and colleagues (2012), advocacy is a key function of CBOs. When the work of advocacy is operationalized, CBOs can better support the systems of care in which they are associated. Since its emergence, COVID-19 has posed many challenges for CBOs that offer services to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA; Operario et al., 2020; Pinto & Park, 2020). For example, the virus has brought about a noticeable reduction in resources offered by CBOs. A temporary suspension of services is not an option as many CBOs rely heavily upon program revenues.

Leaders of many CBOs that offer socializing opportunities have been advised to halt non-essential programming because of the pandemic, making social isolation much more challenging for PLWHA (Marziali et al., 2020; Operario et al., 2020). PLWHA sometimes experience poverty, which makes it difficult for them to remain in contact with family members and friends because they lack access to cell phones, internet services, computers, and other technologies during this time of physical distancing (Chenneville et al., 2020, p. 2). Moreover, increased bouts with depression because of the COVID-19 mandates have caused setbacks for many clients, derailing existing efforts on the part of both the clients and the healthcare providers toward clients remaining on the care continuum (Chenneville et al., 2020, p. 2).

As the novel coronavirus continues to affect how clients engage in services, we offer narratives to begin conversations around the phenomenon to explore how the COVID-19 virus has derailed the efforts for BWLHA. As well, we explore the health and well-being of BWLHA, and the strategies and resources offered to these women during the pandemic. This research also serves as our way of placing a call to action for further exploration of the phenomenon.

RESEARCH METHODS

We employed qualitative methods in this study because they illuminate and place emphasis on individuals' contextualized experiences and give meaning to social and psychological experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Moreover, qualitative research is appropriate for holistically capturing Black women's experiences (Lani et al., 2014). We used the purposeful sampling technique to select participants who "can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). We selected the two participants because they were workers of CBOs, they provided HIV/AIDS related services to BLWHA, and they had been employed with their agency for at least 2 years.

Participants

To recruit participants, we sent a message to an HIV Syndicate listserv and provided a brief description of the research to elicit interest. When potential participants responded, we followed up with an email and provided information about the study and those who were willing to participate were asked to return an email with the following statement—return of email is an agreement to participate in the study. Then, we collected demographic information. Afterward, we scheduled a mutually agreed upon time for each participant to share their narrative. Only two participants were chosen for this study to help inform a larger study. One participant identified as male and the other participant identified as female, and both participants were African American. Narrator 1 had served in the role of health educator for over 20 years and Narrator 2 had served in the role of case manager for almost 5 years.

We wanted to share their narratives to help call attention to the myriad challenges BWLHA are facing amid the novel coronavirus and to offer some insight to service providers at CBOs who work with this population. Notably, the quotes are interpretations of the women's experiences as expressed by the participants. Engagement with the participants was conducted over the phone and the participants did not engage in a typical interview process, as we used storytelling as a form of data collection. According to Brookfield (2013), storytelling can help individuals make sense of their personal experiences and reveal to others life's moments they find to be most compelling. We asked the participants to share stories based on the following questions: How has the pandemic disrupted CBOs' HIV/AIDS efforts for BWLHA, how has the global pandemic affected the health and well-being of BWLHA, and what strategies and resources do CBO service providers offer to BWLHA to strengthen and protect their health during a global pandemic? The participants offered short stories and we compiled them into complete narratives (DeMedeiros & Etter-Lewis, 2020).

We analyzed the narratives using three approaches. First, we applied Alexander's (1988) approach to narrative analysis as we read the narratives multiple times and used principles of salience to focus on word meaning, rather than the specifics of language. While Alexander introduces nine principles, four were significant to the analysis process. Such principles included frequency, omission, incompleteness, and emphasis, to make meaning of the participants' stories. Then, we used elements of Denzin's (1989) life narrative to identify important events and verbalized insights or epiphanies within the participants' narratives. Denzin further noted such elements occur in most stories. A third method we used in our narrative analysis was a linguistic approach that was culturally specific. Because the participants were African American, there was an assumption that they would provide insights outside of the "dominant culture." Therefore, we used culture (Johnson-

Bailey, 2002) as the narrative analysis tool to give meaning to service providers' stories. The focus in our cultural analysis was on the manners in which Black people communicate, repetition of words and phrases, emphasis placed on words, and the use of Black English. Offering three methods for analysis helped us to fully explore the participants' experiences. To check for trustworthiness, participants were given the opportunity to review their narratives to help contextualize their experiences (Goings, 2016).

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

To protect the identities of the participants, they are identified as Narrator 1 and Narrator 2. Their stories are delineated in the following paragraphs.

Narrative 1: Health Educator

At the beginning of the interview, Narrator 1 explained, "Justice and equity are not established for Black women many times. There is also structural inequity within the healthcare system making it difficult for Black women to receive the proper care and treatment." As a health educator, Narrator 1 provided services such as health education, counseling, health literacy (e.g., uptake of PrEP and other anti-retroviral therapy), food bank services, and other support to BWLHA at a CBO.

Narrator 1 stated when the novel coronavirus emerged, it completely disrupted the care and treatment she provided for clients. The shelter in place orders served to separate "the agency" from the clients, as the women were no longer able to come to the center and receive services. For those women living in isolation, the lack of interaction with service providers and with other women living with the diagnosis negatively affected their mental health. Narrator 1 reported that during a webinar, one woman indicated, "I am 39 years old, but I feel like I am 90. I have a heart issue, cholesterol, and high blood pressure. I cannot take it any longer. I am going nuts." Narrator 1 also recalled instances of clients contemplating suicide because they could not stand the isolation. In such instances, Narrator 1 immediately contacted the suicide hotline so a qualified person could offer some assistance.

During the pandemic, the clients interacted with agency members, case managers, and other agency professionals through different virtual platforms (e.g., Zoom). Clients were also forced to interact with healthcare providers through telehealth systems. Many of the Black women with whom Narrator 1 worked felt that they had been cheated out of care and treatment. They felt telehealth was another way for healthcare providers to disregard their need for adequate care. BLWHA have multiple health concerns and many of the women questioned the validity of the doctors' diagnoses because of their inability to see them face-to-face. Narrator 1 stated one client indicated, "Medical professionals are working from home. If you are working

from home, you are not dealing with me.” Narrator 1 reported another client stated,

You call me so the hospital can charge my Medicare, but what did you really do for me? What did you really accomplish with me? You did not get to put me on a scale. You did not get anything effective going on.

Narrator 1 indicated another client said, “There should be check-in calls, like a wellness check just to see if we are doing okay. With everything going on [COVID-19], we could be dead in our home.” Narrator 1 reported yet another client explained,

My primary care doctor—I expect them to look at the whole of me. The pandemic started in March. I need some labs done; not just for HIV/AIDS. Labs can tell a lot about a person’s health. I have 11 different doctors that I see.

The mandates for COVID-19 called for the agency to deny walk-in clients, which affected the women’s ability to acquire their medications. Narrator 1 stated one client commented, “They [agency] are not taking walk-ins. I have not been able to take my meds for about 8 or 9 days.” Narrator 1 made a call to the program manager and advocated on behalf of the client to ensure that she received her medication. Occasionally, Narrator 1 would allow clients to listen to those calls to develop skills for advocacy. Clients listened to the questions asked, how the questions were framed, and the tone of voice used. Narrator 1 stated, “Developing skills for advocacy is important. See, when women can stand up for themselves, it gets people’s attention. It also builds self-confidence because many Black women living with HIV/AIDS have developed learned helplessness.”

Because clients were forced to remain inside, their normal engagement in activities for learning had been replaced with television. Narrator 1 indicated,

I told them [women] sitting in front the television is not doing anything for you. You need to keep your brain functioning . . . reading and learning. There are all sorts of materials . . . webinars . . . listening sessions . . . support groups for Black women.

Narrator 1 encouraged clients to engage in online learning activities, including workshops, panel discussions, and webinars. She also suggested the women engage in reading materials online or reach out to “sister circles” or networking systems that provide up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS and other information.

Narrative 2: Case Manager

Narrator 2 served in the role of case manager within his organization. As a case manager, Narrator 2 assessed clients’ wellness, developed care plans, provided counseling and intervention, charted referrals, and conducted

home visits. Because of the pandemic, in-house HIV testing was no longer offered. At the request of the clients, the tests were mailed to their homes and they were responsible for returning the specimen by mail or dropping it off at the agency.

Prior to the pandemic, case managers often visited clients at their homes, which provided clients the opportunity to speak with case managers privately. The women relied heavily upon these interactions. In adherence to the mandates instituted in response to COVID-19, the agency was forced to discontinue home visits and case management transitioned to telehealth. For most of the clients, lack of interaction and the inability to socialize brought about feelings of loneliness.

Although some of the women shared their living spaces with other family members, they still experienced feelings of isolation, as their roommates were often unaware of their HIV/AIDS status. Therefore, they distanced themselves within their homes to prevent their family members from developing any suspicions about their diagnosis. Hiding while in isolation became emotionally labor intensive for the women, thereby increasing their anxiety. Narrator 2 stated one client explained,

I live with my cousins. They do not know that I am HIV positive. I try not to be around them too much. It is crazy. I must think about my health and at the same time try to stay away from them.

Narrator 2 stated another client indicated, “Some of my family members live with me. They say that I am too private. I cannot tell them I am HIV positive. They will tell everybody. So, I distance myself from them.”

In addition, the women’s weekly support group meetings were canceled. Those clients who attended the meetings, along with the facilitator, offered the psychological support the women needed to help manage their personal life experiences while living with HIV/AIDS. For instance, a client called the center, seemingly in a state of depression. Narrator 2 immediately contacted the group facilitator, who managed to get in contact with other group members and they all met through a virtual platform. The group members provided the support the distressed client needed to help counter feelings of depression and anxiety. A meeting with Black women she identified as her “sisters” was motivating. Narrator 2 indicated the client called the following day and stated, “Thank you for connecting me with the group. To hear their voices and to see their faces gave me the opportunity to get some human interaction that I am not getting.” The feelings of loneliness had been exceedingly difficult for some of the women to manage. The women looked forward to the weekly face-to-face support group meetings. Such meetings provided a safe space for them to be vulnerable and allowed them the time to interact with women who looked like them and shared similar experiences.

The persistent lack of interaction began to weigh heavily on some of the women such that they considered reverting to their old habits. Narrator 2 stated one client indicated, “I am so stressed out. Not being able to speak to people face-to-face makes me want to go back to drinking and smoking.” The added pressure of being isolated with someone who was problematic caused them to consider reverting to their previous addictions. For example, Narrator 2 stated one client indicated, “My daughter mistreats me. I just feel like drinking. It gets really hard for me sometimes.” Narrator 2 stated another client indicated, “The arguing back and forth is driving me crazy. If I say blue, he says green. Everything does not have to be an argument. It is enough to make you wanna have a drink.”

To help the women temper their feelings of loneliness, Narrator 2 recommended meditation. Though Narrator 2 admitted to having a lack of expertise in meditation, it provided an outlet for him while adhering to the shelter in place mandates. Because employees at the agency were unable to meet with clients face-to-face, Narrator 2 mailed the women copies of activities for meditation and provided websites that offered activities for meditative purposes. Some of the women found the activities to be helpful. Narrator 2 stated one client indicated, “It takes some real concentration, but the activities kind of relax your body.” Narrator 2 indicated another client stated, “It gives me something to do. Meditation takes my mind off the world. I am glad you gave us this information, Mr. Kenney [pseudonym]. These activities would be great for the women’s group.” The client was hinting at the idea of Narrator 2 performing activities for meditation during a virtual meeting.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Informed by the BFT, we placed the experiences of BWLHA at the center of the research through its empathetic lens. The research indicates that service providers at CBOs made Black women a focal point. Here, the women’s experiences intersect racism, sexism, collective trauma, isolation, anxiety, depression, and HIV/AIDS.

In response to the pandemic, clients were ordered to shelter in place, forcing CBOs to alter the way in which they provided services to the women. Seemingly overnight, the women were separated from their CBOs. Suddenly, the women were unable to have physical contact with CBO providers, healthcare providers, or members of their support groups. Home visits with caseworkers were suspended indefinitely. Some of the women lived with roommates and faced the possibility of their diagnosis being revealed. Other women experienced maltreatment from their roommates. Some clients even considered reverting to addictions. Morin (2020) indicated pandemics can be characterized as traumatic events. Leonard (2020) indicated prolonged exposure to stressful events can be traumatizing. Morin (2020) further noted when traumatic events affect members of an entire group, in this case

BWLHA being serviced by CBOs, the experience can be identified as collective trauma. BWLHA face existing stressors associated with HIV/AIDS, including structural violence and intimate partner violence (Nydegger et al., 2020), that make their experiences associated with the pandemic even more traumatizing. However, Morin (2020) warned that though an entire group may be affected by trauma, the burden of trauma looks different for everyone.

The shelter in place mandates led to social isolation, which triggered feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression among the women. Black women are more likely to experience depression because of the intersections of poverty, racism, sexism, social health difficulties, and cultural socialization practices (Martin et al., 2013). Social isolation was an added layer. In the findings, the case manager recommended the women engage in meditation practices to manage their emotions. To help ameliorate their anxiety and depression, some women engaged in activities for meditation. According to Lapina (2018), meditative activities trigger the body's response to relaxation. For adults, learning how to manage stressful circumstances is critical as it influences how they respond to daily life events, life aspects, and learning outcomes (Lapina, 2018, p. 132.). Meditation is a useful technique for achieving a clear mind as well as managing emotions. When clients' emotions were stabilized, they were better able to engage in treatment and care. As well, when clients' emotions were managed properly, they were better prepared to engage in activities for skill development. As well, the women were either advised to engage in "sister circles" or other informal support groups. Women are called to offer psychological support for other women (Nanton, 2009, p. 13). Such psychological support may include social support, anxiety reduction, and the relief of tension (Nanton, 2009, pp. 18-20). Alfred (2009, p. 7) indicated such groups can also serve as networking systems for the transaction of knowledge for upward mobility.

Some of the women felt their health concerns were not being taken seriously because they were given a diagnosis through telehealth without a thorough assessment. Acquiring anti-retroviral therapy medication was also challenging. These findings aligned with the study conducted by Onos (2020), which indicated that often the health issues of Black women are either not taken seriously or are ignored. Narrator 1 allowed clients to listen to phone conversations during which she challenged certain structures to teach clients how to self-advocate for needed services. Such training aligned with the findings of Wilson et al. (2012), which indicated advocacy is a quintessential component of CBOs. Brookfield (2013) stated challenging the structures that control information and fighting for resources that are beneficial are the indicators of women being self-directed. Moreover, when women can advocate for themselves through self-directed learning processes, it can build confidence and self-efficacy.

CONCLUSIONS

There continues to be an increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS among Black women. BWLHA have experienced a compilation of traumatic events. A global pandemic can intensify the impact of these experiences. While there may be collective trauma among the subgroup members, the effect is different for each Black woman living with HIV/AIDS. Therefore, CBO service providers need to consider collective trauma care plans that are comprehensive (e.g., addressing physical, cognitive, and emotional health), specific to the client's needs (e.g., sister circles, advocacy, meditation), and informed by adult learning principles (e.g., transformational learning, self-directed learning, and experiential learning) to help BWLHA navigate trauma events.

IMPLICATIONS

There are some implications of the results of this study. This study serves to widen the lens of educators of adult and higher education. Gailbraith (1995) held the view that service providers at CBOs are considered adult educators. Using an interdisciplinary approach, service providers at CBOs can offer informal learning programming to develop Collective Trauma Care Plans (CTCPs) for BWLHA. During the times of crisis, CTCPs can help women think more clearly, maintain balance, and serve as a framework for everyone involved including the women, spouses/partners, friends, or colleagues to support one another (Moss, 2020). It is important that the plan is comprehensive to meet the client's needs holistically rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Strategies for adult development and learning differ significantly from traditional learning. Therefore, it is essential for the plan to be informed by adult learning principles (e.g., transformational learning, self-directed learning, experiential learning, or project-based learning) to help BWLHA navigate inequitable systems during times of trauma (e.g., mass shootings, war, famines, and pandemics). Marchi (2020) indicated that when developing a CTCP, there are some elements to consider, including (a) risk factors (e.g., personal, work, cultural, etc.), (b) personal symptoms of trauma (e.g., cognitive, emotional, behavioral, etc.), (c) personal coping strategies, and (d) finding hope and meaningful work within the trauma (Moss, 2020). It is important to clearly define the objectives so the women can understand the purpose of the care plan. CBO service providers can begin a CTCP by doing the following: (a) allow the women to choose two items regarding (c) and (d) (from the above strategies), (b) allow the women to identify two actions that are measurable and realistic, (c) allow the women to develop at least two sentences they can use as a reference to manage how they respond to trauma, (d) have the women identify specific barriers that may prevent them from adhering to their plan for addressing traumatic experiences, and (e) allow the women to identify strategies to overcome such obstacles and identify systems of support (Marchi, 2020). Examples can be useful as adult learners, including

BWLHA, can become familiar with aspects of the plans that are specific to their needs and experiences. Moreover, as clients' experiences and needs change throughout the lifespan, CBOs can be the mechanism for instigating lifelong learning opportunities for treatment and care plans among BWLHA if cultivated properly.

As with any research, there are some limitations. A limitation of the study is the actual voices of BWLHA were not included. As well, further studies with larger cohorts of service providers at other CBOs would enhance generalizability. Despite its limitations, the research illustrates how CBOs can support BWLHA during a pandemic. Future research may focus on collective trauma responses through CTCs and their impact on the professional development of service providers at CBOs.

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Riding Out the Immigration Storm: Higher Education Responses and Support Provided to International Students in the U.S. During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Government restrictions imposed during the pandemic affected both international students planning to attend U.S. higher education institutions and those currently enrolled. Reviewing the websites of 160 colleges and universities enrolling the highest numbers of international students, this study investigated if and how these institutions supported their international students during the global crisis. The results, obtained through document analysis, revealed that the majority of websites or 74% provided such guidance, while the remaining 26% did not. Only 10% of the institutions issued official statements to and in support of their international students during the pandemic. Based on the findings, the article proposes recommendations for all colleges and universities that are yet to respond to the international members of their academic communities.

Keywords: international students, immigration, student support

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

COVID-19 disrupted the educational experiences of all students around the world primarily by preventing them from taking face-to-face classes and constraining them to remote instruction. Given the holistic structure of U.S. campuses, reflected through miscellaneous student services, curricular and co-curricular programs, clubs, organizations, and other involvement opportunities, college students in the U.S. were also deprived of social and academic engagement structures critical to their success. Furthermore, the effects of COVID-19 on students' educational experiences remain disproportional, with some groups being negatively impacted more severely than others. These more severely affected groups include economically disadvantaged students, as well as students or caregivers with limited access to health services or those at increased risk of contracting the virus. Among students who have experienced unique challenges during the pandemic are also international students whose academic progress and educational opportunities have been hindered by the immigration measures imposed by the U.S. government as a response to the pandemic.

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), in 2018-19 more than one million international students decided to enroll in U.S. higher education institutions (IIE, 2019). The largest share of international students (39%) were enrolled in undergraduate programs, 34% sought graduate education, 20% were in Optional Practical Training (OPT), and 6% were non-degree seekers. Unsurprisingly, STEM remained the most desirable field for international students with 21% enrolled in engineering and 16% in math and computer science combined. The top five sending countries in 2018-2019 were China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada.

International students bring numerous benefits to their educational institutions and host societies, including economic, cultural, and academic. According to the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), in 2018-2019 international students studying in U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$41 billion and 458,290 jobs to the U.S. economy (NAFSA, 2019). These data are not surprising considering that 62% of these students supported their education from international funding resources (e.g., personal and family funds, foreign governments and universities or private sponsors) (IIE, 2019).

In addition to the frequently cited financial contributions, international students support U.S. academic communities in many other, not easily measurable ways, such as fostering cultural competence, promoting international relations, and increasing the international prominence of U.S. educational institutions. International students further support under-enrolled

programs and disciplines, primarily STEM. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education announced a national initiative to increase enrollment in these fields, a goal that has been sustained by a high concentration of international students in STEM disciplines (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

However, COVID-19 led to many uncertainties regarding the continued presence and contributions of international students in the U.S. The pandemic led the U.S. government to tighten immigration measures and reach several decisions that directly impacted the educational opportunities and academic progress of international students. Undoubtedly, the biggest impact was recorded in June 2020 when the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued a directive preventing international students enrolled in fully online coursework from remaining in the United States. Only after several universities filed a lawsuit to block the directive, the rule was rescinded and international students were granted temporary exceptions and stay (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2020).

Travel restrictions, which many countries imposed as a response to the pandemic, represent another factor that directly impacted the mobility of international students enrolling in U.S. institutions. In March 2020, the U.S. Department of State temporarily suspended visa services at all U.S. embassies and consulates (NAFSA, 2020a). This decision, even if warranted, directly affected all newly admitted international students by preventing them from obtaining the visas necessary to join their academic programs. Some of these students were able to defer admissions for one semester or a year; however, many students had to forego their hard-earned educational opportunities.

Among the decisions yet to be considered by the U.S. government is the recommendation to suspend OPT programs for international students (NAFSA, 2020b). This rule, if adopted, would deprive international students of critical post-graduation employment opportunities – a motivator that led many of them to choose the United States for their higher education. Even though the OPT training remains in place, national hiring freezes, especially in the higher education sector, have left many international graduates unable to find employment upon finishing their academic programs, thus having to return home.

As both higher education institutions and their students are fearfully awaiting immigration directives that may restrict them further, many of the questions that burden students remain unanswered. Even though international students make significant and long-term personal, professional, and financial commitments when they decide to study abroad, the return of that investment and the ability to see it through completion currently remain uncertain. To shed some light on these uncertainties, the purpose of this study was to

explore the guidance and support that higher education institutions in the U.S. provided to their international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. By reviewing the websites of U.S. colleges and universities, this study investigated if and how higher education institutions responded to the ongoing and severe immigration restrictions imposed on their international students. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research question: At U.S. colleges and universities that enroll the highest shares of non-domestic students, what guidance have offices of International Student Services (ISS) provided to support their students in times of uncertainty?

The results obtained through the analysis of the website content aimed to document if and how these institutions provided guidance and support to their international student body. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to presents the recommendations for colleges and universities that are yet to respond to their academic communities and international members seeking support, equity, and equal opportunity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since global competitors have been embracing more strategic and assertive approaches to the recruitment of international students, the mobility of this student population currently presents an uncertain and fluctuating phenomenon for most countries engaged in such efforts. Unfortunately, the United States emerged as one of the host countries whose international student enrollments have an unpredictable trajectory. Since the last enrollment decline that took place between 2003-2006 (1.3% average annual decrease), the United States has achieved relatively stable growth in the number of international students it hosted over the past decade (IIE, 2019). However, the average annual increases in student enrollments have started to drop again, ranging from 10% in 2015 to only 0.05% in 2019.

International Student Mobility

Since global competitors have been embracing more strategic and assertive approaches to the recruitment of international students, the mobility of this student population currently presents an uncertain and fluctuating phenomenon for most countries engaged in such efforts. Unfortunately, the United States emerged as one of the host countries whose international student enrollments have an unpredictable trajectory. Since the last enrollment decline that took place between 2003-2006 (1.3% average annual decrease), the United States has achieved relatively stable growth in the number of international students it hosted over the past decade (IIE, 2019).

However, the average annual increases in student enrollments have started to drop again, ranging from 10% in 2015 to only 0.05% in 2019.

English-speaking countries in North America and Oceania remain among the most attractive educational destinations and they collectively host 40% of all international students around the world. The United States is commonly recognized as a leader in global student mobility, as it welcomes the highest number of international learners. However, its total share of international students among the overall student population portrays a different picture; international students in the U.S. make up only 5% of total enrollments, compared to 21% in Australia, 13% in Canada, and 12% in New Zealand (IIE, 2017).

Choudaha (2018) raised attention to three critical declines in international student enrollments in the U.S. over only two decades. Wave I, or the first significant decline, was recorded after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Wave II was caused by the global financial crisis in 2008–2009, while Wave III was influenced by political shifts and immigration regulations implemented in 2016–2017 (Choudaha, 2018). At the same time, all three waves were accompanied by a phenomenon that is still present – increased competition from other English-speaking countries pertaining to recruitment of international students.

According to the perspectives of international students, the quality of higher education is no longer the sole decisive factor in choosing an educational destination, especially among those considering the U.S. as a host. Equally important is safety, security, and cost of educational programs (Nicholls, 2018), especially as they relate to uninterrupted academic progress and degree attainment. In many aspects, these concerns seem to be related to the rigor of U.S. immigration and visa policies that became even more stringent since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Immigration measures imposed on international students as a response to COVID-19 are not an isolated phenomenon within U.S. immigration policy. Other past U.S. government actions contributed to limiting the access of international students to higher education. For instance, in 2017, U.S. President Trump issued an executive order to suspend the entry of foreign nationals from seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2018). This decision directly affected 16,216 international students enrolled in U.S. educational institutions at the time the order was activated. (IIE, 2016). The most detrimental effect of this action was reflected in the message it sent to prospective students around the world, as evidenced by the decline in the

annual growth of international student enrollment during the following academic year.

Simultaneously, global competitors, primarily Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada, continue to implement more deliberate recruitment efforts to increase their international student enrollment by being willing to accommodate various student needs, including immigration. As a result, Canada recorded an impressive 18% increase in its international student enrollment between 2015 and 2016, while Australia and New Zealand recorded a combined 10% rise in 2015 (IIE, 2017). These efforts occurred just as the U.S. was setting the stage for immigration measures that would result in one of the major historical declines in their global student enrollment. Contrary to U.S. practices, global competitors commonly use immigration measures to incentivize international student enrollments, such as expediting visa approvals and offering work permits during studies or after graduation (Helms, 2015; Helms et al., 2015). Canada, for instance, offers special incentives to their international students by allowing for enrollment in a Canadian university to count as extra credit in the petition for permanent residence (Canada Immigration and Citizenship, 2019).

The landscape in international student enrollment has been shifting for more than a decade. For many countries, the immigration and policy decisions made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will define their future position as a global higher education provider. The fact that the United States has successfully come back from three waves of major enrollment declines is not necessarily a guarantee that such recovery will occur again. Even though the reputation, quality, and attractiveness of U.S. colleges and universities remain reiterated in global circles, they no longer present sufficient motivators for international students to choose the United States as their host country. Instead, the global student body is increasingly concerned with long-term prospects of their education, rather than just the quality of their college experience.

Thus, the recurring declines in international student enrollments in the United States call for a more deliberate and methodical approach to understanding not only the pre-arrival visa challenges of this student group but also their immigration experiences as they settle on U.S. campuses. Even if recruitment efforts improve and the United States restores its global competitiveness, its educational institutions are facing significant challenges in ensuring the continuous presence of international students, along with providing them with educational opportunities equal to those of domestic students. Unfortunately, immigration measures imposed since the emergence of COVID-19 further obstructed these goals, making the U.S. position on the

global education market even more uncertain and students' academic trajectories more precarious.

COVID-19 Measures

A U.S. immigration directive was issued on July 6, 2020, stating that international students enrolled in fully online coursework in fall 2020 would not be allowed to remain in the United States. The directive further stipulated that international students enrolled in online classes would not be issued visas and would not be allowed to enter the U.S. According to the rule, enrolled students had the option to transfer to another institution that offers in-person instruction or to leave the United States. Failure to obey this directive was announced to result in immigration consequences that may include an initiation of removal proceedings (ICE, 2020).

Within days of issuing the directive, U.S. colleges, universities, and professional organizations expressed their disagreement with the rule, requesting the decision to be rescinded and international students enrolled in online courses allowed to stay in the U.S. Following a lawsuit filed by Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the ICE directive was rescinded on August 14, 2020, and the exemptions for nonimmigrant students to enroll in fully online coursework during the pandemic were extended to the fall 2020 semester (ICE, 2020). However, the government's willingness to provide such extensions in the upcoming semesters remains unknown. This uncertainty is what makes international students concerned for their academic progress, as many of their educational institutions have already made long-term plans for online instruction due to the ongoing emergence of new COVID cases and the extensions of quarantine measures.

Before the ICE directive, the U.S. government issued several COVID-19 measures to which international students were subject. In March 2020, during the peak of the pandemic, the U.S. Department of State suspended routine immigrant and nonimmigrant visa appointments at their embassies and consulates (NAFSA, 2020a). This decision, even though warranted, prevented all newly admitted international students from obtaining student visas and arriving in the U.S. Directly affected were also all international students and scholars who were outside of the U.S. when this decision was implemented and who became unable to renew or extend their visas. Consequently, they were prevented from returning to the United States and continuing their academic careers.

Several other travel-related directives ensued, such as limiting the entry of certain international student and scholar visa categories and suspending the entry of internationals from certain countries. The most

significant impact, however, was caused by the decision reached in June 2020, when the president issued a proclamation suspending the issuance of non-immigrant H-1B visas. Historically, H-1B work visas represented a critical pathway for international graduates and scholars to engage in employment in the U.S. (NAFSA, 2020a).

Among the barriers yet to be manifested is the uncertain future of Optional Practical Training (OPT), a post-graduation employment opportunity that motivates many international students to pursue their higher education in the U.S. Currently, OPT permits international students to work in the United States for 12 months upon completing an academic program or for 24 months in the case of STEM graduates. In 2019 alone, more than 223,000 international students were participating in OPT (IIE, 2019). Even though no measures have yet been taken to limit or suspend this opportunity, many public requests have been made to restrict the OPT program. Several U.S. senators and other independent groups made public recommendations and requests to end the OPT program to promote post-pandemic economic recovery and employment opportunities for U.S. citizens (NAFSA, 2020b). At the same time, many educational institutions and professional organizations issued public statements in support of international students documenting the positive impacts of their uninterrupted presence and OPT engagement.

Even if the OPT program sustains, international graduates are facing the same challenges as any other students completing academic programs – uncertain employment prospects caused by national hiring freezes. The additional burden that international students encounter is that their OPT or other employment must begin 60 days after graduation in order for them to remain in the U.S. Namely, 60 days is a pre-departure preparation and grace period that international students have to either start their OPT, change their immigration status to another category (most commonly H-1B), or leave the country (USCIS, 2020). Unfortunately, the extreme impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the U.S. economy have led to massive hiring freezes and furloughs, impeding the employment prospects of all college graduates, including international students. Hiring freezes have been especially prominent in the higher education sector, as many colleges and universities encountered financial challenges caused by unexpected costs and revenue losses. At the same time, higher education has been a leader in international students' employments, especially for international graduate students continuing their academic careers as postdoctoral scholars, researchers, and faculty. The reliance of international graduates on the higher education sector is perhaps best reflected by the legislation stating that H-1B workers

employed at an institution of higher education are not subject to the annual cap in the number of H-1B visas awarded to foreign workers (USCIS, 2020). Still, hiring freezes in the higher education sector and the previously noted suspension of H-1B visa issuance are just some of the factors that make academic and career trajectories of international students and scholars uncertain and unpredictable.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the adaptive leadership framework (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009). In its essence, adaptive leadership denotes individual and collective adaptations to changing and challenging environments. Specifically, adaptive leadership is “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 2). Practicing adaptive leadership means assisting others with the discomfort and distress they are experiencing by demonstrating compassion, while leading them through the change (Heifetz et al., 2009). This study examined if and how higher education institutions in the U.S., specifically their offices of International Student Services (ISS), utilized the adaptive leadership framework to guide their international students in the time of distress and uncertainties caused by the tightened immigration measures.

As already discussed, the recently imposed immigration restrictions and higher education reaction will affect not only international students in the U.S. will also likely shape the U.S. position in the global higher education market. Thus, applying the adaptive leadership framework in these contexts allowed for the exploration of higher education adaptation within changing environments and an expected decline in international student enrollments. Specifically, the adaptive leadership framework allowed the researcher to investigate (a) if International Student Services implemented adaptations required of them and (b) how effectively they engaged in preparing their international students to deal with the current obstacles.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was designed as a qualitative document analysis study with a document defined as any text “that can be published or unpublished, written, oral and virtual and may reside in either the public, private or virtual domains” (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 281). Document analysis, in particular, denotes a systematic process of reviewing and evaluating documents “in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). This definition was further advanced by Tight (2019) who noted that such an analysis also includes investigating the

purposes and context of document creation, as well as a document's ongoing use and relation to other related documents.

The document analysis research design was deemed as the most appropriate for this study because its purpose was to systematically analyze the available content by identifying common themes and extracting significant meanings (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Specifically, the goal behind this design was to identify patterns, themes, and categories from the reviewed International Student Services websites that would best reflect the phenomenon examined in the research question.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from the websites of International Student Services (ISS) at U.S. colleges and universities that enrolled the highest share of international students in the academic year 2018-2019. The list of institutions was obtained from the Open Door report published annually by the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2019). The report included top 40 doctoral degree-granting universities, top 40 master's colleges and universities, top 40 baccalaureate colleges, top 40 associate's colleges, and top 40 special focus institutions enrolling international students. Together, these 200 institutions enrolled 519,046 or more than half of all international students present in the United States in 2018-2019. The researcher compiled the list of all 200 institutions and removed duplicate entries, which resulted in the final sample of 160 colleges and universities.

Once the institutions were identified, the researcher reviewed the websites of their offices of International Student Services (ISS) and examined their content. In doing so, the researcher deductively coded the website content by looking for any COVID-related announcements, reactions, or guidance that these offices provided to their international students since the pandemic outbreak in March 2020.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the website content, the researcher followed the three-stage approach recommended by Roller (2019). The first stage included developing an accurate but flexible codebook that would ensure a consistent coding process. In this stage, the researcher developed an Excel spreadsheet with predefined codes that were systematically applied when reviewing each website. These codes included "Yes" or "No" codebook entries regarding the presence of items addressing COVID-response on ISS websites. The second data analysis stage involved collecting the content from ISS websites that

provided COVID-19 response content to their international students. Specifically, this step included carefully reviewing the available content to develop structural codes or content-based words and phrases that would best illustrate that content. The third, and final stage included organizing the collected data by groups of codes and creating meaningful code clusters. These clusters are reported in the findings section as themes.

Trustworthiness

The advantage of document analysis research over other qualitative traditions is the absence of a researcher-participant relationship. Being distanced from the research participants and working with the content only, the potential bias of the researcher-participant relationship and the researcher's impact on participants do not represent a concern (Roller, 2019). At the same time, this research design poses an increased risk of researcher-as-instrument bias as the researcher is independently creating and selecting the codes from the available content.

To increase the trustworthiness of the findings, the research implemented investigator triangulation (Roller, 2019) or intercoder reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). This approach involved comparing the codes that were independently developed by two different researchers. The codes and themes reported in the findings were independently developed by the principal investigator and a graduate research assistant. Then, both codebooks were reviewed and compared to solidify the interpretation of the data and increase the credibility of the findings. Both researchers offered feedback to one another as they developed the drafts of their findings and provided data-based evidence (e.g. website links and content) to support their analysis. The final results reported in this study were produced when the researchers addressed all inconsistencies in their coding and reconciled these differences through collaborative analysis.

RESULTS

The review of International Student Services websites from 160 institutions revealed the following findings regarding their responses and guidance provided to international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. As illustrated in Table 1, 119 of 160 institutions had COVID-related content and updates on their ISS websites. Still, 26% of colleges and universities enrolling the highest share of international students had no COVID-related content on the websites of their International Student Services.

Table 1:*Institutional Responses (N =160)*

COVID-related content	n	%
Yes	119	74%
No	41	26%

It is particularly interesting to note that some of the ISS websites that had no COVID-related updates for their international students actively advertised serving and supporting this student group. Similarly, several ISS websites without any COVID-related updates contained a list of frequently asked questions for their international students, but none of these questions had any mention of COVID or immigration measures imposed during the pandemic.

Table 2:*Website Content Themes*

Overarching Theme	Sub-themes
Immigration	I-20 documents
	Immigration status
	OPT program
	Visa and government services
Employment	Hiring freezes
	Post-graduation employment
	Remote employment
Academics	Admissions and transfers
	Academic programming
	Course modalities
	Leave of absence
	Research
	Transferring in/out
Travel	Travel restrictions
	Incoming/graduating student travel
Student Support	Bias, discrimination, and safety
	Counseling and psychological support
	Finances
	Healthcare
	ISS operations

Website Content Themes

The thematic analysis of the content from the websites of 119 ISSs that provided COVID-19 response and guidance to their international students revealed the following five themes or code clusters: (a) Immigration, (b) Employment, (c) Academics, (d) Travel, and (e) Student Support. Table 2 illustrates sub-categories within each theme or sub-content that different institutions prioritized on their websites. Each theme and corresponding sub-themes are further discussed in this section.

Immigration

The website content pertaining to immigration issues mostly focused on frequently asked questions about the I-20 document (a legal document issued by the U.S. government to international students certifying that they have been admitted to a full-time study program). This content included responses to questions about issuing I-20 documents to newly admitted students and extending I-20s for current students. The next sub-theme consisted of frequently asked questions about maintaining an international student status during the COVID pandemic. With that regard, ISSs guided students on how to maintain their student status by enrolling in a required number of courses, how to update their immigration paperwork (while inside or outside of the U.S.), and how to handle their visa expirations and extensions. Much attention has also been devoted to questions about the 5-month rule (a policy stating that international students in the U.S. who are away from classes for 5 months may lose their immigration status). A separate sub-category within this theme consisted of regular ISS updates about the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

Employment

This category primarily encompassed the list of frequently asked questions related to international student remote work during the pandemic. In that regard, ISSs offered directions for students working remotely, both to those employed part-time during their studies and those participating in Optional Practical Training (OPT). Closely related to this content was guidance regarding non-traditional employment offers caused by the pandemic, such as limited hours of employment, volunteer or unpaid work, remote internships, and similar. The majority of institutions also addressed the 90-day employment rule according to which international students not seeking or securing employment may stay up to 90 dates in the U.S. upon graduation. Some ISSs listed the information about the impact of national hiring freezes on international students' ability to secure employment, while

others handled the questions of students who were able to secure jobs but could not obtain social security numbers due to the closure of government offices.

Academics

ISS website content from this category mainly pertained to the questions related to different course modalities these institutions transitioned into during the pandemic, as well as the potential impact of different instructional formats on students' immigration status. On that note, ISSs published comprehensive guidance about course formats in which international students may enroll while maintaining their immigration status. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of the information offered was related to the academic restrictions imposed on international students by the recent ICE directive.

Students transferring in or out of an institution were given additional support, mainly concerning course modalities offered and transfer requirements. Several institutions published further guidance to their newly admitted students who were still in their home countries and who planned to defer admission due to the inability to schedule a visa appointment or to travel. Similarly, a number of ISS offices compiled a list of frequently asked questions for students planning to take a leave of absence. Several colleges and universities dedicated particular efforts to their international students still present on campuses and in residential housing. Such content mainly addressed the issues of academic and campus programming available to students during campus closures. Lastly, significant attention was dedicated to developing guidance for graduate students engaged in research, specifically regarding their inability to continue or conduct research or secure research grants and funds.

Travel

The category of travel was quite straightforward and contained consistent content among different websites. Much of the information was presented in the form of regular travel restriction updates from the Department of State, along with clarifying their potential impact on international students. The second sub-theme consisted of the most common questions from either incoming students or recent graduates, both of whom were facing mobility challenges caused by travel restrictions. ISSs also informed their students about alternative means to obtain travel signatures (required of all international students entering the U.S.). Lastly, a few ISSs provided written letter templates aimed to serve as supporting documentation

for incoming students concerned that they would not be permitted to board their flights or enter the United States.

Student Support

The final theme comprised various frequently asked questions and updates that could not be categorized within any of the previously discussed themes. The main focal point of this content were questions related to health care, mainly health insurance coverage for COVID testing and treatment and health insurance requirements for international students residing outside of the United States. Counseling and psychological support, along with mental health resources, represented another sub-theme. Numerous institutions connected their international students with counseling centers as a means of providing psychological assistance to students who may be experiencing mental health issues caused by isolation and disconnectedness from their families and friends. Several institutions initiated commendable efforts in addressing the issues of international student discrimination that emerged during the pandemic, including but not limited to discrimination against Asian and Chinese students. The resources of this type also encompassed guidance for reporting hate crimes and discrimination against international students and general resources for all students encountering bias.

The next group of questions involved finances and inquiries about financial resources available, refund options for students not enrolled in classes, tuition and fee costs for different course modalities, and general resources for international students experiencing financial challenges. A few institutions published guidance for students who mistakenly received a stimulus check for which they were not eligible. Lastly, much of the content within this theme discussed revised hours and operations of ISS offices, alternative formats and structures of immigration advising, and website links to external resources such as the Social Security Administration, Customs and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, Department of State, and Center for Disease Control.

Official Statements

The last group of findings obtained from ISS websites revealed that only 27 institutions or 17% of sampled colleges and universities issued an official statement in support of their international students during the COVID pandemic. Among those that made such an initiative, official statements were released by several different parties. Table 3 presents the issuing bodies among the 27 institutions that made public statements to and regarding their international students.

Table 3:*Official Statements Issued (N = 27)*

Issuing Body	n
President	17
Institution	5
Dean	2
Chancellor	1
Provost	1
Vice Provost	1

The review of the focus and content of issued statements revealed further differences among institutions. As presented in Table 4, 18 or 67% of the issued statements addressed the ICE directive preventing international students enrolled in online coursework from staying in the U.S, as well as the ICE decision to rescind the rule shortly after its implementation. The next group of statements (8 or 30%) included messages of support to international students in the light of COVID-19 and tightened immigration measures. Lastly, only one statement or 4% of the content focused specifically on providing public expression of support for Chinese nationals at the institution – students, faculty, and researchers.

Table 4:*The Focus of Official Statements (N = 27)*

Statement Focus	n
Reaction to ICE rule	18
Statement of support for international students	8
Statement of support for Chinese nationals	1

The first group of official statements pertaining to the ICE directive mainly expressed strong disagreement with and opposition to the ICE rule. Words of criticism, disapproval, and condemnation of the directive were the prevalent theme among the statements of this type. The second theme that emerged from these announcements were public words of celebration and congratulations issued after the directive was rescinded. Such proclamations offered reassurance for international students while praising and applauding

the actions of higher education institutions that led to the rescinding of the directive.

The second category of statements comprised all public announcements that acknowledged the challenges that international students in the U.S. have encountered during the pandemic and offered support to these students. The majority of statements recognized the difficult circumstances that many international students encountered and expressed public promise to support their international student body in navigating these circumstances. Some institutions dedicated particular focus to expressing the appreciation for international student presence on their campuses and acknowledging the value of such presence. Others reemphasized their commitment to diversity, multiculturalism, and global engagement. Several announcements publicly condemned recent immigration and other policies that are particularly disadvantageous for international students, describing them as cruel and xenophobic.

Lastly, only one official statement particularly focused on expressing public support for Chinese students, scholars, and faculty. This message reflected on the government proclamations restricting entry for certain Chinese students and researchers and the proposed federal legislation aimed to prohibit Chinese nationals from receiving student visas in STEM fields. The institution acknowledged the value of Chinese students and scholars to their academic community and raised a concern about the arbitrary nature of these restrictions.

LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the response and guidance that offices of International Student Services at U.S. colleges and universities provided to their students in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The review of ISS websites among 160 institutions enrolling the highest share of international students revealed that even though the majority of websites (74%) provided such guidance, the remaining 26% did not include any such content. The main themes identified from ISS website content included academics, immigration, employment, and travel guidance offered to international students. The results of this study also revealed that only 27 or 17% of the reviewed institutions issued official statements to and in support of their international students during the COVID pandemic.

Before discussing the implications of these findings, it is important to acknowledge their limitations. First, content analysts engage in the interpretation of the data only after the data have been generated. Consequently, they have to cope with the content represented in a variety of

formats, patterns, and structures, which may cause difficulties in finding what they are looking for (Krippendorff, 2004). The researcher in this study invested significant time and effort in reviewing the content of ISS websites and searching for the information investigated. At the same time, however, this information may have been present but housed under a different webpage, thus resulting in such content to be reported in this study as non-existing. Additionally, the content investigated in this research may have been shared with international students at these institutions via internal communication channels, such as emails, listservs, Learning Management Systems, or other platforms. The second limitation is reflected in the fact that the two major constructs examined in this study – the COVID outbreak and immigration measures – took place in March and June 2020 respectively, while the data for this study were collected in September 2020. Thus, it may be possible that the reviewed websites initially included such content but that it is no longer present.

DISCUSSION

Despite these limitations, the findings of this research yield valuable and credible insights. The advantage of document analysis over other qualitative approaches is that it can cope with large volumes of data. The ability of document analysis to investigate large volumes of text found a particular application in this study by allowing the researcher to generate findings from the review of 160 websites of the institutions that enroll more than one-half of all international students in the United States. Even though this study did not offer insights into the practices of all higher education institutions, the purposeful sample of institutions that enroll the highest share of international students allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about the COVID-related guidance and support provided to the majority of international students in the U.S.

It is critical that academic institutions and their International Student Services offices provide detailed academic guidance to all international students as their immigration status is directly dependent on the number and the format of courses they take. Further, international students are in desperate need of timely immigration guidance from their institutions in times when immigration restrictions are being continuously revised by the government. This support must not only include regular immigration updates but also active advocacy for international students' rights to continue their education and maintain their uninterrupted presence in the U.S.

In that regard, this study concludes that the majority of the sampled U.S. colleges and universities included publicly available information about

the ways in which they supported their international students. It is also probable that other institutions provided support in different ways, such as emailing students or virtually advising them. For only 17% of the sampled colleges and universities, institutional leadership issued official statements through their ISS websites in support of their international students. Similarly, it is possible that others have implemented such actions through non-public and internal communication channels. Either way, during the global crisis of unprecedented scale, immediate, proactive, and strategic support to all students disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including international, is of the utmost importance.

As noted in the introductory section of this study, the United States has already struggled with maintaining its leading role in international student enrollments over the past decade (IIE, 2019). Unfortunately, the results from recent surveys on prospective students' intent to study in the U.S. indicate that these numbers will decrease further (IIE, 2020a). These predictions have already been confirmed by the most recent data revealing that the total number of international students at higher education institutions in the United States and studying online outside the United States decreased by 16% in Fall 2020 compared to the previous academic year (IIE, 2020b). This grim finding advances Choudaha's (2018) theory of recurring waves in international student enrollments by showing that enrollment declines are not a phenomenon of the past. It is alarming that the current, fourth wave appears to be the most drastic of them all.

Despite the admirable efforts made by many institutions from the sample, the findings of this study still indicate that the leaders from 133 institutions and 41 ISS offices did not publicly support or reassure their international students through their websites in the time of global crisis (but it is possible that they had done so through either internal channels or other public venues). These results are particularly critical when compared to the recent surveys of U.S. colleges and universities regarding how they supported international students during the pandemic. As many as 97% of respondent institutions stated they have been providing continuous support to their international students (IIE, 2020b), while 85% reported posting updated COVID information on their websites (IIE, 2020a). As can be seen, the analysis of institutional website content revealed less favorable information. In times of uncertainty, it is critical that institutions publicly share their COVID response plans with not only currently enrolled but also prospective international students many of whom still struggle to make informed decisions about their future academic plans.

Providing effective student support in a time of crisis is even more critical knowing that safety, security, and continuous educational access are emerging as critical factors in international student selection of a particular host destination (Nicholls, 2018). Therefore, the superb quality of education, including remote and online education highlighted by many U.S. colleges and universities, is no longer a sufficient motivator for the global student body. In that regard, the results of this research revealed that even though the majority of reviewed institutions were resolved to an adaptive leadership framework (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009), they applied this framework to different extents. Namely, 74% of the institutions provided COVID-19 related content on their ISS websites which can be perceived as adaptive leadership in terms of “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 2). However, only 10% of institutional leaders showed public compassion to their international student body while leading them through the change. In other words, even though the majority of ISS implemented immigration adaptations required of them, very few demonstrated the traits of adaptive leadership by expressing public concern with how students adjusted to new circumstances and providing them with a supportive environment.

IMPLICATION

This study produced important implications for all higher education institutions and for ISS offices that are yet to provide their international communities with guidance and support through their websites. U.S. colleges and universities can use the findings of this study as a starting point for developing their COVID or other emergency response content for international students and for issuing official statements in support of their global student body. Several specific recommendations stem from this study.

Given the direct relationship between international students’ opportunity to secure employment upon graduation and their ability to stay in the U.S., additional advice and counsel is necessary for this domain. With the uncertain future of Optional Practical Training and widespread national hiring freezes, colleges and universities must help their international students understand their employment options and make informed, rather than haphazard decisions. Next, due to the rapidly changing travel restrictions, international students need to be presented with the mobility options for their future semesters. Consequently, institutions must provide detailed guidelines for all categories of international students affected by travel restrictions – actively enrolled students who are currently in the U.S., actively enrolled

students who are currently outside of the U.S., and incoming or prospective students.

Additionally, the implications of these findings extend beyond ISS offices and apply to institutions and wider communities. Even though diversity and internationalization are frequently featured on institutional websites and used as a popular marketing tool, the results of this research revealed a different picture regarding the actual commitments to these constructs. Therefore, institutions can use the obtained results as a tool to demonstrate the dedication to their institutional values, missions, and visions. With that respect, this study serves as an important and comprehensive research record of what diversity and internationalization mean for higher education institutions in the COVID-19 environment.

This study is particularly informative for institutional leadership by offering possible ways in which they can either provide the necessary support to their international students or lead their academic communities in a time of crisis. Historically, the leadership has always had a vital role in communicating the institutional stance in times of crisis. By applying the adaptive leadership framework, leaders can embrace the roles of advocates and allies for not only international but all other student groups whose education may be disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

As we brace for the next wave of declined international enrollments, along with grim future prospects in this domain, now is the time for college leaders to take a distinct position and directly connect their proactive support of international students with the mission, vision, and values of their institutions. Given that the sample for this study consisted of colleges and universities that enroll the highest number of international students in the U.S., leading through support and compassion is critical for sustaining the global prominence of these institutions. Taking a distinct position in the current immigration debate is the first step toward wider institutional engagement and collective support to international students.

Lastly, this study offers implications for practice for all other campus stakeholders working with and supporting international students (e.g., faculty, student affairs professionals, administrators). Additionally, engaged and proactive support also means reaching out beyond institutional borders and to wider educational and social communities. Securing public support from significant allies such as professional organizations, for instance, can assist colleges and universities in reiterating the compassion and support for international students with greater trustworthiness.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the purpose of this study was to portray the extent and scope of the support provided to international students by their academic institutions, to inform the field on best practices for supporting the global student body in times of crisis, and to identify gaps and limitations among such efforts. As a result, this study identified the commendable efforts undertaken by many colleges and universities in support of their international students. At the same time, this research elucidated the need for a more consistent, thorough, and categorical institutional support in a time of uncertainty.

The unpredictable future of the pandemic and the dismal economic outlooks make it paramount for all higher education institutions to provide timely and continuous guidance to their international students. While global student mobility will inevitably be disrupted in the months and even years to come, the students who have already invested in their international education and those who are preparing to do so deserve adequate assistance and support in accomplishing their academic plans. In that regard, this study provided a blueprint for building the necessary support systems for international students in the U.S. to benefit both parties involved – students and their educational institutions.

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Socio- Psycho- Religious Responses to Covid-19 in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic once again challenged the advancement of modern biological sciences. Man found himself utterly blinded by the nano-Lilliputian corona virus known as Covid-19. Against the background of daily death tolls all over the globe, scientists and researchers spent strenuous days and months to invent Covid-19 vaccines; governments adjusted and readjusted their combat policies, and WHO continued presiding over the conundrum with periodical situation studies and issuing warnings and updates. But a man is, after all, a man—a living symbiosis of social, psychological, moral, and a host of other values beyond the grasp of laboratories and offices. So one might be curious to know, how Bangladesh, in a far-flung corner of the globe, responded to Covid-19 in the early days of the onslaught, then in a one year span, and what the encounter might look like from the perspectives of sociology, psychology, and religion, besides economy. This paper, more theoretical and perceptual than scientific, will examine how the Covid-19 proliferation in Bangladesh affected the socio-psycho- religious equilibrium of her people like the people of the rest of the world. It will further explore how Bangladesh, till this date, managed to bridle the rate of infection and death through strategic policies, and cruised a moderate path to curb down the nascent mass panic and defiant religious dogmatism, followed by a timely vaccination program.

Keywords: Covid-19, community transmission, socio-psycho-behavioral patterns, religiosity, strategic policies, herd immunity, vaccination.

INTRODUCTION

The sudden onset of Covid-19 pandemic caught the world completely unprepared. The monumental advancement of medical sciences stood utterly perplexed and clueless. It was an unbelievable spectacle ever witnessed by mankind. It was equally unthinkable how fast it travelled continents in a matter of weeks. The powerful governments (in all nuances of meaning) found themselves in a state of total disarray. The corona virus turned everything upside down. Nature's modus operandi of retaliation over man's daily encroachment upon nature proved once again inevitable, subtle and incalculably destructive. Not to speak of the threatening giant viruses lying under permafrost (Giant virus, 2015), just a species of Chinese virus proved enough to unsettle the whole world.

The Global Scenario and Bangladesh Situation

Historically, mankind had been through wars, famines and epidemics every now and then with much higher tolls, but never got so lost, panicky and unarmed as with the onslaught of Covid-19. The social media got flooded with videos of wild animals moving out to the streets, and men bolting the doors of their homes! Towns, cities and countries, one after another, closed their borders, suspended flight operations. Lockdowns came into force; all economic activities were abruptly halted. The familiar scenes of crowded streets, traffic jam, noisy malls, busy offices and educational institutions turned unfamiliar. The lead news in the media was corona virus and the number of infected, recovered and dead patients all over the globe, its acceleration, preventive measures, WHO's routine bulletins etc.

The global tour of the Chinese virus (November 17, 2019) spared no unwilling host, rich or poor, spared no worlds—the First, Second or the Third. The equilibrium of the societies, politics, economics, cultures, life-styles, religious faiths, and psycho-behavioral patterns of people experienced a terrible jolt all over the globe that redefined and restructured the strategy of survival of every country. Parallel to the scientists' ongoing struggle for inventing and marketing Covid-19 vaccines to disempower the corona virus and its killing capacity to a zero level, a chaotic spectacle of national, societal and individual psycho-physical responses to Covid-19 started surfacing as the constant flow of information continued pouring in. Based on ever-changing data of the Covid-19 onslaught, a conceptual study on a particular country can be of interest to show how the concerned people offered diverse responses to a fatal disease like Covid-19. The focus of the present article is centered on Bangladesh and her people's socio-psycho-religious responses to Covid-19. But for the long stay of the virus, nature of the fluidity of data, inadequate

tests, and reliability of the sources related to the figures of the infected, cured and dead, the article restricts itself to a premise more theoretical than scientific and more inferential than conclusive. Moreover, in the passage of one year, the change of physical, psychological and societal approach to Covid-19 in Bangladesh (as in other countries) along with the virus's indefinite stay restricts the article further to articulate any plausible conclusion.

Bangladesh: First Detection of Covid-19

The first three patients infected with Covid-19 were confirmed on 8 March, 2020 in Bangladesh by the country's lone epidemiology institute, IEDCR. According to WHO- situation report (05 March to 05 October 2020), the total number of the corona-virus cases is 2,001,431; confirmed cases 370,132; recovered cases 283,182 and dead 5,375 (Corona virus disease, 2020). But worldometers.info reports on 7 October 2020: the number of corona-virus cases is 371; deaths 5,405 and recovered 284,833 (Worldmetre) year later, on 01 March 2021, WHO- situation report -53 (Morbidity and mortality, 2021) gives staggering figures: confirmed cases stood to 546,216; recovered cases 496,924, and death 8,408. The country's ability for conducting Covid -19 tests went up proportionally to a higher figure of 4,044,027.

The news of Covid-19 eruption in China, even when reported extensively in the news and electronic media in Bangladesh, spread little concern in the public mind. Most people took it casually as if it were a distant problem of a distant country. On 01 February 2020 Bangladesh Biman, the national carrier, evacuated as many as 312 stranded Bangladeshis from Wuhan. Though it left little ripples of concern over the majority of people, it triggered suspicious angst among the conscious and educated elite of the country. To a great relief of all, they all tested negative. It was stated earlier, the first three corona-virus cases were detected on 08 March 2020 and two of them were returnees from Italy. In the meantime Italy got itself entrapped into the worst pandemic scenario: it turned into the epicenter of Covid-19 in Europe. On 15 March 142 Bangladeshis returned from Italy to Dhaka. The fiasco of health check and impatient wage earners, though grimly taken, signaled a high risk of spreading the virus to the far-flung areas the returnees would travel. This sent a nervous cold wave across the nation. That was the onset of the onslaught. Against this background of nationwide concern, the government decided to scale down the Father of the Nation's birth centenary on 17 March 2020 (Bangabandhu's birthday, 2020). It was followed by closing down of all educational institutions; sporadic and all-out lockdown;

closure of mills, factories and supermalls; gradual restrictions on roads and highway traffic and air flights. Bangladesh structured and restructured its strategy to combat against this formidable virus relying more on the ministry of health and the lone epidemiology institute excluding the private health service sector (Cousins 2020) reported “The Lancet”, 29 August 2020. It might be worthwhile to observe how a society, composed of diverse faiths, classes, ethnicities and their financial strengths/ weaknesses—elite-non-elite, literate-illiterate, Bourgeoise-Proletariat all put together—responded to this long- term havoc.

Early Days of Covid-19 and Its Impact on Various Sectors

Initially there was a dead lack of concern about the new virus even when it had already infiltrated into the country. A nation that had the experience of battling malaria, cholera, dengue in epidemic scale, besides other regular killer diseases, took it more or less casually. With lockdowns on, an entrapped population cautiously monitored this endgame. Like bystanders, they gaped at the empty alleys, roads, streets and highways and heard only the sirens of ambulances and peals of the police patrol cars. Few dared steps outside. This was clearly a sign of shock and vulnerability.

The lower strata of the society living under the poverty line that sharply rose from 20.5% in June 2019 to 29.5% in June 2020 faced the grimmest reality. The slum people, pavement-dwellers, vendors, rickshaw-pullers, hired day laborers etc. were on the top of the worst sufferers. Along with the previously recorded poor, a new set of lower middle class poor emerged; ‘tens of millions of people’ lost ‘their jobs’ which “brought them below the poverty line” (Bhuiyan, 2020) What the report missed was that in many private sectors, salary got dwindled into a half or even less. Though government and voluntary organizations came up with aids to help temporarily the non-earning families, but no aids could be given for eternity. The lower middle-class people could hardly bring them down to line up for relief materials and photo sessions; they were sandwiched between dignity and empty wallet. The result was an existential crisis –either defy lockdown and earn or perish. The mantra of wearing masks and maintaining social distance started losing grip over their innate habit; the call of hunger turned out to be more powerful than the fear of disease and death. Only a conscious segment of the population, like the Pope among the sinners, followed the government and WHO’s guidelines. The ignominious burial scenes of Covid-19 induced deaths—burial personnel with protective gears on, no relatives nearby, wrapped dead bodies pulled and dropped into graves—poked up an unimaginable horror. The social media played a dark role in multiplying the

intensity of mass phobia. The grossness of the final ritual, however, subsided with the introduction of a better coordinated humane plan. The procession of death, in addition to its crudity, could not deter people in the least to begin a new way of life, accepting the reality and adjusting to it. Call it normalcy or not, it was the social behavioral pattern that brought the airs of normalcy in an otherwise pandemic situation.

Lockdown Withdrawn: Socio-economic Concerns

To run the wheels of economy, rather to salvage it, the government partially eased lockdown on 30 May 2020 and allowed some garment factories, small business holdings to operate following the government's health guidelines (Sakib 2020). Partial withdrawal, however, soon paved the way for a final good bye to lockdown. Once the sluice gate of lockdown was lifted, people took it for a safe return to old life and life-style, as if, corona-virus were a nonexistent threat. That tells why the graph of the suspected, infected and dead people rose high and higher till mid-October 2020. The necessity of keeping alive, on the one hand, and inadequate healthcare strategies, on the other hand, reflect a social mind-set which is diehard for survival but dismissive of the consequences, restorative in values but carefree in behavior. This explains why even in mid-October the official daily death toll fluctuated from 25 to 30. Sociologically this is a third world scenario: densely living illiterate, half-literate or literate people, economically struggling, habitually opinionated and all-knowing, fighting against an unknown virus with their old attitude and blind apathy. It is to be remembered, Bangladesh has a population of 165,830,170 as of Monday, March 8, 2021 with a density as high as 1265 per sq.km (Countries in the world, 2020).

Psychological Responses to Covid-19

The above sociological factors overlap with many of their psychological counterparts. Their major problem lies in not understanding the invisible destructiveness of the virus which made the people, in return, more defiant and aggressive and less rational and cautious. In plain terms, psychology is the science of mind that analyzes how under a given situation human mind receives and reacts to the situation. The process of shaping the reception and reaction entails the whole gamut of individual mindset, insight into things, individual, familial and institutional grooming, and social behavioral pattern etc. This has been quite evident in the mass psychological responses to Covid-19 in Bangladesh. In a highly stratified society where divides exist in the form of educated and un/half-educated, hygiene conscious and hygiene blunt, pro-past and pro-present, individualistic and herd-minded binaries, not to speak of the cliché wealthy- penniless, town-rural dialectics.

The rampage of Covid-19 exposed this eternal dichotomy more than ever. Many stepped out of the door to struggle for livelihood and many to safeguard their jobs while many more went out for not-so-urgent shopping, strolling and road-side chitchat. Particularly the young people, either out of their youthful adventurism or under the false notion of their non-vulnerability to Covid-19 related infection, emerged as a defiant social group. We saw in the early days of Covid-19 infiltration the students crowding in the tourist spots, especially sea-beaches, and where not. But Bangladesh government closed down all educational institutions to force them stay at home and attend online classes. The Don Quixotes mistook the national crisis for a virus-born summer vacation. The media of all nomenclatures ran picaresque videos of unmasked thousands and (un)social distancing in the streets, markets and other likely places. The government's repeated appeal and instructions fell on their deaf ears. Only the solvent elderly people with records of previous complications seemed to smell the danger and stayed cautious. The higher death rate of this age group might have made them extra watchful, or the death toll could have gone higher. Another psychological (sociological too) trajectory of the prolonged pandemic is the suppression of the real causes of deaths of many people by their relatives. It could not be ascertained whether the deaths were due to Covid-19 or other diseases. Natural deaths are very likely, but the fresh memory of the Covid-related burials, restrictions on the proximity of the relatives of the dead for health reasons (there had been cases of self-withdrawal) and other elaborate rituals (not excluded but abridged) could have left an impact on concealing facts. If we hypothetically take these cases (in absence of valid records) as manipulated ones, then the mass psychosociological syndrome cannot be ruled out. Again the reported events of socially boycotting neighbors, leaving the infected and the deceased in the hospitals by their family members, throwing away suspected elderly parents by their children, even denying the deceased to have burial in local graveyards etc. in the early days of the pandemic speak more of psychological phobia than pragmatic caution (Bangladesh to ban all rallies, 2020). Covid-19 related fear and deaths are now an accepted reality. This pandemic struck first human physiology, then human psychology wrecking every norm of life and values of society, and thus adding an enormous load of anxiety, depression, morbidity, phobia and helplessness leading to the extent of committing suicides (Bangladesh to ban all rallies, 2020).

Religious Responses to Covid-19

Like the rest of the globe Covid-19 left a deep impact on the belief systems, religious rituals and practices in Bangladesh. It's a country of diverse

faiths with Muslims forming the majority (about 90%), and Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians comprising the rest (10%). Bangladesh is widely known as a moderate Muslim country where, besides the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, people are accommodating and tolerant to other faiths. By and large they are God-fearing, religious, ritualistic, and persevering to uphold the tenets of their faith, even though at times it borders on dogmatism. The pandemic unexpectedly halted the spontaneity of religious duties like daily and weekly Friday prayers in the mosques, pujas in the temples and pagodas, Sunday prayers in the churches. It robbed the colors of the festivities during the last two major Muslim festivals – Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha. In the meantime, major Muslim countries in Asia like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Malaysia imposed restrictions on mass prayers to control the community transmission. Saudi Arabia banned prayers at mosques over corona-virus fears, Aljazeera reported 20 March 2020 (Saudi Arabia bans prayers, 2020). A three-day religious mass gathering in Indonesia was cancelled in March 2020 (Subdued Eid al-Fitr in India, 2020). The Malaysian gathering in March 2020 proved to be fatal as the cases of corona-positive pilgrims had already carried the virus to their home countries, and 550 infections were reported (Subdued Eid al-Fitr in India, 2020). BBC reported on 19 March 2020, close to 30,000 people gathered at Raipur in Bangladesh for a mass prayer; this was convened, without the local government’s permission, to offer a special prayer for protection from Covid-19. Then dictated by precaution and prudence, the government of Bangladesh “banned all political, social, and religious rallies and gatherings in the country” (Doza 2020) The religious responses to Covid-19 in Bangladesh eventually turned out to be dichotomous in nature: some followed the health-guidelines without being less religious, and some defied the scientific warnings out of a combative religiosity. Videos on the social media went viral claiming that the corona-virus could do no harm to the faithfuls. The undecided mass thus tossed between the fear of real death and assurances of the voluble preachers while the procession of death went on unabated. The state of the religious conundrum, like genome mutation, slowly but steadily got tuned to some religiously pragmatic adjustments.

Major Religious Festivals: Apprehension and Reality

The two major religious festivals of the Muslims Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha, and the Durga Puja of the Hindu Community were observed during the last pandemic year. In anticipation of a traditional country-wide shopping spree, particularly during Eid ul Fitr, the government reiterated the usual warnings. In response to the government’s call, the elite shopping centers

assured the government of adequate sanitization and proper distancing. But in reality, crowds of undaunted men and women and children were found elbowing one another in the shopping malls. Though ‘No Mask, No Entry’ was effective in most of the posh malls, the small shopping places, bazaars, and cheap markets bothered little about health and hygiene restrictions. The psychology of attaining natural hard immunity, and the ideology of ‘non-contamination’ on the part of the faithful made the crowd even bolder. It got clearly manifested in the frenzied pre-Eid days. Caught between two matrices—religious sentiments and good governance—Bangladesh government chose a cautious middle course to contain the situation. The government restricted mass prayers in Eidgahs and open fields, and gave directives to put on mask and maintain social distance during Eid congregations. The measures, to a large extent, proved to be useful to curb the pandemic. (Subdued Eid al-Fitr in India, 2020). Despite administrative efforts, the post-Eid ul Adha Bangladesh saw a rise in Corona-related death after a low trend. On August 4, 2020 the Ministry of Health confirmed the rise: 50 more died in last 24 hours, raising the figure to (Kamruzzaman, 2020). A low profile Durga puja of the Hindus, besides a more student-oriented Saraswati puja (Saraswati being the deity of learning), drew a sizeable number of devotees. With masks on or off, social distancing in such gatherings could hardly been ensured. This pandemic put all the religious communities to test to figure out the difference between the spirit of religion and paraphernalia of rituals.

Covid Vaccination: Hesitation and Enthusiasm

Bangladesh launched countrywide Covid vaccination program on 7 February 2021. It was a bold and farsighted step taken by the government. The Economist reported on 27 January 2021, “More than 85 poor countries will not have widespread access to coronavirus vaccines before 2023” (More than 85 poor countries, 2020). In the first month of the inoculation campaign, 3,682,152 doses (first dose) were given (Our World in Data) in Bangladesh. The administration of doses was primarily based on age and vulnerability of profession. The government assured lower age groups would be gradually vaccinated. What might be a daunting task is to vaccinate hundreds and thousands of teachers at different levels-- from primary to university—both public and private, besides the frontline doctors, nurses, technicians etc. The laudable role of the head of the government was to stick to the commitment; the vaccination of the teachers started in March 2021 while that of the frontline health workers started a month ago, on 7 February 2021. It is to be remembered that all educational institutions of the country remained closed,

under government circular, from 17 March 2020, and the government announced to reopen the schools and colleges from 30 March and the universities from 24 May 2021 (Bangladesh announces reopening universities, 2021). In order to ensure the safety of the students, the teachers' vaccination was given a priority.

While some of the first world countries hesitated to start vaccination, Bangladesh government displayed an unhesitant and sagacious stance to ensure vaccine procurement and begin a massive inoculation program. The dialectic of hesitation and readiness on the part of the people was also explicit in the first one or two days. A lot of misgivings and misinformation went into the making of this religious, socio-psycho dilemma. It was, however, dispelled shortly; registered people spectacularly thronged the vaccination centers in an air of festivity. This can be interpreted as a major shift in public attitude.

CONCLUSION

Time is not yet ripe to reach a conclusion as we are yet to see the end of the pandemic. With spectacular mask-less crowds streaming on the roads, malls, prayer houses, virtually everywhere, maintaining little or no social distancing, and then against the backdrop of a huge number of unvaccinated people, it is yet to see where we stand. And as it appears, we will have to go more miles before we win over Covid-19.

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