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JUMP seeks to advance knowledge of minority and underrepresented people in local, regional, and international settings by publishing narratives, theoretical and empirically based research articles, and reflections. JUMP is indexed in major databases.

The Journal is international in scope and includes work by scholars in a wide range of academic fields and disciplines. Contributions from researchers and professionals in fields like sociology, psychology, higher education, philosophy, education, and cultural studies are welcome in the Journal.

The Journal's audience includes scholars and researchers in social sciences who work on the issues of ethnicity and race, caste and class, religion and spirituality, gender and sexual orientation, power and privilege, wealth and income, health and well-being, beliefs and value systems, and the intersections of these issues.

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Differences in Career Outcome Expectations of College Students by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how U.S. college students' career outcome expectations—what they hope to get out of their careers—vary by intended career path, racial/ethnic groups, gender, and other individual difference factors. The data were drawn from the Persistence Research in Science and Engineering (PRiSE) survey, a national study of U.S. college students enrolled in college English courses (n = 7505). An exploratory factor analysis revealed four foci of career outcome expectations, which we labeled as follows: extrinsic (rewards are external, such as money or status), work-life balance (work does not consume all of a person's time/energy), pioneering (work is intellectually stimulating and cutting edge), and people-related (work involves working with and helping others). While controlling for career interest, our findings indicate that students' gender and race/ethnicity influence their career outcome expectations in a wide variety of ways. Due to the differences in career outcome expectations associated with student backgrounds and demographics beyond career interest, recruiters and program directors looking to attract more diverse populations may benefit from matching the career outcomes they present and offer with those populations' outcome expectations.

Keywords: *career interest, gender, race/ethnicity, socialization, STEM careers*

INTRODUCTION

Work is a central aspect of an individual's life (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000). It contributes to one's positive self-concept, self-satisfaction, happiness, identity, and fulfillment, but also to misery, unhappiness, and boredom (Fogg, 2012; Gagné & Bhave, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000). For most of human history, work has been fairly immutable and divided along gender and class lines. By contrast, young adults in the U.S. today are faced with almost infinite choices in their career paths. The most recent generation to enter the workforce, termed "millennials," faces a unique labor milieu, where they have been raised to believe they can pursue any career they desire. As the freedom to choose an occupation expands, one's job becomes less about inevitability and more about individual preferences, desires, and the fulfillment of individual potential. And while "men and women say they would keep working even if they did not have to," the motivations and values behind why we work have changed over time from an existential necessity to a calling, to social status, to material gain, to personal fulfillment (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000, p. 33). Studying which careers youth end up selecting, and for what reasons, has become critically important.

The study of career development began in the early 1900s and continues to be an important field today (McMahon, 2014a). Researchers have long understood the importance of examining the choice and development of careers. In today's diverse work force, implicit and explicit racism and the gender glass ceiling still persist. Career development researchers have begun to shift attention to disadvantaged and underrepresented groups (Hazari et al., 2013b; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2011; Reyes, Kobus, & Gillock, 1999; Sandberg, Ehrhardt, Mellins, Ince, & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1987), and this focus is bound to gain in importance. Some work that particularly targets underrepresented groups in the labor force has hypothesized that the observed gender and race/ethnicity gaps may not result from a lack of opportunities, but a lack of desire (Reyes et al., 1999; Sandberg et al., 1987). This finding highlights the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to an individual's career expectations, and whether they differ by gender or race/ethnicity.

Today, young people are forming certain expectations of what benefits they will get out of their careers (e.g., money, fame, time for family, flexible hours, etc.) and how those outcomes will affect their personal fulfillment. Career outcome expectations (COEs) are what students desire from their future occupations (Fouad & Smith, 1996; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). We believe that people may vary in what

they want to get out of their careers. This may be different for people who select different careers, or are of different gender, or different racial and ethnic background. For example, COEs may be connected with stereotypes about certain careers (e.g., a health career is regarded as being people related, or a massage therapist is believed to have a more flexible work-life balance).

Empirically, COEs with "people" or "thing" (object) orientations are associated with various college majors. Yang and Barth (2015) found that chemistry, engineering, mathematics, and physical science majors had the lowest ratings for people-oriented careers; jobs affording family and social impact goals mapped to people-orientation; and jobs affording status goals mapped to thing-orientation. Extant research on the importance of finding a work-life balance has mixed results as to whether work-life balance is universally appealing or only desirable to those who can fully take advantage of it (Casper & Buffardi, 2004). For example, one study found specific work benefits, like telecommuting and flexible work time, to have varying importance depending on the individual (Rau & Hyland, 2002), while another study found flexible career paths to be universally attractive (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). Additionally, COEs have been empirically associated with gender (Hazari, Sonnert, Sadler, & Shanahan, 2010), but how COEs vary by race/ethnicity has been less studied.

With their increased job possibilities, millennials may be guided more by COEs in their career choice than previous generations. Therefore, it is important to better understand COEs as they become a stronger motivating force for career selection. While this study is limited in making causal claims, it examines the association of individual factors, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and career interests, with COEs. The goal of this study was twofold:

To identify the COEs college students have.

To determine to what extent gender, race/ethnicity, and career interest predict college students' COEs.

We hypothesize that all three factors are associated with students' COEs, while focusing on the effects of race/ethnicity and gender. This study is one of a kind in its large-scale investigation of this hypothesis.

Theoretical Framework

Two main themes emerge in the research about COEs and, consequently, career choice: career theories that emphasize dispositional traits to explain individual differences and career theories that emphasize the contextual and environmental, alternatively societal factors, that influence individual differences. There are two major dispositional models:

In Holland's (1997) RIASEC career interest model, individuals orient themselves in varying degrees toward realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional (RIASEC) goals for COEs.

People-thing orientation (PTO) looks at the analysis of gender differences through either people-orientations or thing-orientations (Yang & Barth, 2015).

On the other hand, there are also two influential contextual and environmental orientations: Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) accounts for a large portion of the literature about career development and career choice. SCCT was developed in reference to, and shares a similar structure with, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests "people act on their judgments of what they can do, as well as on their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions" (Bandura, 1986, p. 231). SCCT posits self-efficacy, outcome expectations, interests and goals, mediated by environmental and contextual influences as the main predictors of career choice (Lent et al., 1994).

Role conformity theory focuses on contextual and environmental factors (Brown, Darden, Shelton, & Dipoto, 1999; Conkel Ziebell, 2010; Su et al., 2009) and factors that are largely out of an individual's control (Arbona, 1990; Conkel Ziebell, 2010; Constantine et al., 1998; Hanson, 1994). According to this theory, for instance, differences between men and women's career choices result from the socialization of gender norms (Yang & Barth, 2015).

The value of considering individuals and their environment (e.g., society, time) in conjunction is now widely recognized (Betz, Fitzgerald, & Hill, 1989; Conkel Ziebell, 2010; McMahon et al., 2014b), because individual (dispositional) and contextual factors often interact. For example, at the individual level, Blustein's (2011) relational theory of working builds on the constructivist approach to career theory (McMahon, 2014) and puts a greater emphasis on personal agency, meaning making between the individual and their broader context, and narrative discourse. However, it is also recognized that many people have no "choice" in their career development; for these individuals, environmental and societal barriers play a larger role than does personal agency (Brown et al., 1999; Conkel Ziebell, 2010). This difference may be particularly salient for minority groups. Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of research on different racial/ethnic groups' career development, a lacuna that our study was intended to address.

Because societally reinforced gender norms in occupations change slowly, a strong gender norm still suggests that women should be interested primarily in helping-type occupations and men should be primarily interested

in mechanical-type occupations (Arnold, 1993; Riegle-Crumb, Moore, & Ramos-Wada, 2011; Reyes, Kobus, & Gillock, 1999; Su et al., 2009). For example, Yang and Barth (2005) found that on the occupational thing-orientation (a desire to work with objects), men scored higher than women. Conversely, on the occupational people-orientation (a desire to work with people), women scored higher than men. It is important to continue to assess differences between women's and men's interests and attitudes as they select their vocations. Our study contributes to the body of evidence in this area.

Finally, time plays a significant role in career theory. It dictates the emergence of career interests and accounts for the fact that people are interested in different careers at different times in their lives (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). At the individual level, attitudes about careers develop rapidly, mainly in the first couple of decades of life, where interventions may be implemented (Su et al., 2009). A critical time in career interest development is the late-adolescent to early-adult period (Su et al., 2009; Lent et al., 1994). In particular, college age is when students have the greatest opportunity to convert career interests to actual career choices, and career interests at that stage become good predictors of career choice (Sadler et al., 2012; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2010). Hence, our study focuses on college students and their career interests.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The voluminous research on careers has mainly focused on self-efficacy (Adachi, 2004; Lent et al., 1994), identity (Hazari et al., 2010), role models (Hazari et al., 2013a), exposure (Hazari et al., 2010), interest (Hazari et al., 2013a; Hazari, Sadler, & Sonnert, 2013b; Sadler, Sonnert, Hazari, & Tai, 2012), goals (Lent et al., 1994), career choice (Adachi, 2004; Hazari et al., 2010; Lent et al., 1994), much under the general umbrella of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994). There has been some attention to COEs (e.g., Adachi, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; Yang & Barth, 2015), along with gender (Arnold, 1993; Sadler et al., 2012; Su, Rounds, & Armstrong, 2009) and race (Hazari et al., 2013b; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2011; Reyes et al., 1999), but it seems fair to say that they have received comparatively little quantitative empirical consideration (Domene, Socholotiuk, & Woitowicz, 2011). Notably, most of the research on gender, race/ethnicity, and careers has been about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers (see Hazari et al., 2010; Sadler et al., 2012; Riegle-Crumb et al. 2011). In a meta-analysis of gender differences in career development, Su et al. (2009) recognized the importance of future research focusing on variability between racial and ethnic groups.

In a majority of the studies that address COEs, for example, in studies using social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994), the COEs have been predictors of career choice. Not surprisingly, it was found that students who have certain COEs were more likely to persist in a career that they believed would fulfill those expectations (Adachi, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000; Hazari et al., 2010; Lent et al., 1994). For instance, Casper and Buffardi (2004) found that COEs related to schedule flexibility, dependent care assistance, and salary predicted career choice.

The reverse pathway—that is, how career interests predict students' COEs, which is the subject of this paper—has been less studied. This pathway allowed us to place career interests at the same level as race/ethnicity and gender and to conjointly assess the comparative strength of impact of those three predictors on COEs (while controlling for several background variables).

We are aware of no studies of careers that have specifically looked at gender, race/ethnicity, and career interests as predictors for college students' COEs. However, a few noteworthy studies have examined how students' COEs predicted their occupations. Yang and Barth (2015) investigated students' COEs predicting interest in different occupations using both PTO and role congruity theory to examine gender differences in CEMP (computer science, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences) majors of college students (n = 1848). They found no significant differences by major in thing orientation (a preference to work with objects rather than with people). However, they did find a significant gender interaction: men in CEMP majors had less interest in working with people than did men in biology or health majors. Interestingly, women interested in CEMP majors had a similar level of people-orientation (preference to work with people rather than objects) to women in the health fields. Yang and Barth similarly found that role congruity theory significantly predicted interest in people-related jobs and thing-related jobs, but that gender only explained less than 1% of the variance in interest. Our study extends their research by using a large national sample that looks at racial/ethnic and gender differences in COEs in addition to differences in COEs by career interest.

Another study examined students' physics identity (whether someone sees themselves as a "physics person") in relation to their COEs, while controlling for gender and previous physics experiences. With a robust sample size of 3,829 students from 34 randomly selected colleges, Hazari and colleagues (2010) found that college students' physics identity not only predicted their career interests, but also correlated positively with a desire for an intrinsically fulfilling career and negatively with a desire for

personal/family time and working with people. However, the study was limited to only students interested in a career in physics. Our study expands this scope to include health, medicine, and non-science careers in addition to STEM careers.

In a representative cross-sectional study of 3,602 middle and high school students' expectations for the future, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) found that male and female students had similar expectations for their academic pathways, occupations, and lifestyles. However, female students expected "their future jobs to be more enjoyable" (p. 77) than did male students. Interestingly, in contrast to the current reality of gender-based pay gaps, female students' salary expectations were similar to male students. There were no significant differences between racial groups and their expectations for well-paying and enjoyable jobs.

In the same study, students were questioned about the occupation they would like to have and the occupation they expected to have. Students became more pragmatic and realistic with age, which supported our rationale of examining students' career interests and COEs at college age. Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) also found clear gender differences aligned with gender career stereotypes (e.g., boys tended to prefer occupations such as athlete, engineer, or police officer, while girls tended to prefer occupations such as nurse, teacher, or secretary). They also found clear racial and ethnic group differences. For example, Black students more frequently mentioned athlete and lawyer as occupations, Hispanic students mentioned police officer and nurse more frequently, and Asian students mentioned architect, businessperson, doctor, and engineer more frequently than did other student groups.

As a follow-up, students were asked to indicate how important certain COEs were to the job they expected to have in the future. Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) found students to have distinct COEs that correlated with the occupation they expected to have. This suggests that students may already have some pre-conceived associations of COEs with specific occupations, which also seem to follow occupational stereotypes. Furthermore, this finding appears to indicate that students understand that different jobs afford different opportunities (e.g., future teachers do not expect to be famous or make a lot of money; future doctors do not expect to have a lot of free time). While this finding supports our hypothesis, it has yet to be studied with college students.

Within the same study, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) investigated students' motivations (intrinsic, extrinsic, social) for their work, which we define as part of students' COEs. "Intrinsic" motivation for work

included enjoyment, interest, learning something new, taking on a challenge, and inherent talent. "Extrinsic" motivation for work included job security, making money, meeting parental expectations, not falling behind, and learning something useful. A third "social" motivation included impressing friends, doing better than others, and getting respect. These motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive within a specific occupation. The researchers found 52% of students rated intrinsic motivations the highest in importance to them, 40% rated extrinsic motivation the highest, and only 8% rated social motivations the highest. Surprisingly, female students were more likely than male students to be motivated by extrinsic rewards. Also, Caucasian students were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to be motivated by intrinsic factors (as opposed to extrinsic factors). Again, these findings support our hypothesis regarding differences in COEs by gender and race; however, these differences have yet to be studied at the college age.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data

The data used in this article were collected as part of the Persistence Research in Science and Engineering (PRiSE) project, a study of students in college English classes that was funded by the National Science Foundation. The project included a 50-question survey developed to examine in-school and out-of-school factors, as well as demographics, which may predict college students' persistence in science- and engineering-related careers as well as non-science careers. In the fall semester of 2007, responses were obtained from a large national sample of college students (n = 7505) from 40 two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities selected from a stratified random sample that accounted for institution size and type. Additionally, six of the schools were oversampled to ensure adequate representation of students from underrepresented populations (one historically Black college, one Hispanic-serving college, and four women's colleges). Whereas this dataset was collected a while ago, it remains relevant owing to its unique large size and national scope. Furthermore, the pandemic may have drastically redefined students' career outcome expectations. This urgently calls for a repetition of this research, for which the results of the present study would constitute a valuable baseline measurement. Students were surveyed in a mandatory college English course in order to generate a sample that included both students who were interested in STEM careers and those who were uninterested. Of the participants, 53% were female. In terms of race/ethnicity, 14% of the respondents were Hispanic, 62% non-Hispanic White, 7% non-

Hispanic Black, 5% non-Hispanic Asian, and 6% non-Hispanic Other, with the remainder providing no information.[1]

The PRiSE survey contained 50 items that were validated through focus group discussions with college students and experts in science education. Moreover, to obtain good content validity, the development of the questionnaire had been guided by open-ended responses from 412 science teachers and scientists to a preliminary survey that had the purpose of identifying and incorporating a breadth of hypotheses and views. The survey was pilot tested with 49 students to ensure items, vocabulary, and scaling could be adjusted to reflect the natural variation in experiences. Test-retest reliability of the survey was established by administering the survey to 96 students twice, in an interval of about two to three weeks. Correlation coefficients and Cohen's kappas indicated an overall mean test-retest reliability of .67.

Measures

This study focuses on college students' COEs in relation to their career interest, gender, and race/ethnicity, while controlling for other influences (e.g., socio-economic status).

Dependent variables

The dependent variables in this study are the COEs of college students. These variables were created considering students' answers to 15 items regarding their specific COEs. The 15 items include most of the COEs on the list of important career values in The Career Decision-Making System Revised (excluding only "physical activity," "outdoor work," "risk," "variety," and "work with hands") (Fogg, 2012). Our COE variables were created through an exploratory factor analysis by identifying clusters of original items that could be grouped together. Participants rated the importance of items relating to their future career satisfaction including making money, becoming famous, helping other people, having a leadership role, having job security, working with people (rather than objects), inventing new things, developing new knowledge, having time for family, having time for myself, making my own decisions, having an easy job, having an exciting job, making use of my talents, and having lots of job opportunities. The question read "Rate the following factors in terms of their importance for your future career satisfaction." Participants rated each item on a six-point scale from 1 = "not at all important" to 6 = "very important." A factor analysis using a Varimax rotation grouped most of the items into four factors with two items standing alone (see Table 1).

Table 1
Factor Analysis of Career Outcome Expectations

Item	Pioneering	Extrinsic	Work-Life Balance	People-Related
Inventing new things	**0.637**	0.269	-0.001	-0.124
Developing new knowledge and skills	**0.595**	0.092	0.314	0.086
Making use of my talents/abilities	**0.463**	0.064	0.430	0.130
Having others working under my supervision	0.299	**0.588**	0.118	0.129
Becoming well known	0.368	**0.556**	0.052	0.112
Making money	0.086	**0.532**	0.305	0.045
Having lots of family time	0.013	0.019	**0.572**	0.432
Having time for myself/friends	0.064	0.074	**0.512**	0.335
Making my own decisions	0.325	0.238	**0.490**	0.193
Working in an area with lots of job opportunities	0.273	0.352	**0.429**	0.118
Having job security	0.043	0.315	**0.407**	0.161
Working with people rather than objects	0.009	0.124	0.326	**0.566**
Helping other people	0.133	0.066	0.376	**0.486**
Having an easy job	-0.029	0.389	0.159	0.135
Having an exciting job	0.118	0.431	0.444	0.144

Bold text indicates that the factor loadings for that item/factor combination were above the threshold of 0.4 to be considered a significant loading, and therefore the item was included in that factor.

Finally, the items constituting a factor were standardized and added and the resulting composite was standardized again to facilitate interpretation. We named the composites extrinsic outcomes, pioneering outcomes, work-life balance outcomes, and people-related outcomes, and excluded two items which did not strongly load onto any of the four factors ("having an easy job" and "having an exciting job").

Independent variables of interest

Gender was coded as a dummy variable (female = 0, male = 1). Race/ethnicity was coded as one categorical variable (or, equivalently, as separate dummy variables). On the survey, students could identify their ethnicity as Hispanic or non-Hispanic. Students could also identify their racial identity as White, Black, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, Other, or

more than one race (indicated by multiple selections). For the purpose of our analyses, all students who indicated they were Hispanic were categorized as Hispanic, regardless of their further racial identification.

Table 2

Career Interest Fields Presented to Students and Their Composited Groupings

Field	Grouping
Biologist	STEM
Earth/Environmental scientist	
Astronomer	
Chemist	
Physicist	
Engineer	
Computer scientist	
Mathematician	
Science teacher	
Math teacher	
Medical professional	Medicine
Health professional	Health
Other teacher	Non-science
Social scientist (e.g., psychologist, sociologist)	
Businessperson	
Lawyer	
English/Language arts specialist	
Other non-science related career	

The other racial/ethnic categories thus included non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Asian, and Other. Too few students indicated their racial identity as Native American or Pacific Islander to be included independently in our analysis. Therefore, the racial category labeled "Other" includes students who indicated they were non-Hispanic Native American, non-Hispanic Pacific Islander, Other, and more than one race.

On the survey, students had 19 options of career interests or career interest combinations (see Table 2). We collapsed students' responses into four composite variables of broader fields: medicine, health, STEM, and non-science (i.e., not medicine, health, or STEM). The breakdown of career

interests was: 11% medicine, 13% health, 26% STEM, and 50% non-science careers. We kept medicine and health as separate variables because on certain items (especially those belonging to the pioneering factor), students interested in medicine responded markedly differently from students interested in health careers.

Control variables

In addition to our variables of interest, we included several other variables to control for differences in students' backgrounds and personalities. First, we controlled for parental education as an indicator of socioeconomic-related factors, which have previously been found to have an effect on career interest (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000). Students indicated their parents' highest level of education on a scale: 0 = did not finish high school to 4 = completed a master's degree or higher. Parental education was calculated by averaging the education level of both parents, taking into account students who had only one parent. These scores were normalized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one before regression.

On the survey, students could indicate whether they or their parents were born in the U.S. or not. From these responses, we grouped students into two categories: immigrant or non-immigrant. We described students as immigrants if students indicated both themselves and their parents as non-U.S. born. We described students as non-immigrants if they indicated that they and/or at least one parent were born in the U.S. These definitions align with the common definition of "immigrant" by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2015).

As an indicator of overall ability in school, we used students' overall SAT or ACT scores. ACT scores were mapped onto the SAT scale according to College Board (1999). Scores were divided by 100 prior to modelling, so any coefficients are "per 100 points."

We included a personality trait as a control variable because we also expected that the extent to which students are introverted or extroverted might, for example, influence the extent to which they desire a career working with people as opposed to objects. On the survey, students rated their personality on a scale of 1 = introverted to 6 = extroverted. These scores were normalized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one before regression. Of course, this variable is not a psychometrically valid and reliable way of determining this trait; however, if it makes a difference, it may indicate an avenue of further research.

Main Analysis

We carried out a linear regression with each of the four COEs—pioneering, extrinsic, work-life balance, and people-related outcomes—as dependent variables. We included our variables of interest and control variables in the models to analyze any main effects. We furthermore tested for interaction effects. P-values were adjusted with a Bonferroni correction to account for multiple comparisons.

Missing data

Our data contained several variables with missing data. The variable with the most missing data was the overall SAT/ACT score (2,073 missing). To avoid the compounded data loss through listwise deleting that would have summed to 4,040 missing observations, we performed a multiple imputation (Rubin, 1996) that resulted in five complete datasets, each with 7505 complete responses that were pooled for analysis. In our imputation, we included each of the variables considered in our regression model, with the addition of several related variables (e.g., intended career at middle school, beginning of high school, end of high school, and in college).

Normalized data

After completing our primary analyses, we found particular racial/ethnic groups--black and Hispanic students--to display consistently significant elevated results across each COE. While the COEs are not mutually exclusive and it is possible for students to show a high (or low) interest in all COEs, normalizing the COE scores for race/ethnicity allowed us to determine the effects of race/ethnicity, net of differences in the overall levels of COEs.

RESULTS

Main Effects

A summary of the main effects from a linear regression analysis of each of the four COEs—*pioneering outcomes*, *extrinsic outcomes*, *work-life balance outcomes*, and *people-related outcomes*—can be found in Table 3. To compare across variables, the standardized coefficient (β) is reported.

We found that Asian students placed greater importance on extrinsic outcomes compared with White students ($\beta = 0.393$, $p < .001$) but showed no differences on the other three outcome expectations. Black students tended to place a higher value on every COE than did White students (pioneering $\beta = 0.478$, extrinsic $\beta = 0.618$, work-life balance $\beta = 0.280$, people-related $\beta = 0.193$, all $p < .001$). Likewise, Hispanic students rated every COE as more

important than White students did (pioneering β = 0.273, extrinsic β = 0.388, work-life balance β = 0.191, people-related β = 0.173, all $p < .001$). We found no statistically significant differences between students we categorized as "Other" (non-Hispanic Native American or Pacific Islander students, another racial group, and those who indicated more than one racial group) and White students.

Table 3

Main Effects Regression of Career Outcome Expectations

	Pioneering		Extrinsic		Work-Life Balance		People-Related	
Career Interest (ref: non-STEM)								
Medicine	.137	**	.024		.035		.287	***
Health	.000		-.055		.132	**	.307	***
STEM	.226	***	-.065		-.040		-.153	***
Race/Ethnicity (ref: White)								
Asian	.064		.393	***	.024		.030	
Black	.478	***	.618	***	.280	***	.193	***
Hispanic	.273	***	.388	***	.191	***	.173	***
Other	.057		.097		.066		.016	
Male	.169	***	.279	***	-.074	*	-.397	***
Immigrant	.221	***	.154	**	-.071		.065	
SAT (per 100 pts)	.007		-.047	***	-.020	*	-.023	
Parental Ed. (0-4)	-.027		-.026		-.043	**	-.023	
Extraversion (1-6)	.065	***	.179	***	.121	***	.189	***

Note. Standardized coefficients (β) are reported. Pioneering factor = invent, develop new knowledge, use talent; Extrinsic factor = lead others, acquire fame, money; Work-Life Balance factor = have time for family, time for myself, make own decisions, have job opportunities, job security; People-Related factor = work with people, help others.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. P-values have been adjusted for multiple comparisons. Regression estimates without asterisks were not found to be statistically significant.

Compared with students who were primarily interested in a non-science career, students who were most interested in a career in medicine showed higher ratings, on average, for pioneering (β = 0.137, $p < .01$) and people-related (β = 0.287, $p < .001$) outcomes. Students interested in a career in health similarly had higher ratings for people-related outcomes (β = 0.307, $p < .001$), but also showed a higher importance of work-life balance outcomes (β = 0.132, $p < .01$). By contrast, their ratings for pioneering outcomes were not elevated. Students interested in a STEM career placed higher importance on pioneering outcomes (β = 0.226, $p < .001$), but lower importance on people-related outcomes (β = -0.153, $p < .001$), compared with students interested in a non-STEM career.

Male students placed a higher importance on pioneering (β = 0.169, $p < .001$) and extrinsic (β = 0.279, $p < .001$) outcomes compared with female students, and a lower importance on work-life balance (β = -0.074, $p < .05$) and people-related (β = -0.397, $p < .001$) outcomes. Students who were classified as "immigrant" placed a higher importance on pioneering (β = 0.221, $p < .001$) and extrinsic (β = 0.154, $p < .01$) outcomes compared with students who were either themselves or had at least one parent born in the U.S. Students with higher SAT/ACT scores placed lower importance on extrinsic (β = -0.047, $p < .001$) and work-life balance (β = -0.020, $p < .05$) outcomes. Students who reported higher average parental education placed lower importance on work-life balance outcomes (β = -0.043, $p < .01$).

Table 4

Interaction Effects Regression of Career Outcome Expectations

	Pioneering		Extrinsic		Work-Life Balance		People-Related	
Career Interest (ref: non-STEM)								
Medicine	.189	**	.161	*	.041		.295	***
Health	-.056		-.031		.087		.375	***
STEM	.144	*	-.059		-.097		-.105	
Race/Ethnicity (ref: White)								
Asian	.100		.510	***	-.065		.013	
Black	.513	***	.667	***	.254	*	.229	**
Hispanic	.299	***	.442	***	.182	**	.171	***
Other	.198		.173		-.017		.049	
Male	.106	**	.285	***	-.100	*	-.378	***
Immigrant	.229	***	.145	*	-.073		.063	
SAT (per 100 pts)	.006		-.047	***	-.020		-.022	
Parental Ed. (0-4)	-.027		-.025		-.044	**	-.022	
Extraversion (1-6)	.052	**	.136	***	.090	***	.162	***
Male x STEM	.223	**						
Male x Extraversion			.090	***	.065	*		
Asian x Medicine	-.458	*						
Other x STEM	-.424	**						

Note. Standardized coefficients (β) are reported. Pioneering factor = invent, develop new knowledge, use talent; Extrinsic factor = lead others, acquire fame, money; Work-Life Balance factor = have time for family, time for myself, make own decisions, have job opportunities, job security; People-Related factor = work with people, help others.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. P-values have been adjusted for multiple comparisons. Regression estimates without asterisks were not found to be statistically significant.

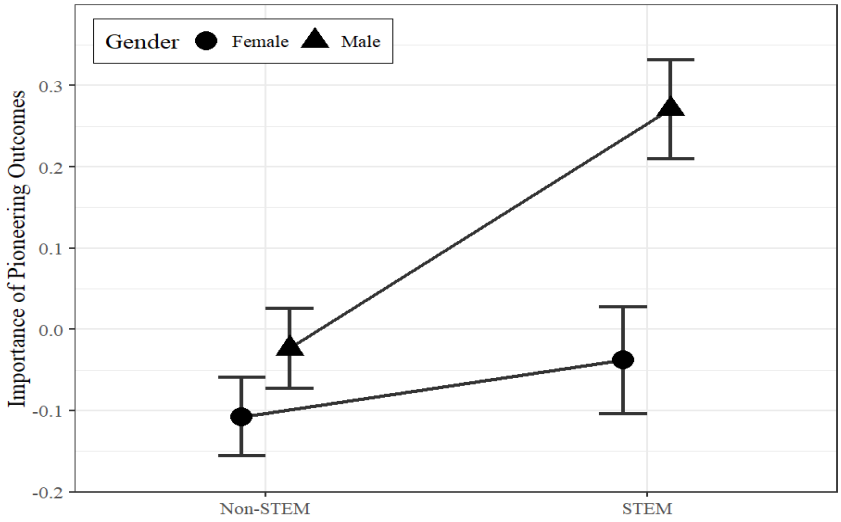
Interaction Effects

A second set of linear regression analyses included interaction effects (see Table 4). Five interactions were significant. Firstly, we found three significant interactions involving career interest variables associated with pioneering outcomes.

There was an interaction between career interest in STEM and gender ($\beta = .223$, $p < .001$), such that pioneering outcomes appeared to be more important for male students interested in a career in STEM than for female students interested in a STEM career (see Figure 1), although there was little difference in the importance of pioneering factors between male and female students who had no interest in a STEM career.

Figure 1

Differences in the importance of pioneering outcomes for male and female participants primarily interested in a career in a STEM vs. Non-STEM field. Shaded bands show standard error in the mean estimate.

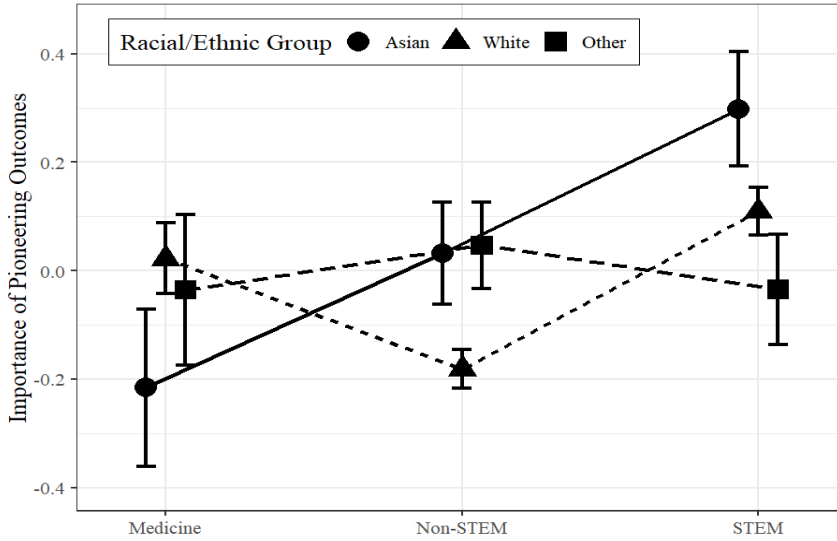


The other two interactions were between race/ethnicity and career interest, specifically between career interest in medicine and Asian students (compared with White students) and between career interest in STEM and students classified as Other (compared with White students). The effect of these interactions is shown in Figure 2. Among those who were intending a career in medicine, students who identified as White valued pioneering outcomes more than students who identified as Asian, but among those who did not want to go into medicine, we found no difference. For students

intending a career in STEM, students classified as Other placed lower importance on pioneering COEs than did students who identified as White.

Figure 2

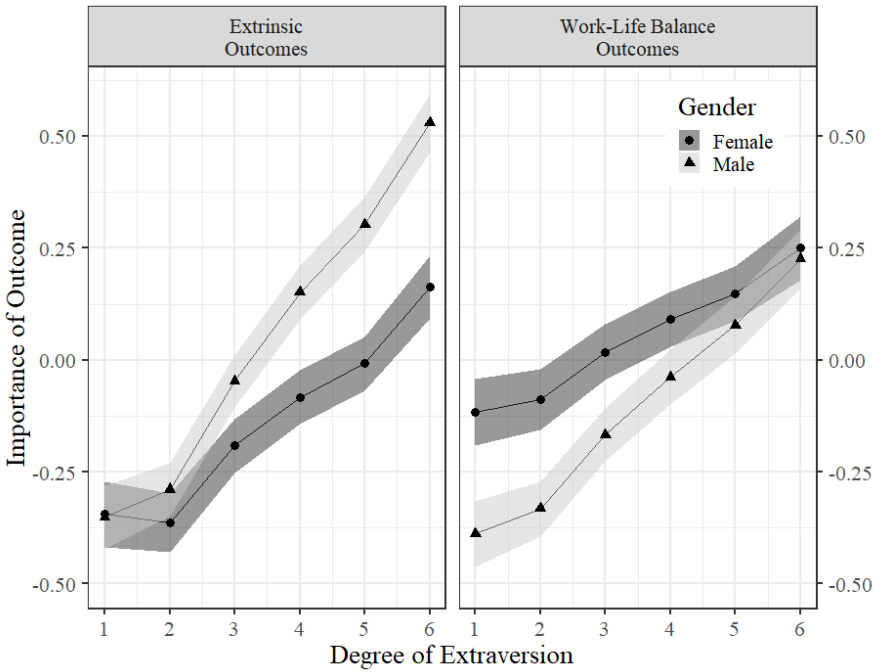
Differences in the importance of pioneering factors for White students, Asian students, and students of other racial/ethnic groups who are primarily interested in careers in STEM, Medicine, and Non-STEM. Vertical bars show standard error of the mean estimate.



Secondly, we found a statistically significant interaction between gender and extraversion for extrinsic outcomes ($\beta = .090$, $p \leq .001$) and work-life balance outcomes ($\beta = .065$, $p \leq .05$). Figure 3 shows that more introverted students do not appear to particularly care about extrinsic outcomes, regardless of gender. Furthermore, while extraverted students tended to find extrinsic outcomes more important than introverted students, extroverted male students rated extrinsic outcomes as even more important than extroverted female students. For work-life balance outcomes, we find the opposite effect: highly extroverted students, regardless of gender, valued these outcomes equally highly, while more introverted male students placed much less importance on this outcome than similarly introverted female students. There were no interaction effects for people related COEs.

Figure 3

Differences in extrinsic and work-life balance factors for male and female students according to their self-reported extraversion. Shaded bands show standard error of the mean estimate. Mean extraversions for all participants was 3.91, with a standard deviation of 1.17.



Main Effects Renormalized for Race/Ethnicity

As mentioned above, we noticed that both Hispanic and Black students rated all four COEs significantly higher than did other students. To determine if Hispanic or Black students simply rated everything more highly, or if there were, in fact, differences by race/ethnicity for individual COEs, we normalized each of the COEs scores by race. To normalize the scores, we subtracted the mean score of all COEs for each racial/ethnic group from an individual student's response, respectively. Linear regressions with the normalized data reduced but did not completely eliminate the associations with racial or ethnic identity (see Table 5).

We no longer found any significant differences in pioneering outcomes associated with student race/ethnicity. The effects on the importance of extrinsic outcomes for Asian, Black, and Hispanic students

were all reduced, compared with the unnormalized model. Before normalizing, Black and Hispanic students had placed higher importance on both work-life balance and people-related outcomes than did White students, but after normalizing, Black and Hispanic students showed lower average ratings for these outcomes. All interaction effects persisted unchanged after normalizing the data, as the interaction effects in linear models are invariant under linear transformations of the data.

Table 5

Race/Ethnicity Renormalized Regression of Career Outcome Expectations

	Pioneering		Extrinsic		Work-Life Balance		People-Related	
Career Interest (ref: non-STEM)								
Medicine	.137	**	.024		.035		.287	***
Health	.000		-.055		.132	**	.307	***
STEM	.226	***	-.065		-.040		-.153	***
Race/Ethnicity (ref: White)								
Asian (-0.125)	-.061		.268	***	-.101		-.095	
Black (-0.411)	.068		.207	***	-.131	*	-.127	***
Hispanic (-0.296)	-.023		.092	*	-.105	*	-.123	**
Other (-0.057)	.000		.040		-.123		-.040	
Male	.169	***	.279	***	-.074	*	-.397	***
Immigrant	.221	***	.154	**	-.071		.065	
SAT (per 100 pts)	.007		-.047	***	-.020	*	-.023	
Parental Ed. (0-4)	-.027		-.026		-.043	**	.023	
Extraversion (1-6)	.065	***	.179	***	.121	***	.189	***

Note. Standardized coefficients (β) are reported. Pioneering factor = invent, develop new knowledge, use talent; Extrinsic factor = lead others, acquire fame money; Work-Life Balance factor = have time for family, time for myself, make own decisions, have job opportunities, job security; People-Related factor = work with people, help others. The parentheticals for Race/Ethnicity in the first column indicate the differences in overall group means used for renormalization. Only the coefficients for terms involving race/ethnicity (and not an interaction) were affected by the renormalization and are highlighted for emphasis.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. P-values have been adjusted for multiple comparisons. Regression estimates without asterisks were not found to be statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2004), we found that college students vary in what they hope to get out of their careers, which we termed their COEs. Specifically, we found that college students' COEs differed depending on their gender, racial or ethnic background, and desired occupation, even after controlling for other

background and personality factors. Additionally, some differences by race and ethnicity persisted after normalizing the data in this respect.

Career Interests

Because we inverted the traditional relationship between COE and career interest in our analysis, this dimension is less interesting than the others because these associations have already been well studied in prior literature. We included them in our analysis primarily as controls to more properly isolate the effects of the other demographic variables.

Race and Ethnicity

One overall effect we see in comparing the results of our normalized and unnormalized regressions is that Black and Hispanic students tend to place a higher importance on various COEs than White students do. These students are invested in their careers and have stronger ideas about what they want from their careers.

After normalizing, we found differences in the relative importance of several factors. Asian, Black, and Hispanic students placed greater importance on extrinsic outcomes than did white students, while White students rated work-life balance and people-related outcomes higher than did Black and Hispanic students. It is not clear why that may be the case and future research may want to further examine this finding. One possible explanation is that there may be more importance placed on the traditional (i.e., extrinsic) outcomes of success for minority students when those outcomes have traditionally been more difficult to achieve, compared with their White counterparts. In other words, a long-standing condition of systemic disadvantages and even oppression may have heighted the focus among the Black and Hispanic students on extrinsic outcomes as avenues of advancement for themselves and their communities.

Gender

We found differences in the importance male and female students placed on all four COEs and additional differences associated with their levels of extraversion. These results indicate differences in values and priorities of young men and women, and these differences exist beyond their preferences for one kind of career. For example, in alignment with a longitudinal study of female valedictorian high-school students who increasingly reduced their workload to make preparations for family time as they advanced in their careers (Arnold, 1993), we found that female students value a work-life balance more strongly compared with male students.

Why do these differences exist? Why were male students more interested in pioneering career outcomes than female students, separately from any differences in their preferences for careers typically associated with those outcomes? We suspect that these differences are a result of differences in childhood socialization, such as boys being more frequently encouraged than girls to experiment and tinker, with toys to support such behaviors, than girls. Moreover, male students' strong desire for extrinsic outcomes, in comparison with female students, aligns with the idea that money, fame, and leadership are the keys to success for men. These aspects resonate with deep-seated cultural definitions of what it means to "succeed" as a man.

A person's extraversion and their gender interacted to predict interest in extrinsic and work-life balance COEs. The differences in extrinsic COEs exist primarily between the more extroverted men and women, while the introverted students expressed more similar preference for these outcomes. Meanwhile, the differences in work-life balance existed primarily between the introverted students, with more extroverted male and female students indicating similar preferences. These findings may have implications for gender differences in income and leadership positions, which are extrinsic career outcomes. However, further research is needed to understand why there are greater differences for extroverted individuals compared to introverted individuals.

Again, we should note that our simple measure of introversion/extroversion was not psychometrically valid so future research should explore whether these results hold up when measures of higher quality are used.

Other Demographic Factors

Other demographic factors were used as control variables, but they do tell an interesting story. Parental education level is traditionally used as an indicator of socio-economic status (SES), as a proxy for their careers and income levels. Our study found that students with parents who had less total amount of education were more interested in a work-life balance. This finding might be owed to these students experiencing difficult work-life balances in their families while growing up. Another interesting finding is that the better students performed on the SAT/ACT, the weaker was their desire for extrinsic rewards in their career. It may be the case that 'good' students, or those who perform better on standardized tests, are more concerned with intellectual rewards. On the other hand, poor performing students may feel more pressure to find a more traditional form of success (i.e., extrinsic rewards) when their academic ability does not guarantee attainment. Additionally, immigrant

college students were particularly interested in a pioneering career, possibly indicating that the idea of an American dream is still alive and well among newcomers to the country.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study demonstrates that students vary in their COEs. Students' race and ethnicity, followed by gender, are the strongest and most consistent predictors of COEs, while career interests have varying degrees of influence on college students' COEs. Our findings regarding career interest and COEs aligned with certain job stereotypes and previous research associating career outcomes with career interests. Further studies could look at how shifting career stereotypes influence career choice. There could be two mechanisms by which COEs interact with career interests. In the first, students may have a particular set of values (such as those gained through socialization) and may then search out a career that matches those goals. Alternatively, students may primarily be motivated by interest in a field or career, and their values are subsequently shaped by exposure to the communities of practice that already exist in that field.

If it is a goal to attract students with more varied desires for COEs, fields like medicine, health, or STEM could work to break the stereotypical COEs by emphasizing that other COEs can also be achieved by working in these careers. This change may be a real change (if the outcomes associated with the field in fact match the stereotypes), or it may be a change in messaging and branding (if the associated outcomes reflect a distorted view of the field). For example, Hazari and colleagues (2011) hypothesized that promoting more balanced motivations for a career in physics and countering stereotypes—such as this career catering mainly to intrinsic rewards—may help attracting students from underrepresented groups who may need to focus on external rewards like monetary compensation in consideration of their career.

As usual with correlational research, this study can offer no causal explanation. However, our findings do indicate a relationship between career interests and COEs. In light of these results, as well as those of other research on COEs and career interest, it appears likely that there is mutual feedback within this relationship. Longitudinal research would be valuable in helping disentangle this interdependent relationship and determine how a career interest influences COEs, and vice versa. Furthermore, follow-up investigations of student COEs could investigate whether or how these values shift with generational changes over time.

Research on career development has rarely examined the impact of career interest, gender, and race/ethnicity on what students hope and expect to get out of their careers. This study contributes to the field by identifying differences in career outcome expectations by gender and race/ethnicity. In an increasingly diverse workforce where racism and gender discrimination persist, more studies are needed to understand the underlying factors that impact career choice in minority and marginalized groups of individuals.

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Endnote

[1] Demographic percentages were calculated with the raw data (prior to the multiple imputation). Hence, the percentages do not add up to 100%.

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Diversity in Leadership Among Arts Graduates: Aiming for an Inclusive Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the multiplicity of diversity based on gender, ethnicity, and age, and how it is reflected among leaders with an arts degree. They include leaders who are managers, arts administrators, curators, arts educators, theatre producers, and stage directors. In this quantitative study, the aggregated data of arts alumni, nearly 65,000 respondents from three consecutive years (2015, 2016, and 2017) from the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP), are analyzed using a descriptive method. The study shows that 45.7% of art alumni are in management positions, of whom 78.5% are white, and the remaining 21.5% are fairly evenly distributed among other ethnicities. Therefore, there is a lack of diversity in the positions of leadership. This paper suggests the need for inclusive leadership in which diversity is encouraged.

Keywords: diversity, leadership, arts graduates, inclusive leadership

INTRODUCTION

Arts leaders connect audiences with the most significant artistic achievements in human history. Yet, the demographic composition of arts managers in the United States remains unexplored (Cuyler, 2015). One of the most pressing issues to address in the 21st century is a lack of diversity in

organizations (Cuyler, 2015). Cuyler (2013) offers an inclusive definition of diversity for arts programs: "Diversity is acceptance, acknowledgement, and proactive use of the fact of human difference in practice" (p. 100). Generally, it refers to the degree to which there are similarities and differences between groups and how this affects team performance (Van Knippenberg et al., 2011). Coleman (2012) defines diversity as comprising a wide range of characteristics, some of which are more obvious than others (such as gender, race, religion, and physical ability) and others that are less apparent (such as socioeconomic status or sexual orientation) (p. 597). The United Nations' (U.N.) Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for everyone to be treated the same without regard for any differences between us; therefore, the focus is on everyone (U.N., n.d.).

Research shows that diversity and minority representation among leaders is crucial for organizations to realize their full potential (Cook & Glass, 2015). Diversity encourages community development, innovation, and discovery (Cook & Glass, 2015; Nielsen, Bloch & Schiebinger, 2018). Nonetheless, diversity issues have garnered less attention in recent leadership theories in terms of equity, diversity, and social justice (Coleman, 2012; D'Andrea, 2021b; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016; Chin, 2010; Chin & Trimble, 2015; Eagly & Chin, 2010). In North America, existing leadership models and most of the observational leadership research that supports them are based on a limited sample of leaders—primarily white, straight men—whose cultures reflect management policies and practices (Chin, 2010). Moreover, Kelly and Carton (2020) point out that there is a lack of research that critically examines the relationship between diversity and leadership and how diversity engages with leadership. This paper focuses on higher education and examines the extent to which diversity in leadership positions exists among alumni with a graduate degree in the arts.

The following two questions serve as a starting point and will direct the research into the issues of a lack of diversity within art leadership.

(1) How many arts graduates are currently in a management or leadership role? (This includes managers, arts administrators, curators, arts educators, theatre and stage directors, and producers).

(2) How diverse are these leaders based on gender, ethnicity, and age?

I use the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project's (SNAAP) raw data on arts alumni from three consecutive years: 2015, 2016 and 2017 (See Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, 2018). SNAAP is an online survey, data management, and institutional improvement system, designed to enhance the impact of arts-school education. Over the years, SNAAP data have been used for assessment, curriculum reform, recruitment, benchmarking, alumni

engagement, and advocacy (SNAAP, n.d.). Since this study investigates how diversity is represented among leaders with an arts degree, the database utilized for this research comprises response frequencies for all art graduates who graduated from universities that participated in SNAAP in Fall 2015, Fall 2016, and Fall 2017.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership-Diversity

Leadership has been extensively researched over the years, with numerous classifications being developed to define it (Cote, 2017; Kovach, 2018). Leadership theories have deepened to explore their social and relational dimensions and focused on group process leadership and motivation theories, such as behavioral and trait theories (Cote, 2017; Kovach, 2018). Cote (2017) identifies three main leadership theories: Situational Leadership, in which a leader adapts their behavior style to meet the needs of employees in different situations to achieve goals; Path-Goal Theory, which aims to enhance employees' performance and increase satisfaction by motivating them to accomplish specific goals; and Leader-Member Theory, where job-related matters are negotiated (p. 28). Bucher (2010) describes the three critical leadership elements as (1) *process*, which reflects what someone is doing rather than their position and motivates, influences and inspires them in the pursuit of common goals; (2) *interactions* which involve the ways a leader relates to people's values and cultures; and (3) *situations* that take into account variables that shape contexts, such as time, location, organizational culture, and communities. Furthermore, transformational leadership, namely the ability to inspire followers to share a vision and empower them to perform beyond expectations, is one of the most well-researched leadership theories (Andriani et al., 2018; Buil et al., 2019; Kovach, 2018; Shafique & Beh, 2018).

Kelly and Carton (2020) argue that research on diversity and leadership has been dominated by two perspectives: first, diversity as organizational inequality, in which minority groups are expected to assimilate into dominant group norms; therefore, generalized diversity management prescriptions are ineffective in resolving diversity-related issues. Second, inequality examined through the discursive lens, which emphasizes the discriminating experiences of minorities (p. 437). Further, Kelly and Carton (2020) claim that there is growing discontent with traditional approaches, which ignore questions of power and context and generate uncertainty in interpreting diversity. Tatli (2011) also highlighted "two problematic tendencies in the current diversity research: the focus on single-level

explorations, and the polarization between critical and mainstream approaches" (p. 238).

In the labour force as well, "racial and ethnic minorities remain underrepresented in higher-level leadership positions" (Gündemir et al., 2017, p. 172). As one of the reasons is because "racial/ethnic minorities are assumed to be less competent, intelligent, and successful" (Cook & Glass, 2015, p. 112). This perception creates scrutiny, negative bias, and less organizational engagement (Cook & Glass, 2015). Minorities continue to face the glass ceiling (Cross, 2010). Gender, racial, and class diversity are ingrained in our culture, limiting minority groups' growth in organizations (Cross, 2010). Robinson and Harvey (2008) believe that cultural diversity requires us to change our leadership philosophy. To practice inclusive leadership, leaders must be sensitive to the needs of a diverse community, including ethnicity, values, behaviors, and cultural differences. Chin & Trimble (2015) also advocate for inclusive leadership that supports diverse leaders and removes barriers to inclusion, such as our limiting perceptions and expectations of leaders. Finally, Feder and McGill (2021) contend that while leading art institutions have spent time and resources on responsible, transparent, and participatory leadership, non-profit cultural organizations, such as opera boards across the United States, must diversify their volunteer leadership.

The conversation up to this point demonstrates that leadership theories explain how various features of leadership and constrained views might impact our perceptions of leaders, particularly in relation to art leaders who are leading cultural institutions.

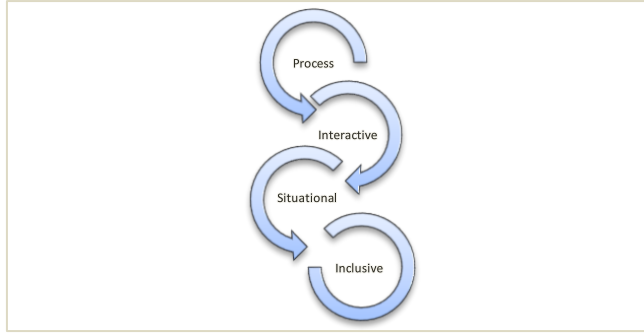
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I am adapting Bucher's three key features of leadership—the process, the interactions, and the situational context—to incorporate a fourth, inclusivity, as shown in Figure 1, drawing on the concept of intersectionality.

Inclusive Leadership

Some may argue that diversity does not automatically lead to better outcomes because diversity by itself is not enough, so it "must be skillfully managed in an inclusive way" (Tapia and Polonskaia, 2020, p. 7). Inclusivity is the "new currency of power, influence, and effectiveness," and inclusive leaders must constantly distinguish and innovate to continue to grow (Tapia and Polonskaia, 2020, p. 5).

Figure 1:
Leadership: Key Features



Source: D'Andrea (2022)

There is a large amount of research on inclusive leadership, with a greater focus on education (Booysen, 2013; Hollander, 2012; Javed et al., 2020; Kugelmass, 2003; Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2020; Lumby & Morrison, 2010; Randel et al., 2018; Ryan, 2006). Inclusive leadership, according to Gardner, "respects competition and cooperation as a part of a participative process" (p. 3). Booysen adds that inclusive workplaces are based on "a collaborative, pluralistic, constructed, and coevolving value frame that relies on mutual respect, equal contribution, standpoint plurality (multiple viewpoints), and valuing of difference" (p. 298). In other words, inclusive leadership is "simply an extension of diversity management" (Booysen, 2013, p. 297).

In examining diversity, Chin (2013) found a considerable difference in dimensions of colour, ethnicity, and gender diversity in leadership attitudes among five U.S. racial/ethnic groups: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American Indians. Chin (2013) asserts that minority leaders are more humane, self-protective, and participatory, and the author proposes a more nuanced interpretation of leadership styles that takes into account diversity. Williams and Wattam (2018) argue that in higher education, although "student diversity is increasing, the diversity of administrators is lagging behind" (p. 72). To summarize, being more demographically diverse necessitates leaders adapting to become more inclusive (Williams & Wattam, 2018), which requires professional development in which an inclusive culture is fostered (Coleman, 2012).

Finally, all people from diverse backgrounds must feel respected, recognized, valued, and included during the decision-making process, and an

inclusive leader is transparent, culturally agile, collaborates and facilitates, embraces and leverages the vast diversity, creates a safe space, and empowers (Tapia & Polonskaia, 2020).

Intersectionality

To understand the phenomenon of diversity leadership, I draw on the concept of intersectionality and examine the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and age. An "intersectional approach does not treat race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality as autonomous categories but seeks to examine their interaction in understanding leadership identity, behaviour, and effectiveness" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 176). Since society tends to provide opportunities first for those with privilege and limit those without (Sloan et al. (2018), an intersectional approach focuses on the experiences of a disadvantaged group (Cole, 2009) as well as how intersectionality shapes the experiences of minorities (Crenshaw, 2017). A more nuanced picture emerges from considering how various forms of diversity connect with one another (Coleman, 2012). Intersectionality "attends to the seeming complexity of leadership and diversity, recognizing ways through which apparent complexity aims to attend to material power issues" (Kelly & Carton, 2020, p. 444).

My approach to intersectionality focuses on specific interactions and dominant frames of oppression or lack of inclusiveness for minority groups in leadership positions in art institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative study adopts a descriptive approach to data collection and analysis of raw data. Specifically, it explores how diversity is reflected among leaders with an arts degree with graduate degrees. As a research fellow, I was given access to the data collected by the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) of arts alumni for three consecutive years: 2015, 2016 and 2017. (See Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, 2018). SNAAP is an online survey, data management, and institutional improvement system designed to enhance the impact of arts-school education.

Participants

The database used for this research contains response frequencies for all arts alumni who graduated from undergraduate and graduate-level institutions and participated in SNAAP in Fall 2015, Fall 2016, and Fall 2017. A total of 577,391 individuals with arts degrees from 109 postsecondary institutions and nine arts high schools were invited to participate. Of this

sample, 88,525 alumni of all ages responded to the online survey. Approximately 65,000 people responded on the topic of leadership. Over the years, SNAAP data have been used for assessment, curriculum reform, recruitment, benchmarking, alumni engagement, and advocacy (SNAAP, n.d.). The database used for this research contains response frequencies for all arts alumni who graduated from undergraduate and graduate-level institutions that participated in SNAAP in Fall 2015, Fall 2016, and Fall 2017. A total of 577,391 individuals with arts degrees from 109 postsecondary institutions. There were 64,688 respondents on the topic of leadership and diversity. The questions asked were: "Please indicate those occupations in which you *currently* work. Check all that apply;" "What is your gender identity?"; "What is your age? In years;" and "What is your race or ethnic identification? Check all that apply." I focused on undergraduate and graduate alumni in leadership positions in any field and explored diversity among arts alumni. High school participants were excluded from this study, focusing on higher education enrollment and leadership attainment. The operational variables examined are listed in Table 1 next.

Table 1:
Operational Variables

Variables for Leadership	Occupations
artsrel	Manager/Administrator
curjob_artadm	Arts administrator/manager (Including development, marketing, or box office/sales)
curjob-manag	Management (e.g., executives and managers)
curjob_curator	Museum or gallery worker, including curator
curjob_tchhied	Higher education arts educator
curjob_tchk12	K-12 arts educator
curjob_prvttch	Private teacher of the arts
curjob_othtch	Other arts educator
curjob_stage	Theatre and stage director and producer

Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

DATA ANALYSIS

I used pivot tables to analyze the data and examine the relationships within the data that may not be readily apparent. Pivot tables are flexible and "permit users to summarise dynamically and cross-tabulate data, create tables in several dimensions, offer a range of summary statistics and can be modified interactively" (Grech, 2018, p. 104). Pivot tables "facilitate descriptive statistics" (p. 104) and "visual data inspection" (p. 107), allowing the user to cross-tabulate data. A straightforward way to do cross-tabulations is using Microsoft Excel's pivot table feature. Excel's PivotTables can be used for cross-tabulation and analytical processing of data (Dierenfeld & Merceron, 2012). Using cross-tabulation minimizes the potential for confusion or error by providing clear results, helps us derive great insights from raw data, helps evaluate the current work, and allows the charting of future strategies.

Using SNAAP aggregate data of arts alumni from three consecutive years (2015, 2016 & 2017), this research explores how diversity is reflected among leaders with an arts degree. Specifically, the population from "ALL SNAAP" undergraduate and graduate institutions are examined. Diversity is identified in terms of "ethnicity," "gender," and "age," while the operational variables for leadership include "arts administrator or manager," "manager," "director," "producer," "curator," and "teacher."

RESULTS

Table 2 depicts 64,688 responses, and the number of leaders reported for each occupation. It is worth noting that respondents could select more than one variable since it was a 'check-all' survey. For instance, an arts administrator may have also been selected as a 'producer.' Next, in Table 3, the leadership occupations have been combined to include curators, producers, directors, and arts educators to avoid repetition and to have a clear picture of the leadership data. As a result, a new variable named "Combined Total Leaders" was created to cross-tabulate data from 'manager administrator' to 'producer.' A total of 29,558 leaders were tallied, eliminating repetitions. As a result, the percentages of each variable do not add up to 100% because the frequency of the total numbers varied across variables. Thus, Table 3 totals 29,558 arts graduates who reported being in leadership positions during the SNAAP survey. Table 3 also shows different job occupations and their corresponding frequency.

Leadership Roles

Table 2:
Art Graduates in Leadership Occupations

Occupation	Frequency
Manager/Administrator	13,202
Arts administrator/manager (Including development, marketing, or box office/sales)	5,820
Management (e.g., executives and managers)	4,056
Museum or gallery worker, including curator	2,223
Higher education arts educator	7,220
K-12 arts educator	5,708
Private teacher of the arts	6,611
Another arts educator	2,163
Theatre and stage director, and producer	2,241
Total Responses (n=64,688)	

Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

'Manager/Administrator' represents the highest percentage in leadership (44.7%), followed by 'Arts administrator/Manager', including higher education (24.4%), private (22.4%), and K-12 (19.3%). Overall, almost half (45.7%) of the participants, who had been enrolled in arts degrees, were in positions with managerial responsibilities.

The number of artist-students enrolling in programs and those who become leaders is consistent across countries. Scholars such as Elstad and Jansson (2020) examined the differences between managers and non-managers among arts graduates. Elstad and Jansson (2020) surveyed 73 graduates from a six-year period (2012–2017) who completed a one-year arts management graduate program in Norway. They found that almost half (45.7%) of the participants were in positions of managerial responsibility, which is, coincidentally, equal to the results of the SNAAP data study, where 45.7% of alumni reported being in leadership roles in the United States. Elstad and Jansson's study (2020) which backgrounds are the most attractive for arts managers in terms of legitimacy and effectiveness report that "it is common to recruit individuals with aesthetic backgrounds into managerial positions" (p. 185). In other words, the students recruited into such positions often had an arts-oriented career prior to entering an arts management program and are assumed to have leadership aspirations (Elstad & Jansson, 2020). As a result, an arts leader's identity is related to that of a cultural worker and artist (Elstad

& Jansson, 2020). The opportunity to become a leader with an arts degree is close to 46%. Nevertheless, achieving leadership roles in the arts is promising, but diversity in leadership lags.

Table 3:
Combined All Leadership Occupations

Occupations	Frequency	Percentage of Leaders	Percentage of Responses
Manager/Administrator	13,202	44.7	20.4
Arts administrator/Manager (Including development, marketing, or box office/sales)	5,820	19.7	9.0
Management (e.g., executives and managers)	4,056	13.7	6.3
Museum or gallery worker, including curator	2,223	7.5	3.4
Higher education arts educator	7,220	24.4	11.2
K-12 arts educator	5,708	19.3	8.8
Private teacher of the arts	6,611	22.4	10.2
Other arts educator	2,163	7.3	3.3
Theatre and stage director, producer	2,241	7.6	3.5
Combined Total Leaders - Grant Total**	**29,558**		**45.7%**
Total Responses (n=64,688)			

Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

Gender

Table 4:

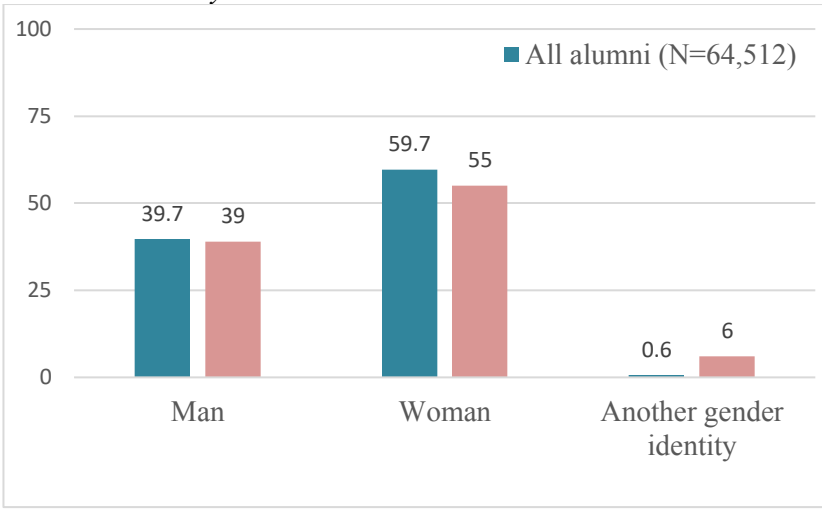
Gender Frequency

Gender	Total Percentage of Alumni	Total Percentage of Alumni Leaders
Male	39.7	39
Female	59.7	55
Other	0.6	6
All (N=64,512)		Leaders (N=29,558)

Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

Figure 2:

Alumni Leaders by Gender



Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

The demographic characteristics of the leaders are also important. Table 4 and Figure 2 show that about 60% of respondents to the survey are women. In comparison, 55% of female alumni reported having leadership roles. The percentage of male participants remains equal. In Figure 2, "another gender identity" responses are half a percent (0.6%) across all alumni; however, their leadership occupations are more visible, raising the total to about 6% for alumni leaders. This gender discrepancy warrants further

investigation. Women outnumber men as survey respondents, but there is a slight decline in their percentage in leadership positions. Schmutz et al. (2016) argue that girls have historically participated more in extracurricular arts activities, while other scholars maintain that this discrepancy results from female artists tackling gender bias in the industry (Fard, 2017). However, scholars agree that although "women have higher levels of cultural participation" (Schmutz et al., 2016, p. 27), still, the increase of women in leadership positions is encouraging.

Ethnicity

Table 5:

Ethnicity (Arts Alumni Population vs. Alumni Leaders)

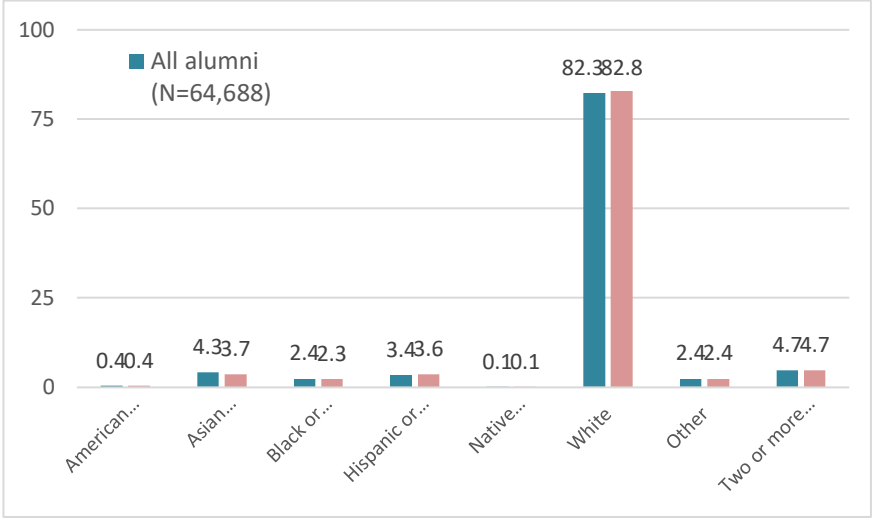
Ethnicity	Percentage of Total Alumni	Percentage of Total Alumni Leaders
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4	0.4
Asian (including Indian subcontinent)	4.3	3.7
Black or African American	2.4	2.3
Hispanic or Latino	3.4	3.6
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1	0.1
White	82.3	82.8
Other	2.4	2.4
Two or more races	4.7	4.7
All (N=64,688)		Leaders (N=28,000)

Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

In U.S. society, whiteness is often one of the most salient characteristics. Table 5 and Figure 3 display race and ethnicity distributions for all arts alumni versus those in leadership roles. Selecting the top three, as per the U.S. Census Bureau (2022, July 1), 75.8% of the American population is White, followed by Hispanic/Latino (18.9%) and Black/African American (13.6%). Figure 3 shows that the percentage of white alumni respondents is higher (82.3%) than the rest of the alumni sample, followed by "two or more races" (4.7%) and Asians (4.3%). In terms of leaders, 82.8% are white, followed by "two or more races" (4.7%) and Asians (3.7%). The most notable finding from these tables is that the most significant percentage of arts leaders

identified as white (78.5%). To reiterate, the results show that the arts leadership workforce closely reflects the U.S. population.

Figure 3:
Alumni Leaders by Ethnicity



Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

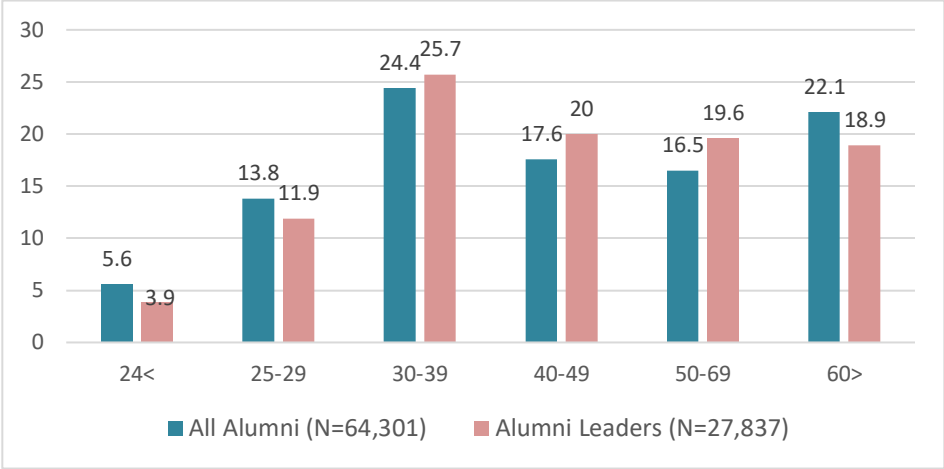
Age
Age also plays a part in diversity counts and most arts alumni leaders are between 30 and 39 years old (see Table 6).

Table 6:
Ethnicity (Arts Alumni Population vs. Alumni Leaders)

Age	Percentage of Total Alumni	Percentage of Total Alumni Leaders
24 <	5.6	3.9
25-29	13.8	11.9
30-39	24.4	25.7
40-49	17.6	20
50-69	16.5	19.6
60 >	22.1	18.9
	All (N=64,301)	Leaders (N=27,837)

Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

Figure 5:
Age, Alumni Leaders



Source: D'Andrea (2021a). SNAP Data (2015, 2016 & 2017)

Table 6 and Figure 5 offer a bar graph for the age distribution of alumni leaders. Leadership positions become more prevalent once graduates are 30 years old. The question, therefore, is: How diverse are these leaders based on gender, ethnicity, and age? As per the alumni respondents in the sample, white is the predominant ethnicity of the U.S. population, student enrollment, and leaders, whereas age is widely diverse, although leadership peaks are between 30 and 39. In terms of gender, females tend to gravitate towards an art career and are about 17% more prevalent in the field than their male counterparts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Why Diversity and Inclusive Leadership Matters

Diversity innovates (D'Andrea, 2019), and leadership drives diversity. Diversity promotes "out-of-the-box" thinking and generates new ideas and ways of doing business. Diversity in leadership promotes innovative thinking. When a leadership team comprises individuals from various backgrounds, including diverse age, demographics, race, gender, nationality, education, and more, innovation within an organization is enhanced (Chin, 2013). In other words, embracing diversity in leadership means an organization is not boxed into a single line of thought.

The impact of diverse leaders in organizations is widespread. Cook and Glass (2015) examine the effect of racial and ethnic minority CEOs in corporations and find that by promoting individual minority leaders, corporate governance strengthens and product innovation increases. Minorities' career trajectories differ from those of their white peers, which adds richness to the decision-making process since minority leaders with different perspectives and priorities are more likely to have experienced barriers, such as discrimination and bias, prior to their promotion to leadership (Cook & Glass, 2015).

Diverse leadership implies *inclusivity* for a broader range of leadership skills. Leadership skills are often acquired; however, Gasman et al. (2015) point out that some valuable skills are inborn and cultural. When an organization hires people from different backgrounds to assume leadership roles, it accesses the skillsets, knowledge, and experience emanating from different backgrounds (Gasman et al., 2015). Embracing diversity in all aspects of an organization, including leadership, is a voluntary practice that improves a brand's reputation (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2014). A diverse leadership lets key stakeholders, such as customers, the government, potential employees, and activists, know that an organization values diversity, and a good brand image is necessary for a competitive advantage.

Another benefit of diverse leadership is that it fosters a healthy company culture. As previously implied, diversity in leadership means that a firm encourages diversity and inclusion in its practice. Chrobot-Mason et al. (2014) point out that diverse leadership also means that employees are represented at the organization's top management level. It communicates to employees and other stakeholders that an entity is welcoming of different cultures and backgrounds. As such, members of an organization, even those at the bottom, feel included, leading to a better management-subordinate relationship. An inclusive leader facilitates values, norms, and principles of diversity and inclusion. The *inclusive leader* is transparent, culturally agile, collaborates and facilitates, embraces and leverages vast diversity, creates a safe space, and empowers (Tapia & Polonskaia, 2020).

Cuyler (2013) encourages academic institutions to proactively recruit diverse students into their degree programs. Cuyler (2013) argues:

> As key decision makers about who gains admission into graduate and undergraduate degree programs, arts management educators can lead the way in addressing the challenge of diversity by considering and responding to the neglected opportunities provided by affirmative action, diversity, and recruitment (p. 98).

This quantitative research reveals the magnitude of diversity reflected among leaders with an arts degree. A qualitative narrative could follow up this research to seek out and understand further leadership opportunities and/or constraints for the arts community of students and alumni and those who seek out leadership roles in the arts. However, a significant limitation is that this study relies solely on quantitative data. Although open-ended questions were asked, these responses were not shared with the researcher or fellow members of the team in order to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, another limitation is that items needed to be combined to get a proxy for leadership since there was no direct item to address the "leadership" variable. Moreover, the number of art graduates in leadership positions in arts organizations versus non-arts institutions remains unknown.

Diversity Makes Us All Richer

Diversity in education is increasing but lacking in the arts. For this reason, new leadership styles and teaching methods must emerge to create a more inclusive learning environment in organizations and academia. It is not simply enough to develop diversity policies, but to take action on inclusivity. Addressing and embracing diversity in organizations will require leaders to strategically implement diversity plans that raise awareness and address how inclusiveness can increase individual and organizational performance. These could be taught in higher education institutions in the form of explicit leadership training during the time at the institution, which would include minorities from the outset. Future research could further explore the reported leadership skills acquired at institutions and the gaps for minorities.

Leaders have their individual journeys into leadership. Nonetheless, the accounts of arts alumni (29,558), who reported being in leadership positions, reveal a considerable divide in race, ethnicity and culture. There is a striking gap, given that 78.5% of the alumni leaders are white. Generally, minority groups are not given the same opportunities for higher-paying jobs, including leadership roles. Diversity needs to be addressed by society as a whole. Intersectionality matters: race and cultural bias have been identified as impediments to the ability of minorities to climb the ladder or move out of poverty. There is a need to emphasize the importance of understanding the role of race, ethnicity, and other forms of diversity within a minority community and the walls of higher education institutions.

Without inclusion, there is no diversity; without equal opportunities, there is no equity. This paper sought to recognize the need for inclusiveness in a diverse world, as the main focus in leadership, not by ignoring differences in terms of race or class but by acknowledging these differences, helping to

reframe the conversation, and undertaking research so that leadership becomes more inclusive. When inclusive leaders exercise their influence, they will unleash humanity's full potential, and we will be closer to adopting and embracing an *inclusive* society. Nonetheless, addressing the leadership diversity of arts graduates requires considerable effort and commitment. Uncomfortable discussions resulting in strategies that will require a team of inclusive leaders need to be transpired. Once the path towards inclusivity is genuinely endorsed and embarked upon, we will change the status of minorities in society, fostering a healthier, more prosperous and innovative culture.

IMPLICATIONS

My findings inform how the intersection of race and gender shapes leadership experiences in minority groups. This research calls on higher education institutions to improve inclusivity, collaboration, and opportunities for minority groups. Creating and encouraging a mentorship program that supports diversity and inclusive leadership is necessary. Human resources professionals can foster this practice by helping ethnic minorities gain experience in, for example, mentorship relationships that are fruitful and relevant.

The implications of this study for leaders in a culturally diverse world are that they need to address the following: (1) how to assess "inclusiveness" and explore the role of "gatekeepers," i.e. those with the power to exercise equity and equality; (2) the development of an articulated vision and mission for inclusiveness; (3) the creation of inclusive leadership education; and (4) the monitoring of leaders' performance and requiring them to be held accountable for achieving their diversity and inclusivity goals.

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A Descriptive Quantitative Exploration of College Students of Promise During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The term Students of Promise is used for students considered to have a heightened risk status, which not only has a negative effect on students but also on the higher education institutions they attend. This quantitative study explored how the COVID-19 virus has impacted student populations at various US higher education institutions and to uncover what specific issues (financial, emotional, social) impacted students during this unprecedented time in light of student categories and student demographics. This study found statistical significance in Students of Promise characteristics and presents data on the behaviors, activities, and tools necessary for success, concerns surrounding COVID-19, and opinions on higher education factors. Implications are also discussed to include a deeper understanding of Students of Promise needs, social mobility, and advising. This study shows that Students of Promise continue to need academic resources but also ways to lower stress levels and to afford college.

Keywords: COVID-19, higher education crises, students of promise

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted traditional ways of campus learning and instructional delivery. This global event disrupted the student learning model which was rooted in the historical *Oxbridge* model which relies on an

in-person or on-grounds experience. Within this model, residential undergraduate students experience rites of passage through intentional university engagement programs (Sasso & Devitis, 2015). These programs facilitate increased levels of student involvement by connecting students to their campus and with their peers to develop increased forms of social and cultural capital which promotes individual student persistence (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). These peer connections are especially salient for many students who are characterized by stigma such as low academic performance, lower social or navigational capital, or who lack critical literacy (Blasi, 2002; Sosa et al., 2018).

Students are often academically filtered and positioned into three groups: (a) students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, (b) students who are of minority race, and (c) first-generation students (Tucker & McKnight, 2019). They are often assigned the term *at-risk* which is deficit framing noted by Harper (2010). The at-risk term can be stigmatizing and influence assumptions by peers and higher education professionals that these students are not academically ready for college. However, we center asset-based language to humanize the experiences of these undergraduates thus we use the term Students of Promise instead of at-risk in congruence with previous research (Blasi, 2002).

Extant research about Students of Promise indicates they are academic outsiders who must interface with several barriers and oppressive academic systems to persist to graduation (Price-Williams & Sasso, 2021; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016; Sasso & Phelps, 2021). Additional disruptions such as with COVID 19 and shifts to remote learning may negatively impact their persistence to graduation and place additional barriers which may lead to stop-outs (Sasso & Phelps, 2021). The disruptive effects of the COVID-19 are latent and still being examined by researchers (Wolniak & Burman, 2022).

In this study, we examined Students of Promise who were enrolled during the COVID-19 disruption to determine the pandemic's impact on their learning across the domains of behaviors or activities necessary for learning, concerns about COVID-19, and perceptions of learning formats and student supports through use of the COVID Impact on Current and Future College Students survey (CICFCS) by Fishman and Hiler (2020). The purpose of this study was to contribute to the understanding of factors associated with Students of Promise coupled with additional barriers due to a crisis like COVID-19. Our aim was to identify these salient factors to conceptualize potential solutions to mediate the effect of the COVID-19 disruption for Students of Promise.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students of Promise

The transition from high school to a university is historically challenging for Students of Promise in which academic rigor is required to become successful and becomes connected to their emotional growth (Blasi, 2002; Thomas et al., 2020). Students of Promise also tend to be considered first-generation students who are often defined as students in which neither parent has a four-year degree (Phillips et al., 2020; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). This lack of social and cultural capital often referred to as *college knowledge* transmitted from family systems inhibits social mobility and the capacity of Students of Promise to move from a lower-class status to a higher-class status (Philips et al., 2020; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). The unfortunate inability for some Students of Promise to merge comfortably between class systems may increase their inability to have a sense of fit with continuing-generation students (CGS). CGSs are defined as students with "one or more parents having a four-year degree" (Philips et al., 2020, p. 2). If first-generation students feel a lower sense of fit, their academic performance can also be negatively impacted (Shnabel et al., 2013).

Students of Promise also experience challenges related to academic success and endure increased academic-related stress which may perpetuate self-fulfilling prophecies drawn from and rooted in stigmatization (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Scribner et al., 2020; Tibbetts et al., 2016). Stress has been identified as a barrier to student success and Frazier et al. (2019) found a positive linear relationship to stress and poor academic performance.

Students of Promise as first-generation students associate with the negative aspect of their lower-class status and begin doubting their ability to become successful (Croizet & Claire, 1998). Additionally, Students of Promise are typically viewed from a deficit lens; meaning they fit within such "at-risk categories" and may be seen as expected to struggle because of their background instead of believing that they are capable of achieving at higher levels (Brown, 2016). These factors may contribute to first-generation students' ability to persist to graduate and have the potential to earn a higher income, access better health care, and better well-being overall (Reardon, 2011).

Student Success Barriers

College access, the ability to attend and afford college, can vary greatly by student demographic, social, and structural factors (Mwangi, 2015). Underrepresented minority groups and those lower socioeconomic

groups have historically struggled to access college (Comeaux et al., 2020; Hurtado et al., 1997; Perna et al., 2005). Students typically are more like to encounter barriers to persistence if they: (a) have made poor choices or decisions that negatively impacted their academics, (b) are adult students who return to higher education after an extended absence, or (c) students with academic or physical limitations not identified before enrolling in higher education (Horton, 2015; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). These students are typically low-income, first-generation, and minority students and often the coupling of these social identities can exacerbate student success (Bullington et al., 2022; Tucker & McKnight, 2019).

Students of Promise may experience other system barriers which can be analyzed through interrogating power structures, oppression, and privilege lenses (Brunn-Bevel et al., 2019). These systems facilitate marginality and perpetuate inequalities for many minoritized racial and ethnic populations and are due to their and/or parents' economic status. Students from low-income families are less prepared for college than students of higher income families and are less likely to succeed in college (Roska & Kinsley, 2019).

Students of Promise often attend colleges that are underfunded and have lower graduation rates and come from similar K-12 systems with lower graduation rates (Blom & Manarrez, 2020; Ormrod, 2012; Roderick et al., 2008). Students of Promise, especially Students of Color, are more likely to have higher debt responsibilities, and lower median annual earnings compared to their White peers (Espinosa et al., 2019; Taylor & Turk, 2019). Some minority women have struggled to keep pace with White women in college completion (Guerra, 2013).

Stress, due to discrimination, also negatively impacts student success (Stevens et al., 2018). Students who feel the most discriminated are from Asian and Latinx backgrounds, however Black and Multiracial students also reported high levels (Stevens et al., 2018). LGBTQ+ students also do not academically perform well when they do not feel safe on campuses (Coulter & Rankin, 2020; Coulter et al, 2017; Hoffman et al., 2019).

COVID-19

College and university campuses were closed in 185 countries as the initial disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic (Marinoni et al., 2020). Whichever level of risk institutions of higher education deemed appropriate for their population, universities had to seek and deliver training associated with risk-reduction programs to encourage awareness and ultimately

decrease the student mortality rate (Dehdashti, 2020). Globally, institutions moved to online learning in March 2020 (Crawford et al., 2020), but by Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, institutions offered more hybrid and in-person models (Rixon et al., 2021).

Faculty members and administrators had to find ways to move traditional face-to-face classes to online environments and students had to quickly move back home and take classes online (Johnson et al., 2020; Patricia, 2020). Many issues impact student learning like the rapid transition to online/home environments, unstable internet connections, access to support (Lederer et al., 2021), professors who were not used to teaching online, loss of jobs/income (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020; Smalley, 2020; Son et al., 2020). Many institutions also suffered severe enrollment declines which had effects on higher education operating budgets (Wolniak & Burman, 2022).

COVID-19 also led to even further disruption for underrepresented student populations. Students of Color reported concerns on delayed time-to-graduation and were more likely to change majors than their White peers due to COVID-19 (Aucejo et al., 2020). Students of Color also reported that they did not know if they would return to their campuses (Simpson Scarborough, 2020). Black and Hispanic students were also almost six times more likely to take leaves of absence for Spring 2020 (National Student Clearinghouse, 2020) over Asian and White students. Moreover, minorities, especially Blacks and Hispanics, were more likely to contract COVID-19 (Oppel et al., 2020).

COVID-19, like other pandemics, can have detrimental effects on minority populations and increase the stress put on students such as having to move back home can affect academic success or work a frontline, part-time job (Selden & Berdahl, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceptions of behaviors or activities necessary for learning, concerns about COVID-19, and perceptions of learning formats and student support among Students of Promise. This study used a quasi-experimental descriptive quantitative within-groups survey design to examine the subscales on the CICFCS (Fishman & Hiler, 2020).

The independent variables were (1) perceptions of learning activities or formats and (2) COVID-19 concerns. The dependent variable was

Students of Promise which was defined by Blasi (2002). This study was guided by the following research questions:

What are the perceptions of behaviors or activities necessary for learning, concerns about COVID-19, and perceptions of learning formats and student support among Students of Promise?

What is the relationship between demographic factors and behaviors or activities necessary for learning, concerns about COVID-19, and perceptions of learning formats and student support among Students of Promise?

Sample

The target population of study was full-time undergraduate Students of Promise in the United States who identified within the inclusion criteria of this study. The inclusion criteria was: (1) over 18; (2) undergraduate student status or had plans to enroll in an undergraduate-level degree program; and (3) identify with first-generation status. A random nonprobability sampling procedure was used because the sample size could not be determined because participants reserved the right to participate (Vehovar et al., 2016).

The sample (n = 181) reflected broad undergraduate demographics (see General Trends section) and national trends in higher education institutions as aforementioned within the literature review and introduction sections of this paper. Thus, the results of this study have high external validity as applied to four-year higher education institutions.

Instrumentation

This study used the COVID Impact on Current and Future College Students survey (CICFCS) by Fishman and Hiler (2020). The survey has a credibility interval of +/- 3.1% (Fishman & Hiler, 2020). The CICFCS is organized into three sections using different Likert-type scales (1-5). The first measures behaviors or activities necessary for learning. The second asks about concerns about COVID-19 including its influence on COVID conditions on their enrollment status. The third prompts participants about their perceptions of learning formats and student supports such as student loans or grants.

We also used a demographic questionnaire asking participants to self-report gender identities, age, sexual identities, geographic identity or location, education status, ethnicity, race, marital status, family size, socioeconomic and first-generation status. Each of these instruments consisted of forced-choice surveys with close-ended questions that are

limited to self-reporting. The survey was anonymous and did not collect any identifying information.

Procedure

This study was conducted during a four-month period of the COVID-19 disruption in which many campuses had limited accessibility and presented constraints in accessing the target population of the study. Therefore, for the purposes of study, survey research was used as a "means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people" and an online survey was used to reach the broadest cross-sectional population (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993, p. 2).

This survey was cross-sectional because it was only limited to inclusion criteria and it was shared with via social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. It was also shared with higher education administration professional groups, like Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), College Student Educators International (ACPA), and the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA). The survey was presented in Qualtrics and distributed electronically containing a link for potential participants in which they completed a standardized recruitment statement, informed consent, as well as the demographic survey and CICFCS instruments.

Data Analysis

Survey data were exported from the online survey platform into SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics by research question. In order to measure the difference between Students of Promise across factors of academic success, a Pearson chi-square analysis was used to analyze if there were any statistically significant differences between group means. CICFCS scores were computed using standardized scoring as outlined by Fishman and Hiler (2020).

RESULTS

General Trends Among Students of Promise

Participant demographics are reported in Table 1 and are broken down by gender, age, ethnicity, and race. Across gender identities, students self-identified as female (65%), male (22.3%), or gender non-conforming (4%). Students of Promise were mostly of non-traditional age between 20-30 (53.3%) or over 30 (20.7%). Only selected students were within the traditional undergraduate age range (14.7%). Across race and ethnicity, a small proportion identified as Hispanic (13.2%), but the majority were

diverse including other Students of Color such as Black (36.0%), Asian (4.5%), or Multiracial (8.1%).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Category	Response	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	44	22.3%
	Female	129	65.5%
	Gender Non-Conforming	8	4%
Age	Under 20	29	14.7%
	21-30	105	53.3%
	31-40	24	12.2%
	41-50	16	8.1%
	51+	4	4.4%
	Missing	15	7.6%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	26	13.2%
	Non-Hispanic	146	74.1%
	Missing	15	12.7%
Race	American Indian/Alaska Native	2	1%
	Asian	9	4.5%
	Black or African American	71	36.0%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	1.0%
	White	67	34.0%
	Two or More Races	16	8.1%
	Other	4	2.0%
	Missing	26	13.1%

Participants self-reported other demographic information including geographic identity, degree status, marital status, and family size as seen in Table 2. Most were from a suburban area (56.9%), but also from urban (20.3%), and rural (14.2%). Most respondents had completed some coursework but did not have a degree (59.9%) and some completed an associate degree (22.3%). Most respondents were single (68.0%) and a small percentage were married (13.2%) or divorced (5.1%). Family size varied with 5 or more (34.9%) individuals, 3 individuals (19.3%) 4 individuals (17.8%), 2 individuals (13.2%), or a single person household (10.6%). Finally, most participants reported their income status as middle (63.5%) or low (24.9%), but a small percentage reported high (4.1%).

Table 2

Participant Socioeconomic Status

Category	Response	Frequency	Percent
Residential Area	Rural	28	14.2%
	Suburban	112	56.9%
	Urban	40	20.3%
	Missing	17	8.6%
Completed Education	Some college, but no degree	119	59.9%
	Associate degree	44	22.3%
	Bachelor's degree	14	7.1%
	Missing	15	7.6%
First-Generation Student	Yes	81	41.1%
	No	62	31.5%
	Missing	15	7.6%
Marital Status	Single	134	68.0%
	Married	26	13.2%
	Divorced	10	5.1%
	Widowed	3	1.5%
	Domestic Partnership	9	4.6%
	Missing	15	7.6%
Family Size	1	12	10.6%
	2	26	13.2%
	3	38	19.3%
	4	35	17.8%
	Between 5-10	60	34.9%
	Over 10	2	1%
Income Status	High	8	4.1%
	Middle	125	63.5%
	Low	49	24.9%
	Missing	15	7.6%

Research Question 1

Participants were asked about what was important to them to be successful in college. Overwhelmingly, students listed all categories as being extremely important, followed by highly important, as shown in Table 3. Getting proper instruction from instructors or professors was highly rated (94.77%), staying motivated to learn (95.88% extremely important or very important), having enough resources to pay for school (94.77% extremely important or very important), being able to easily ask questions and interact with instructors/professors (84.89% extremely important or very important), having a quiet place to focus (74.27% extremely important or very important), access to a stable, high-speed internet connection (96.52% extremely important or very important), access to student support services

(71.01% extremely important or very important), high quality learning materials (72,78% extremely important or very important), and being able to take care of children while pursuing education (79.27% extremely important or very important).

Table 3

Behaviors, Activities, and Tools Necessary for Success

Category	Extremely Important		Very Important		Moderately Important		Slightly Important		Not at All Important		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Getting proper instruction from instructors or professors	128	74.42%	35	20.35%	5	2.91%	2	1.16%	2	1.16%	172
Staying motivated to learn	125	73.53%	38	22.35%	5	2.94%	2	1.18%	2	0.00%	170
Having enough resources to pay for school	143	83.14%	20	11.63%	6	3.49%	3	1.74%	3	0.00%	172
Being able to easily ask questions and interact with your instructor or professor	104	60.47%	42	24.42%	23	13.37%	3	1.74%	3	0.00%	172
Having a quiet place to focus	85	49.71%	42	24.56%	31	18.13%	7	4.09%	7	3.51%	171
Having access to a stable, high-speed internet connection	140	81.40%	26	15.12%	5	2.91%	1	0.58%	1	0.00%	172
Having access to student support services	79	46.75%	41	24.26%	30	17.75%	16	9.47%	16	1.78%	169
Having access to high-quality learning materials	84	49.70%	39	23.08%	33	19.53%	9	5.33%	9	2.37%	169
Taking care of children while pursuing your education	56	68.29%	9	10.98%	4	4.88%	6	7.32%	6	8.54%	82

We also examined stressors that could affect student success (Table 4). Again, every category was ranked extremely important or very important by most respondents. The categories were: mental health (82.56%), friends and family catching COVID-19 (67.64%), keeping their current job (65.11%), helping their children navigate distance learning while working or going to school themselves (65.75%), getting a job after graduation (80.73%), catching COVID and spreading it to others (69.59%), being able

to purchase necessities to survive (66.87%), being able to pay tuition (71.43%), and being able to pay for non-education related bills in the next year (77.16%).

Finally, we examined participants' opinions on factors that surrounded higher education (Table 5). Again, most respondents rated the factors very favorably or favorably. The categories were higher education institution, college and university faculty, college and university staff and administrators, in-class learning, online learning, hybrid learning, their institution's response to the pandemic, student grants, and student loans.

Table 4

Concerns Surrounding the COVID-19 Virus

Category	Extremely Important		Very Important		Moderately Important		Slightly Important		Not at All Important		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
My mental health	105	61.05 %	37	21.51 %	24	13.95%	4	2.33 %	2	1.16 %	172
My friends and family catching COVID	95	55.88 %	20	11.76 %	34	20.00%	14	8.24 %	7	4.12 %	170
Keeping my current job	64	49.61 %	20	15.50 %	13	10.08%	13	10.08 %	19	14.73%	129
Having to help with distance learning for my children while I work or go to school	40	54.79 %	8	10.96 %	12	16.44%	5	6.85 %	8	10.96%	73
Getting any type of job once I graduate	110	66.27 %	24	14.46 %	21	12.65%	7	4.22 %	4	2.41 %	166
Catching COVID and spreading it to others	105	61.40 %	14	8.19%	29	16.96%	14	8.19 %	9	5.26 %	171
Being able to purchase necessities like food and housing in the next few weeks to a month	86	52.76 %	23	14.11 %	22	13.50%	11	6.75 %	21	12.88%	163
Being able to pay my upcoming tuition bill	91	56.52 %	24	14.91 %	20	12.42%	12	7.45 %	14	8.70 %	161
Being able to pay my non-education related bills in the next year	102	62.96 %	23	14.20 %	26	16.05%	5	3.09 %	6	3.70 %	162

Research Question Two

A Pearson chi-square analysis was conducted for each of the factors in Tables 3-5 to explore potential significant differences in relation to data from the demographic questionnaire. Statistical significance was found for the following variables in the following demographics of gender identities, age, sexual identities, geographic identity or location, education status, ethnicity, race, marital status, family size, socioeconomic status, and first-generation status.

Table 5

Opinions on Higher Education Factors

	Very Favorably		Favorably		Unfavorably		Very Unfavorably		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Your higher education institution	59	36.20%	89	54.60%	13	7.98%	2	1.23%	163
College and university faculty	56	34.36%	89	54.60%	16	9.82%	2	1.23%	163
College and university staff and administrators	50	31.25%	90	56.25%	18	11.25%	2	1.25%	160
In-class learning	57	42.22%	40	29.63%	21	15.56%	17	12.59%	135
Online learning	60	35.93%	58	34.73%					
Hybrid learning	37	25.00%	71	47.97%	24	16.22%	16	10.81%	148
Your higher education institution's response to COVID	49	31.01%	78	49.37%	22	13.92%	9	5.70%	158
Student grants	83	61.03%	35	25.74%	10	7.35%	8	5.88%	158
Student loans	46	32.39%	42	29.58%	26	18.31%	28	19.72%	152

For gender, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for getting proper instruction from instructors or professors, x^2 (15, N = 172) = 36.685, p = 0.01; being able to easily ask questions and interact with their instructor or professor, x^2 (20, N = 104) = 31.893, p = 0.44; staying motivated to learn, x^2 (15, N = 125) = 35.685, p = 0.001; having a quiet place to focus, x^2 (20, N = 85) = 31.893, p = 0.044; having access to high-quality learning materials, x^2 (20, N = 84) = 32.276, p = 0.003); their friends and family catching COVID-19, x^2 (16, N = 95) = 59.697, p = 0.000; catching COVID-19 and spreading it to others, x^2 (16, N = 105) = 56.396, p = 0.000; and being able to pay for non-education related expenses in the next year, x^2 (15, N = 102) = 27.279, p = 0.050.

For age, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for having access to student support services, x^2 (16, N = 143) = 27.461, p = 0.037; mental health, x^2 (16, N = 105) = 26.764, p = 0.044; catching COVID-19 and spreading it to others, x^2 (16, N = 105) = 27.764, p = 0.015; and getting any type of job once the student graduates, x^2 (16, N = 110) = 27.057, p = 0.041.

For sexual identity, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for having access to high-quality learning materials, x^2 (20, N = 84) = 32.276, p = 0.030; friends and family catching COVID-19, x^2 (16, N = 95) = 59.697, p = 0.000; catching COVID-19 and spreading it to others, x^2 (16, N = 105) = 53.396, p = 0.000; being able to purchase necessities like

food and housing in the next few weeks to a month, x^2 (4, $N = 86$) = 12.325, $p = 0.015$; and being able to pay for non-education related bills in the next year, x^2 (16, $N = 91$) = 26.279, $p = 0.050$.

For geographic identity, the only relationship found to be statistically significant was getting proper instruction from instructors or professors, x^2 (8, $N = 128$) = 16.363, $p = 0.037$. For education level, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for staying motivated to learn, x_2 (12, $N = 125$) = 23.984, $p = 0.020$; having access to a stable, high-speed internet connection, x^2 (12, $N = 140$) = 29.671, $p = 0.003$; taking care of children while pursuing their education, x^2 (16, $N = 56$) = 52.176, $p = 0.000$; likelihood to re-enroll in current school for upcoming academic year, x^2 (16, $N = 172$) = 38.864, $p = 0.001$; and needing more time to complete their college education than originally anticipated due to COVID-19, x^2 (16, $N = 168$) = 28, 075, $p = 0.031$.

For race, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for staying motivated to learn, x^2 (21 $N = 125$) = 55.192, $p = 0.000$; having access to a stable, high-speed internet connection, x^2 (21, $N = 140$) = 44.453, $p = 0.002$; taking care of children while pursuing their education, x^2 (28, $N = 56$) = 45.993, $p = 0.017$; mental health, x^2 (28, $N = 105$) = 43.124, $p = 0.034$; COVID-19's effect on the desire to enroll in college, x^2 (28, $N = 168$) = 51,153 $p = 0.005$; and needing more time to complete their college education than originally anticipated due to COVID-19, x^2 (28, $N = 168$) = 48.866, $p = 0.009$. For ethnicity, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for having access to a stable, high-speed internet connection, x^2 (6, $N = 140$) = 12.812, $p = 0.046$; being able to purchase necessities like food and housing in the next few weeks to a month, x^2 (8, $N = 86$) = 19.732, $p = 0.011$; the likelihood to re-enroll in current school for upcoming academic year, x^2 (27, $N = 172$) = 39.721, $p = 0.042$; and viewing student loans as favorable or unfavorable, x^2 (6, $N = 142$) = 13.193, $p = 0.040$.

For first-generation students, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for being able to pay upcoming tuition bills, x^2 (12, $N = 91$) = 28.906, $p = 0.004$; the extent to which COVID-19 plays a role in their decision to go back to college, x^2 (9, $N = 168$) = 17.782, $p = 0.038$; viewing their higher education institution's response to COVID-19 favorably or unfavorably, x^2 (9, $N = 163$) = 16.989, $p = 0.049$; viewing their college and university faculty favorably or unfavorably, x^2 (9 $N = 163$) = 17.490, $p = 0.042$.

For family size, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for being able to easily ask questions and interact with instructors

or professors, x^2 (45, N = 104) = 61.627, p = 0.050; having access to high-quality learning materials, x^2 (60, N = 84) = 79.569, p = 0.046; their friends and family catching COVID-19, x^2 (60, N = 95) = 86.240, p = 0.015; catching COVID-19 and spreading it to others, x^2 (60, N = 105) = 90.977, p = 0.006; getting any type of job once they graduate, x^2 (60, N = 110) = 95.198, p = 0.003; their likelihood of re-enrolling in their current school for the upcoming academic year, x^2 (60, N = 172) = 89.647, p = 0.008.

For socioeconomic status, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for having enough resources to pay for school, x^2 (6, N = 143) = 16.051, p = 0.013; having a quiet place to focus, x^2 (8, N = 85) = 16.695, p = 0.033; keeping their current job, x^2 (8, N = 64) = 15.720, p = 0.047; getting any type of job once they graduate, x^2 (8, N = 110) = 16.148, p = 0.040; being able to pay non-education related bills in the next year, x^2 (8, N = 102) = 17.729, p = 0.023; being able to pay their upcoming tuition bill, x^2 (8, N = 91) = 18.916, p = 0.015; being able to purchase necessities like food and housing in the next few weeks to a month, x^2 (8, N = 86) = 20.617, p = 0.008; the extent to which COVID-19 is playing a role in their decision to go back to college, x^2 (8, N = 168) = 20.617, p = 0.008; their likelihood to want to enroll in college because of COVID-19, x^2 (8, N = 172) = 19.368, p = 0.013; needing more time to complete their college education than originally anticipated due to COVID-19, x^2 (8, N = 168) = 23.130, p = 0.003; viewing their higher education institution's response to COVID-19 favorably or unfavorably, x^2 (6, N = 163) = 12.950, p = 0.044; viewing student grants favorably or unfavorably, x^2 (8, N = 136) = 32.255, p = 0.000.

For marital status, the relationship was found to be statistically significant for catching COVID-19 and spreading it to others, x^2 (16, N = 105) = 31.311, p = 0.012; to the extent COVID-19 is playing a role in their decision to go back to college, x^2 (12, N = 172) = 28.684, p = 0.004; their likelihood of re-enrolling in their current school for the upcoming academic year, x^2 (16, N = 172) = 27.926, p = 0.032; viewing their college and university faculty favorably or unfavorably, x^2 (12, N = 163) = 22.981, p = 0.028; their opinion that their institution is delivering an online experience that sets them up for success, x^2 (8, N = 163) = 18.069, p = 0.021.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The findings from this study suggest Students of Promise encounter significant academic stress. Stress levels can be attributed to finding ways to pay for college, the COVID-19 pandemic, and academic issues. These findings are also in line with research about Students of Promise. We found

statistical significance for at-risk student characteristics for gender (Guerra, 2013); sexual identity (Coulter & Rankin, 2020; Coulter et al., 2017); first generation status (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Croizet & Claire, 1998; Shnabel et al., 2013; Tibbetts et al., 2016), socioeconomic status (Philips et al., 2010; Roska & Kinsley, 2019; Taylor & Turk, 2019), and racial and minority status (Blom & Manarrez, 2020; Espinosa et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2018; Taylor & Turk, 2019).

There are several implications for practice that can be gleaned from the findings of this study. Practitioners, policymakers, and researchers need to be aware of the needs of Students of Promise to encourage and support their persistence towards graduation during extended learning disruptions such as during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. This study highlights the importance of understanding Students of Promise, particularly during a crisis like COVID-19.

It is vital for higher education institutions to understand the needs of their students, particularly for students at risk of not graduating (Reardon, 2011). Their concerns about the COVID-19 disruption and perceptions of learning are highlighted in this study. Thus, practitioners should be aware of the barriers and stressors identified in this study in order to provide support that will help students overcome some of these barriers.

Finding ways to increase social mobility of students, programs focused on financial literacy and academic success skills should center Students of Promise to address the success gaps elucidated from this study (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). However, practitioners must understand the needs of students on their campuses by surveying them and assessing their differential needs (Wolniak & Burman, 2022). Adding professional development for faculty, administrators, and staff on how to provide solutions to barriers could help institutions develop increased capacity to support students (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). Additional approaches should also integrate technology to engage with Students of Promise.

Generation-Z, Millennials, as well as post-traditional Students of Promise felt disconnected during the COVID-19 pandemic and institutions struggled to respond. Practices such as proactive advising should be used with Students of Promise (Dobrinich Johns et al., 2017). Due to aspects of interpersonal communication and relationship development, academic advising has traditionally been provided in person; however, in recent years, it has become more prevalent in the online learning environment and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bouchey et al., 2021; Habley et al. 2012; Steele, 2016). Advisors can discover new ways to meet students' communication requirements and expectations as online learning has

developed and entered new areas (Pasquini & Steele, 2016). This can allow higher education and academic advisors to investigate both synchronous and asynchronous routes of delivery because of the development and integration of technology (Sasso & Phelps, 2021). Applying various technical tools has increased the prospects for asynchronous or *cloud advising* to become more efficacious (Leonard, 2008).

For example, individualized asynchronous advising through recorded video is not intended to replace conventional face-to-face advising sessions; rather, the asynchronous technique, or *cloud advising,* has the ability to suit the advising requirements of various student groups (Phelps, 2019; Sasso & Phelps, 2021). Simply, practitioners and professionals in higher education must promote effective practices and strategies for communicating with Students of Promise (Price-Williams & Sasso, 2021). Approaches to universal design in academic advising and higher education pedagogy promote inclusive settings and personalized learning methodologies such as cloud advising (Phelps, 2019).

Limitations

There are limitations of both the internal and external validity of this study. Self-report instruments were used in this study, and we only examined undergraduate students who intended to pursue undergraduate studies which were important due to the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was only open for four months and we used random sampling to find participants through social media advertising and through higher education professional groups which may have led to sampling bias. There was no differentiation between learning formats, including distance learners, transfer, and *on-grounds* students or between residential and commuter students.

The generalizability of this study might be limited, given the sample size. The findings of this study are not causal and are only exploratory and correlational using primarily descriptive data. This study is not predictive, and its findings cannot claim which perceptual factors influence student persistence during the COVID-19 disruption. Future research should explore the differential impact of this pandemic disruption across the most invisible student communities within existing marginalized economic or social systems.

Future Studies

Researchers need to continue to explore barriers experienced by Students of Promise and disseminate findings through applied research and

evaluation. Additionally, qualitative research on the effects of COVID-19 on student populations is also warranted as we lack nuanced understandings about the differential impact across marginalized identities and Students of Promise. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected how students learn and the rapid move to online-only instruction has highlighted increased educational and learning disparities that have a latent effect on incoming and current students. More research across identities and classifications could also help develop targeted support initiatives for Students of Promise to engage them during another disruption like COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

Students of Promise continue to be a population that needs extra attention in postsecondary education. Often viewed from a deficit lens, these students face increased barriers and may be at heightened risk for academic success and graduation. However, continuing to address and research the needs of Students of Promise can help remove some of the obstacles that they encounter in college and university.

This study centered on Students of Promise enrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic and examined their needs based on learning, student support, and concern on the effects of COVID-19. Students of Promise were faced with additional barriers because of COVID-19 thus it is important to understand how additional obstacles may have affected their academic progress. The research questions focused on the behaviors, activities, and tools needed for success, as well as concerns surrounding COVID-19, and the importance of higher education factors such as learning media and paying for college. The findings are in line with other studies on Students of Promise, particularly with regard to gender, sexual identity, as well as first generation, socioeconomic, and racial and minority status. Finding more ways to connect with and engage Students of Promise to help remove potential academic and personal barriers to education is important and we hope this study advances understanding of this important population in higher education.

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Exploring the Narrated Experiences of Three International Muslim Students in a U.S. University

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the narrated lived experiences of three international Muslim students in a US university. The study took place at a northeastern public university in the USA and used a narrative research methodology in which the three participants were interviewed twice and asked to share materials and artifacts. The study has two main goals: First, it enriches our understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Second, it utilizes the participants' narrated experiences to develop pedagogical implications for programs and professors to empower minority students, such as the Muslim student population. The findings of this study reveal that the participants needed more support from their professors and departments to increase their visibility and empower them. Such support can come from means of critical pedagogy practices that challenge mainstream students' misconceptions and biases about their Muslim peers.

Keywords: Minority, Islam, Muslim students, identity, lived experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Muslim international students are prone to discrimination, exclusion, and violent behaviors in the western US environments (Ali, 2014; Allen, 2020; Bacchus, 2019; Choudhury & Beydoun, 2020; Green, 2019). Beshara (2019) argued that studying Muslims in the United States has political and moral

significance to Muslim students' political, religious, and national identities for the established well-being of imposed threats by non-Muslim persons. Muslim students in the United States are labeled and seen as individuals who belong to a suspicious community (Ali, 2014). In November 2016, the FBI Annual Hate 2015 Crime Report indicated that hate crimes against Muslims increased by 67%, a 19% increase that totaled 307 hate crimes in comparison to 257 in 2016 (FBI, 2017). However, from 2018 to 2021, a report noted a recent decline in hate crimes against Muslims (FBI, 2019). According to the August 2021 FBI Report, hate crimes against Muslims were 38%, with fewer cases in the US, FBI oversight. Regardless of the declining percentage, incidents against Muslims are still severe. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2017), from 2015 to 2016, the number of hate groups in the United States increased by 197% against Muslims. The Pew Research Center (2017) highlighted the primary religious affiliations in the US as Americans Judaism, Catholics, Protestants, Evangelical Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, Atheists, and Islam ranking as the least welcomed and the least-favorite religion among the US population.

In 2015, there were 34 anti-Muslim hate groups; they surged to 101 in 2016. However, this number dropped in 2019 to 88 hate groups. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) received 10,015 anti-Muslim hate crimes between 2014 until June 2019. Such incidents include harassment, vandalism, bullying, denial of service or access, issues with employment or promotion, inappropriate questioning or contact, and denial of religious accommodation, and these incidents soared in 2017 with Islamophobic propaganda (CAIR, 2020). In January 2017, former President Trump signed the Muslim Ban Executive Order that furthered racial profiling of Muslims. This narrative examination study, therefore, reports findings from three Muslim students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The anti-Muslim rhetoric is rooted in the Islamophobic discourse that rejects multiculturalism and fights against it. Green (2019) defines *Islamophobia* as “hostility toward Muslims and Islam that is driven by racism and manifested in acts of discrimination and violence” (p. 3). Sway (2005) argued that anti-religious ideologies such as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are "rooted in xenophobic Eurocentrism, which fosters multicultural barriers in a “world not dominated by nationalism and national interests” (pp. 21-22); however, the paradigms to replace the rhetoric of vast destruction extends not only to Muslims but other marginalized groups where

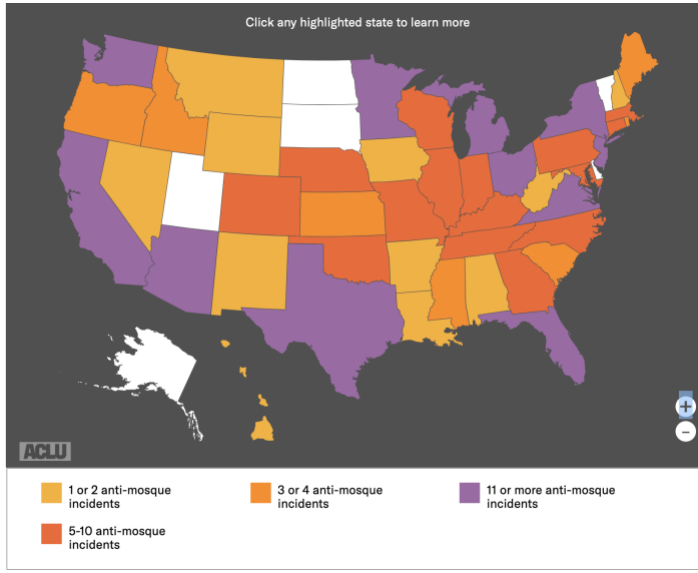
attitudes of isolationist lead to the passing of laws that target these disparities (Cesari, 2010; Ekman, 2015; Fekete, 2009).

Bacchus (2019) argued that Muslims experience discrimination of socio-integration, which presents challenges and barriers to their religious beliefs, attire choices, and non-Western ethnic origins" (p. 1). Bacchus (2019) highlights that anti-Muslim media depictions have produced profiling policies within the Patriot Act, the Handschu Agreement, and the Muslim Ban. Additionally, examination of Islamophobic discourses in US societies is essential to the developmental senses of the marginalized student experiences. Bedi (2019) disputed that an Islamophobic individual is, indeed, a victim of their "unconscious shadow and struggle with symptoms of anxiety and fear and operates out of reptilian survival consciousness of fight, flight, or freeze" (p. 150). Schulzke (2011) claimed that the alleged war on terror promoted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western European countries are one way of fighting multiculturalism. However, nationalistic utilization only strengthens arguments surrounding 9/11 as a failure in multiculturalism in the Euro-Western Counties (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Choma et al., 2015; Eyssel et al., 2015; Fetzer & Soper, 2005; Stabac & Listhaug, 2008). The impact of representing Muslim people as a demographic threat removes their right to public spaces through symbolism designed to terminate Muslim people (Bakali, 2016).

Allen (2020a) acknowledges that the racial and cultural identity of the Islamic faith exposes Muslim persons to Islamophobia in the US. Beyond these physical acts of violence, Muslim individuals and families are frequent persons of interest in police investigations. Thus, further examination of the Muslims' lived experiences will provide parallels for analyzing Euro-Western countries. Choudhury and Beydoun (2020) asserted that Islamophobia's manifestations are often visible forms of violence. However, quotidian forms of discrimination are prevalent and less seen or observed. The worship places of Muslims (mosques) are frequently vandalized and attacked. Allen (2020a) reported that Muslim prayer places receive violent physical attacks, racist graffiti, smashed windows and break-ins, the desecration of sacred items, arson, and bombings. These attack on a specific group's place of worship attacks their identities. In Figure 1 below, we can see the attacks on Muslim prayer spaces (American Civil Liberties Union, 2020).

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, (2020), 67% of Muslims reported physical acts of violence at their local mosque. The ACLU noted many acts were initiated in the late hours, and impacted multiple marginalized communities. Additional reporting from the ACLU indicates the immigration status of many Muslims delayed reporting.

Figure 1
Nationwide Anti-Mosque Activity



As information of three or more acts of violence directly indicated fear or concern for women and children determine the timeless of community reporting. Nonetheless, Muslim racial brutality extends to the college campus environments. CAIR (2017) highlights the cumulation of New York Universities' vandalism and hate speech with the former elected President, Donald Trump. University found the name "TRUMP" written on the door of the Islamic prayer room, the acronym "ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], and a calling for Muslims to leave" in women's restrooms at the same university **(CAIR, 2017).** Also, other campuses experienced manifestations of Islamophobia, including the University of Michigan Ann Arbor and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, with similar anti-Muslim vandalism (CAIR, 2017).

Lost Privileges

Anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment can affect how Muslims are perceived (Ahmed et al., 2014; Mir, 2014; Rissanen, 2014). Yacoub (2017) developed a list of the lost privileges Muslim ESL University students desire to possess. Yacoub's list is a reflection on McIntosh's (1997) list of the White privileges (Table 1).

Table 1

*McIntosh's (1997) Privileges of the White and Yacoub's (2017) Wished Privileges of Muslims**

White Privileges	Wished Privileges of Muslims
- I can be reasonably sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me. - I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives. - I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented. - When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is. - I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race. - I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider. - I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.	- When people know that I am a Muslim, they recognize that Islam is not monolithic but a diverse religion that houses 1.7 billion adherents. - People do not consider me a part of the political conflict, because I represent myself and not any political entity; I am just a victim of a big political game - If I violate a rule, I deserve a penalty not because I want to ruin the system of the country but because I am not yet familiar with it. - If I turn on the TV, I find my religion or culture represented in a good way. - If I turn on the TV, I see people of my religion or culture represented and their achievements highlighted. - If I am assigned a group of classmates to work with, I am seen as normal as everyone else. - When I watch TV, I do not see any association between "terrorism" and "Islam." - If I look for Halal food, people do not think I hate their food or detest their religion. - If I am accompanying people of my religion or race, we are not looked down upon or thought we are plotting something.

Note: These are not the complete lists; these are only relevant examples.

In addition to Yacoub's list above, some Muslims change their Arabic names to both avoid potential forms of discrimination and increase their chance of getting hired. In the movie *The Citizen*, a Lebanese Muslim immigrant suffering from discrimination and job rejections was advised by a Muslim peer to change their name to a more Americanized option to increase their chances of employment. With such anti-Muslim rhetoric and

Islamophobic discourses, few studies explored the experiences of Muslim students. Ali (2014) explored the life experiences of 24 Muslim US citizens enrolled as undergraduate students in four universities in Southern California. Over nine months, Ali investigated how those Muslim students understood their experiences to construct an identity as Muslims in America. The categorized research included three predominant themes in the participants' data analysis: Muslims as pre-modern people, a physical threat, and gendered figures.

The participants believed that the society around them viewed them as backward, illogical, or unwilling to participate in a democratic country and "extremists." (Ali, 2014, pp. 1251-1253). Additionally, the 24 participants in this study indicated they were often treated in ways that reflect the prevailing image of Muslims in America. One of the participants stated having to stop wearing the hijab to avoid being classified as a Muslim, or at least to reduce such categorization. Ali's (2014) findings concluded with more investigation on issues that can contribute to researching at-risk students in the school context. Dey's (2012) findings for the Muslim US citizen examined college students' construct of personal identity by living as Muslim citizens in the US and studying in its colleges. Dey's (2012) findings indicated four major identity dimensions: religion, citizenship, culture, and gender; they affect Muslim US-citizen-college students. Dey (2012) clarified that these dimensions resulted in unparalleled anti-Muslim verbiage in the United States. Dey (2012) concluded that with increased knowledge about the Muslim college student population, Muslim communities experienced increased "visibility" for enhanced knowledge of the different levels of accommodations that support Muslim college students, college programs, faculty, and staff for a whole society development (p. 19).

Muslim Women and College Campus

Mir (2014) investigated the struggle of transient Muslim American undergraduate women who wore hijabs on college campuses. Mir (2014) examined the imaged and perceived treatment in external and internal campus environments and found that participants, although all Americans with fluent American English abilities, suffered from being scrutinized. Participants suffered from the reductionist looks that associated them with a monolithic group. Additionally, the identities of the participants were diverse, varying from orthodox to contemporary Islamic practices with Muslim women's personal praying, dating, and fashion styles. Also, Ahmed et al.’s (2014) collection of fourteen published essays from Muslim American students, eight men, and six women, are memoirs and personal reflections on student

experiences. The fourteen grouped essays are divided into five parts on the struggle and diversity of Islamophobia, sexuality/relationships, piety, and family. These collected narratives of Muslim students dig into discovery for a sense of belonging and the Islamophobic discourse for perceived experiences. The current study is a continuation of such efforts to examine the lived and narrated experiences of Muslim students.

Research Questions

This study is committed to examining possible answers to the following questions:

RQ1: What are the narrated experiences of three international Muslim students in a US university?

RQ2: What do these reported experiences reveal about the participants' sense of belonging and identity negotiation?

METHOD

This study adopts narrative design. Labove (2006) defines a *narrative* as a chain of events told orally or in writing and ordered chronologically. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that narrative research works best for studies that explore how contextualized discourses form the participants' stories. Narrative studies are valuable because participants' stories include "language, social relations, communities, conventions, rules, beliefs and discourse of the individuals" (Hanauer, 2000, p.1) and they are discovered, explored, and valued in narrative-based studies. Therefore, the researcher's use of a narrative research design in this study is the most suitable as it empowers the participants to understand and interpret the stories they describe. While telling their stories, the participants can reflect upon their voices, comment on their experiences, and re-consider the story's context. The duality of the narrative research allows for "a dual layer of interpretation" where the participants interpret recounted stories, and the researcher "makes sense" of these interpretations, adding a layer of interpretation to the narratives (Riessman, 1993; Delve et al., 2020).

Data Collection and Analysis

This study occurred at a public university in the northeastern region of the United States. The researcher used a semi-structured interview style for collecting data. Following Riessman's (2008) and Rubin's (2012) semi-structured interview models, which argued that the researcher and the participants should create a dialogue until the researcher deeply comprehends

the participants' narratives. Data collection spanned over five months in two separate interviewing sessions. In the first interview, research participants were asked open-ended questions to encourage them to share their lived experiences as Muslim students on and off campus. In the second interview, participants were asked to reflect on their stories for further information, clarity, or to provide additional details. Narayan and George (2003) wrote that narratives require storying and re-storying. Therefore, this aspect was essential to the narrative research method as it allowed the participants time to hear back their stories.

Participants

After obtaining the Institutional Review Board protocol approval, the researcher sent invitations to potential participants using WhatsApp. Additionally, the researcher contacted some undergraduate instructors for assistance with disseminating invitations to all potential participants. Through these recruitment efforts, the researcher identified one female and two male participants who signed the consent form for participation in this research study. While the number of participants in quantitative studies is critical for sample representation and generalizable findings, qualitative analysis relies on a different examination that does not usually take numbers into account. In qualitative studies, an examination of the collected data's thickness, depth, and complexity focuses on the participants' narrated experiences and stories. Towards the concluding findings, the number of participants does not become an issue; however, what becomes an issue is the quality of the analysis and the interpretative depth. Qualitative research humanizes the participants; one participant's story is worth listening to and investigating since generalization is not the end goal, but understanding a human experience is. As this study aims to examine Muslim students' narrative experiences, the four inclusionary criteria consist of the following:

1. The participants must be 18 years old or above,
2. The participants must self-identify as Muslims,
3. The participants must be born outside of the USA and not hold a US citizenship, and
4. The participants must speak English as a second language.

As the academic literature highlights the existing and perceived forms of discrimination towards Muslim US citizens, the barriers within the US educational system may pose additional challenges for academic studies. The reason that the researcher focused on non-US Muslim students is that they

"may lack a feeling of ownership, awareness of their legal rights; they may not have mastery of the English language; or they may not have a feeling of living amongst the margins (Yacoub, 2017, p. 409). However, it does not imply that Muslim international students are ill-equipped for the vigor of a US academic program; however, it does infer that Muslim US citizens may have received more attention within the college support structure.

FINDINGS

The findings for this research include three narrative experiences from the participants.

Khalaf's Young Religious Identity

Khalaf was born in Egypt but came to the United States with his family when he was four years old because his father was enrolled in a Ph.D. program in English linguistics. When his father graduated, Khalaf, then 11 or 12 years of age, returned home with his family to Egypt. After finishing high school, Khalaf returned to the United States and studied Bachelor's in English. Khalaf's Muslim identity started to develop early in his life. In his fourth grade in the United States, Khalaf's parents asked him if he was interested in fasting during Ramadan, and he enthusiastically agreed. He said, the school accommodated him and another Muslim classmate who was also fasting." Khalaf said," at a very young age, I was developing this identity of what it means "to be a Muslim." He continued by saying "that to be a Muslim means to be a humble person, to sympathize with everyone else, to fast the month of Ramadan so that we can feel those in needy who cannot afford food on a daily basis, so I became a generous person." Khalaf said, "All of that is because I understand what it means to be a Muslim." Khalaf's religious identity was enforced by visiting Egypt. Khalaf said that it was a completely different experience for him when he returned to Egypt. From an Islamic point of view, Khalaf said, "it was amazing, I would hear the beautiful call for the Azan [call for prayer] in the microphones of the many mosques, and you would see many people, children, and adults, go to the mosque."

Khalaf as an Adult Muslim in the USA

Today, as a 23-year-old individual, Khalaf shared some pictures and screenshots from his Facebook social media account. Khalaf feels empowered by using social media. He said, "on social media, I have a lot of American non-Muslim friends, and I can defend my religion and speak well things about my religion on social media."

Figure 2
A picture about parents in Islam

This shared picture from Khalaf's Facebook account is an example of memorable experiences, particularly the Islamic religion and how he is being kind to his parents—which he feels proud of. He thinks it extends love to the two people that cared about him the most. Juxtapositionally, he said that it makes him sad to see his old neighbors alone and their children come to visit them once a week or once a month, or even rarely. He wonders how much time, money, and love these old neighbors spent on their children when they were young, and now these old people are left lonely by their children. "They can experience strokes or can even die, and their children will be last to know," Khalaf said. Khalaf's identity seems to have been influenced and shaped by the teachings of the Quran. "The Quran, on the other side, tells those kids to be loving and caring to their parents and to never let them down," Khalaf said. He thinks that such posts could help his non-Muslim friends understand the essence of Islam and what it promotes.

Khalaf associates his Muslim identity with sharing Islamic posts on Facebook, writing Arabic on his textbooks, visiting the mosque, and praying congregational prayers with his fellow Muslim brothers. Khalaf's connection between his religious childhood and adulthood is manifested by such posts.

He is proud of his religious identity and shares verses from the Holy Book on his page.

Experiencing Campus Life as a Muslim

Khalaf keeps his religious identity on campus by representing Muslims in positive Islamic acts toward others. Khalaf is aware of anti-Muslim sentiment and rhetoric and tries to push against such rhetoric by inviting others to know about Islam. He said, "there is a lot of 'negativities' against Muslims in the media." However, he always engages people who find excuses to hate Muslims. When asked about these excuses, he said, "those people who think negatively of Muslims and Islam do not have first-hand experiences with Muslims but that they have been fed hatred from anti-Muslim media." However, Khalaf does not feel comfortable praying in open spaces on campus. When asked if he ever prayed on campus, he said he always prayed in the prayer room in the library. However, sometimes Khalaf needs more time to cross buildings and pray in that room, so he prays in an empty classroom. “One day,” he said, “people have walked in on me while I am praying. I didn't stop, and once I finished, I would not even wait for them to ask me. I ask them, do you have any questions about prayer?"

Khalaf stated that although he has a sense of fear when practicing his religion openly, this apprehension is not too strong to stop him from practicing his religion on campus. Khalaf initiates conversation and takes steps forward to help others to learn about Islam. He tries to correct these distorted images as an active Muslim Student Association (MSA) member. Khalaf operates as a member and an officer holding the position of organizational secretary, planning events that invite Muslim scholars to speak on his campus about Islam, Muslim people, and the many misinterpretations about the Islamic religion. In Figure 3, Refreshments Offered by the MSA, Khalaf shows his commitment to the MSA by participating in 2 to 3-hour library events that bring students Arabic coffee and refreshments and books in walks between classes for refreshments, conversation, questions, and answers about Islam.

When asked if he is afraid to be accused of preaching Islam on campus by helping organize MSA events, Khalaf said, “it is not preaching; it is teaching and informing others about something they do not know about Islam." He said that they don’t ask people to convert to Islam but ask people to get educated about it. Such events are also powerful because Khalaf can talk to students about Islam so that other students who missed the event can learn about and discuss the goals of such activities. As Khalaf’s stories unfold,

he seems to have a good mix of his extrovert social and religious identities. It is not a problem for him to look different.

Figure 3
Refreshments offered by the MSA

He said, "My skin tone looks completely different from everyone else. For the most part, most of the students are White, except for two classes, there were two black girls." His different look makes him even more willing to share who he is and his identity. He thinks of himself as an asset to his non-Muslim classmates. Khalaf said, "I can share my personal existence with people so that they can have a reference whenever they hear Islam or Muslims." Khalaf considers himself a reference for his classmates about Islam so that they can relate to him whenever they hear something about Islam. He knows that anything he does with people, or his classmates would probably relate to Islam, not his behavior. Khalaf said, "when they [his classmates] talked to me, they are not only talking to a man, they are also talking to a Muslim person."

Shahd's Religious Identity

Unlike Khalaf, who left the United States when he was about 11 years old, Shahd, arrived in the United States at age 12 from Saudi Arabia with her parents, who were also Ph.D. students. She started the 7th grade when she arrived in the United States and knew some English but needed more to continue a conversation or pass a class. Shahd started to develop a religious identity from a young age. Her religious choices were primarily affected by the decisions of her parents. While in grade seven, her parents asked her to

start wearing the hijab (Muslim headscarf). Shahd stated, “it was that it was difficult to wear the hijab because everyone has already seen [her] without the hijab in the first semester." With this decision, Shahd struggled with her identity and body as a Muslim girl. She said, "it was difficult to go to school with this new identity, this new version of myself, but no one questioned it." Shahd cites the reason for this ease, stating, "there were other girls who were already wearing the hijab at my school. So, it was more of an internal struggle than external."

The Impact of Shahd’s Parents on her Identity

Having two educated parents impacted Shahd's understanding of her identity and who she is as a Muslim woman. Specifically, having a Muslim mother who also wears the hijab and is also a student at the same university, Shahd said, helped her understand what she goes through as a student and as a Muslim woman wearing the hijab. She said, "my parents helped in developing an academic personality." Shahd said," in high school, she always got high grades, honors, and a high-grade point average (GPA), and had "a lot of that was due to [her] upbringing."

Feeling Different

As someone who started wearing the hijab very young, Shahd always feels different. She is different in her US school because she is Muslim and wears a hijab. She is also seen differently in her home country because she is seen as westernized. Shahd shared some pictures, and she said that they relate to her experience. In Figure 4, her images were captured; however, these are not her original creation.

As seen in the caricature picture above, Shahd said, "It describes me throughout my whole life. I have always been an advocate for what I believe in no matter how small the issue was; it is always related to a bigger issue." When analyzing the picture, Shahd relates to it, stating,

> I can see two groups: a majority and a minority. First, the minority tried to join the majority and be among them, but they were rejected because they looked different. Consequently, the minority decided to create their place, but then they were blamed for doing so by the majority.

Shahd is an optimistic person; a person that never loses hope. Within a small minority Shahd perceives herself to be living in, she always fights for her cause and for who she is. She wears the hijab, she prays, and she opens discussions with her classmates and writes about women and Islam in her

assignments because she sees herself as a hopeful person, a person who looks at the good thing. She talked about how she was related to a sign that promotes love between neighbors and that she took a picture of it.

Figure 4

A comic figure shared by Shahd

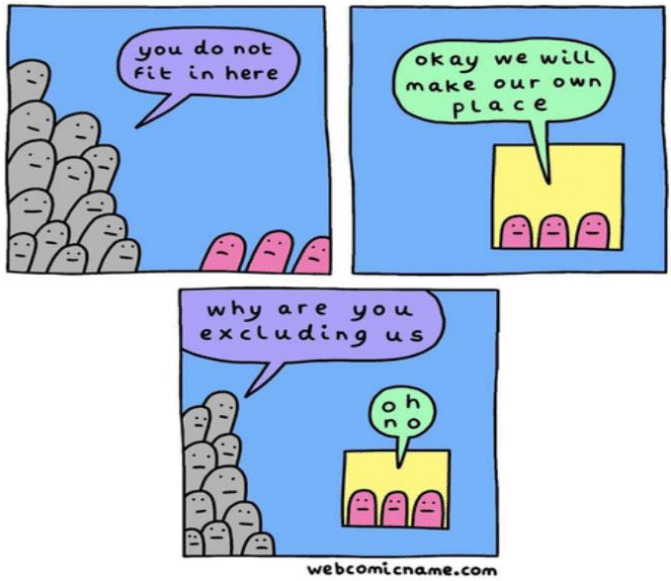


Figure 5

A Sign Picture Shared by Shahd

This picture is taken from a sign that promotes love to neighbors regardless of their color, religion, or immigration status. It promotes love for the sake of love. Shahd relates to this picture and says,

> It agrees with verses in the Holy Quran that promote love, especially among neighbors….Quran verses that promote love among neighbors but also the prophetic teachings. She felt a sense of belonging and attachment to such a sign that partially represented her religion.

Experiencing Campus as a Muslim Woman

As a Muslim woman, Shahd became used to getting undesired looks. She said, when I'm walking …people give me strange looks or things like that all the time or were afraid to approach me. Like, I look a certain way, like I'm different." Such looks make her afraid to pray on campus, and she feels too fragile to do it. When I asked her if she could pray on campus, she said, "I get a little nervous 'cause I don't know what they're going to do or say or anything like that but it does not stop me from praying." Such feelings increased with the New Zealand attack on Muslims. Shad said about this incident, “it did make me really scared. Like I've always like been a little scared to like to perform my religious beliefs in public because of how the community is different, but like that increased my fear.”

Like Khalaf, Shahd thinks that Islam is portrayed unfavorably in the media and that she feels" a responsibility to improve the picture given about Muslims." She said, "its's really important for me to show Islam in a better light than what is shown in the media or how it is portrayed, or things like that."

Shahd can share her opinions and empower her voice in class, especially in English classes. Such a distorted picture of Muslims and how she feels perceived affects her belonging. For Shahd, to belong meant "when fear disappears" and when a person becomes "approachable with no worries." Like Khalaf, who gave excuses to people who do not favor Muslims, Shahd stated, "it's just harder for people to, especially here in this town, in this campus, to understand issues of diversity that people are different from them. And I think they sometimes like to ignore those ideas or just stay away."

Experiencing Courses as a Muslim Woman

Since graduating from high school in the United States, Shahd's language proficiency has advanced. Shahd was empowered by having a supportive teacher. Shahd voiced that having a teacher that is willing to accept her position on different matters and give feedback that does not suppress her opinion is the most important for her. Talking about educational feedback she

receives from her teacher, Shahd voiced that, "I was more comfortable sharing my controversial opinions cause I knew like she knows what I mean and kind of felt or been through some of the things I been through." As an empowered student, Shahd integrates topics of race and diversity in her writings. Shahd voiced that, “issues of diversity and race and things like that are very important to me. So, I try to integrate that into most of my writing. An example, I would say, I wrote about Muslim women in the Middle East.”

Shahd's justification for integrating diversity issues in her English assignments is due to her perception of her American classmates. She said, "it is difficult for Americans to distinguish between what is Islamic and what is cultural." Shahd said she would talk to her classmates in discussions or group work about her culture of Saudi Arabia and how things that her classmates think religious are, indeed, cultural." When I asked her to give an example, she mentioned, "women driving cars and covering faces." This highlights how Shahd reconciles her Muslim identity by speaking up and expressing who she is, what her culture is, and what her religion teaches. Shahd voiced, "this helps my classmates to understand my point of view because most of my classmates … don't know much about diversity or diverse issues, and I think my input really matters or like any Muslim." The overall experience of Shad's class experience is positive and empowering.

Joining a Local Muslim Community

Malek is an introverted individual. He voiced that he came to the United States with a specific goal: To complete his studies and travel back to his country where he could find a better job. However, he feels isolated. One of his friends who used to go to the Islamic center (mosque) suggested that he should start going there, too, and would never regret the idea. After multiple attempts of persuasion from his friend, Malek finally agreed to go to the Islamic center to pray and start making some more friends but on a small level. He said, “It was a good timing because it was Ramadan, and the Islamic center was looking for volunteers to set up the Iftar [breaking the fast at sunset] during the holy month of Ramadan and to keep the mosque clean.” Malek said that it was good for him to go and start expanding his circle of friends “a little bit more.”

At the mosque, Malek started to join the community by attending the prayers and offering help. He liked the idea of volunteering and started liking the people there who got together for no reason but to volunteer and set the mosque up for the fasting Muslims to come and break their fast and pray together. Malek said, “this spirit is unforgettable and made me change my shy personality a little bit.”

Figure 6.1 and 6.2
Muslim Community Breaking Their Fast in Ramadan.

Malek said, “Such Ramadan gatherings and food sharing made me feel that I belonged to this Muslim community and helped me make more friends with the people who frequently go to the mosque.” Malek’s images provided in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 display something about identity. Malek states, “I started to love sharing and to help others.” His volunteer work at the Mosque during Ramadan made him change from an introverted person to a more social person. However, he was not as active on campus as in the Muslim community he joined.

Experiencing Courses as a Muslim

Malek expressed some anxiety that affected his experience. Malek said that for him, “belong” means “being part of something and being involved in something important....to belong when you feel part of something.” Having anxiety, less engagement, and less belonging in taking courses with American classmates, Malek says taking courses with American classmates is a good “opportunity to learn about American students and their culture, and also … for them to learn about us.” Malek’s Muslim identity was challenged in a composition course. He narrated that one time the topic of religion was part of an open discussion, and his American classmates said it was “OK to have people from other religions in our country, but it is not OK to call for … any religion other than Christianity because America is a Christian country.” He said he did not have a problem with that, but only some students said some religions promote violence, “I felt like they were talking about Islam, and that did not make me feel comfortable at all.”

Malek's Muslim name was a challenge for him. He shared a situation when one of his classmates used to call him when they worked together in a

group, "you, whatever your name is." Malek said that this happened to him more than once, and when he decided to resist and ask her why she does not call him by his name, she said, "sorry, I cannot pronounce your name; it is hard." He said, "she should ask me how to pronounce it, but calling me "you, whatever your name is' is racist, in my opinion."

Malek is aware of the anti-Muslim rhetoric, so he would not pray on campus to not trigger such negative sentiment and rhetoric. He said, "...would not feel comfortable praying in front of people, and that would make him attract the attention of the other students, the thing that does not make him comfortable, and fear of unwanted or dangerous reactions. Malek's fears increased when the New Zealand massacre happened. He shared with me that when the incident happened, he was at Walmart and saw two people murmuring racist words against Muslims and gloating over the incident. Juxtaposed with the anti-Muslim rhetoric and Islamophobic discourse, Malek thinks the topics covered in the composition courses are off and do not address such important social issues. Malek's teacher wanted the class to write about a certain topic, but Malek thought that he was not interested in the topic. Malek said, "I was not interested in this topic; I wanted a more valuable topic, especially because I am not taking a creative writing class." When I told him that maybe in other classes in his major, such important topics are discussed, Malek said, "English class is not like any other class like our major classes. Other classes in my major, it is you, the teacher, and the material. There is not much interaction with students or chances to discuss important like topics."

DISCUSSION

What the participants expressed uncovered some anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment in the USA. This anti-Muslim sentiment is characterized by Islamophobia, which Sayyid (2014) defined as an ideology that aims to undermine Muslim individuals' presence. There has been an investment in this sentiment (Sayyid, 2014). Sayyid categorized some anti-Muslim and Islamophobic acts such as attacks on persons perceived to be Muslims, attacks on Islamic premises, acts of intimidation, attacks on individuals perceived to be Muslims, and acts of unfavorable treatment. Media majorly inspires these acts. Jamieson and Cappella (2008) argued that media could and does create specific images and then reinforce them to their agreeing viewers. However, teachers can challenge such images with creative reinforcements through media.

According to these research findings, teachers have a significant impact in empowering their students, as in the case of Shahd, whose teacher empowered her by allowing and encouraging her to write about and discuss

women in Saudi Arabia. Institutional programs should invest in training teachers who can teach minority students. Additionally, professors overseeing programs should organize workshops to discuss empowerment to support a minority student population. These research findings direct the following implications for empowered minority students, including the Muslim student population.

Valorizing Critical Pedagogy Practices

Critical pedagogy is an educational philosophy that uses critical social theory to examine and explore how schools are structured to reproduce injustice and inequality (Beck, 2005). Critical pedagogy can involve asking students to critique and examine different texts (Beck, 2005). During this study, participants shared a need for more critical pedagogy practices in the curriculum. The researcher asked participants 1) if they talked or wrote about topics that can push them out of their comfort zone or 2) what topics problematize beliefs they initially held about groups of people (topics such as race, diversity, ethnicity, discrimination, racism, religious plurality, etc.). Shahd replied, "Issues of diversity and race and things like that are very important to me. So, I try to integrate that into most of my writing." It seems that Shahd, as a Muslim felt that she needed to integrate assignments topics with Muslim or Islamic beliefs even if she was not asked to do so. Malek, who experienced a situation when some of his classmates thought it was unacceptable to promote any religion in America, said, "unfortunately, the teacher did not give us another chance to discuss religion or beliefs or free speech. I hope that English classes give opportunities for such conversations about free speech and brotherhood instead of leaving students think what they think." Khalaf shares Shahd's views that initiating discussions and discussing religion with his friends can support content integration in assignments.

Cultivating Narrative Assignments

Through this study, I came to learn that narratives are one way that students can get empowered by having their voices heard through sharing their stories and narratives. Such stories and narratives can open up opportunities for further discussions and conversations and open up venues for rhetorical listening. Krista Ratcliffe (2005) asks: Why is it difficult to listen to each other? She then answers that our debates are almost always based on and aiming at the arguments: “I’m right” vs. “No, you’re wrong.” This leads to a status of non-identification in cross-cultural communication or reiterates the status of disidentification. The two statuses drain blood from the veins of understanding. Understanding, as Ratcliffe (2005) defines it, means

listening not for intent but with intent to understand not just the arguments, not just the cultural logics within which the claims function, but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well.

Encouraging Students to Write About Their Own Biases

None of us is bias-free is a statement that can be a good introduction in a composition classroom where the teacher can encourage her/his students to explore their possible biases and write about that. The teacher can provide students with a set of questions (something like an inventory) through which students can be introduced to their own biases so that they can explore these biases and write about possible ways of educating themselves to be less biased.

Exploring the Unknown by the Means of Research

Many students perceive the composition class traditionally; i.e., they think that they have to agree with an opinion and refute the counterargument. However, it is essential that the teacher introduces to their students that we do research to explore things we don't know. Students are then encouraged to act upon what they find because we do research to know what we didn't know and if we become aware of what we did not know, we then should act upon our findings.

Reaching Out to Minority Places.

Almost every city and town in the United States of America has some type of minority that could be reached. These minority places could be mosques, churches, synagogues, stores, clubs, etc. The teacher should encourage their students and ask them, especially the domestic ones, to explore the place and write about it. In one of my classes, I asked my domestic L1 students to reach out to any minority group and write about their experiences. This was not a major assignment. I didn't feel confident enough to make it a major assignment. I wanted to try it out first on a small scale, a low-stakes assignment. The challenge I found with my students was that some of them did not digest the objective of the assignment and asked if there was another option for the assignment. Some of them ended up asking if it was possible to reach out to a student organization instead of going off campus since they did not have cars. This was a brilliant idea since there are many student organizations that represent minorities on campus. Another idea is the virtual visit. Some students visited the webpages or Facebook pages of minority groups and wrote about them. Such practice and other critical

pedagogy practices not only challenge students' biases but also boost their engagement.

Limitations And Delimitations

The study, however, is delimited to research parameters: the narrative research design, the number of participants, the lived experiences of the participants, and the location of the university from which data was collected. The study is also limited to potential weaknesses that are not within my control. The sample I have worked with might not be representative, and the participants' experiences might not necessarily speak to the experiences that other Muslim students face. The study is also limited to my positionality as a Muslim researcher and my understanding of the discrimination and racism that Muslims face in the West. Overall, while these delimitations and limitations might have influenced the study findings, this is an opportunity for other researchers to expand on this study and consider more participants and different research designs to investigate the identity of Muslim students in the West, in general, and in the United States, in particular.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, this study co-constructs knowledge and fills an important gap in our understanding of the narrated experiences of international Muslim students in the United States by exploring their narratives. Understanding the narrated experiences of minority students is critical; seeing what students see, listening to their voices, and understanding their perceptions can improve institutions and program policies and can improve students' overall college experience. Specifically, having an in-depth understanding of Muslim students' experiences in a US higher education institution can help resist anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment. More research is recommended to expand these findings and explore more lived experiences of Muslim students from different countries around the world.

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Toward Equitable Online Learning: Seeing the Missed Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Access to online learning does not guarantee equitable learning experiences, particularly for students from diverse backgrounds, such as international students and members of indigenous communities. As an online, asynchronous instructor, I recorded my observations of students' online interactions and used reflexivity to analyze my journal entries. Participants' conversations followed the contemporary debates in a North American academic context. Members, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, actively negotiated their online presence or social absence based on those conversations. Their experiences remained on the margins only to stimulate robust discussions. Online course instructors must be proactive in creating inclusive virtual learning environments and be able to see the missed opportunities of knowledge construction through reflexivity, particularly in their awareness of what equity would entail in online learning environments with diverse learners.

Keywords: Equitable online spaces; Online learning; Reflexivity

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic and rapid transition to virtual spaces has contributed significantly to the rise of online learning and programs. It has also highlighted substantial issues and concerns about building online, equitable learning spaces for all, particularly when interactions cross international borders (Pregowska et al., 2021; Li & Lalani, 2020). Although online

learning environments appear to be equal, not all student groups are served uniformly in them (Öztok, 2019). *Those who have worked closely on developing courses for educational leaders in North American classrooms may have observed* that students from diverse backgrounds and experiences, such as international students who haven't worked in local boards or North American school systems and lack contextual knowledge or vocabulary, may find it difficult to participate and engage fully in discussions that tend to center on improving local school systems and leadership practices. The challenges are not only about students' access to technology but also about their participation in online discussions, specifically how they make meanings of new concepts, their role in knowledge construction, and their participation in critique processes without being on the margins of the learning process. Knowledge construction in a group entails members sharing, utilizing, negotiating, and critiquing knowledge about a common object—a problem or a goal (Öztok 2016; Stahl & Hesse, 2009). Their learning depends not only on individual knowledge influencing the reasoning of other participants but also on collaborative meaning-making in a specific context. The context—physical or virtual— is a perceptually constructed space "where the material realities of the social, historical, economic, and political discourses intersect" (Öztok 2016, p. 162). Hence, learners must be offered opportunities to place their knowledge or unique perspectives within the context and draw a connection between their own thinking and the meaning of the group.

Instructors offering online courses comprised of students from diverse backgrounds need to pay close attention to group dynamics and the links between individual and group meaning. An instructor's lack of appreciation or understanding of diverse perspectives can greatly diminish students' learning experiences in these spaces (Kumi-Yeboah, 2018; Li et al., 2010). Instructors must not only be proactive in their efforts to create virtual spaces that are safe and inclusive of all students, but they must also be reflexive in their practices, which demand an understanding of what equity would look like in online learning spaces and ask whether these spaces, which appear neutral and offer flexible access to educational resources (Öztok, 2019), reproduce inequitable learning experiences for learners from diverse backgrounds.

This paper aims to examine equity issues in online learning by focusing mainly on online discussion forums. The article is my personal reflection as an instructor and shares my experience teaching an online, asynchronous course on educational leadership for graduate students at a North American institute. Based on instructors' reflections (see the

researcher's positionality), it urges developing guidelines for an equitable design and the reflexive practices of instructors of online courses in order to offer inclusive learning experiences for all students. This paper is composed of four parts: first, it explores some debates around the use of technology in education and expands on the online discussion model, which provides a systematic approach to making sense of data from instructors' reflections. The subsequent section explains the concept of reflexivity as a methodology for researchers and instructors. The next section includes discussions and findings, and finally, the paper concludes with some suggestions for online instructors. Before proceeding to the literature section, I share the course context, the author's position, and the participants' backgrounds.

Researcher's Positionality

My course can be described as an interdisciplinary course focused on educational leaders, administrators, and teachers, engaging them in ethical, equity, and social justice issues, adjudicating between conflicting values and beliefs, and incorporating different rights and human interests in their planning. The content of the course comprised various ethical schools of thought and approaches to social justice. The subthemes included ethics and ethical leadership (see Nash, 2022; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Tuana, 2014; Pinto et al., 2012), transformative leadership (see Shields, 2014), coloniality and educational discourse (see Lopez, 2021), and everyday dilemmas that educational leaders encounter, such as ethical leadership in schools serving African American children (see Williams, 2001) or students with refugee backgrounds (see Sellars & Imig, 2001); issues in ethical inquiry, including diversity (see Tuters & Ryan 2020; McPherson 2020; Tuck, 2014); and use of technology (see Granitz & Loewy, 20227; Dahya, 2017). Students were expected to demonstrate a theoretical and systematic understanding of different ethical schools of thought and leadership in diverse institutions and demonstrate the ability to critically engage in self-reflection by participating in group discussions and the analysis of real-world case studies and ethical dilemmas.

In my asynchronous online course, participants learned mainly through the course's collaborative learning activities. They were required to review weekly assigned material, perform independent research, and participate in an online discussion forum to share and contribute to each other's learning. Each week, a group of students volunteered to serve as leaders and came up with discussion prompts to moderate the weekly discussion. On the forum, participants posted their initial thoughts on the prompts by leaders and, later in the week, continued the dialogue by

responding to their peers' posts. The group leaders often offered contradictory arguments or dilemmas that leaders encounter in their everyday work practices, which generated discussions and encouraged acknowledging alternative perspectives. This routine continued once a week during the entire semester.

As an instructor, I did not set out to write this article. Only after my first class did I notice the subtleties that kept me reflecting on my approach and carefully crafting each subsequent lesson throughout the course. The reflective journal I kept while teaching the course became the basis of this article; I employed a reflexivity approach to make sense of my observations, which I discuss in the following section. Sharing my reflections aims to contribute to advancing the field—equity in online spaces—and connect with other learners and instructors in virtual classrooms.

Many of the students in my course were not from the typical university demographic of the United States or Canada; instead, they were either from Indigenous communities or from countries like China, India, or the Middle East, attending online courses offered by institutions in response to the pandemic. I do not provide any of the learners' personal experiences or their notes, but rather my own observations on understanding student involvement in virtual settings. I make sense of their contributions, such as why some themes were debated one way and not another, why certain topics were addressed within specific groups of students, and why other students did not join in those discussions. To respect their privacy, I do not include any names or allude to individual students or their experiences, nor do I identify the institution's name or the teaching session.

In this article, I refer to students from diverse backgrounds, mainly international students, recently arrived immigrants, or even indigenous students, as group A. They were included in this group not because of the language barrier but because they were in the process of developing the academic vocabulary—and confidence—that are considered legitimate in academia, particularly in North America. Here, the term "academic vocabulary" refers to the rhetorical, cultural, and cognitive aspects of academic discourse (Loewenstein et al., 2012) or the cultural frameworks for reasoning (Loewenstein et al., 2012; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Thorton et al., 2012) that provide normative understandings for desirable behaviours in North American academic spaces while both allowing and restraining social practices, for instance the use of gender neutral words or preferred pronoun in conversations, etc. When I refer to group B, I mainly refer to students who were white, English speakers with superior academic vocabulary and who communicated their experiences and views in vivid, engaging

discussion postings. Group B typically began the posts and established the tone for the week. Finally, in the class, the students who were children of immigrants familiar with Western contexts and contemporary issues in educational fields contributed to class discussions and served as a bridge between group dialogues; I kept note of their input and so included them in either group based on their contribution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education and Technology

Learning in online spaces is linked to building a community of inquiry, which involves information exchange, social presence, and the development of understanding (Garrison et al., 1999). What distinguishes a collaborative community of inquiry from a simple process of downloading information is the degree to which its members present themselves and are perceived by others in online spaces, or their social presence, in other words. It entails socioemotional interactions, which are critical to any instructor's achievement of educational goals (Garrison et al., 1999; Öztok, 2019).

For the instructors aimed at building reflective practitioners in educational leadership, equity concerns are at the heart of their work. In research, the plasticity of the term "equity" is not new; it can imply various meanings depending on different situations, but in general, equity alludes to justice or fairness, while equality denotes similarity (Esmonde, 2009). Thus, instructors would place a premium on the dynamics of interactions, meaning-making, and knowledge construction in virtual spaces over attaining the prescribed goals of the courses. Online education technology holds the promise of equity because it can provide more flexible and enhanced access to educational resources while removing time and location constraints (Harasim, 2000; Öztok, 2019). Furthermore, online venues are more neutral because they erase sociocultural differences, improving participant communication (Freeman & Bamford, 2004; Swan & Shih, 2005; Öztok, 2019). Many online education academics, however, have focused on academic content rather than the social structures of the broader context and have tended to treat students in online spaces as a homogeneous group, ignoring the power dynamics at work in the classroom, where competing economic, political, and social agendas pressure instructors and alter how they conduct their lessons (Öztok, 2019). This lack of attention to the broader context in online education settings is troubling because such forces can significantly impact participants' learning. Eventually, while online education venues provide a space for students to access academic content beyond the boundaries of time, space, and sociocultural factors,

these platforms still contain power dynamics that can impact how knowledge is created and shared.

I will now briefly present a four-component model for productive online discussion that incorporated knowledge production into the online learning process and helped me conduct a methodical analysis of my findings.

Productive Online Discussion Model

Online learning can be done synchronously or asynchronously. Teachers and students interact simultaneously in synchronous learning, whereas asynchronous learning is self-paced, and participants do not need to engage in the learning process simultaneously. Asynchronous online learning provides participants additional time to reflect and self-regulate in response to peer engagement (Gerosa et al., 2010), resulting in deeper and more meaningful conversations (Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006).

The Productive Online Discussion (POD) model promotes participation in online discussions by emphasizing cognitive processes, critical thinking, and social knowledge construction (Gao et al., 2009). Participants in online forums must use cognitive processes such as interpretation, elaboration, and making links to prior knowledge. An online engagement model also calls for critical thinking and evaluating different points of view. As a result, the model allows instructors to evaluate different parts of online learning (Gao et al., 2009). The model recommends that participants must (1) discuss to comprehend, (2) discuss to critique, (3) discuss to develop knowledge, and (4) discuss to share. Being reflexive of these four dispositions of online learning, instructors may create an equitable and engaging space for conversation, allowing participants to voice their perspectives and contribute their knowledge.

I adopted this framework to inquire into how students from diverse backgrounds participated in weekly discussions, including the topics they chose to explore, the ways they participated in critique, the experiences they shared, and the means by which they constructed knowledge among their peers. By embracing the concept of reflexivity, I was able to observe the social presence of the participants and how they interpreted new concepts and their learning experiences, which they occasionally shared in their individual written assignments.

REFLEXIVITY AS RESEARCH METHOD

Researchers have viewed the practice of reflexivity as an acknowledgment of how their own histories and experiences influence the

study process and its findings, especially in qualitative research, rather than a claim of complete impartiality (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Kenway & McLeod, 2004; Pillow, 2003). Researchers take responsibility for their biases (Hopkins, 2008, p. 203) and reveal their underlying views and beliefs when choosing their methodological approach and explaining why they chose it (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). It is also different from reflection in that reflective practice is focused on critical thinking, systematic reflection, and the reflective capacity of teacher-researchers (Watts, 2019), while reflexivity is focused on change and transformation (Powell et al., 2016; Ryan & Bourke, 2013).

Researchers in educational research can use reflexivity either as a part of the research process—assuming responsibility for their role in producing meaning and partial truths—or to locate and historicize their point of view in research (Kenway & McLeod, 2004). To use the concept effectively, researchers must understand its limitations and risks, such as how using the term without fully understanding it can lead to "comfortable" use (Pillow, 2003, p. 187) and "narcissistic accounts of yourself" (Trinh, 1989), which can be used to demonstrate a researcher's "positional validity" (Macbeth, 2001) rather than true transformation.

For educators, reflexivity involves critical thought—an internal dialogue—that assesses several perspectives in context—including the broader political and social context—to inform specific classroom actions (Lunn Brownlee et al., 2017; Archer, 2009). Hence, as an instructor, I considered reflection a crucial aspect of reflexivity, and reflexivity requires an internal dialogue and deliberate action following reflective thought. I paid close attention to my proclivity toward self-indulgent reflexivity and consciously tried to identify my biases and shifts in perspective. I reread my reflections and engaged in various internal conversations regarding why my first response to a particular observation was specific and whether or not this altered as I examined my beliefs about equity and transformation. My own learning experiences in class as a minority student, a woman, and a person of colour also influenced my perception of events and my desire for change. These reflexive practices shaped my understanding of online learning spaces and prompted me to seek classroom equity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I present my reflections on the two broad themes that emerged throughout the weekly discussions and expand on them in connection to each disposition indicated in the POD model.

Decolonizing Educational Practices and Deconstructing Knowledge Frameworks

Decolonizing educational practices for educational leaders was one of the key themes that emerged and was explored throughout the course as students sought to connect the course concepts with their own experiences and shared those with other participants to re-evaluate the dominant knowledge frameworks.

Reading over the comments, I noticed that students were making an effort to draw parallels between theory and practice. They all agreed that the institutionalization of Eurocentric knowledge through colonialism rendered it the de facto, objective form of knowledge, or the dominant knowledge framework, as I refer to it in this discussion. Moreover, decolonial methods in education present a tremendous intellectual challenge since they necessitate attention to the views of historically underrepresented communities. Students developed an appreciation for decolonization as a process that might lead to the incorporation of a decolonizing framework into educational practices in order to address social, economic, racial, and gender inequities. Participants broadened the concepts by *agreeing* with what their peers said and adding new references, such as using culturally responsive pedagogy, making intentional efforts, critically assessing and making existing curriculum antiracist, or “critiquing with promise” (Shields, 2014, p. 333).

However, I noticed a difference in how students from diverse backgrounds participated in the conversation. These students contributed to the discussion by sharing their personal experiences and insights. They did not criticize any policy in particular but instead pointed to their own marginalization to argue that decolonization must be a deliberate process. I observed their insistence on "reconciliation" as a process, not a one-time event, if the educational institutions are to confront the prevalent colonial perspectives. Or their insistence on "inclusion," as in centring minority voices in education programs, to question the coloniality of legitimate knowledge. Or their caution to the "language" of western knowledge, which is objective and acquired by scholarly knowledge production in contrast to traditional cultures, where knowledge is transferred from elders to younger generations through oral tradition. They argued that communities marginalized by unequal social structures could not be expected to construct a more equitable society. Hence, school administrators should intentionally examine how different demographics perceive the curriculum and strive to confront the deficit thinking that is common among educators.

Their peers acknowledged repression and the imposition of colonial knowledge at that juncture. Some also began their conversation with, "Sorry to hear about your experience." Yet the academic dialogue could only go so far since the participants, both from groups A and B, found it challenging to navigate the unfamiliar terrain of dismantling hegemonic frameworks, especially when their only previous interaction with their peers had been virtual. For instance, when a member of group A stated that some teachers might not realize they are operating from a colonialist mindset because they have never experienced it in their own lives, I waited for members from either group to discuss this further by agreeing, disagreeing, or problematizing the thought, which needed further unpacking. Still, no one pointed that out or discussed it further. Questions such as experiencing colonialism to understand it and the difference that it would make to our perceptions of coloniality could be further interrogated. Could there be a distinction in the experiences of colonial subjects between those who have experienced direct colonialism and those who have not? And how can participants of the course ethically learn from members' lived and non-lived experiences of colonialism without further probing them to enrich the discussion? One of the group B members asked about the specific activities an administrator may take to assess the extent to which coloniality exists in their institution. Another person proposed that the school examine the faculty's makeup and how resources and procedures sustain coloniality. The member of Group A who started this notion did not carry on the conversation. As an instructor, I imagine the conversation would have lasted a little longer in an in-person setting since this perspective's absence or silence would have been more thoroughly felt. The conversations in group B tended to focus more on professional development and strengthening institutional support. They would cite and criticize a particular policy with which group A participants could only partially engage. Participants in group B also suggested increased community engagement where possible, and some members expressed concern about teachers' lack of time and opportunity to engage in reflective practices owing to the pressures of completing the curriculum.

During such conversations, the participants, mainly from Group B, often led to a "list of resources" that could be found on school boards, ministry websites, or university resources. While I consider that those conversations could have been instances of knowledge construction, the practice of directing the conversation to a list of resources—the legitimate academic vocabulary in a North American context—in this particular context, however, posed an obstacle since it turned the conversation back to

institutionalized forms of knowledge by decentering Group A's experiences, which were clearly present in the class. It might not be intentional, but being aware of their online social presence helped the participants learn that using ready-made resources was a simpler alternative than trying to unpack complex ideas while navigating the power dynamics of online learning spaces. I returned to the initial discussion thread, where members had to introduce themselves to the group. Participants provided brief information about their teaching and learning experiences if they were in the North American context only. And while many of them mentioned the program/year and their preferred pronoun, I was surprised at how few mentioned ethnicity, which came up later in the conversations or in a one-on-one meeting with me (see details later in the discussion). That post, I realized, was the first step in constructing the context (Öztok 2016). Many of the students were in their final or nearing-final courses, and by then, they had determined what kinds of conversations were acceptable in that particular institutional context, what academic vocabulary was used, and what could be said in the open discussion forum versus what could be said in one-on-one meetings. I also knew from previous interactions with students and being a student the level of trust to be placed in institutional databases (emails, mailing lists) with personal information and opinions. Together with the prospect of taking a course with a new instructor (a woman of colour in a North American university), these could be some of the factors that aided in constructing the course's context, in which participants crafted their responses and engaged with each other.

Due to the potential challenge of deconstructing knowledge frameworks or critically exploring complex concepts in a digital setting, these discussions sometimes needed more depth, thus limiting the focus to surface-level considerations like legislation or practices rather than addressing inequality and underlying standpoints. As an instructor, I had to be creative if I wanted to expand these conversations in meaningful ways. I shifted my focus to hypothetical scenarios and dilemmas that educators might confront in their practice and shared tools, such as self-reflection and reflexivity, to take more thoughtful approaches. I appreciated the students' attempts to further the dialogue and encourage each other to adopt a more ethical and introspective stance in their own communities. In addition, drawing parallels between formal schooling and broader society remained a common thread of interest for all the students. They shared and gained from one another's educational experiences, which ranged from international private schools in the global south to public schools with indigenous populations in North America. Yet, I observed that while the online

environment allows participants more time to reflect and respond, institutional norms shape the context in which they compose their responses and interact with one another. Decolonial ways of thinking remained a popular topic. Still, in the actual setting, participants were thinking of decolonial practices as educators, as something in their schools or their classrooms only, and not in their current online practices as individuals. Similarly, race was frequently mentioned in relation to colonial institutions and cultural superiority, and "economic domination in the system of capitalism" (Lopez, 2020, p. 32) was not an idea that was extensively discussed because the program was designed for educational leaders, who primarily focused on educational policies and practices rather than the economics and finance of education.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Intersectionality

Another recurrent theme in the discussions was diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality. Participants discussed that one of the barriers to a comprehensive understanding of diversity in educational leadership is its "plasticity"; despite its appeal, the term diversity has yet to be fully defined by its proponents (Nofal, 2023, p. 4). Participants acknowledged that a leader should consider how racial and ethnic variety, cultural and religious diversity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic position, ability, and other forms of diversity of the student body could impact achieving the institution's goals (Shields, 2014). As a result, educational leaders' concerns for diversity may serve as an underlying principle rather than a response to exclusion and marginalization in their educational institutions.

I noticed that the discussion moved on from recognizing the growing demographic diversity within Western countries—primarily due to global economic interests—to how schools adapt to meet the needs of diverse students. Participants critiqued how a deficient lens among educators prevents them from appreciating and comprehending diversity and being conscious of their prejudices. Instead of a melting pot, they frequently used the metaphor of a Chinese hotpot to comprehend the notion of diversity in a Western context (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Furthermore, they were aware of and made efforts to connect the dots between social justice concerns and transformative ethical leadership practices by referring to intersectionality theory and emphasizing the lack of diverse voices and experiences—sources of knowledge construction—in academic policy and practice at the micro and macro levels.

Here is where I noticed inconsistencies in their conversations.

Several students expressed skepticism about the diversity agenda's ethical implications. Students from diverse backgrounds voiced their belief that discrimination against people of colour results from systemic, institutional racism. They were also curious about the challenges school administrators face in embracing diversity and how these challenges are met through a transformative leadership framework in Western contexts. Group A students with professional experience brought up the funding issue and questioned the financial planning of current diversity initiatives, which require robust backing at the national or state level. Neither group elaborated on these concepts. In one instance, a student from Group A asked a school leader in Group B about the challenges of embracing diversity and whether or not the concept of transformative leadership could be helpful in practice. The student replied that critical, transformative leadership was the key to dialogue and mutual adherence to respectful engagement. How in practice? The conversation never progressed. Similarly, a student from the Indigenous group reflected and explained how transformative leadership might benefit the community on various occasions. Still, the engagement with that post was minimal, and the discussion never progressed.

Group B concentrated on recruiting policies and professional development while examining diversity. They criticized widespread hiring practices in local ministries that make it difficult for individuals of colour to enter the field. Similarly, the professional development discussion circled teacher preparation and principal preparation programs, delving into their structures and credentials as well as their escalating prices and unfilled administrator pools. There were small occasions of interactions when Group B was curious to know why people of colour chose not to apply for administrative positions at the boards or ministries as educational leaders—and where children of immigrants brought up in a western context significantly contributed by pointing out the intersectional barriers—but the conversation mostly referred to specific policies. Participants in Group B reported that experienced white teachers have more chances to become principals, and white male leaders mostly dominate the leadership positions.

I also observed that students were intrigued by the concept of transformative leadership, how it manifested itself in various contexts, and the complications that came with it. They approached it from multiple perspectives, with some emphasizing that transformative leadership must be intentionally incorporated into the practices of educational leaders rather than being used as a performance enhancer; some were inspired by social justice education for students, while others contrasted it with transactional leadership. However, neither the larger group nor the students from diverse

backgrounds engaged in a conversation to imagine transformative practices by educational leaders for diverse communities, whether they belonged to those groups or not. For an instructor, that seemed like a missed opportunity. The participants wanted to comprehend, critique, share, and develop knowledge. However, the online environment limited their opportunity to unpack dominant knowledge frameworks—to understand and learn together—which would be slightly better in in-person sessions due to the presence of time, space, and sociocultural cues. For example, during one of the weeks, the discussion was on transformational leadership, and one of the female members stated that in schools, female principals lead solo with numerous observers and critics. Another participant concurred and questioned whether female leaders are indeed more interpersonally oriented and sensitive or whether the difference is context-dependent. They continued asking if a female immigrant leader would still be considered emotional. How are women whose orientations are more traditionally masculine perceived? Is an older female leader considered more capable and proficient than a younger leader? Are women's leadership styles more democratic since they have been socialized as people-pleasing and deferential? These intersectional queries were quite intriguing. I observed that, although Group B members posed the questions, engagement with this post could have been more extensive but was primarily limited to a few female members of Groups A and B. The male participants did not participate in this discussion thread. Instead, they focused on incorporating all voices from diverse groups, such as black people, women, and LGBTQ2S+, to achieve transformational leadership.

As an instructor, I had some access to those cues. On various occasions in my course, I organized one-on-one meetings with participants to discuss their research interests, during which they also discussed their broader passions and professional challenges. What struck me most was how the group members discussed topics in our one-on-one conversations differently than in the online forum. The participants' online social presence reflected a limited version of themselves in which they did not wholly represent themselves; for instance, they would sometimes take distance from their ethnicity and other times their gender in conversations to avoid potential prejudices and maintain the neutrality of dialogue. This was especially true for indigenous and immigrant women of colour, who sometimes thoroughly disagreed with prevalent educational leadership practices but chose to discuss that with me in one-on-one meetings and not in the discussion forum. Although I encouraged participants to exchange email addresses and join the WhatsApp group that the students had created

to stay in touch, I was aware that the structure of an online learning environment would allow them to choose their online presence or absence on specific discussions, thereby restricting the knowledge-building component or the imagining of transformative solutions.

After learning about intersectional barriers and noticing the online social presence (or lack thereof), I asked all the participants to keep a personal reflexive notebook where they could write down times when their ideas reflected their beliefs and/or the dominant frameworks. I would speak about reflexive note-taking each week and encourage students to record their thoughts and incorporate them into their activities. To continue the discussion, I urged participants to consider how the concept might be applied in a real-world context and how their insights could support their colleagues in refining the concepts and enhancing their practices. I anticipate that the next time, I will ask participants to make entries on the presence of identities, the absence of identities, and the coloniality of space from the start, as well as invite them to think about their intersectional identities in their introductory posts. This will be my small step toward a major leap toward a positive shift in online learning experiences as an instructor.

CONCLUSION

The article highlights some of the challenges faced by instructors aiming to create equitable online spaces for learners. By revisiting my online teaching experiences using the concept of reflexivity and building on two themes that recurred throughout the course's weekly conversations, I share the dynamics of student participation in understanding, discussing, sharing, and constructing knowledge.

Online education technology promises equity since it may offer flexible access by reducing time and place restrictions and is considered neutral since it eliminates intercultural barriers, enhancing participant communication. Moreover, asynchronous online learning could likely provide participants with more meaningful engagement by offering more time to think and self-regulate in response to peer involvement. However, in an effort to provide equitable experiences, I could see the missed opportunities in online learning spaces for knowledge sharing and knowledge construction by carefully observing participants' interactions.

I demonstrated how, in discussion forums, interactions such as the most liked post or debated subject, the material referenced, and the challenges for which solutions are sought reinforce inequity and hierarchy rather than neutralizing sociocultural signals. The significance of shared experiences, academic vocabulary, and value systems in these interactions

cannot be overstated. How an instructor designs a course can offer drastically different opportunities for students, especially those from diverse backgrounds, to engage fully in these conversations. The prompts in the discussion posts tend to drift to dominant cultural frameworks, and diverse students may be on the margins, contributing to everyone's learning yet never being able to centre their experiences. In other words, they contribute to vibrant conversations, but their experiences are insufficient to challenge prevailing knowledge frameworks if the instructor does not deliberately seek to do so.

Finally, instructors must be familiar with diverse students' social presence—and absence—in online spaces. Participants actively negotiate their presence in online spaces, and to appear modern, intellectual, and scholarly, these students may present only a part of their identities. Instructors of online learning environments are encouraged to be reflexive in their approaches, engage with diverse student groups, identify their intersectional barriers, and design their courses to meet the needs of all learners.

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Dis-labeling the Ables: The Overrepresentation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students Receiving Special Education Services

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ABSTRACT

There are significant changes in the education system's demographics due to the increased immigration into the United States. A growing demographic has unique characteristics and academic needs for educators to recognize. This lack of understanding often causes the misidentification of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students as having special educational needs. The present research examined the factors contributing to the overrepresentation of CLD students receiving special education services in an urban school district in the Midwestern United States. Through a qualitative phenomenological study of six CLD families regarding their perceptions of their children's evaluation for special education services, three themes emerged: inaccurate screenings, grade retention, and parental lack of awareness of special education services. Based on these findings, this research calls for preparing teachers to provide culturally responsive services, carefully identifying culturally and linguistically diverse students, and educating CLD parents about special education services in their native language.

Keywords: culturally and linguistically diverse, misidentification, overrepresentation, special education

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students are misidentified as having a learning disability when the difficulties they face are often due to cultural and/or linguistic differences (Milner, 2021; Sullivan, 2011; Spinelli, 2007). This creates an overrepresentation of CLD students who are not receiving appropriate services in special education classrooms. When school personnel fails to distinguish between the shared characteristics of language acquisition and disability-related learning challenges (Shifrer, Muller, & Callahan, 2011), more English Learners (ELs) will be wrongly labeled as needing special education services. Harry and Klingner (2006) found that teachers at schools with a higher population of these students were less qualified and more likely to display inadequacies in the classroom than teachers at other schools.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act suggests, “Greater efforts are needed to prevent the intensification of problems connected with mislabeling and high dropout rates among minority children with disabilities” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA), 2004). Through interviews with six CLD families regarding their children’s school experiences, the present research examined the factors contributing to the overrepresentation of CLD students in special education classrooms in an urban school district in the Midwestern US.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oswald et al. (1999) define disproportionate representation as the degree to which membership in a particular community is linked to the likelihood of being labeled as having a special education disability, compared to the representation of others with that label. "The reality of such a label is the label not only affects the labeled child, but all who interact with the child, often for a lifetime" (Tetzloff & Obiakor, 2015, p. 69). When this label inaccurately delineates a child's abilities, it can also lead to inappropriate interventions (Metzger, et al., 2010) that do not fit or meet the child's needs as interventions should; a predestined perception of the child (Blum & Bakken, 2010) through this label and not through their actual strengths, performance, or behavior (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005); and lower expectations for the child's academic outcomes (Tetzloff & Obiakor, 2015). The negative effects of mislabeling a child and the stigma around the special education label may also impact the child's self-determination, self-perception, and socialization (Gates, 2010). Further, this can and has inadvertently contributed to the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Obiakor, 2001).

A child's race, ethnic background, and linguistic abilities often play a part in the label assigned to them. The disproportionate representation of minority students has been a reoccurring theme in US special education programs for over 40 years (Sullivan, 2011; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006; Waitoller et al., 2009; Obiakor, 1999, 2001) explains that CLD students may be labeled as needing special education services when their physical appearance, articulation, and/or behavior is different from those of their peers although they typically experience hurdles that are specifically caused by their cultural and linguistic diversity (Park & Thomas, 2012). It is, as Jonak (2013) describes, problematic to rely on special education programs for help addressing those barriers. Artiles et al. (2005) reported that CLD students are overrepresented in high-incidence disabilities and underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. This disproportion is due to over-diagnosis and under-referral (Sullivan, 2011).

Hardin et al. (2009) present three key explanations for why CLD students continue to be overrepresented in special education: (1) misunderstandings related to cultural differences, (2) a lack of special education staff with cultural and linguistic awareness, and (3) communication difficulties, i.e., language barriers between schools and families. These obstacles are especially evident during the complicated Individualized Education Program (IEP) process (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Meyer et al., 2007; Harry, 2008; Hardin et al., 2009; Hart et al., 2012), which is foreign to many immigrant families (Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2002; Salas, 2004; Lo, 2008) and during which, too often, little to no interaction with CLD parents has been observed to occur (Valenzuela, 2004). Educators and service providers must understand CLD students' individual needs while staying knowledgeable about how to address them (Jonak, 2013; Gates, 2010) and avoid generalizations that can overlook those needs (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007; Zhang & Choh, 2010).

RESEARCH METHOD

This phenomenological, qualitative study aimed to uncover the factors contributing to the overrepresentation of CLD students who receive special education services. The researcher analyzed the perceptions of CLD parents as they discussed their children's evaluation of special education services. The researcher gathered information on participants' perceptions through qualitative research methods, including questionnaires and interviews (Lester, 1999), to investigate how much these parents agreed or disagreed with this evaluation. Through the experiences of Six CLD parents, this study explores the following research question: What are the

perceptions of CLD parents regarding their children's evaluation for special education services?

Qualitative Approach Rationale

Qualitative research methods are often used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective from the participant's perspective. According to Lieblich (1996) when researchers invite people to talk about their reflections on experience, they can learn more than they plan to uncover. The study focused on learning about people's meaningful experiences. Interviews at the school district became sites for participants to tell their stories to active listeners (Gergen, 2001).

Phenomenological Method Rationale

This qualitative research followed a descriptive phenomenological approach that aligns with the purpose of phenomenological research, which is to "record the experiences of another person's life" (Creswell, 2007, p. 55). As defined by Teherani et al. (2015), phenomenology describes the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it. This required the researcher to suspend her own attitudes, beliefs, and suppositions in order to focus on the participants' experience of the phenomenon and identify the essences of the phenomenon through epoche, also called the process of bracketing, to ensure that the researcher's individual subjectivity does not bias data analysis and interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected data at the Delfino school district (pseudonym) through, first, semi-structured questionnaires with all participants. Rivano & Hagström (2017) recommend the use of qualitative questionnaires to generate informative data on the respondents' everyday life. Second, the researcher led semi-structured interviews to allow parents to engage in conversations, discussions, and give the researcher windows for questioning (Newton, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

The researcher organized the data, breaking them into manageable units to identify patterns and group parents' experiences into critical themes. Each part of the questionnaire and the interview was segmented and labeled with codes. Codes were examined for overlap and redundancy then collapsed into broad themes (Creswell, 2012). Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's modified method for analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994) was applied to analyze the collected information from participants.

Research Methods and Procedures

To participate in the study, participants had to be CLD parents who recently arrived in the US and have a child to be evaluated for special education services. Participants received an invitation letter from the Delfino public school district, which serves a large urban community in Midwestern US. Several internal validation strategies, including member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation were used to authenticate the findings. During the data collection meetings, the researcher explained the study thoroughly and answered any questions before the participants signed the consent form. The researcher then administered the questionnaire in a conference room assigned by the district's administrator. Afterwards, an in-depth, face-to-face interview was conducted individually at the school with each of the six participants, who were found to have a child requested to be evaluated for special education services.

Research Ethics

Prior to the initiation of any research activities, approval for human subject research was obtained from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before beginning the questionnaires, the participants read and signed an informed consent form, which provided participants with information about the purpose of the study, as well as a brief description of the procedure, possible benefits, risks of voluntary participation, confidentiality terms, and the researcher's contact information. Participants were also given the right to stop participating at any time with no consequences (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

Table 1 lists demographic information for each participant, including their relationship to the child requested for special education services evaluation. All names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Parent	Relationship to child receiving special education services	Country of origin
Hajar	Mother	Sudan
Ahlam	Mother	Syria
Omar	Father	Syria
Faten	Mother	Sudan
Nesmah	Mother	Sudan
Daniel	Father	Syria

RESULTS

An analysis of the questionnaire and interview portions revealed three major themes of CLD parents' perceptions regarding their children's evaluation for special education services.

Table 2

Developing the first theme based on participants 'questionnaire and interviews responses.

Participant	Inaccurate screenings
Hajar	My child's school requested that he be evaluated for special education services; however, I believe that being new to the US is what made him unable to catch up on his academic work in English and that he needs individual support in the classroom.
Ahlam	I attended one evaluation meeting where it was decided that my daughter should receive specially designed instruction.
Faten	I was frustrated with a prior school in another district that sent me a form to sign for evaluating my youngest child for special education services, and his teacher told me that my son has a specific learning disability and needed tailored programs to fit his academic needs. I refused to sign, because I did not believe that he needed an IEP just because he is in the ESL program.
Nesmah	I went to the evaluation meeting for my daughter in junior high school. My daughter did not understand English yet and had difficulties in her classes, because instruction was given to her in English from an American teacher, who my daughter did not understand. My other two children have made progress because of an Arabic-speaking ESL teacher's support in all their classes.
Daniel	I received an evaluation-meeting request to put in place a plan for my preschool daughter, as she had difficulties with English communication. At the evaluation meeting, a decision was made to provide her with early intervention services.

First Theme: Inaccurate screenings

Several participants reported unsatisfaction with the evaluations their children received or the lack thereof. This is further elaborated on in Table 2. Parents reported that, overall, they did not agree with the school's decision to evaluate their child for special education services. These requests were often made in response to CLD children's poor academic performance; however, parents argue that these outcomes are due to their children's lack of English comprehension as opposed to their academic abilities. Parents also explained that their children performed well academically in their home countries.

Second Theme: Grade retention

Many studies discussed the negative impact of grade retention on students' academic achievement as well as their social and emotional wellbeing. Upon interviewing Omar, he shared his son's grade retention story with a downhearted tone, stating,

> The school recommended that my child remain in the same grade level the following year since no progress was achieved from the early intervention services. I had to agree with their decision as I feel that the school is better informed than me.

During the school year following this decision, Omar's son started to loose his self-esteem and constantly asked his father to stay home from school because he was no longer surrounded by his peers and was always asked why he wasn't in their grade anymore. This was an unexpected complication, which caused Omar to move his son out of the district for his emotional and mental wellbeing.

Third Theme: Parental lack of awareness about special education services

Although parents received the school request for their children to be evaluated for special education services, they had no knowledge about it prior to the evaluation. A lack of awareness about special education services was very evident among all parents. The emergence of this theme is described in
table 3.

Table 3

Developing the third theme based on participants' responses.

Participant	Lack of awareness about special education services
Hajar	I don't know what special education services are.
Ahlam	I don't understand what special education services mean. No one at my children's school explained it to me in Arabic.
Omar	I don't think I fully understand what special education services mean and the role of an IEP.
Khadra Nesmah	There is no need [to collaborate with the school]; the teachers know what they're doing

The questionnaire and interview responses show that CLD parents know little to no information about special education. For instance, when Ahlam was asked if she thought that her child should indeed receive special

education services tailored to her needs that facilitate her learning process, she replied that she does not understand what is meant by special education services, adding in the space provided that no one at her children's school explained this to her in Arabic before. However, Ahlam's high school daughter struggles with math and receives one-on-one explicit instruction through a pullout program. Ahlam could not name the type of service that her daughter receives and could not identify whether the service fell under a 504 Plan or an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP).

DISCUSSION

It is common practice for school districts to evaluate CLD students for special education services due to their lack of English-speaking skills; however, Spinelli (2007) recommended an informal assessment of CLD students and described it as an authentic solution to the need for formative evaluation that is adjustable to language and cultural differences, individual learning styles, and personal challenges. In this study, Hajar also indicated that she does not believe her child should receive special education services. Similarly, Faten also selected on the questionnaire that she does not think that her child should have an IEP. The screenings performed on CLD students neglect to take into consideration their linguistic differences. The fact that students' previous academic record showed no need for special education services when instruction was given in their native language is proof that language is the main obstacle to their academic success in their new host countries as opposed to learning/intellectual disabilities.

As in the case with Omar's child, who was retained in preschool, schools may often duplicate an entire year of schooling for CLD students falling behind in academics. Research also found that minority students and ELs, including first-generation immigrants, are significantly overrepresented in schools' decisions regarding grade retention (Warren, Hoffman, & Andrew 2014; Tillman & Harris 2006; Willson & Hughes 2006) furthers their overrepresentation in special education. Many studies discussed the negative impact of grade retention on students' social and emotional well-being. For example, Jimerson & Ferguson (2007) argued that retained students displayed more aggression compared to matched peers. Similarly, Martin (2011) reported that retention was a negative predictor of academic self-concept and homework completion, a positive predictor of maladaptive motivation and weeks absent from school, and a negative predictor of self-esteem. In this study, we saw how Omar's son developed low self-esteem and wanted to stay at home not to face his peers' interrogations. Jimerson et al. (2002) argue that early grade retention is one of the strongest predictors

of dropping out of high school, which could have been the ultimate consequence for Omar's son who wanted to stay home to avoid his peers. As David (2008) states, students should have multiple media of support, including summer school and after-school support throughout the year to help them catch up and avoid grade retention. In fact, struggling students should be promoted and provided with the needed support among their peers.

In an article by the Policy Insights from Behavioral and Brain Sciences, researchers Robinson-Cimpian, Thompson, and Umansky (2016) determined that current education policies limit English Learners' access to equitable educational opportunities and puts them at a disadvantage compared to their monolingual peers. Nesmah reported that she was invited to an evaluation meeting for her daughter in junior high school. There was no interpretation of what was being evaluated during the meetings, and she assumed that they were talking about her daughter's learning goals.

Similarly, Zetlin, Padron, and Wilson (1996) investigated the experiences of five low-income Latin American families with regard to their children who receive special education services under learning disabilities through semi-structured interviews. They reported the families' unawareness of their children's level of functioning and were more critical of the services being received. This was echoed by Hajar, who did not understand what it meant for her child to be evaluated for special education services.

Lo (2009) recommended that CLD parents, whose children receive special education services, should be provided with information about their child's disability in their native language. Professionals, who neglect to provide sufficient information about services and rights and do not meet parents' need for increased communication and cultural sensitivity, create even more barriers to a successful partnership (Connery, 1987; Harry, 2002; Matuszny, 2004; Sullivan, 2011). Parents' lack of knowledge also enables CLD students' overrepresentation in special education because it eliminated parents' ability to advocate for their children and their abilities. Providing a qualified interpreter who speaks the same dialect as the families and has expertise in special education is preferable because it will allow the parents to feel comfortable and valued by the school district.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conclude that CLD families continue to experience disappointing interactions with special education professionals. The existing services do not specifically address the needs of CLD parents

of students receiving special education services. Special education professionals should provide culturally responsive services and apply careful identification of CLD students in their native languages to avoid their misidentification due to inaccurate screenings, grade retention, and parental lack of knowledge about special education services – the three major factors that contribute to CLD students' overrepresentation in special education. As outlined by IDEA (2004), to comply with providing free appropriate public education to English Learners, the disability determination of an English Learner is based on criteria that measure and evaluate the student's abilities and not the student's English language skills.

Additionally, educating CLD parents about special education services is the district's responsibility; information often exists on the district website in English, so it is important to provide the same information for other CLD parents in their native language, not to exclude them from the learning process.

There were several limiting features of this study that may have influenced the overall interpretation of its results. Most notable was the challenge of the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007). Another limitation of the study was the limited number of participants who met the research criteria. Participants were also recruited from the same metropolitan area where their children were educated. All parents' national origins were from Arabic-speaking countries, and they arrived in the United States through different means within two years. Further research is necessary to address the needs of families with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds from multiple school districts and states.

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