Perspectives 2011

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What sociology major hasn’t been bombarded with questions like, “Socio-what?” or “What are you going to do with that degree?” At times, defending your major can be difficult for students of the social sciences. But hold your heads up high my fellow Sociology majors, for although relatively unrecognized, sociological research is among the most important in modernity. Especially in contemporary times, when social happenings seem to be a whirlwind of lunacy and confusion, sociologists are there to shed some light on the situation. While Egyptians fight for democracy with the help of Facebook, American politicians narrowly escape a government shut down through the contemporary rarity of unadulterated compromise. With Donald Trump in the mix for Republican Presidential Primary in 2012 and Charlie Sheen running amuck, Japan grapples with the aftermath of an earthquake and subsequent nuclear meltdown. Society, globally, nationally, and locally, can be rather baffling. This insanity of current events only highlights the importance of a sociological lens. Critically examining disjuncture or confusion within society helps sociologists lift the façade of everyday life and reveal the patterns and structures beneath. Sociological perspectives aid in deciphering these conundrums and more. Beyond the pursuit of further knowledge and understanding, sociological research also informs the creation of public policy and helps guide societal development in this upside down world.

In this year’s publication of Perspectives, students address concerns in the areas of Law and Politics, Family and Parenting, Academics and Education, and Media, Culture and Community. Submissions take a close look at our home campus of the University of New Hampshire, while also recognizing the growing connections in international politics. Delving into issues from parenting to inequality, these researchers critically analyze assumptions of societal reality.

Looking at themes of Law and Politics, Valerie Barthell begins by investigating biases within jury verdicts. Barthell affirms that constitutionally all defendants have the right to an impartial trial, but in truth factors like race, age, and appearance affect the decisions of a jury. While Barthell concentrates on the initial incarceration patterns, Ashley Clark researches patterns in recidivism rates for violent crimes. Focusing on age of the offender, type of crime, and the presence of substance abuse, Clark acknowledges the complexity of predicting repeat offenders. Although there is a growing sense of respect for multiculturalism and belief in the motto that we are all humans, Sociological research, including Barthell and Clark, reveals that social characteristics, whether race, age, or gender, do play a determining role in our ideals, beliefs, and ultimately, our fate. Morin, Schmidt, Vinciguerra, and Magane add further evidence to this premise. In her study, Celie Morin considers the affect of race, religion, and gender on attitudes towards capital punishment, while Bethany Schmidt centers her attention on gender differences in perceptions of victimization in male inmate sexual violence. Victoria
Vinciguerra and Dana Magane tackle a more concentrated population by looking at student perceptions of law enforcement on the campus of the University of New Hampshire. Their research asks whether age and gender changes these perceptions of campus police. Zooming out to a macro scale, Ashley Charron closes out our Law and Politics section with her paper on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Charron argues that reducing violence in the region would help thwart threats of terrorism against the United States. From perceptions of national issues such as the death penalty to male inmate sexual violence, and from campus law enforcement concerns to the global fight against terrorism, submissions in this section of Perspectives truly address numerous aspects of Law and Politics.

Acknowledging the importance of familial socialization, Rafford and Story make up the Perspectives section on Family and Parenting. Ryan Rafford looks at various family members influence in establishing religiosity of adolescence. Considering parental religiosity, the adolescent’s relationship quality with the family, religious communication among family members, and the possible impacts of divorced parents, Rafford discusses why adolescents adopt religious beliefs they were taught as a child, or if they choose to abandon them. Samantha Story looks at the correlation between parenting styles and adolescent substance abuse. Comparing authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting styles, Story’s research concludes that the authoritative has the most positive effect in deterring adolescence from substance abuse.

In the bureaucratic and supposed meritocratic structuring of modernity, a high expectation is placed on the ability of education to lift up the poor. Nevertheless, as the following submissions show, the American educational institution is not a simple process of input and output. An assortment of factors affects the quality and success of any educational track. Kendall Clark investigates the effect of some of these social and economic factors on adolescent academic achievement. Reviewing available literature, Clark focuses on community social capital, peer relations and economic composition. Kelby Mackell discusses a similar topic, but centers her research on the experience of African Americans. She highlights the effects of socioeconomic status, parental involvement and self-esteem. Splintering off Mackell’s themes, Callen Rockwell dives specifically into parental involvement. Rockwell’s qualitative study looks at how parent’s socioeconomic status, level of education, and the parent-school relationship change the level of involvement with their children’s education. Clark, Mackell, and Rockwell all acknowledge the complexity of the educational institution, while realizing its importance.

While previous sections have touched upon topics traditionally researched, our final section, Media, Culture, and Community, steps into some of the more obscure yet intriguing topics of society, considering topics such as pornography, violent video games, and the loss of the American Dream. Shannon Farley begins the section through her research on mass media and socio-cultural pressures on adolescent women to achieve the perfect body. The ubiquitous unrealistic images of models have led to an increasing frequency of eating disorders in the United States. While teenage girls are worried about their waists, teenage boys are engrossed in extreme video games such as Call of Duty or God of War. Mackenzie Colburn researches this
growing phenomenon and the parallel concern that these video violent games are increasing aggressive behavior in adolescence. Similar to Colburn, Danielle Hernandez emphasizes the ability of visual media to influence future perceptions and actions. Her submission addresses the effects of consuming pornography, touching on issues including men’s attitudes towards violence against women, sexual objectification of women and fantastical sexual expectations of women. Closing this section, and this year’s journal, is a qualitative study by Barrett Mueller of tragedy in an upper class suburb. This research specifically looks at the identity created around a sense of the American Dream and how this sense of community comes under question after a series of traumatic events.

This year student submissions have covered the spectrum of issues within society, from politics to family, and education to media. The extent of research and knowledge produced by these student researchers is impressive in itself and barely skim the surface of possibility in the field of social sciences. So, students of Sociology, embrace the expanse of possibilities and next time someone questions the merit of being a Sociology major, hand them an issue of Perspectives.
Jury Verdicts and Biases in the United States

Valerie R. Barthell

ABSTRACT

This study will examine jury biases, especially the biases of race, appearance, and age in the trial and sentencing phases. Of the literature reviewed, it has been found that race is salient in jury trials, finding that white jurors are more likely to find a black defendant guilty (Cohn, Ellen S., Donald Bucolo, Misha Pride, and Samuel R. Sommers. 2009). Appearance is also a factor considered by jurors as a study designed by MacCoun (1990) found that jurors were more likely to find an unattractive defendant guilty. This study further examined biases in the sentencing phase concluding that there are more black defendants in jail with longer sentences (with many sentenced to death) than white defendants (Cohn et al., 2009). Age is also a significant factor in the sentencing phase with findings that age is a determining factor in the length of sentencing.

INTRODUCTION

Every year in the United States there are thousands of jury trials at the state and federal levels. Jury trials are a fundamental right guaranteed by article three, section two of the U.S. Constitution. The article states: “the trial of all crimes, except in cases of impeachment, shall be by jury”. These rights are furthered by the sixth amendment guaranteeing the rights to a speedy and public trial, an impartial jury, and confrontation of witnesses against the accused. This fundamental right has become engrained into our criminal justice system and society over the course of history.

Jury trials are a lengthy process by which a number of citizens judge a peer and hold their future and, in some cases, life in their hands. While juries are intended to be unbiased when judging a case, every person has long held, sometimes unrecognized, biases that will guide their decision. This paper asks how do biases of race, age, and appearance affect the criminal justice system in the United States during the verdict and sentencing phases.

It is hypothesized that biases do exist in the process of jury deliberation and decision making for a verdict. Race, age, and appearance of the defendant will all have an impact on jurors as every person holds prejudices whether they are pronounced or not. Further, it is hypothesized that these characteristics will all be salient in the determination of the death penalty.
JURY VERDICTS

Race has long been salient in jury trials. There has been research on the effect of the defendant’s race on jury verdicts as well as on the severity of sentencing. It should be noted however, that the majority of the research is focused on black and white racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Research suggests that aversive racism (Gaertner and Dovidio 2005 as cited in Cohn, Bucolo, Pride, and Sommers 2009: 1956) persists in our society such that individuals hold prejudicial views that are different from the racist views toward blacks that are typically associated with blatant racist notions. This suggests that while many people do not practice overt racism such as segregation there is a suggested prejudice that people in our society hold towards those of other races.

Cohn, et al. (2009) show that there is overwhelming consensus among researchers that black defendants are more likely than white defendants to be found guilty, especially if the jury is white (1954). Sommers (2007) further notes that it is evident that white jurors seem to be harsher toward out of group defendants versus in-group defendants (173).

Cohn et al. (2009) designed a study to determine whether race salience, based on the definition developed by Sommers and Ellsworth (2000, 2001, 2003), has an affect on verdicts of juries (1958). The study suggests that if the race of the defendant, a black defendant, is made apparent the defendant would receive a different verdict than if the race of the defendant was not salient. The study included 157 white students from a Northeastern public university with an age range of 18 to 34 years old (this sample included more females than males) (Cohn et al. 2009:1958). Participants watched a trial that was either race salient or not race salient, they were then asked to complete questions. This study used the “old fashioned racism scale” and the “modern racism scale.” The findings of this study show that the defendant is more likely to be found guilty if race is not salient (66.7 percent) than if the race is made salient (50.6 percent) (Cohn et al., 2009:1962). Further, when participants were asked about the strength of the defense’s case it became evident that in the case where race was salient participants answered that the case seemed stronger (Cohn et al., 2009: 1962). Cohn et al., (2009) drew the conclusion that making a black defendant’s race salient reduces juror racial bias (1964). These findings suggest that race does play a factor in the verdicts of jurors, particularly in the case of white jurors on convicting black defendants.

Mitchell, Haw, Pfeifer, and Meissner (2005) designed a study in order to determine whether jurors were affected by in-group biases in making their decisions (627). This study analyzed other studies gathered through the use of academic databases, which represented the responses of 7,397 participants (Mitchell et al., 2005: 627). They concluded that participants were more likely to render guilty judgments for other-race defendants than for defendants of their own race (Mitchell et al., 2005: 627). Mitchell et al., (2005) found evidence that racial bias in participants has a different impact on white participants than on black participants; they found that racial bias was more significant in black participants (629). The overall conclusions of Mitchell et al., (2005) were that there was a small but significant racial bias in both the verdict
and sentencing decisions (629). This suggests that, while we try not to be racist in our society, there are those who do carry racial bias that appear through our criminal justice system.

Appearance is also a factor for juries when deliberating for an outcome. Appearance can have a great impact on people, especially in first impressions. MacCoun (1990) created a study with 321 participants, who were students from introductory psychology courses, with the primary purpose of examining the impact of appearance on jury verdicts (307). This study manipulated defendant appearance through the use of black and white photographs of attractive and unattractive males and females that had been previously selected. Participants viewed a forty-minute trial, followed by a pre-deliberation questionnaire and group deliberation for about thirty minutes (MacCoun 1990:307-8). MacCoun (1990) analyzed the pre-deliberation questionnaire and found that the attractiveness manipulation was successful in that those who had a higher attractiveness rating were rated higher than those who had a lower attractiveness rating (308). The results of the pre-deliberation found that the mock juries were more likely to find an unattractive defendant guilty (61 percent) than an attractive defendant (49 percent) (MacCoun 1990:309). In post deliberation analysis MacCoun (1990) found similar yet less striking results that these mock juries found unattractive defendants guilty 39 percent of the time compared to attractive defendants who they found guilty 21 percent of the time (308). This suggests that a defendant’s appearance does have an impact on the jury; MacCoun (1990) interpreted this data as the jury being less likely to give an unattractive defendant the “benefit of the doubt,” thus impacting the outcome (312).

**SENTENCING**

As Cohn et al. (2009) point out, there is disparity in the number of blacks in prison and the number of blacks in the general population. Blacks represent about 12 percent of the general population, yet they constitute about half of the prison population (Cohn et al. 2009:1953). Research suggests that in the crimes of burglary, manslaughter, rape, sexual assault, and homicide black defendants are more likely to be found guilty and face longer sentences (Cohn et al. 2009:1954). Further, it has been found that black defendants receive significantly longer prison sentences than white defendants, and black defendants are more likely to be sentenced to death than are white defendants (Cohn et al. 2009:1954). This finding was supported by Mitchell et al., (2005), who found that black defendants receive longer sentences even when controlling for the seriousness of the crime (622). Mitchell et al., (2005) studied racial bias in sentencing judgment using 16 studies that contained a total of 3,141 participants (628). This portion of the study demonstrated that participants were more likely to render harsher sentences to a defendant of another race than to a defendant of their own race.

The death penalty is a central issue in our criminal justice system that is raised quite often in society. A sentence of death for a crime comes after a trial and verdict and further deliberation on the issue of the death sentence. Race is a characteristic that jurors consider in the judgment of the death penalty. Dovidio, Smith, Donnella, and Gaertner (1997) designed a study to determine racial biases of white jurors in the determination of the death penalty for
both black and white defendants (1468). The researchers used aversive racism theory, in which those who appear nondiscriminatory on a self-report measure hold deep-seated negative feelings towards blacks, which appear in judicial outcomes (Dovidio et al., 1997:1469). This study used a sample of 104 males and females (58 females) from a northeastern college selected based on responses to a survey concerning the death penalty (Dovidio et al., 1997:1472-3). Participants read a scenario of felony murder cases in which the defendant was either described as black or white, and the participants then viewed recorded statements from jurors, each of whom advocated the death penalty at the original trial in which the defendant was convicted (Dovidio et al., 1997: 1474). The videotapes were presented in order, however, only the second tape varied as either a white male advocating the death penalty because there was no evidence that it was self-defense or a black make advocating the death penalty with the same reasoning (Dovidio et al., 1997:1474).

Dovidio et al., (1997) revealed a number of things concerning juries and aversive race theory. In general, they found that participants who scored lower in prejudice were more opposed to the death penalty than those who scored higher in prejudice (Dovidio et al., 1997:1475). Further, the study revealed that those who scored higher in prejudice exhibited more overt patterns of bias against black defendants, and those who most strongly advocated the death penalty were white jurors (Dovidio et al., 1997:1480). An interesting finding of the study showed that white jurors who scored lower in prejudice tended to advocate for the death penalty in the case of a black defendant while in the presence of a black juror than when there is an absence of a black juror (Dovidio et al., 1997:1481). These findings suggest a relationship between the prejudices of jurors and their decisions on the death penalty.

Antonio (2006) set out to study the capital punishment decision-making practices of jurors who actually served on a capital jury (220). The methodology used was in-depth interviews that lasted about three to four hours with each participant, using a sample of 80 jurors selected from actual capital cases that resulted in both the death penalty and life sentences (Antonio 2006:221). Participants were asked questions at various stages throughout the trial that included their favored punishment and their first vote in the case, the type of case, and the appearance of the defendant (Antonio 2006:222). The defendant’s appearance was placed into one of nine categories by the participant including bored, sorry, sincere, self‐confident, uncomfortable, spruced up, frightening, bitter, or constant (Antonio 2006:228). The study found that when the defendant appeared emotionally involved (sorry or sincere) this impacted the jurors’ decision towards life imprisonment whereas appearing emotionally uninvolved (bored) and self-confident influenced jurors to seek the death penalty (Antonio 2006: 227). Antonio (2006) found that the strongest determinant of outcome is when the defendant appears to be bored or emotionally uninvolved in which the jurors would remain undecided in their decisions but favored the death penalty at the first vote (227).

Age is another characteristic that factors into a jury’s decision of a defendant’s fate. Over time, the juvenile justice system has come to mirror the adult justice system, thus giving juveniles the right to a trial by jury. In a trial of a juvenile, the jury is not of the juvenile’s peers, but rather a jury of adults to determine the fate of the juvenile defendant. Warling and
Peterson-Bandali (2003), concerned with age influence on jurors, designed a two-part study to determine the effect of age on verdict and sentencing. There were a total of 321 participants both from a university and the general public who were given a questionnaire containing scenarios with defendants ages 13, 17, or 25 years old (Warling and Peterson-Bandali 2003:66-7). The participants were asked to read a scenario, render a verdict, and choose a sentence followed by a series of questions of demographics and attitudes (Warling and Peterson-Bandali 2003:68).

This study concluded that there was no significant relationship between the age of the defendant and the likelihood of the guilty verdict (Warling and Peterson-Bandali 2003:69). However, the study did find a relationship between age and the sentence given to a juvenile defendant. The overall findings for sentencing and age concluded that the older the defendant, the longer the sentence received (Warling and Peterson-Bandali 2003:70). These findings suggest that age influences one’s sentence, especially in adult jurors. As Warling and Peterson-Bandali (2003) suggest, this could be due to an adult’s belief in rehabilitation of juvenile offenders (72).

Race, appearance, and age biases all have been shown to have an impact on jurors’ decision making both in the case of verdicts and sentencing including the death penalty. Over the years, social sciences have had an impact on our court system as the United States Supreme Court has handed down several decisions concerning these issues and court procedure. Historically, prosecuting attorneys were allowed to eliminate potential jurors solely because of their race, however, this changed. In the case of Batson v. Kentucky (1984) the Supreme Court ruled that peremptory challenges to a juror solely on the basis of race were not prohibited (Dovidio et al. 1997:1482). This issue in this case was not raised due to the defendant’s right but rather a juror’s constitutional right to sit on a jury. In 1987 the Court examined the issue of racial disparities in sentencing decisions in death penalty cases in McClesky v. Kemp (Dovidio et al. 1997:1483). The Justices decided, as stated by Dovidio et al., (1997), “a petitioner would have to offer evidence specific to his own case that would support an inference that racial considerations played a part in his sentence, and furthermore that the petitioner must also prove that the decision makers in this case acted with discriminatory purpose” (1483). These two cases show how biases, particularly racial biases, can affect our legal system not just in decisions but also in laws themselves.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

As we have discussed above, there are a number of biases that affect jury decisions in verdicts and sentencing including race, age, and appearance. Race has long been a prominent issue in America and has thus influenced our laws and actions in society. The bias that is most salient in the American criminal justice system is the bias of race. Therefore a discussion of the evidence pertaining to racial biases in juries’ imposition of the death penalty will be presented.

Amnesty International is a nonprofit international organization with the goal to end grave human rights abuses. This organization conducts a great deal of research on human rights...
violations throughout the world, including information on the death penalty and race. Amnesty International publishes an annual report on the state of human rights in countries throughout the world. For the 2010 report, Amnesty International released current statistics on the death penalty in the United States; this showed that in the year 2010, 52 people were executed, and of these 52 people, 24 were executed in the state of Texas (346). Further, the organization found that nine people were released from death row this year due to evidence that exonerated them (Amnesty International 2010:346).

In 1999, Amnesty International conducted a comprehensive study on race and the death penalty in the United States. Amnesty International has shown that there are patterns of sentencing that cannot be explained except by race, which becomes most apparent when the race of the defendant is linked to the race of the victim. In 1999, there were 3,549 inmates on death row in the United States with a racial breakdown of 46.75 percent white, 42.24 percent black, 8.09 percent Latino/a, 1.41 percent Native American, .79 percent Asian, and .74 percent unknown; this shows that imposition of the death penalty is linked to defendants racial or ethnic background (Amnesty International 1999:5). Further, between 1977 and 1988 there were 500 inmates executed, 81.8 percent were convicted for the murder of a white despite the fact that blacks and whites are murdered in equal numbers (Amnesty International 1999:5). A study conducted by David Baldus of 2,000 murder cases controlling for other legal factors found that “the odds of a death sentence were four times higher for cases with white victims than for cases with black victims. The odds of a death sentence in cases in which blacks killed whites were as much as eleven times higher than the capital murder of a black victim by a white person” (David Baldus 1990 as cited in Amnesty International 1999:7).

Through this use of empirical data, it is undeniable that racial biases have a relationship with the decision making of juries when it comes to both verdicts and sentencing, particularly in the case of the death penalty. We have seen that there is an undeniable pattern in sentencing of defendants that can only be explained by race.

REFERENCES


The Effects of the Characteristics of a Violent Crime and Its Offender on Recidivism Rates

Ashley Clark

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the relationship between key characteristics of a violent crime and its offender, and recidivism rates. Some characteristics seem to play a prominent role in recidivism rates, such as an offender’s age, the type of violent crime committed, and the offender’s involvement with substance abuse. All of these are crucial factors that indicate the person’s likelihood of offending again. In this paper, I will use studies of homicide offences in particular to show how age, substance abuse, and type of crime committed play a central part in recidivism rates of violent crime.

BACKGROUND

Every year, millions of people commit violent crimes, which vary in severity. Violent crime includes any crime in which violence or a threat of violence is used. This can range from simple forms of assault and robbery to sexual abuse and murder. Violence can be the purpose of the crime, or occur during the commission of a crime. Violent crimes are some of the most instinctual of crimes because many times, they are driven by anger, which is one of mankind’s most basic emotions. Often times in violent crime, there are other factors such as drug or alcohol abuse that can add tension and danger to an already dangerous situation. Alcohol or drugs can amplify a person’s emotions, and if anger is dominant, then that leaves potential for a dangerous result.

According to Leonard Beeghley, a contemporary American sociologist, “The greater a person’s frustration and the more one has been socialized to violence, the more likely one is to commit murder” (Beeghley 2003: 25). This relates to Dollard and Miller’s frustration-aggression hypothesis, which states that when one is unable to attain a goal, frustration sets in, and from this frustration, aggression is often the outcome. “It is believed that our past actions are the best predictor of our future actions. Although it is considerably difficult to collect data related to aggression, it is presumed that one out of every ten persons has intentions of harming a certain person and one out of every fifty, actually does so” (Çorapçioğlu and Erdoğan 2004: 170). Men are often pictured as the aggressors in violent crime. However, according to Freeman and Sandler (2008), “In recent years, the number of female offenders under criminal supervision has grown significantly and now comprises approximately 17% of offender populations” (Freeman and Sandler 2008: 1395). However, this statistic includes all crime, so it is clear that men do commit significantly more violent acts. This may be due to men being more aggressive by nature than women. This is one reason that men are quite often the offenders and victims of violent crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2011).
Homicide is an extremely broad term, and is often used interchangeably with words like murder or manslaughter. This is common in every day conversation; however, all of these words have specific definitions. Homicide is used to describe the act of one person killing another. In the justice system, homicide is divided into two subgroups, which are criminal and non-criminal. Non-criminal homicide allows for certain defenses to justify the act. Some of these include self-defense, duress, entrapment, insanity, or war crimes. Criminal homicides are not justifiable by law and are prosecuted. These consist of two groups, murder and manslaughter. Murder is the more severe form of the two and must factor in premeditation, malicious intent, or both. There are two forms of murder including first and second degree. The less severe side of the spectrum includes manslaughter, which has several forms as well, such as voluntary, involuntary, and vehicular (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2011).

The justice system uses prison as a deterrent for crime. Unfortunately, there are still a number of violent crimes committed every day. It is the hope of the prison system that an inmate’s departure will be the last time they find themselves in trouble with the law. However, for many, this is not the case. A large percentage of these people return to jail or prison on the same, similar, or different charges. The reason for the commission of another crime varies and cannot be explained with one or even a few factors; however, there are three factors in particular that greatly affect recidivism rates. These factors are the offender’s age, their substance abuse involvement, and the characteristics of the crime committed.

**OFFENDER’S AGE**

Age is an extremely important factor in recidivism as well as in crime as a whole. Statistically, the age group of ten to twenty-four year olds has the highest crime rates (Barkan 2006: 88). Criminologists have studied juvenile populations for decades because of the impact that they have on the future. From the mid-1980s on, juvenile arrests for violent crime have increased dramatically and because of this, interest has been focused on juvenile offenders who commit violent acts (Heide et al. 2001). Roberts et al. conducted a longitudinal study of four different types of homicide offenders released from the New Jersey department of corrections between 1990 and 2000. “Almost seventy percent of the homicide offenders were released between the ages of 21 through 40” (Roberts et al. 2007: 501). This indicates that the crimes committed by these people occurred when they were most likely in their late teens or twenties.

A study comparing juvenile homicide offenders to non-violent juvenile criminals concluded that a nonviolent juvenile offender stood the same chance of recidivating as a violent juvenile offender (Heide et al. 2001: 99). In the study that was carried out by Heide et al., juveniles convicted of some form of homicide were studied when they were released from prison. The study found that over half of them returned to prison. This is a significant percentage, and age seems to be prominent in these findings. Because these were juveniles, the majority of these adolescents had not finished high school. Hill, Habermann, Klusmann, Berner, and Briken (2008) conducted a study assessing criminal risk factors in sexual homicide perpetrators. One of the main findings discussed was age and the effect it had on recidivism.
rates. “Increased recidivism with any violent re-offence was associated with age-related factors: young age at first sexual offence, at homicide, and at release and duration of detention” (Hill et al. 2008: 5). This supports the evidence of age’s role in violent crime recidivism rates.

According to Barkan (2006), “Crime peaks at age 17 or 18 and then declines, especially beyond young adulthood” (Barkan 2006: 88). This gives criminologists some relief, however, this shows that the younger a person is when they commit their first offense, the more likely they are to commit a second. Being younger gives the person more time to offend again and this does not necessarily mean committing the same crime, but merely other crimes. Young people also tend to have fewer responsibilities than adults do. Older people have jobs, families- things to lose. Young adults do not have nearly as much to lose, which may be a reason for the high recidivism rates among young people.

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE INVOLVEMENT**

Another crucial factor of recidivism is substance abuse. Whether it is alcohol or drugs, many of these substances play a role in their initial crime, or any that may follow. Drug wars have led to large amounts of violent crime and while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, one does not necessarily think clearly, and as a result they can sometimes act out of character. The substance acts as a catalyst to heighten or intensify any emotion the person has. If someone else says or does something to anger or upset them, there is no telling how they will react (American Society of Addiction Medicine & Research Society on Alcoholism 1997).

Tiihonen, Hakola, Nevalainen, and Eronen (1995) studied homicide offenders and different characteristics that made them more dangerous than average people who have not committed a homicide. What they found was that, “twelve out of thirteen prisoner recidivists could be classified as type two alcoholics” (Tiihonen et al. 1995: 47). Type two alcoholism is a severe alcohol addiction with an earlier onset that affects mainly males. Twelve out of thirteen is an astounding proportion and it shows that there is a strong correlation between alcohol abuse and violent behavior. A study conducted by Bjorkly and Waage (2005) looked at a specific group of criminals known as recidivistic single-victim homicide offenders. “This subgroup includes people who commit a homicide, are institutionalized in a prison or psychiatric facility as a consequence, and then commit a second homicide after release” (Bjorkly and Waage 2005: 99). There has not been much research done regarding this group, this study is one of few. A list of characteristics of the perpetrators was collected. This list indicated that alcoholism was a dominant trait in almost all of the offenders. Along with this were different types of mental disorders. This article indicated that the findings could not be compared to anything else because studies on this group are virtually nonexistent; however, it is clear that alcoholism was prevalent in those studied, and may have played a role in the actual homicide.

The fact that alcoholism was a prevalent characteristic in the vast majority of offenders in these studies shows that there is a moderately strong correlation between substance abuse
and violent crime. One of the many factors that contribute to substance abuse could be a lack of or problem with social bonds. Two dangerous affective mental states can arise from this, feelings of isolation and feelings of hostility towards others. When these two factors are combined, there is potential for an extremely dangerous outcome (Ferrante 2008). Although substance abuse can pose as an indicator of a person’s likelihood of offending again, there is another factor that is perhaps more telling, which is the characteristics of the crimes committed.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CRIMES COMMITTED

The study referenced earlier by Roberts, Zgoba, and Shahidullah (2007) looked at four different types of homicide offenders. They were divided into the following subgroups: “1) offenders who committed a homicide that was precipitated by a general altercation or argument, 2) offenders who committed a homicide during the commission of a felony, 3) offenders who committed a domestic violence-related homicide, and 4) offenders who were charged with a degree of homicide after an accident” (Roberts, Zgoba, Shahidullah 2007: 494). To clarify, recidivism does not mean that the same crime was committed again, but that another crime was committed. It does not have to be another violent crime for someone to be considered a recidivist. “Recidivism is classified for this study into four distinct categories, including parole violations, new property offenses, violent offenses and/or drug offenses” (Roberts, Zgoba, Shahidullah 2007: 504). The recidivism rate for this group of 336 offenders was 51.2 percent. This percentage was made up mostly of parole violations and new drug charges. This shows that a homicide offender will not necessarily commit another crime of that severity.

It is tremendously important to distinguish which type of homicide the person has been convicted of because in cases such as accidental homicides, there was no premeditation or intent. Therefore, the likelihood of someone in that category committing murder again is low. In the Roberts, Zgoba, Shahidullah (2007) study, domestic violence homicides had the highest percentage of parole violations, while those offenders in the felony-homicide category had the highest percentage of violent re-offences. These offenders generally have a lengthier prior record because the types of crimes they typically commit are less severe, and more commonly misdemeanors. Therefore, upon release, many of these offenders go back to the less severe crimes that they took part in countless times before they were ever convicted of murder. “Homicide offenders who had over 5 prior arrests had the highest level of recidivism; they made up 40% of the overall sample, yet comprised 55% of the recidivism sample” (Roberts, Zgoba, Shahidullah 2007:504). It is no surprise that this subgroup had the highest percentage of violent re-offences.

“Almost one-third of the general altercation precipitated homicide offenders recidivated for a new violent (i.e. usually aggravated assault) or drug offense, and slightly over one-third of the felony commission related homicides recidivated for a new violent or drug offense. In a sharp contrast, less than 10% of the domestic violence homicide offenders recidivated for a new violent or drug offense” (Roberts, Zgoba, Shahidullah 2007: 505).

According to Roberts, Zgoba, and Shahidullah (2007), another high recidivism group was the general altercation homicide offenders. An example of this type of offender could be two
men engaging in a bar fight. The involvement of alcohol is often a component in a general altercation homicide, as well as aggression. These two factors are addicting and habit-forming, so because of this, the general altercation homicide group of offenders has high recidivism rates. Just looking at these four homicide offender groups shows how important it is to look at characteristics of the crime and offender in determining an offender’s likelihood of offending again.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that violent crime and its motives cannot be explained with simply one factor. Often times, there are several variables that contribute to this type of crime and recidivistic behavior. The three characteristics discussed earlier have great significance, but do not encompass every factor, as people are different and have unique situations. However, these three variables prove to be quite prominent in crimes of this nature.

The offender’s age is often a factor in violent crime recidivism. The younger someone is, the more time they have to commit again before they statistically age out of crime. Also, teenagers and those in their early to late twenties have much less to lose than those who have established a name for themselves at their job, in their communities, and with friends and family. Because of the high rates of young violent offenders and recidivists, law enforcement should certainly focus on ways to reach young kids and discourage this kind of behavior before it becomes a problem. Also, attention should be paid to juvenile offenders to get them on the right path, out of their criminal behavior and away from alcohol and drugs before they become adults.

Substance abuse is another important factor to examine. Alcoholism and drug dependency can ruin lives and there is no easy fix for them. Just because someone is sent to prison, where drugs and alcohol are not easily attainable, does not mean that their addiction problems are over. Upon release, many go right back into old habits and it becomes a vicious cycle. Law enforcement across the country has been faced with tackling the Drug War problem and this is certainly the cause of many violent crimes and countless recidivistic behaviors. It is also known that alcohol and drugs can precipitate violence and, alcohol in particular, can play a role in domestic abuse and altercation precipitated homicides. For these reasons, drug rehabilitation centers and support groups are crucial and should be mandatory in court sentencing. Also, it is important to monitor the people in treatment programs closely to ensure that the offender continues with treatment.

Finally, it is very important in predicting whether or not someone will offend again to distinguish between the type of violent crime and its characteristics. Usually, in accidental violent crimes, recidivist rates are low, unless that accident was the result of a felony commission. In this case, recidivism rates tend to be higher. This may be because those convicted of felony-related violent crimes are often career criminals, and have no intention of stopping the nonviolent crimes they were participating in prior to their arrest. Understanding
the differences in the nature of how these crimes were committed and the two afore mentioned characteristics will better help to predict an offenders chance of offending again.

In order to combat recidivism rates, there are a few beneficial areas of future research. First, offending often begins during adolescence and the past and current diversion programs in the United States have not shown to be very effective. More of the government’s funding ought to be given to local teen centers that focus on finding positive outlets for kids to socialize, exercise, and have fun in a safe environment. Drug and alcohol counseling is crucial to the rehabilitation and recovery of many inmates. Those that go through detoxification in prison are not necessarily stable and could greatly benefit from mandatory drug and alcohol counseling. Finally, repeat offenders should face harsher penalties because this would create a larger deterrent for both offenders and non-offenders. Perhaps implementing some of these changes will lead to a decrease in violent crime recidivism, but this is certainly an area of crime that needs more research and attention.

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Do Race, Religion, or Gender Affect Death Penalty Support in the United States?

Celie Morin

ABSTRACT

This article examines the effects race, religion, and gender have on Americans’ attitudes toward capital punishment. This literature review uses existing literature to explore and analyze the specific question at hand. The article looks at each factor (i.e. race, religion, and gender) individually, and also examines the joint effects of race and religion. After a thorough review of the literature, I conclude that race, religion, and gender do in fact influence the public’s attitude toward capital punishment, with race having the most influence. Further research on this topic, including qualitative studies, is important to gain a better understanding of the variables that influence death penalty attitudes in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

There is much debate around the issue of capital punishment in the U.S. Many people hold strong beliefs either in support or in opposition of the death penalty. Some oppose the death penalty because they feel it is not right to take another’s life. Others support the death penalty because they feel people who kill should be killed themselves. Regardless of one’s attitude toward the death penalty and reasons for their opinion, many demographic variables are shown to influence death penalty attitudes. In this literature review, I will examine the effects race, religion, and gender have on people’s attitude toward capital punishment. It is important to look at the correlation between these variables and death penalty attitude for several reasons. First, law officials could use the information to choose an unbiased jury in a death penalty case (Miller and Hayward 2007). Also, knowing what factors influence attitudes toward capital punishment could be helpful in changing the public’s view on the issue. Whether impacts include “decisions made by lawmakers...penalties sought by prosecutors, [or] verdicts delivered by juries” (Bjarnason and Welch 2004:103), public opinion of the death penalty affects the use of such a punishment.

THE INFLUENCE OF RACE ON DEATH PENALTY ATTITUDE

African Americans versus White Americans

Studies found on the topic of race and death penalty attitude (Britt 1998; Baker, Lambert, and Jenkins 2005; Buckler, Davina, and Salinas 2008; Unnever and Cullen 2007a, 2007b) suggest that race plays a large role in determining people’s attitudes toward the death penalty. Unnever and Cullen (2007b) state that race is the most powerful predictor of public
support for capital punishment. More specifically, all of these studies found Blacks to be less supportive of the death penalty than Whites. Results from Unnever and Cullen’s study (2007b) indicate that African Americans are 25 percent less likely to support the death penalty than Whites. Another study by Baker et al. (2005) measured Black and White college students’ level of death penalty support using seven degrees of support from very strongly favor to very strongly oppose (Baker, 2005). The findings from this study showed that for every level of death penalty support, Whites outnumbered Blacks, and for every level of death penalty opposition (except one), Blacks outnumbered Whites. In the same study, the response options were narrowed to support, uncertain, and oppose, and the difference in support between Blacks and Whites was even more pronounced. Of the White participants, 62 percent supported capital punishment compared to 42 percent of Blacks, and 28 percent of Whites opposed it compared to 41 percent of Blacks (Baker et al. 2005). Even when controlling for political, educational, religious, and economic differences, Whites are still more likely to support the death penalty. These control variables merely reduced the racial gap by two percent (Unnever and Cullen 2007a).

White Racism and Death Penalty Support

An important finding is that racism, more specifically white racism, is “one of the [greatest] predictors of the degree to which Americans [support] the death penalty” (Unnever and Cullen 2007a:1290). White racism occurs when White Americans view the African American race with more racial acrimony than Blacks view their own race. White racists are thus significantly more likely to support capital punishment than white non-racists and Blacks. More than one-third of the divide between Blacks and Whites in support of capital punishment can be explained by white racism (Unnever and Cullen 2007a: 1290). Another interesting finding is that non-racist Whites and African Americans show similar attitudes toward the death penalty (Unnever and Cullen 2007a).

Explaining the Racial Divide

The significant and enduring racial divide between Blacks and Whites and their views on capital punishment has been investigated and studied by many sociologists. Much of this, and other previous research, suggests that Whites and Blacks in the U.S. differ in their perceptions of the criminal justice system (Baker et al. 2005). Blacks may view the government and law enforcement more negatively or skeptically due to their history of oppression, inequality, and discrimination (Unnever and Cullen 2007b). Buckler et al. (2008) suggests that the racial divide may partly be explained by certain values held by White Americans, including individualism, patriotism, and authoritarianism. Unnever and Cullen (2007b) provide two explanations for the divide. The first states that race is “a master status that defines views on capital punishment” (Unnever and Cullen 2007b:147). This perspective suggests that the racial divide on death penalty attitudes will not end any time soon because, although the death penalty holds little racial significance for most Whites, it is racially significant to African Americans. The other explanation Unnever and Cullen (2007b) suggest is that the racial divide is not enduring because there are spurious factors contributing to its existence. This means that outside
variables such as social norms, religion, political affiliation, etc. are the actual reason for the racial divide, and that over time Black Americans will “come to share similar social characteristics with White Americans who tend to support capital punishment” (Unnever and Cullen 2007b: 126). Findings from Unnever and Cullen’s (2007b) study support the perspective that race is a master status; therefore the racial divide between Blacks and Whites on support for the death penalty is enduring.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON DEATH PENALTY ATTITUDE

Along with race, religion is another variable that tends to influence attitudes toward capital punishment. Unnever and Cullen (2007b) found that respondents who attended church often were less likely to support the death penalty. In this particular study, religion was a control variable, and was not the main focus of the study. The participants were asked how often they attend religious services, but were not asked to specify their religious affiliation. Britt (1998) reported similar findings, and found that a greater participation in religious activities leads to lower levels of support for capital punishment. Contrary to these findings, Miller and Hayward (2008) found no significant difference between those who favor and those who oppose capital punishment in terms of how frequently they participated in religious activities (e.g. attending church). This contradiction could stem from various things. The way the question is phrased may affect the respondents’ answers, and the term “religious activities” is rather ambiguous, and could have different meanings. The fact that a definition was not specified could have influenced the respondents’ answers as well. Miller and Hayward (2008) found the following true of death penalty supporters: they are more likely to believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible, they are more likely to believe that God supports the death penalty for convicted murders, and they are more likely to be Protestant than any other religion. Bjarnason and Welch (2004) focused on Catholics, and found that if a priest or head of the church is strongly opposed to capital punishment, or if he has frequent contact with parish members, those parish members will be less likely to support capital punishment. Bjarnason and Welch (2004) also found that there is no significant difference in support between Catholics and non-Catholics. It is important to note that Bjarnason and Welch (2004) did not look at any specific religions other than Catholicism, and gave their respondents only two options for religious affiliation: Catholic and non-Catholic. A study conducted at Loyola University, Maher, Sever, and Pichler (2008) found no notable differences between Catholics and non-Catholics on death penalty support, “with a majority of all groups in opposition” (Maher et al. 2008:37). I have several criticisms of this article. The article was more focused and interested in the topics of abortion and euthanasia, and less on capital punishment. The background information regarding capital punishment is significantly less than the background information that was given regarding the other two topics. Also, the results were based on students’ responses to only twenty statements. Furthermore, the statements were vague, and left much room for uncertainty. Finally, the article stated that most of the participants were freshman, and there were very few juniors or seniors. More effort should have been made to incorporate a range of ages, from freshman to seniors. I think this would have yielded more accurate and dependable results.
The Joint Effects of Religion and Race on Death Penalty Support

Race and religion have their own distinct effects on death penalty attitudes, but they jointly affect these attitudes too. Predominantly Black church communities are often less supportive of the death penalty than predominantly White church communities (Bjarnason and Welch 2004). However, Black and White people are more likely to support the death penalty if they are in a church that consists primarily of members of their own race. Blacks and Whites who attend a parish primarily made up of people of the opposite race are less likely to support the death penalty. This information suggests that the racial divide converges somewhat in Black churches, where Blacks are more supportive and Whites are less supportive of capital punishment than the general population (Bjarnason and Welch 2004). I also found that the racial divide is lessened among Catholics, with Black Catholics being more supportive of capital punishment than Black non-Catholics (Bjarnason and Welch 2004). In regard to racism, Unnever and Cullen (2007a) found that religion predicts death penalty support among non-racists more than it does amongst racists. An explanation for this could be that racists tend to have different religious values and affiliations than non-racists. In Britt’s (1998) study, of the effects of race and religion on death penalty attitude, it was found that Black fundamentalist Protestants are the least supportive of capital punishment, while White fundamentalist Protestants are the most supportive. In addition, it is interesting to note that Britt (1998) found Black and White fundamentalist Protestants to have corresponding religious beliefs. According to Britt, the cause of their differing levels of death penalty support must be due to the different ways in which they apply these beliefs (Britt 1998). In contrast, Unnever and Cullen (2007b) studied Blacks and Whites who belonged to a Christian fundamentalist church. It was found that Blacks who belonged to such a church showed less support for capital punishment than those who belonged to other denominations, while Whites showed the most support. These findings suggest, “embracing fundamentalist religious beliefs actually increase[s] the racial divide in support for capital punishment” (Unnever and Cullen 2007b: 147).

The Influence of Gender on Death Penalty Attitude

I also investigated how gender influences death penalty attitude. Research suggests that men are more likely to support capital punishment than women (Britt 1998; Miller and Hayward 2008; Whitehead and Blankenship 2000), though the majority of both genders support it (Whitehead and Blankenship 2000). In a study conducted by Whitehead and Blankenship (2000), eighty percent of men and sixty-five percent of women favored the death penalty given the response choices of favor, oppose, and no opinion. In the same study, participants were given a choice between capital punishment and life in prison without parole. Twenty-six percent of women, compared to twelve percent of men, chose life in prison instead of capital punishment.
Reasons for Gender Differences

Britt (1998) points out that women may be less supportive of capital punishment partly because they are shown to have greater participation in religious activities. Also, biological differences may contribute to the variation in support between genders (Stack 2000). For example, the correlation between testosterone and aggression shows that men, who have more testosterone than women, are more likely to harbor aggressive tendencies. This higher level of aggression could make men more likely to accept violence, and in turn, more likely to accept capital punishment (Stack 2000:165-166). Another cause for the “gender gap” (Whitehead and Blankenship 2000:1) could be due to unseen or spurious factors. These factors could include economic disparities, political attitude, and differences in gender socialization (Whitehead and Blankenship 2000). Finally, gender differences in support for capital punishment are likely influenced by racial prejudice. In both genders, greater racial prejudice corresponded with greater support for capital punishment. In women, greater prejudice increased death penalty support by eight percent compared to a nine percent increase in men. However, it was also found that the correlation between racial prejudice and death penalty support became non-significant once the defined variable of “authoritarianism” was controlled for (Stack 2000).

CONCLUSION

I have concluded that race, religion, and gender affect the public’s attitude toward capital punishment. Race seems to have the most influence on death penalty attitude, followed by religion, and then gender. There is a prominent racial divide between Blacks and Whites and their support for the death penalty, with Blacks being much more likely to oppose it than Whites. Racism seems to play a role in this divide. People who are more religious and attend church more often tend to be less supportive of the death penalty. Religious fundamentalists who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible and those who are Protestant tend to be more supportive of the death penalty. Finally, gender plays some role in death penalty attitude, with men more likely to support it than women. While this is true, the majority of both men and women support capital punishment.

This research is important because it can be used to influence public policy. As Brace and Boyea (2008:369) indicate, “public preferences translate into political outcomes” because of high-powered figures that share those same preferences. For future research on the death penalty, it would be interesting to look at the attitudes of races other than White and African American, and also to examine the influence of other variables such as social class, political affiliation, and educational attainment on death penalty attitude. Additionally, I think qualitative research studies that investigate the influence of certain variables on death penalty attitude could shed a lot of light on the topic.
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Student Attitudes toward Male Inmate Sexual Violence: Gender Differences in Perceptions of Victimization and Policy

Bethany Schmidt

ABSTRACT

Previous research has found that the gendered connection via intergroup identification increases the likelihood that women will express more sympathetic attitudes toward traditional rape victims. The present study investigates whether these favorable attitudes will transcend gender lines when in the context of the correctional setting, and when the assaulted victim is male. A sample of undergraduate students (N = 174) were surveyed to examine how they perceive male inmate sexual violence, how gender influences these attitudes, and what potential policy implications can be inferred from the findings. It was hypothesized that females will victim blame less, be more inclined to favor policy progression, and be less likely to subscribe to rape myths than males. The results indicate that gender does not significantly influence beliefs in rape myths or victim blaming, but is significantly related to the support of policy advancement when in the context of male-on-male inmate sexual violence.

INTRODUCTION

Our nation’s prison population has reached an all-time high and continues to increase annually with an estimated 762 per 100,000 U.S. residents currently incarcerated (U.S. Department of Justice 2009). With more than 90 percent of these inmates being released back into the community at some point (U.S. DOJ 2009), their impact on family relations, social services, and neighborhood dynamics is substantial. In addition, surviving sexual victimization while incarcerated is a profoundly painful experience that creates countless emotional and physical difficulties which can interfere with a productive life. Inmates released back into society already face surmountable adversities; adding a history of sexual victimization to this will inevitably make reintegration more difficult and harder to maintain. Finally, though rape and sexual violence have been well researched in the general population, myths, stereotyping, and victim blaming continue to persist. These attitudes are counterproductive to addressing core issues concerning the motivation, intervention, and prevention of sexual assaults. The current study seeks to examine how gender in the larger population will influence attitudes toward, and perceptions of, male inmate sexual violence as they specifically relate to victim sympathy, subscriptions to rape myths, and the support of policy advancements in the correctional setting. This research will provide an important foundation for future research and hopefully be an impetus to encourage further policy discussions.
Male Inmate Sexual Victimization

Though universally perceived as a pervasive problem, prison rape and sexual assault have been sparsely researched and provided victimization estimates ranging from less than 1% to over 20% (Davis 1968; Hensley & Tewksbury 2002; Moss & Hosford 1979; Nacci & Kane 1983; Saum, Surratt, Inciardi, & Bennett 1995; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, Rucker, Bumby, & Donalson 1996; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson 2000). In addition, many methodological issues have prevented consistency in rates of prevalence and occurrence. Due to the sensitive nature of the issue, many inmates may be reluctant to openly share their own experiences of victimization in an interview format for fear of retaliation or due to their sense of shame and embarrassment. Likewise, data collected from reported incidents to prison officials is conservative at best, and is unlikely to be representative, as it is widely accepted that most of the inmates sexually assaulted do not make formal reports (Struckman-Johnson et al. 1996; Eigenberg 1994; Eigenberg 2002; Robertson 2003).

Despite these ongoing limitations, researchers continue to study sexual violence in prison as it presents many ethical, social, and public health issues that impact the entire population, behind bars and in the outside community. There also appears to be a general consensus among correctional administrators, practitioners, and inmates that sexual victimization alters the social climate of prison, contributes to institutional violence, and results in physical and psychological trauma on the part of victims (Jones & Pratt 2007; Nacci & Kane 1983; Struckman-Johnson et al. 1996). As prisons increasingly become more overcrowded, less supervision is available, and the likelihood of unnoticed sexual assaults increases (Colson 1989; Eichenthal & Jacobs 1991). It is evident that this is an ongoing issue and one that is bound to become worse with a greater number of individuals impacted as time goes by. However, the ability to effectively address inmate sexual violence can only occur if we better understand perceptions of rape and those victimized in the larger population. Inmate sexual violence and our response to it is a multifaceted issue in need of many intertwined perspectives.

Gender Attitudes Toward Rape

As with the occurrence of “traditional” rape in the general population (i.e. male offender, female victim), the perpetration of sexual victimization in prison is more about power and control than it is about obtaining sexual gratification (Jones & Pratt 2007; McMahon 2010; Franiuk, Seefelt, & Vandello 2008). This is an example of a rape myth as originally defined by Burt (1980), in that sexual violence is often attributed to a man’s inability to control his sexual urges. Likewise, victim blaming is another way in which a perpetrator’s actions are justified and his responsibility is lessened, while more fault is assigned to the victim, and her behavior (e.g. style of dress, alcohol consumption, etc.) is attributed to the precipitation of the assault (McMahon 2010). This propensity to blame the victims of rape disturbingly translates into a tolerance of the crime itself and has numerous implications for policy advancements, treatment of and for survivors, as well as criminal penalties.
Prior research indicates that males are more likely than females to believe in rape myths and are more inclined to victim blame (Lev-Wiesel 2004; Grubb & Harrower 2009; Burczyk & Standing 1989; Franiuk et al. 2008). This has often been broadly accounted for from a long history of intergroup research, which reveals that individuals tend to hold favorable attitudes toward members of their own group and unfavorable attitudes toward members of out-groups (Grubb & Harrower 2009). Consequently, women are generally more likely to empathize with rape victims and men are more likely to identify with perpetrators of rape. Additionally, studies have also found that males are more likely to assume that the rape victim did something to provoke the attacker (Deitz & Byrnes 1981; Feild 1978), and thus may believe that the victim was deserving of the assault. Unfortunately, these prior studies have examined gender differences in attitudes toward rape and rape victims almost exclusively in the larger population and within the limits of the “traditional” roles of rape.

Whatley and Riggio (1993) attempted to expand the literature on public perceptions of inmate sexual violence by presenting undergraduate psychology students (N=160) with a hypothetical scenario involving a male victim raped while in a police holding cell. The findings are consistent with the previous research reviewed in that males are more likely than females to blame victims (even when they are male) who are raped while incarcerated. Despite the unique quality of this study, it has limitations in sample size and diversity, and thus generalizability to the public at large. Additionally, to this author’s knowledge, no other studies have addressed this specific dimension of gender differences and public perceptions to sexual assault within the prison population. Finally, because of the lack of literature regarding the public’s attitudes toward inmate sexual victimization, it is still unclear as to how the aforementioned gender differences in perception will translate to attitudes toward male victims of sexual assault within the correctional setting.

The belief and subscription to rape myths is particularly detrimental to the progression of prevention, intervention, and educational awareness of sexual violence. In addition, as policy is derived from public concern and defined social values, it is imperative to understand attitudes toward victims of sexual assault, the responsibility of perpetrators, and ways in which we can better address this issue. In 1994 the Supreme Court stated that “being violently assaulted in prison is simply not part of the penalty that criminal offenders pay for their offenses against society” (Farmer v. Brennan 1994:7). Unfortunately, incarceration has become synonymous with sexual victimization and little has been done to substantially eradicate it, or better understand the complexities of its occurrence. Being sexually assaulted, regardless of gender or social status, can result in profound physical and psychological damages that are long lasting. As our nation’s prison population continues to grow, generations to come will inevitably face unprecedented numbers of released inmates attempting to reintegrate back into the community, many of whom will now have a history of sexual trauma.

METHODS

The current study seeks to examine how gender influences perceptions of male inmate sexual violence and the policy implications that can be inferred from such findings. Specifically,
it is hypothesized that females will express more “sympathetic” attitudes toward male inmate sexual victimization, will victim blame less, and will be more favorable toward policy initiatives. Conversely, males will be less sympathetic to inmate sexual victimization, will victim blame more, and will be less inclined to favor policy progression.

HYPOTHESIS 1: Females will express more sympathetic attitudes toward victims of inmate sexual assault than males.
HYPOTHESIS 2: Females will be less likely to subscribe to rape myths than males.
HYPOTHESIS 3: Females will be more likely than males to support policy advancements for addressing inmate sexual violence.

Though rape and sexual violence have been well-researched in the general population, public attitudes and reactions toward inmate sexual violence have not, despite its ever-increasing significance. The goal therefore of the present study is to better understand how gender influences perceptions of non-traditional sexual violence (i.e. male offender, male victim), specifically within the correctional setting. It is important to examine these attitudes within the framework of societal approaches to both victims and offenders of sexual violence, as well as the policy implications that can be derived from such perceptions and views. To address this longstanding issue effectively and appropriately, it is critical that we understand how the public reacts to such violence and concentrate on ways in which we can break down misinformation, rape myths, and improve victim treatment. Though this study will exclusively survey college students, it is a starting point and one that may be extended into further research with a broader range of demographic qualities and participant attributes.

Participants and Procedure

In order to capture a wide sample diversity of possible college student participants within the confines of research time and access, a sampling frame of classes offered was derived from the list of all general education courses in session during the fall 2010 semester at the University of New Hampshire. As general education credits are mandatory, social class backgrounds and other specific demographic information should be fairly represented using this frame. In total, ten professors were contacted, five agreed to participate, and 174 students out of 184 completed the survey (94.6% response rate). Though this was a random sample in structure, it may not necessarily be as ideally representative: professors with longer course periods (80 minutes as compared to 50) were more likely to participate, as well as those in the Liberal Arts College. Nevertheless, the current study was able to incorporate students from several UNH colleges and achieve a reasonable diversity amongst participants.

Of the sample \(N = 174\), 57.5% \((n = 100)\) were women, the remainder were men 42.5% \((n = 74)\), and no participant identified as transgendered, though it was provided as a response option. The majority of participants were of a lower class standing: more than half (55.7%) were freshmen and 21.8% sophomores, and most respondents were either enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts (42.0%) or Life Sciences & Agriculture (40.2%). Finally, the majority of participants identified their hometowns as either “suburban” (47.1%) or “rural” (40.8%).
**Conceptualization and Operationalization**

Sexual violence, as defined by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), is divided into non-consensual sexual acts, consisting of forced or threatened sex acts, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex; and abusive sexual contacts, including intentional touching of specified areas of the body (Basile& Saltzman 2002). Using this thorough definition as a foundation, for the purpose of this study “inmate sexual violence” will be conceptualized as any forced or unwanted sexual act toward another inmate with threatened or actual bodily harm. This type of violence can include oral sex, anal sex, groping, or fondling. In addition, for this research an “inmate” will be defined as any individual who is actively being held within a correctional facility, regardless of their legal status (i.e. awaiting trial, charged, sentenced, etc.).

**Victim Sympathy and Subscription to Rape Myths**

To better understand how incarceration has impacted the respondents, two survey questions were included to gauge this, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 assessed whether the survey participant had “ever spent at least one night in jail or prison.” As expected, the majority of respondents have not spent a night incarcerated (90.5% of males, 100.0% of females). As Figure 2 illustrates, the majority of participants have had a close friend or family member stay at least one night in jail or prison: 63.5% of males and 51.5% of females. This was initially thought to be a potential influencer for levels of sympathy in that if a participant has a personal connection to the prison experience, they may be more inclined to express a certain amount of consideration or kindness to those living in such vulnerable circumstances. Likewise, to establish that there may be a link between gender, sympathy, and sexual assault victims, participants were asked if a close friend or family member (male or female) has ever been the victim of a sexual assault. As shown in Figure 3, an overwhelmingly large and significant percentage of females (43.0%) indicated that they did indeed know a victim of a sexual assault, whereas only 17.6% of males did. This helped to establish that women may be more sympathetic to others (regardless of gender) who experience a sexual assault, because of their personal associations with other victims.

Survey questions were constructed and incorporated to measure levels of victim sympathy and subscription to rape myths (which includes victim blaming and rape as sex-driven). Though rape and sexual assault within the general population have been well-researched, non-traditional rape formations in the correctional setting have not. It was therefore difficult to construct indices that adequately and appropriately would reflect public attitudes without guidance from previous studies. Similarly, the subscription to rape myths, as a concept and pattern in belief system, have been constructed and studied thoroughly, but may not translate to male inmate sexual victimization. “Victim blaming” and the belief that a victim “deserved” to be raped or sexually assaulted, have very different connotations and complexities when viewed within the prison context.
Policy Support

The present research also hopes to illuminate how gender influences the support of policy advancements that would explicitly address inmate sexual violence and those that are the victims of such. This researcher speculates that this concept is strongly linked to sympathetic attitudes and thus, it is believed that females will be more receptive to, and in favor of, such policy improvements. The survey questions constructed to measure this idea of policy support include the promotion for more resources to prevent such violence in the correctional setting, the availability of mental health services for victims, the availability of condoms to inmates, and the priority of this issue for public policy makers.

Control Variables

Previous research has indicated that traditional views of gender roles impact subscription to rape myths (i.e. victim blaming, victim responsibility) (Eigenberg 2000; Levine-Wiesel 2004; Weidner & Griffitt 1983). Though most of these studies have not specifically evaluated male-male sexual violence, it is still believed that less egalitarian views of gender roles will translate to this study’s specific dynamic because of the power structure inherent in traditional rape and sexual attacks. Taken from the General Social Survey’s identification of gender ideology, three of the current study’s survey questions will control for such attitudes that may influence a participant’s view of inmate sexual violence. In addition, a control was included for favorable attitudes toward the death penalty. Support for capital punishment often indicates a strong proclivity to view inmates and the prison experience as retribution-based, with less focus on rehabilitation or restoration. Thus, it was important to ensure that respondents’ broad perceptions of inmate sexual violence were not compromised due to this one particular item.

Classification of Prison Sex

Lastly, survey scenario questions were drawn from Moster and Jeglic’s (2009) study, which examined how participants classified and categorized different perceptions of inmate sexual assault interactions. This research found that scenarios in which covert coercion and/or more ambiguous situations where non-consensual inmate sexual activity was occurring, but where there were no signs of either physical force or overt coercion, were harder for participants to classify. This is also reflected in traditional forms of sexual assault, such as acquaintance and date rape, and in the ways the general public perceives these interactions, the victim’s role, and the offender’s culpability. It is important to fully understand the breadth of public attitudes toward sexual violence, both in the population at large and those behind bars.

RESULTS

The findings indicate that within the context of male-on-male inmate sexual violence, gender does not significantly influence the subscription to rape myths or level of victim
sympathy, but is significantly associated with the support of policy advancement. In addition, several other noteworthy response patterns also emerged and will be discussed more thoroughly throughout this segment.

Classification of Prison Sex

As noted earlier, this section was included in order to establish a baseline of how students perceive and classify scenarios of prison rape and sexual assault. Though these survey items were originally used with a sample of prison wardens (Moster and Jeglic 2009), it was of interest to the present study as to how individuals in the general public (i.e. students) without any presumed specialized knowledge of the prison experience would interpret these scenarios of possible rape and sexual assault between inmates. As seen in Table 1, males and females were generally similarly aligned in their responses and classification. The only statistical significance was found in item #11 which states, “An inmate is persuaded to have sex in exchange for commissary goods such as cigarettes and magazines.” The majority of female respondents (64.6%) classified this scenario as prison rape or sexual assault, whereas only 45.2% of males did. Moreover, only 14.1% of women did not consider this a scenario of forced sex, as compared to 28.8% of men. This has several implications for future research, as well as the defining of “non-consensual” sex in all arenas of social life.

As Moster and Jeglic (2009) found, wardens generally had more difficulty in clearly identifying situations of prison rape and sexual assault when more covert tactics are used. A similar trend was also expressed in the current study. Sexual coercion through use of gifts or favors (i.e. commissary goods, protection) was more difficult for wardens to classify as overt forms of rape or assault. It was important to establish a baseline in which to better understand how students interpret, perceive, and classify potential scenarios of prison rape and sexual assault. Though they may have very little exposure to incarceration and its effects on social interactions, it provides us with a glimpse into how they are gauging not only inmate sexual violence, but also how that may translate into their response to sexual violence in their daily lives.

Victim Sympathy (H1)

As Tables 2 and 3a indicate, a significant relationship between victim sympathy and gender was not supported (p > .05). In fact, as Table 2 illustrates, the majority of respondents showed low levels of sympathy (70.4% of females, 59.5% of males) toward male inmate victims of sexual violence. This finding can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, it could be that male inmates elicit very little sympathy in general due to their legally and socially defined status. Therefore, experiencing sexual assault while in prison does not spark a significant or substantial emotional response from the public at large, regardless of gender. Second, “victim sympathy” as an index only contained two variables, and thus was weak in its construction and conception. It could be that a relationship does exist between gender and sympathy towards male inmate victims of sexual violence, but the current study’s measure of it is inadequate or inappropriate. Finally, the lack of diversity and lived experience of those in this sample may have
influenced their response to inmates and the complexities of imprisonment. Participants from inner cities, states that have high incarceration rates, and minority racial populations would offer significantly different perspectives of this issue because of their shared knowledge, as well as proximity and exposure to the prison experience.

**Subscription to Rape Myths (H2)**

The present study also sought to examine how this belief structure may shift when non-traditional formations of rape were introduced (i.e. male offender, male victim) and within the correctional setting. As shown in Tables 2 and 3b, the findings indicate that there is not a significant relationship between gender and the subscription to rape myths when viewed in the context of male-on-male inmate sexual violence (p > .05). What can also be noticed from Table 3b is that the belief in rape myths is significantly and negatively related (p < .05) to the two control variables, favoring the death penalty and traditional views of gender roles. Also of note, as Table 2 further explicates, respondents were nearly equal in their levels of subscription with the majority of both genders falling into the “moderate subscription” category (66.2% of men, 67.7% of women).

**Policy Support (H3)**

Though sympathetic feelings can be expressed in any number of ways, the current research wanted to explore whether gendered emotional ties would make females more likely to support policy advancements aimed at the prevention and intervention of sexual assault, as well as the treatment of imprisoned rape victims. As displayed in Tables 2 and 3c, this hypothesis was significantly supported. As shown in Table 2, over half of participating females (55.6%) highly support policy progression, compared to 31.9% of males. Similarly, Table 3c indicates that even after controlling for views on the death penalty and traditional gender roles, this relationship is still significant (p < .05). This finding may have the most important implications for future focus, both in political and social contexts.

**DISCUSSION**

This study sought to examine student attitudes and perceptions of male inmate sexual violence. Specifically, it was hypothesized that gender would influence levels of victim sympathy, subscription to rape myths within the correctional context, and the support of policy advancements. The findings indicate that only policy support is significantly associated with gender, and that females are more likely than males to support such initiatives. In addition, unexpected and interesting response patterns also emerged which served to further illuminate the complexities of addressing such a politically and socially charged issue. This is the first study of its kind, and will hope to be a foundation for future research.

Having a better understanding for how the public views and responds to prison rape and sexual assault provides insight into the social and ethical values placed on the reduction of inmate sexual violence and ways in which it can be more effectively addressed. The issue of inmate rape and sexual assault continues to persist as overcrowding increases and while
correctional budgets and funding for additional staff simultaneously decreases. It is imperative for the community at large, as well as correctional administrators and prison officials, to find a common ground in which to address these issues appropriately, humanely, effectively, and within the means and resources available.

Despite the limitations in this study, it is still able to provide a base in which further research can develop. Moreover, it has also provided a unique perspective on how men and women perceive rape victims, perpetrators, and the basic rights of those incarcerated. As policy is derived from public concern and shared values, understanding such attitudes provides us with insight on how to approach and synthesize methods of prevention and intervention. Furthermore, the long-lasting impacts of sexual victimization are profound and widespread. As most incarcerates are released at some point, families, social structures, and whole communities feel the reverberation of such experiences; it presents many ethical, social, and public health issues that impact the entire population. Disturbingly, as the number of inmates continues to increase, so too will the number released back into the community. This issue affects us all and needs to be treated as such.

As this concern is ongoing and more relevant than ever, future research should be encouraged, enhanced, and aimed at policy development. The present study provides a solid foundation on which to build a thorough and empirical body of knowledge, though several limitations did hinder its possible representativeness and accuracy. First, public attitudes toward inmate sexual violence need to be broadened to include the entire public, not just students. Though college attendees present an interesting subset of the larger population in that they are the future lawmakers, political leaders, victim advocates, social workers, etc., they are not representative of all U.S. adults. A more comprehensive sample in demographic diversity and size is necessary in order to appropriately gauge and understand wider opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward male inmate rape and sexual assault, and how these may influence public policy.

Second, the created indices of victim sympathy, subscription to rape myths, and policy support may not adequately capture these conceptual frames. Future research will need to expand such indexes, restructure them, or measure these variables alternatively. As the prison environment is unique and unlike most other social arenas, these constructs may not translate easily. Thus, “sympathy” may take different forms not explored in the current study, and the subscription to rape myths may become incomprehensible when in the correctional context. In large part, the general public has little real knowledge of the prison experience; it is generally learned and perceived from media representations and anecdotal reports. This is another avenue in which public perceptions should be analyzed and examined.

Finally, with increased research comes a stronger knowledgebase in which numerous correctional issues and concerns can be addressed and advanced; sexual violence within the prison system is not isolated to male-on-male inmate interactions. As rape is a tool in which to exert dominance, power, and control (Burt 1980), it is not surprising then that this strategic technique is employed in an environment that fosters and breeds such actions. Furthermore,
many correctional settings are authoritarian in structure and operation, the perpetual struggle for inmates to gain power and dominance appears to be mirroring the system that contains them. If inmates were provided with a purpose, and alternative ways in which to feel in control of their lives and futures, violence may be reduced. Undoubtedly, any discussion regarding inmate rights, perceived privileges, or additional programming sparks heated and polarizing debates. Nonetheless, America has the highest incarceration rate of any Western nation, as well as the greatest frequency of criminal recidivism (U.S. DOJ 2009). Examining prison management and how varying administrative organizational styles of correctional government impacts inmate relations may provide valuable insight. Future research may want to consider this type of evaluation, and within the context of fiscal feasibility, appropriateness, security, officer safety, and availability of resources. The correctional system will inherently face issues now and into the future, but with research, education, and activism, their negative impact on the individual and community can be lessened or remedied.

The current research is groundbreaking and valuable in contributing to the knowledge of public attitudes toward male inmate rape and sexual assault. The ability to effectively address inmate sexual violence can only occur if we better understand perceptions of prison rape and sexual victimization from the larger population. As policy is derived from public concern and defined social values, it is imperative that we examine attitudes toward victims of sexual assault, the perceived responsibility of perpetrators, and ways in which we can better manage this issue. This study hopes to set a precedent for further research and policy redress.
Table 1
Students' Classification of Prison Rape and Sexual Assault

"Which, if any, of these situations do you consider prison rape or sexual assault?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Two cellmates have sex in their cell at night, and neither have sex with other inmate.</td>
<td>Yes 0.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 58.9</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 41.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A man is prison for sex offending against boys is pressured to have sex by another inmate.</td>
<td>Yes 78.1</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 8.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 13.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Two men are found having sex. They are known to be good friends.</td>
<td>Yes 4.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 75.3</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 20.5</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. An inmate is asked for sex by another inmate in exchange for protection.</td>
<td>Yes 53.4</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 24.7</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 21.9</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Two men are found having sex. Both are known homosexuals.</td>
<td>Yes 6.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 63.0</td>
<td>59.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 30.1</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. An inmate is asked for sex and is threatened with the fact that if he does not cooperate, the other inmates will be told that he is an informant.</td>
<td>Yes 89.0</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 8.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 2.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. An inmate is persuaded to have sex in exchange for commissary goods such as cigarettes and magazines.</td>
<td>Yes 45.2</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 28.8</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 26.0</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. An inmate known for sexually assaultimg other inmates is forced to have sex by one of his previous victims.</td>
<td>Yes 83.6</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 8.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maybe 8.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *p < .05

Statements #5-12 replicated from Moster and Jegic (2009).
### Table 2
Gender Influence on Indexed Attitudes Toward Male Inmate Sexual Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim Sympathy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Sympathy</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Sympathy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square= 2.243</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Subscription to Rape Myths** |       |        |       |
| Low Subscription            | 17    | 25     | 42    |
| %                            | 23.0  | 25.3   | 24.3  |
| Moderate Subscription       | 49    | 67     | 116   |
| %                            | 66.2  | 67.7   | 67.1  |
| High Subscription           | 8     | 7      | 15    |
| %                            | 10.8  | 7.1    | 8.7   |
| **Total**                   | 74    | 99     | 173   |
| %                            | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |
| Chi-Square= .787            |       |        | .675  |

| **Policy Support**          |       |        |       |
| Low Support                 | 6     | 4      | 10    |
| %                            | 8.3   | 4.0    | 5.8   |
| Moderate Support            | 43    | 40     | 83    |
| %                            | 59.7  | 40.4   | 48.5  |
| High Support                | 23    | 55     | 78    |
| %                            | 31.9  | 55.6   | 45.6  |
| **Total**                   | 72    | 99     | 171   |
| %                            | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |
| Chi-Square= 9.613           |       |        | .008**|
| **p < .01**                 |       |        |       |

N = 174
Table 3  
OLS Regressions of Indexed Attitudes Toward Male Inmate Sexual Violence

a.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Victim Sympathy b (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>(-.060 (.076))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Favor of the Death Penalty</td>
<td>.043 (.037)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional View of Gender Roles</td>
<td>.154 (.067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Subscription to Rape Myths b (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>(.002 (.088))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Favor of the Death Penalty</td>
<td>(-.085 (.043)*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional View of Gender Roles</td>
<td>(-.209 (.101)*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c.  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Policy Support b (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>(.230 (.053)*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Favor of the Death Penalty</td>
<td>.032 (.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional View of Gender Roles</td>
<td>(-.247 (.107)*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  
N = 174
Figure 1
"Have You Ever Spent at Least 1 Night in Jail or Prison?"

Figure 2
"Has a Close Friend or Family Member Ever Spent a Least 1 Night in Jail or Prison?"

Figure 3
"Has a Close Friend or Family Member Ever Been the Victim of a Sexual Assault?"

\( f = 174 \)
REFERENCES


Student Perspectives on Law Enforcement at UNH

Victoria Vinciguerra ● Dana Magane

ABSTRACT

This study examines college students’ attitudes towards campus police, specifically looking at the variables of age and gender. There were a total of 55 respondents from the University of New Hampshire that answered a paper survey with a total of 11 questions. The survey looked specifically at the differences between males and females, as well as students over and under the age of 21. The results of the survey showed no direct correlation between the independent variables of age and gender and the dependent variable of student perceptions of law enforcement. Further research, including a larger and more representative sample, would improve findings.

INTRODUCTION

For our topic, we chose student perspectives of law enforcement at the University of New Hampshire. We chose this topic because we would like to look at our own community and how power dynamics affect interactions with our peers. Since beginning our college careers, the law enforcement here at UNH has been a key part of our lives. From walking along the streets, to emails and emergency alerts, the role of the police department has always been a conscious part of the UNH experience. The sociological relevance of this topic is apparent because the role of power has been examined in many previous studies. For example, the Stanford Prison Experiment studied students given different roles of power randomly between groups of participants. This study of power parallels our study of students and campus police at the University. This topic is also relevant to sociology due to the importance of the university as an institution and how the actions of students and law enforcement function simultaneously.

LITERATURE REVIEW: AGE

Mbuba (2010) defines legitimacy of campus police as the satisfaction of the law enforcement according to the public. “Satisfaction is often based on preconceptions of the community members toward policing and preconceptions are influenced by the type of information the subject has been exposed to” (Mbuba 2010:202). In other terms, when applying this to undergraduate students, one would define satisfaction towards law enforcement as what students think of the police given their experiences with them. Although there are many different types of police (municipal, state, etc.), the focus of this research will strictly be on campus police. Our goal is to explore this further in relation to the drinking age in the United States, using the universe of four-year public colleges. Our specific population that we looked at was University of New Hampshire undergraduates. Our null hypothesis is age does not influence a students’ perception of the legitimacy of law enforcement. For this research
question, the dependent variable was the student perspective on law enforcement, and our independent variable was age. Our hypothesis is that students over the age of 21 will regard campus police as more legitimate than students below the legal drinking age.

One approach to legitimacy of this law enforcement would be if a crime or an emergency would be reported to them. Ruback et al. (1999) explored different factors that would cause a person to be more or less likely to report an incident to the campus police. Their four focuses were “(a) the severity of the crime, (b) the gender of the victim, (c) the age of the victim, and (d) the relationship of the victim and offender” (Ruback et. al 1999:382). In my specific research, I focused on the age of the victim when exploring this article. Although the article had four different studies, the one most relevant to our research was their third study because it specifically looked at our independent variable of age. Their method was to survey 358 people ranging from ages 18-40. This specific study focused on whether the subject would report an incident to the campus police or not, depending on their age. Their hypothesis was that if drinking was involved, students under 21 were less likely to report an emergency then students over 21. One weakness about this study was that they talked to people who were much older than they needed to. Although the article focused on a larger age range than we did in our study, their findings remained consistent with our hypothesis. If alcohol was involved, students under 21 were much less likely to call the police than someone who was above the legal drinking age (Ruback et. al 1999). We addressed this topic in our research in order to narrow the research to strictly university undergraduates.

In the article by Mbuba (2010), age did not always play a specific role in their research. Three hundred and sixty five students were surveyed in a variety of majors at a four-year university in the Midwest. The researchers used 333 of the surveys distributed. They looked at “race, gender, previous police encounter, and criminal justice major in relation to other majors” (Mbuba 2010:204). We mainly focused on the results of students with previous police encounters. We focused on this section because in our research team’s survey, we want to include a question that would ask if previous police encounters had any effect on the students’ perception of campus law enforcement. The article stated that the general consensus was that police had many legitimate reasons to be present, but the students that had not had previous encounters were much more “assertive” and had expressed more boldly that law enforcement was to be here for a reason. Though this article lacked the research on students under the age of 21, it still helped us develop relevant questions to ask on our survey.

Municipal police are greatly overrepresented in research simply because they are the most common type of police in the United States. In the article by Miller and Davis (2008), a community’s perception on police was explored by surveying five different neighborhoods in one community, focusing on whether these people found legitimacy in the police force. This article is helpful to our research because it has a focus on previous police encounters. The authors found that “more frequent and more negative encounters with the police generate greater antipathy toward the police among some Americans” (Miller and Davis 2008:11-12). There are, however, a few gaps and limits that need further exploration on my part. First of all,
this study does not focus on students and the research is not conducted on any type of campus. Also, as mentioned before, the information gathered is in regarding municipal police instead of campus police.

Further research on the legitimacy of campus police is needed. From a researcher’s point of view, articles about how students perceive police is abundant, but the views on campus police are scarce. Wada, Patten and Candela (2009) explain that in order to have a safe environment at a college campus, campus police need to be viewed like any other type of police officer. If the legitimacy isn’t there, then the academic environment is in jeopardy. Wada, Patten and Candela (2009) begin to explore this topic further by comparing the legitimacy of campus police and municipal police by surveying 593 college undergraduates at a doctoral extensive land grant institution in the Pacific Northwest. One hypothesis in this article was that students under the age of 21 would have less favorable views of campus police than students over the age of 21. According to their research, this was found not to be the case and the results led to the rejection of the hypothesis. Our hypothesis is similar to the article in the sense that students under the age of 21 would be more likely to think of campus police as illegitimate (Wada, Patten and Candela 2009).

There are a variety of variables that play a role in a young person’s attitude toward law enforcement. Jones-Brown (2000) defined attitude toward the police effectively, stating that the “nature (direct or indirect), quality (positive or negative), and extent (frequency and duration) of police contact are all factors that influence attitudes towards police” (Jones-Brown 2000:213). The conclusions of this study show that perceptions of the police are drawn through direct and indirect contact. This shows that there are many variables present when examining a person’s perception of law enforcement. These are some of the factors that we will take into account when examining student’s perceptions on law enforcement on college campuses. Our specific research will examine only campus police that work for a college or university. We will also look at variations in gender and how this affects student opinion of law enforcement.

LITERATURE REVIEW: GENDER

By examining previous studies that include gender and campus police, we found there was a wide variety in the methods of research. One study used convenience sampling (Cureton 2003) while others filled a quota (Austin 1999). One study used focus groups and/or interviews along with questionnaires (Smith 2007). Most of the results looked specifically at race and gender because they are often used to categorize people. Smith (2007) shows that males felt as though they were “placed under increased surveillance and control by community policing tactics on and off campus” (Smith 2007: 551).

Many of the studies had the same kinds of limitations. Specifically, the studies had a difficult time generalizing their findings to the public because the sample size was so small. Researcher’s also acknowledged the next logical step should involve an advanced approach
with increased sample size and multiple universities (predominantly white and predominantly black) for comparison” (Cureton 2003).

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Students over the age of 21 will think of campus police as more legitimate than students below the legal drinking age. Our null hypothesis is that age does not influence student perception of the legitimacy of law enforcement on campus. Hypothesis 2: Gender does play a role in campus law enforcement perception; specifically that males will have more negative attitude toward campus law enforcement than females. Our null hypothesis is that gender does not influence a students’ perception of the legitimacy of law enforcement on campus.

DATA AND METHODS

Sampling

We used a survey in order to obtain our data. This was the most accurate way to get a student perspective on the campus law enforcement. This also allowed for specific answers to our subtopics. We used a cluster sampling technique because allows us to use our sampling frame which is the Time and Room Schedule on the Blackboard website at the University of New Hampshire. Random.org number generator was used in order for us to randomly select the departments that we wanted to cluster sample. Our sampling frame was the Time and Room Schedule for Fall 2010. The departments were numbered 1-100 in alphabetical order. From there, multiple classes were selected, finally narrowing down to two classes who were willing for us to give a survey to the students.

We had a total of 55 surveys that were from both classes. Class 1 had 42 students enrolled, yet only 25 were in class that day. This is a response rate of 59 percent. Class 2 had a total of 34 students, and 30 participated in the survey. This is a response rate of 88 percent, a total of 72 percent response rate for both classes.

Our main goal was to find out specifically what student attitudes are towards our campus law enforcement. By using a survey method to conduct research, we were able to ask direct questions to the students with the ability to specifically look at our research of age and gender. We used a variety of questions including some in the form of the Likert scale. By using the surveying method, we were able to get a large number of responses in a short period of time. This type of data allowed us to generalize the responses with other four-year public institutions across America.

Setting

There are a few limitations to the study due to time constraints. With more time, a larger and more representative sample could have been included. The cluster sampling method does
not provide ideal random sampling that we may get by using a random sample. Every element does not have an equal chance of being chosen because of this. Cluster sampling, however, does allow us to randomly sample without a sampling frame of every undergraduate student on campus. Another limitation is accommodating for age in our research. It is important to have a certain number of respondents to be legally allowed to drink, and it is difficult to predict how many of these of age respondents will be in the sample we have chosen.

Conceptualization

Wada, Patten and Candela (2009) define age in relation to the police as the younger population having a “significantly negative predictor of the perceptions of the police” (116). This means that to the authors, the younger generation has a more negative impression of the police than the older population. They go into more detail by specifically talking about campus police by saying “students under the age of 22 would have less favorable views towards the [Campus Police] than older students” (Wada et. al 2009:117).

Looking at past research that has been done to examine gender and the law, much of the literature discusses women or men. There is no discussion of transgender. The general discussion is similar to what is found in the article by Austin and Hummer that writes about “sex-based discrimination” (Austin and Hummer 1999:6). However, the article also explains that “gender differentiation in which the overall value of the ‘male-role’, that is positions occupied predominately by male men, is considered qualitatively more important in the job sphere” (Austin and Hummer 1999:6). This suggests that the researchers are defining gender based on social construction. Overall, gender is a self-examined and reported aspect of this and many other studies.

Operationalization

To measure correctly is to make careful and deliberate observations of the real world. This was done by distributing a survey that specifically looks at our independent variables of age and gender, along with our dependent variable of perceptions of law enforcement. In order for us to measure these three variables, our survey is mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The Likert scale was our level of measurement. When inserting these results in STATA 10, each answer was given a numeric value in order to transfer this data from abstract to quantitative data. A scale of 1-4 was used, one being strongly agree, and four being strongly disagree. This “assumes equal distance among each category” (Neuman 2009:134) and will give us interval measurement.

In order to maximize reliability, our method of measurement was dependable and consistent. The format to the survey is simple and each question is in the same font, the same size, and was as easy to read as possible. The simple questions were in the beginning of the survey, followed by the more difficult ones, and ending with questions about age, gender, etc. Multiple indicators are also used throughout our survey to see different levels of satisfaction. The survey was piloted eight times in order to ensure that it was as clear as possible, along with taking suggestions on how to improve any aspect of the survey.
In order to maximize the validity of the results, all three types of measurement validity were utilized. The survey has face validity because all the questions used on the survey were a valid measure of our dependent variable in relation to our independent variables. To capture all aspects of our topic, numerous questions were brainstormed and only the ones with the most content validity were retained. As for criterion validity, we used the Likert scale, which has been used many times in previous research.

Risks and benefits to subjects

The risks from this survey to the subject would only be minor emotional or psychological consequences, if any. For example, if a student taking our survey has recently had a traumatic experience with law enforcement of any kind, this may cause them to react to various questions we will be asking on our survey. We protected anonymity by requesting that students refrain from putting their name or any identification information on the survey. We only shared our results through our research paper and we kept the surveys only in our possession. This survey will also provide us with many benefits, most importantly to better understand perceptions of law enforcement. By doing this, the subjects will benefit by exploring our research results.

Survey

The survey was piloted to current undergraduate students or alumnito insure we get information from people who are familiar with UNH campus life. We wanted to make sure the layout of the survey was simple and the questions were placed in the best order. It was also important for us to make sure all the questions were straightforward and could only be interpreted one way.

RESULTS

We used the Small STATA program to produce our results. Out of the 55 students surveyed, we found a total of 31 percent of males and 69 percent of females had participated in our survey. We also had a total of 69 percent of students under the age of 21, along with 31 percent of the students being over 21. We found that the majority of students surveyed have not been arrested. As seen in figure 3, only four percent of the students had at one time been arrested and 96 percent said that they had never been arrested. Of this 4 percent, we found that 100 percent had been arrested for underage possession of alcohol.
Figure 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you been arrested</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked if students had ever spoken to a police officer, the majority had not. Figure 4 shows that 53 percent of respondents had said they had never spoken to a UNH police officer. However, 45 percent reported that they had. In Figure 5, the majority of the respondents could not report on their experience speaking with a police officer. Those that had spoken to a police officer said that their experience was good. Twenty percent of respondents said they had a good experience talking to a police officer, 11 percent of respondents reported that they had an excellent experience, nine percent of respondents said they had a fair experience, and lastly four percent of respondents said they had a poor experience.

Figure 5: How was your experience speaking to a campus police officer?

The majority of both males and females feel that campus police are mostly necessary. To be more specific, 41 percent of males and 40 percent of females felt that campus police were mostly necessary. Following closely behind, 35 percent of women and 26 percent of males felt that campus police were only sometimes necessary. This is contrasted by 24 percent of males and 34 percent of females that felt campus police are always necessary. A chi-square test showed the provided alpha level of .681, meaning we had to fail to reject the null hypothesis and could not make any conclusions between gender and perspective of campus law enforcement. We believe these results are due to our sampling, as 69 percent of respondent were female and only 31 percent were male.
According to our research, we must fail to reject the null hypothesis because of our alpha level of .05. Our results concluded that most students over 21 think police are mostly necessary (see figure 9). Forty-five percent of students under 21 responded “mostly necessary” when asked what the importance of campus police was. Thirty-one percent said “always necessary” and 24 percent said “sometimes necessary”. When it comes to students over 21 however, most said that the presence is sometimes necessary. Forty percent responded as that, along with 30 percent saying presence is always necessary and 30 percent saying mostly necessary. Because of our alpha level of .05, we must fail to reject the null hypothesis because the probability that these results were due to chance was 3.79/10. This was most likely due to our sampling size. Only surveying 55 students prevented us from getting a more representative sample.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results from our research indicated that we failed to reject both of the null hypotheses. We could not find a specific relationship between age or gender and the perception of law enforcement on the UNH campus. As noted in the results section, we used an alpha level of .05. In both of our chi-square tests, the probabilities of the results occurring due to chance were high. For gender, the probability that was found was .6, whereas the probability for age was .3.
Our findings could have been improved in many ways. Not only was the sample size not sufficient (55 students), but it was also not representative of the student population at UNH. We had significantly more females than males, which made it difficult to explore the research question regarding gender. Also, the only ages sampled in our survey were 19, 20 and over 21, which did not represent UNH exactly. We did not get any 18 year olds to participate in our survey and this may have affected our results. Of the two classes that we sampled, one of them was comprised of only female students. Even though the second class was more evenly split, our sample population was skewed to 69 percent females. Another limitation for this study was that the random sample resulted in only 400 and 500 level classes. There were significantly more students under 21 in these level classes, which also skewed the sample population to 69 percent under 21. Another reason for this is the UNH population has more students under 21, which made it difficult to get a representative sample.

Along with the weaknesses of our sample size, a few of the survey questions we asked were uninformative when it came to our independent and dependent variables. For example, we asked a question about how often students looked at the police log in The New Hampshire, the campus newspaper. This did not have a significant impact on our independent and dependent variables. Another weakness was the limited number of respondents that reported an arrest in their past. If we had a larger sample on this topic, then this might have impacted our results.

We learned that in order to effectively answer our research question, this requires a larger sample size that is representative of the population. For future research, we advise a more specific survey with questions that directly related to the variables being examined, along with a sampling method that provides a larger and more representative sample. This topic, if examined further, could potentially improve the relationship between students and their campus police.

REFERENCES


The Israel-Palestine Problem: How Minimizing the Conflict Would Lower the Threat of Terrorism against the United States

Ashley Charron

ABSTRACT

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been in existence since 1948, when Israel declared statehood in the land formally occupied by Palestinians. Since then, tension has resulted on both sides as they fight for control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the occupied territories in this region. This hostility appears to result from a lack of nationalism for Israeli-Palestinians and inequality rooted in education, social class, and politics, to name a few. Furthermore, it appears that al-Qaeda, a multinational terrorist group responsible for the September 11 attacks in the United States (U.S.), has entered the region. If so, this could be problematic for the U.S. due to the group’s anti-American sentiments and extreme ideology. Because it seems unlikely a solution will occur anytime soon, it would be in the U.S.’s best interests to develop strategies that would minimize this conflict and demonstrate that the nation does not solely support Israel. Efforts to fight prejudice and restore nationalism are some of the efforts the U.S. could make.

INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, the United States (U.S.) faced the greatest and most destructive terrorist attack ever administered, indefinitely altering Americans’ perception of terrorism. The organization bearing responsibility for the hijackings of four U.S. airplanes that crashed into the World Trade Centers, the Pentagon, and an empty field in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania has since been viewed as the biggest threat to the country’s safety. In fact, there have been no other groups that compare to the magnitude of al-Qaeda, “a worldwide terrorist movement that threatens global stability” (Poland 2011:94). Al-Qaeda’s hatred towards the U.S. is illustrated explicitly in its leader’s statements directed at Americans, the rest of the Western world, and various Islamic countries. At the forefront of Osama bin Laden’s speeches, interviews, and recordings is his anger at the so-called “Judeo-Christian/American” alliance he so often discusses (Lawrence 2005). Lewis (2003) attributes the Western country’s support for the Jewish state of Israel as the primary reason for anger against Americans in the Muslim community (p. 197).

This anger reflected in bin Laden’s grievances results from his belief that this alliance is actively attacking the religion of Islam and the Muslim community as a whole, as noted in more than one of his public statements (Lawrence 2005). Israel formed statehood after displacing
700,000 Islamic Palestinians during the War of Independence in 1948 (Poland 2011:77). As a result, conflict ensues as each side fights for control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the occupied territories), both of which have religious significance for Judaism and Islam. Hamas and Hezbollah are the most notable terrorist organizations that have emerged from this conflict. However, it should be noted that the latter is concentrated in Lebanon, but also sympathizes with the Palestinian cause, and is the only terrorist group who has successfully reclaimed territory from Israel (Poland 2011:81-8). There is widespread speculation that al-Qaeda has entered the occupied territories (Abbas 2007; British Broadcasting Corporation 2007; Keyes 2005, as cited in Markoff 2008). Due to anti-American feelings resulting from the country’s support of Israel and the possibility of al-Qaeda becoming directly involved, it would be in the United States’ best interests to develop strategies that would minimize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in turn, lowering the threat of terrorism.

WHAT CONSTITUTES TERRORISM?

The definition of terrorism treads foggy waters. As noted by Jenkins (2003), there is a difference between what it is meant to terrorize and what terrifies, and this is an important distinction (17). Although no widely used definition currently exists, terrorism is commonly described as violence or the threat of violence against innocent targets from an organization hoping to generate mass fear and publicity as well as “bring about some social or political change” (Jenkins 2003:16). One has to be careful, though, of what constitutes terrorism as many acts that are not commonly associated with this term could be labeled as such. Also, a popular expression also notes that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” highlighting the complexity of classifying terrorism (Jenkins 2003:17; Poland 2011:2).

Furthermore, there is a difference between international terrorism and domestic terrorism. The former encompasses acts committed abroad to attack targets, those executed in the terrorists’ home nation but against targets of a foreign nation, and attacks on international trading or commerce (Jenkins 2003:18). Domestic terrorism accounts for acts that occurred within a nation by members of that nation; for example, the Oklahoma City bombing.

Al-Qaeda, according to the definition of terrorism provided, is considered a terrorist organization. This is illustrated by the September 11th (9/11) attacks. Members of al-Qaeda hijacked airplanes in the U.S. filled with innocent civilians and crashed into various locations with the objective of drawing publicity and creating terror, as well as intending to hurt the U.S. economy by crashing into financial centers and government buildings (Poland 2011:96). Al-Qaeda created mass fear, drew publicity, and had a political motive. Specifically, they qualify as international terrorists because their attacks are committed abroad. However, as noted by Gunaratna, al-Qaeda is comprised of many groups, thus, labeling them as an encompassment of terrorist organizations (Poland 2011:6). Al-Qaeda supports international terrorist groups in the Middle East listed by the U.S. State Department by supplying them with weapons and exerting massive influence. Four separate groups also carried out the attacks on 9/11. Al-Qaeda, therefore, represents the “first multinational terrorist group of the twenty-first century” meaning that an abundance of organizations represent al-Qaeda as a whole, supporting Gunaratna’s point (Poland 2011:24; Hellmich 2005:39).
THE IMPORTANCE OF IDEOLOGY IN TERRORISTS’ MOTIVES

This important notion, that al-Qaeda is a grouping of many extremist Islamist organizations, shows the importance of ideology. In fact, Burke (2004) wrote that al-Qaeda is more of an ideology than an organization (p. 18). He further argues that “al-Qaedaism” operates like a “venture capital firm” and not as a terrorist network because of the training, supplement, and advising they provide (Burke 2004:18). Ideology refers to ideas and views about issues. The theory of al-Qaeda as an ideology could be considered worse than any physical damage because of the visions and anti-American sentiments they promote. The majority of terrorists fall under the classification of passive supporters. They do not actually participate in attacks, but still sympathize with the beliefs of the group. In this sense, al-Qaeda may engage support from those who adhere to their beliefs their ideology, and those who may possibly join groups and commit attacks in the future.

This ideology dates back to bin Laden’s days spent with the Muslim Brotherhood (Hellmich 2005:43). In the early 1980’s, he and Abdullah Azzam as well as other extremists, set al-Qaeda up with the idea that many Islamist fundamentalists could meet, share thoughts and plans, and act together and support Afghanistan against the former Soviet Union’s invasion that began in 1979 (Poland 2011:96; Hellmich 2005:43). Al-Qaeda literally translates as “the base” (Poland 2011:96; Hellmich 2005:96; Burke 2004:18). As a base, groups with shared views could refer back to one specific area or in this case, one specific organization, for reinforcement. After, shifting locations between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan, al-Qaeda joined with the Taliban (then the ruling party in Afghanistan) where bin Laden declared jihad, a defensive war, on the U.S. in August of 1996 (Poland 2011:96; Hellmich 2005:43; Lawrence 2005:23-30). Although his reason given was the American presence in Saudi Arabia, his annoyance lay with the Judeo-Christian alliance (Lawrence 2005:25). This alliance is important for numerous reasons. Michael Scheuer, an intelligence officer for the CIA, notes that bin Laden and al-Qaeda support the Islamic Palestinians and dislike U.S. support of Israel, and this has been continuous (Poland 2011:97). Ayyman al-Zawahri, the Jihad movement’s leader and al-Qaeda member, listed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the first reason for violence and main problem for Islam in his discourse written in 1996 (Hellmich 2005:44). If al-Qaeda believes that the U.S. is joining forces with Israel to destroy the Palestinians as part of their larger mission to fight the Islamic world, then the problem clearly needs to be addressed.

RELIGION: A CAUSE TO BLAME?

The “stunning Arab defeat” by the Israelis in 1967 during the Arab-Israeli “Six-Day” war marked the beginning of Israeli control of the occupied territories and brought to attention “a Palestinian national consciousness” (Crenshaw 2003:161). Before then, it can be argued that the Palestinian plight was largely ignored. The Palestinians were first displaced on May 15, 1948 following the end of the British mandate which, after being handled by a new United Nations, deemed Israel as the new Jewish state on land that formerly belonged to Palestine (Poland 2011:76). This was a result of the Second World War which centered on Jewish

54
persecution, during which a large number of Jews emigrated from Europe. The United Nations suggested this Jewish refuge, perhaps because of the immense mistreatment of the Jews by the German Nazi party (Poland 2011:77). Although Israel was created as a Jewish state, the founder of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, contested that there should be a separation of religion and government (Frisch and Sandler 2004:81-2). The Zionist political movement wanted to see a Jewish homeland, and cautiously attempted to avoid religious influence as a guiding force within the movement (Frisch and Sandler 2004:82). In fact, during the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict (the War of Independence for Israel), there was no struggle to take Jerusalem, a holy city for both religions. Instead, focus fell on a much larger, more tactical and sensible move: securing land in the larger Negev.

Although religion remains one of the major differences between the Arab Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, the Palestinian motive for control of the occupied territories is based more on the idea of nationalism than religious conviction. Arab nationalism within Israel diminished during the 1967 war as Israel went on to occupy the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Lowrance 2006:175). Nationalism, the connection of people based on ethnicity and culture that can stem across borders, increased when the Israeli Palestinians came into contact with those Palestinians who had left and possessed a strong sense of ethnic identity. Israeli Palestinians began to identify less with Israel and more with their Arab counterparts, reflected in their actions throughout the conflict. The Palestinians also abstained from using religion in their politics and hopes for their future (Frisch and Sandler 2004:84). Instead, during the King-Crane commission in 1919, Arab delegates discussed with the U.S. a Palestine that would be independent of religion and centered on the majority that would represent the people and reflect their culture.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONALISM**

A shift in identification has also occurred since the war. Many Arabs would call themselves Israeli, Israeli-Arab, Arab, or Palestinian, in that order, before 1967 (Peleg 2004:420). After, however, the Israeli victory found Arabs describing themselves as Arab, Muslim or Christian, Israeli-Arab, or Israeli, an opposite to what preceded the war. Peleg (2004) marks this change as “growing nationalism” amongst the Palestinian community (420). As the religious and ethnic minority since the War of Independence, it can be argued that there is a great deal of difficulty in identifying and cohabitating with a majority group that is believed to be the source of their defeat (Lowrance 2006:171). One can learn the sense of nationalism a Palestinian possesses, as claimed by Lowrance (2006), through their self-identification (171-2).

If nationalism results from Palestinians as the minority in Israel, attention should be paid to the Israeli majority. Israeli ethnocentrivity is vividly shown through their early treatment of Arabs, particularly in the establishment of the Military Government and their use of harsh tactics. This reflected an impression that both could not cohabitate, especially as equals (Peleg 2004:418). Israel discriminated against Arabs by creating inequality through state institutions that favored the majority (Caspi and Weltsch 1998; Grossman 1993; Rouhana 1997; Schnell 1994, as cited in Lowrance 2006:168). Before the 1967 Arab defeat, segregation manifested
itself in separate neighborhoods, schools, and at the workplace, where Israelis mostly presided over Palestinians as “boss and worker” (Peleg 2004:419). This hegemony is reflected particularly by a lack of resources and independence that plagues the Arab schools in comparison to the Israelis’ (Peleg 2004:424).

These educational problems as well as other forms of discrimination still occur today, perhaps to a slightly lesser degree (Poland 2011:76, Peleg 2004:424). Growing Arab nationalism alongside Israeli hegemony has resulted in the current state of the conflict. There is consensus that the problem of Palestine and territory is not likely to be resolved soon, nor will it be easy to resolve (Hofman 1972:241; Peleg 2004:416; Lowrance 2004:168). In fact, Hofman stated this in 1972 in the introduction of his article regarding his study conducted on Arab and Jewish social relations between teenagers (241). He found, through a questionnaire administered at various high schools, that both sides desired social relations and considered them possible to attain (Hofman 1972:248). It was agreed upon, however, that Arabs display a greater interest in achieving greater social relations than the Jewish teenagers. He concluded that the behavior of Israeli Arabs depends more on the Israeli Jews, but is not the same for the Jews (Hofman 1972:249). Thirty-nine years later his assumption stands correct, as the struggle is still ongoing. Equality is thus essential in minimizing the conflict, but difficulties arise when one group of people view themselves as superior to another. Equality is harder to achieve then realized, especially when there is a history imbued with hate and war like that of Israel and Palestine.

HOW DOES A SOLUTION BENEFIT THE U.S.?

There are a few reasons why it would be in the best interest of the United States to help implement realistic strategies that could lead to a future resolution. First, as briefly noted, al-Qaeda may be operating partly from the occupied territories (Markoff 2008). This is a serious problem as this organization is the result of loudly resonating ideology. A report released by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) on January 11, 2010 relays that “al-Qaeda-inspired groups in Gaza ‘think big’ and are regularly plotting large-scale attacks” (Cunningham 2010). Even if the evidence is flawed and al-Qaeda is not located in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, as alleged by the report, their ideology has clearly seeped through the borders. This reflects the point that ideology can often be more dangerous than actual terrorist attacks. Groups such as the radical Islamist Ansar al-Sunnah based in Gaza that sympathize with al-Qaeda, and claim to have fired three mortars at Israel in November of 2010, will often take matters into their own hands (TREND 2010). These attempts could possibly be targeted at the U.S. in the future.

The Islamic community largely believes that the U.S. supports Israel in this conflict. Even though American President Barack Obama has maintained that resolving this tension is a top priority, he was unsuccessful in halting Israel from building in the West Bank by cancelling the Israeli settlement freeze (Lee 2010). A reiteration should thus be made that it is in the U.S.’s best interest to try to settle this dispute, or at least make a serious attempt at appearing more neutral. The U.S. does not need to arouse more anti-American feelings and give justification to
al-Qaeda’s motives. The U.S. also maintains good relations with many Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, who is an important supplier of oil, a frequent annoyance of bin Laden’s (Lawrence 2005). It is important for the U.S. to secure these political relationships even though they bring their own drawbacks. For example, bin Laden has expressed anger toward Americans and Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, who ally with them (Lawrence 2005:245-75). But it is better for the U.S. to have allies in this region, even if hated by al-Qaeda, then to have none because that could only result in more sources of hostility (i.e., more anti-American foreign governments). The U.S. needs countries that support them in the Middle East because a lot of nations inhabiting anti-American sentiments are located there and allies are important to help control this.

POSSIBLE EFFORTS IN MINIMIZING THE CONFLICT

The U.S. will not realistically be able to solve this conflict. It has been demonstrated, however, why it is important that measures be taken to minimize the conflict. There is a distinct difference, as the latter is more feasible, and minimization would lower the threat of terrorism inside and outside the region. Fauk (2003) argues that in order to defeat terrorism, two sources need to be addressed (p. 58). First, an attempt should be made to understand the constant suppression of a group that falls victim to mistreatment. Second, the need for a group to achieve political goals that cannot be gained in a lawful or moral manner should be examined. In the case of Palestine, both are applicable. Israeli Arabs feel oppressed and abused by their government and do not think they can achieve equality or regain land through peaceful means. With a lack of “affective Israeli identity ... loyalty to the state”, there needs to be an inclusion of Arabs in the Israeli state while lowering the “exclusive Jewish nature” that currently exists in Israel (Lowrance 2006:182-3).

In order to establish equality and push Israel to appear less ethnocentric, the political process of appointing Arabs to positions of power in the government must operate faster (Peleg 2004:434). The Israeli government has begun this process, but it is not progressing at an acceptable pace. Due to the fact that nationalism appears to be the underlying issue in the conflict, this should be a successful way of reintegrating Arabs with the Israeli identity they lost after the 1967 war. It should be noted, however, that this does not mean that Arab and Palestinian identity should be extinguished. Instead, there needs to be a place for them in Israel in order for coexistence to occur. As Lowrance (2006) notes in her findings while examining Palestinian protest in Israel, those who identify more with the Israeli nation protest less as the grievances matter less (p. 182). Protesting can be compared with terrorist violence as it is assumed that the less attached to Israel one feels, and the more grievances he or she possesses, the greater the chance that they would sympathize with organizations that hold similar views to their own.

Peleg (2004) identifies other ways in which equality can flourish (p. 434). There needs to be repercussions administered by a publicly funded government agency that addresses prejudice against the Arab community. He further notes how this prejudice does not adhere to the democratic ideals that Israel should possess. Israel needs to transform itself from a
“hegemonic ethnic state... to a flourishing, genuine democracy” (Peleg 2004:434). Another suggestion has Arabs sharing military and national service equally with their Jewish counterparts through recruitment on the basis that it would help them connect with Israel and enable them to acquire the benefits that come with service. By establishing this measure of equality, Palestinians would feel attached to Israel because they would be providing direct service to their country and enjoying the benefits.

The educational inequality in Israel between Israeli and Palestinian students should be taken into consideration and improved upon as well. Resources given to Arab schools can help eliminate the difference in dropout rates between the two nations (In 2004, twenty percent of Arab teenagers had left school by age 15, while only two percent of Israelis had) (Peleg 2004:424). This creates another problem as a result of an uneducated Arab subgroup: religious fundamentalists. Without proper teaching of the Qu’ran, the Islamic religious text, Muslims are more likely to be “galvanized” by bin Laden and al-Qaeda in “corrupting, misrepresenting, or misinterpreting the Quranic text” (Gunaratna 2002:14, as cited in Hellmich 2005:42). Hellmich (2005) points out that soon after the death of the prophet Muhammad, politics and religion were separated, a fact often misinterpreted by fundamentalists that assume Islam incorporates the two (41). Furthermore, if Palestine claims that they are entitled to land solely based on past rulers’ Islamic affiliation, foreign states will definitely not support this assertion (Frisch and Sandler 2004:92). It is important that educational equality be achieved for exactly these reasons. Education allows for an equal ground between the Israeli Arab population and Israeli Jews as well as provides proper teaching of the Qu’ran and not allowing for fundamentalism based on misinterpretation to ignite.

CONCLUSION

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one that has lasted for a considerable amount of time with no clear end in sight. Drawing on an ideological background that stems from religious fundamentalism, al-Qaeda has successfully exerted influence on many smaller organizations over the years. Whether or not they are currently operating out of the occupied territories, it has become crucial that the U.S. pay attention to the conflict and make serious attempts to visually neutralize their stance on the issue (i.e., not openly favor Israel) so that this idea of an alliance against Islam by the Americans and Israelis created by bin Laden and al-Qaeda can be extinguished. The U.S. could lower the threat of terrorism through the implementation of equality between Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews that has resulted largely from an increased sense of nationalism and oppression. Bin Laden has explicitly stated that this supposed-alliance is seeking to attack Islam. The U.S. needs to rid al-Qaeda of this belief by helping displaced and worn down Palestinians achieve equality within the Israeli government and educational system through the means discussed. Only this will help diminish the threat of terrorism as well as ideally establish peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
REFERENCES


The Family’s Influence in Determining Adolescent Religiosity

Ryan Rafford

ABSTRACT

The following literature review attempts to examine the influence that an adolescent’s family wields in determining adolescent religiosity. A number of factors involving the family are explored, including parental religiosity, relationship quality within the family, religious communication among family members, and divorce’s impact on religion. Certain consensuses were found to exist among the previous studies dealing with this subject. Among these findings were that parental religiosity was a significant predictor of adolescent religiosity; that religious values are transmitted from parent to child more effectively when healthy relationships exist within the family and when there is a consistency between the religious values expressed by family members and their religious behaviors; and that divorce impacts religious participation among adolescents. This literature review should lend insight as to why adolescents might adapt the religious beliefs they were taught as a child, or instead, choose to abandon them.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals are socialized from the day they are born. Over time, one’s environment plays a major role in shaping personality and ideals. One of the more influential institutions in the socialization process is the family. Family members, parents in particular, are vital in transmitting values and lessons to children born into the family. One of the values common in families is some form of religion. Religion is prevalent in American society, and one’s religious beliefs often affect their attitudes towards social issues, such as abortion and gay marriage. Therefore, the transmission of religious beliefs in families has an impact on society as a whole.

Whether children inherit the religious beliefs taught to them and maintain their religiousness throughout young adulthood is contingent on a variety of factors, including parental religiosity, quality of relationships, parenting styles, divorce, and parent-specific (mother vs. father) influence. In the following literature review, I will examine the impact that each of these variables has in determining adolescent religiosity. For the purpose of this paper, religiosity will be defined as the quality of being religious.

PARENTAL RELIGIOSITY

There is a definite consensus in the literature that parental religiosity is a significant predictor of adolescent religiosity. Parents who value religion are likely to attempt to pass on their beliefs to their children. Parents maintain a certain level of control over their child’s
church attendance, and it has also been hypothesized that parents are able to socialize their children into peer groups and institutions that will share the religious values taught in the home (Martin, White, and Perlman 2003:171). In various studies, strong correlations were found to exist between adolescent religiosity and variables such as parental church attendance (Martin et al. 2003) and perceived importance of religion to one’s parents (Milevsky, Szuchman, and Milevsky 2008). It is likely that parents who maintain strong religious beliefs hope that their beliefs will manifest in their children, but whether that occurs depends largely on specific family dynamics.

QUALITY OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION

A common finding among the research is that religious beliefs are transmitted more effectively from parent to child when healthy relationships exist between them. Adolescents are more likely to mirror their parent’s beliefs if they come from supportive, caring families (Milevsky et al. 2008:424). It was also found that greater satisfaction with one’s family is related to more frequent church participation in adolescents (Regnerus, Smith, and Smith 2004:33).

Dudley and Wisbey (2000) examined the relationship between church commitment during adolescence and parenting style by enquiring about certain facets of the parent-child relationship, such as how understanding, affectionate, protective, and communicative the parent was. Dudley and Wisbey (2000) found that adolescents who perceived their parents to be over-protective and uncaring were most likely to have stopped attending church and least likely to be enthusiastic church members. Adolescents with parents who were over-protective but caring were most likely to be enthusiastic church members and were also least likely to have ceased their church attendance. Adolescents coming from households with parents perceived to be caring and not over-protective were likely to be enthusiastic church members and comprised a small percentage of those who no longer attended church (p. 48). Further, Bader and Desmond (2006) found that when parents allow their children greater freedom and set fewer rules, their children are less likely to attend church frequently and more likely to consider religion unimportant.

Part of maintaining a healthy relationship is being able to communicate effectively. If parents communicate their attitudes toward religion to their children frequently, the attitudes they convey will have a better chance of resonating with the adolescent. Milevsky, Szuchman and Milevsky (2008) examined what effects verbal communication, such as a parent discussing prayer, and implicit communication, such as a parent illustrating their religiousness by studying the bible, might have on adolescent religiosity. It was concluded that how frequent both forms of religious communication were utilized predicted adolescent religiosity, with a greater frequency of communication predicting a higher degree of religiosity (p. 432).

When parents communicate their attitudes toward religion to their child, it is important for there to be consistency between these attitudes and the parent’s actions. If a parent expresses that religion is important to them, but does not illustrate that belief through religious
behavior, such as attending church frequently, it could make transmitting religion to their child more difficult. Bader and Desmond (2006) found that when parents expressed religion to be important to them and also attended church frequently, this consistency in their behavior was “significantly and positively associated with church attendance, importance of religion, frequency of prayer, and view of the Bible” for their adolescent children (p. 325).

When parents were religiously inconsistent the impact on the adolescent varied by the type of inconsistency. Parents who expressed religious importance but didn’t attend church frequently had adolescent children who, on average, found religion to be less important than those adolescents whose parents were consistently religious in their attitudes and church involvement. These adolescents also attended church less frequently, prayed less often, and found the bible to be less sacred (Bader and Desmond 2006: 321). Parents who attached low importance to religion were not found to influence religious importance, prayer frequency, or attitudes toward the bible in their adolescent children regardless of whether they attended church frequently or not. Therefore, Bader was able to conclude that parents who do not find religion to be important are not likely to pass religious values onto their children, even if they attend church frequently (2006:325).

There is certainly a consensus among the research that close parent-child relationships and effective and consistent religious communication help facilitate the transmission of religious values. However, caring relationships are not only necessary between the child and each respective parent in order to maximize the effectiveness of religious transmission, a healthy relationship between an adolescent’s parents also makes religious socialization more effective, while a conflicted spousal relationship can make parents less effective in transmitting religion to their child (Gunnoe and Moore 2002:614).

DIVORCE’S IMPACT ON ADOLESCENT RELIGIOSITY

Divorce is never easy on a family and can have lasting implications for a child. Divorce completely transforms the life of a child by altering the structure of the family, which can have an effect on adolescent religiosity as a result. When parents divorce, evidence has shown that they become less likely to attend religious services, which ultimately impacts how often their children attend (Zhai et al. 2008). The effects of parental divorce during childhood can be lasting, and it has become “increasingly clear that the influence of childhood family disruption on religious allegiance and practice can extend into adulthood” (Zhai et al. 2008:380).

Divorce can impact whether a child continues to view their parents as role models, as the process of divorce can cause a decline in respect for one’s parents. This could in turn make the child less receptive of their parents’ values. Divorced parents may contribute to their loss of role model status by criticizing their ex-spouses in front of their children, which could impact the child’s opinion of their parents (Zhai et al. 2007:128).

Divorces are associated with conflicted spousal relationships. When a child’s mother and father are often in disagreement, they may have conflicting methods about how to best
instill religious values in their children, which in turn may decrease the effectiveness of their methods. Children of divorce may also be forced to become more independent and self-reliant following a divorce, which could possibly lead to them forming their own set of beliefs and ideals (Zhai et al. 2008:383).

Divorce may disrupt the father’s ability to transmit religion in particular, as mothers are most often awarded child custody. As a result, the father has a limited amount of time he is allowed to spend with his children. This decreases opportunities for the father to bond with his child and provide support and guidance (Zhai et al. 2007:129).

In their study of young adults from both intact families and families who experienced divorce during the young adults’ childhood, Zhai et al (2008) found that young adults from intact families considered themselves to have a greater degree of religiosity than young adults who experienced parental divorce. Those who had experienced divorce were more likely to identify themselves as being spiritual but not religious (p. 388).

In a separate study by Zhai et al (2007), it was found that young adults who were the offspring of divorced parents attended church far less frequently during adolescence than those from intact families. Prayer activity and one’s perceived relationship with God were not influenced by whether or not one’s parents had been divorced. The data collected also pointed to fathers having less influence in transmitting religion to their child after experiencing divorce (p.139).

It seems evident that the experience of divorce leads to less of an attachment to organized religion and a move away from church involvement. However, private religious beliefs do not appear to be similarly affected. These conclusions seem logical, as attending church is often a family activity, and once one’s intact family is split apart it disrupts family traditions. Also, if children of divorce indeed become more independent and self-reliant, they may maintain or attempt to further their spirituality in a quest for self-fulfillment.

**INFLUENCE OF SPECIFIC FAMILY MEMBERS**

One common aspect in the majority of the literature is the investigation of whether or not specific family members had a greater influence in predicting adolescent religiosity. There was often the question of whether mothers or fathers were more influential, or whether their influence was dependent on the sex of the child.

In a study of adolescent attitudes toward Christianity, Francis and Gibson (1993) found that how often the mother attended church served as a better predictor of the adolescent’s church attendance than did the father’s church attendance. This study also found that fathers had a greater influence on their sons’ beliefs rather than their daughters, and that mothers had a greater influence on their daughters rather than their sons (p. 248). Milevsky, Szuchman and Milevsky (2008) obtained results consistent with mothers wielding more influence by finding a
correlation between mothers’ beliefs and children’s beliefs, but no correlation between fathers’ beliefs and children’s beliefs (p. 431).

Interested in examining the influence of family members other than the parents, Copen and Silverstein (2007) specifically examined the role of grandmothers in the religious socialization of their grandchildren. Copen and Silverstein (2007) found that grandmothers’ beliefs moderately predicted their adolescent grandchildren’s beliefs. Grandmothers were found to have the greatest influence when strong religious beliefs were shared with the mother, and were more influential in determining their granddaughters’ beliefs than their grandsons’ (p. 67-68).

One possible explanation for why mothers and grandmothers appear to wield greater influence than fathers in transmitting religious values is that they are present in the home more often than fathers, despite the trend towards an increasing number of mothers entering the workforce rather than remaining at home. The notion that fathers have a greater impact on their sons’ beliefs rather than their daughters’ beliefs, and that mothers have a greater impact on their daughters’ beliefs rather than their sons’ beliefs may be explained by the idea that a person is probably more likely to identify with their own sex.

CONCLUSION

This literature review has illustrated how families influence the religiosity of their children during adolescence. I have demonstrated that parental religiosity is a major predictor of adolescent religiosity; that religious beliefs are transmitted more effectively when healthy relationships exist in the family and when values are communicated effectively; that religious transmission is disrupted when divorce occurs; and that certain family members may wield more influence in determining adolescent religiosity.

Further research could be done by examining the role that older siblings might play in the religious development of their younger siblings, as I did not encounter any information on this topic in the literature. Also, more studies should be conducted with the use of qualitative methods rather than surveys and questionnaires, the prevalent data collection methods I encountered. This should occur in order to gain more of a detailed insight into how adolescents perceive their religious beliefs were influenced by their families. One limitation of the research I encountered was that the majority of the research articles focused on Christianity in suburban areas, so the findings may not be generalizable with regards to other religions and environments. My hope is that this literature review provides people with a better understanding of the influence their families have in forming religious beliefs.

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The Effects of Parenting Style on Adolescent Substance Use

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on the relationship between parenting style and adolescent substance abuse. While all parenting styles have a significant effect on adolescent substance use, authoritative parents have the most significant effect on decreasing adolescent substance use. Evidence provides many points of view regarding this topic, which results in the presentation of the sociological importance of this research subject. This research paper begins with the presentation of background information about parenting styles, as well as substance use, and continues by discussing each parenting style in detail while showing how that parenting style significantly affects adolescent substance use in a variety of ways. The three parenting styles that I will focus on for the purpose of this paper will be authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Parenting is one social aspect of life that affects everyone in society. This experience shapes who we become, whether we want to accept that fact or not. The morals and beliefs that came from our parental figures during childhood stay with us through the duration of our adult life. It is possible to tell a lot about a person from how he or she was brought up in their family setting. This can play a role in many aspects of a child’s life, but significantly affects the behavior of that child as they get older (Coombs and Landsverk 1988). This is one way in which this topic can relate to the Social Learning Theory. Social Learning Theory, which can also be linked with differential association, discusses the significance of social interaction on future behavior due to imitation (Pratt et al. 2010). Adolescents learn many behaviors from their parents, and those behaviors could determine whether they abuse substances or not. Parenting style is looked at in terms of whether it can have a positive or negative effect on adolescents’ decision to use, or not use, various substances. All types of parenting styles have their strengths and their areas for improvement, specifically when it comes to this topic.

For the purpose of this paper, substance use is defined as the use of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and other licit and illicit drugs. Substance abuse is a sociologically relevant problem in and of itself because it seems to be increasing among adolescents at a younger age than it has in the past. Finding the possible root of this problem could be very helpful in decreasing the prevalence of this social issue, which is why it is important for sociologists to lend their attention to this topic. In this paper, the hypothesis is that parenting style is related to adolescent drug use because people tend to learn a great deal of social lessons from their
parents while growing up. That is why the belief exists that parenting style can strongly affect the use, or lack of use, of various substances by adolescents.

**AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING**

The first type of parenting style that is discussed is authoritarian parenting. This parenting style tends to focus on discipline and high expectations. While the children of these types of parents are loved, they often can feel the need to earn that love. Authoritarian parents are extremely involved in the lives of their children, without being warm and loving (Baumrind 1966). Parents who act in ways that are both extremely hostile and strict can affect adolescent behavior in many ways, and has been shown to actually encourage adolescents to use substances (Mogro-Wilson 2008). There could be many reasons for this finding, including the explanation of deviance. When adolescents are told not to do something, especially by authoritarian parents, it tends to make them want to do it (Mogro-Wilson 2008). Therefore, when an adolescent is strictly warned about drugs this will not only make them curious, it will actually encourage them to experiment. This is not to say that if a parent discourages drinking, the child will become a raging drug addict. However, if a parent has harsh rules regarding cigarette smoking, it could make the teenager interested in taking a risk.

A study conducted by Coombs and Landsverk (1988), compared parenting style with adolescent use of alcohol and various licit and illicit drugs. Adolescents that claimed to have a close relationship with both parents in addition to strict rules at home, tended to use less substances than those adolescents who had strict rules at home, but negative relationships with their parents. Another finding in this study was that when adolescents do not get encouragement and praise at home, they can feel “emotionally distant” and not want to be like their parents, therefore they may start using substances as an outlet for those negative emotions (Coombs and Landsverk 1988).

Many adolescents in society today expect some level of punishment after breaking a rule and getting caught. Parents tend to vary in what they believe is appropriate punishment, and it changes dependent on the extremity of the adolescent’s misbehavior. Some parents think it is sufficient to simply tell the adolescent not to do that again, while other parents may find it appropriate to ground the adolescent and take away numerous privileges. It has been found that when an adolescent is severely punished and forced to feel extreme guilt after using substances, it can encourage them to use it more (Mezzich et al. 2007). One justification for this behavior could be that sometimes this action makes an adolescent lose self-esteem, and results in them feeling that they might as well keep using these substances because they do not have the potential to succeed anyway. This is an unfortunate result that authoritarian parenting has on adolescent substance use that seems to be relatively prevalent in multiple studies.

Many of the negative effects that authoritarian parenting can have on adolescent substance use have been discussed, however, it is necessary to mention some positive effects that can occur as well. Adolescents vary in the type of discipline it takes to defer them from getting into various types of trouble, namely substance use. Some adolescents need tough love,
some need positive role models, and others may need a range of various kinds of discipline. That is not necessarily a bad thing, it just means that it is much more important that parents really know their child well so that they can see what type of parenting will suit their adolescent best. For many teenagers, an authoritarian parent is what they need in order to stay away from substances (Jarvinen and Ostergaard 2009). It is logical even for those of us who do not need that level of discipline tactic. If an adolescent is scared to try a drug because they know that their parents will be furious, chances are they will be very cautious to take that risk.

A study conducted by Pires and Jenkins (2006), provides another explanation for the possible positive effects of authoritarian parenting on adolescent substance abuse. The researchers found that as adolescents grow from young teens to older teens, there is little difference in the amounts of substance use between adolescents experiencing higher levels of rejection by parents and those experiencing lower levels of rejection. The most obvious explanation for this finding is the classic example of the age-crime curve (Rebellon 2010). As teens get older, they tend to be more delinquent without any outside effects involved. Therefore, it is hard to say if authoritarian parents are causing more substance use, or if it could simply be the adolescent getting older that explains this behavior.

While discussing this specific parenting style, numerous examples have been shown to explain how authoritarian parents can have a negative effect on adolescent substance use. While this is true, there is research that defends this style of parenting by demonstrating the many positive effects of this parenting style. The research presented provides examples of how, while authoritarian parents have a significant effect on adolescent substance use, that it may not be the most positive effect. Those effects can be compared and contrasted with the permissive parenting style, which is very different from authoritarian parenting.

**PERMISSIVE PARENTING**

Permissive parents are very loving, but try to avoid the disciplinary part of parenting (Baumrind 1966). While this may make the parent seem “cool” and relaxed, it can inhibit the child’s ability to behave appropriately later in life for obvious reasons. If a parent sets clear behavioral expectations, the adolescent will be much less likely to use alcohol or drugs because of those rules (Coombs and Landsverk 1988). It is a concept that is fairly simple to comprehend; if your parents have high expectations of you, you will probably want to fulfill those expectations to the best of your ability. Permissive parents struggle in this area, because they tend to care too much about letting the adolescent set the rules and not care enough about how relevant those rules are.

In a study done by Mezzich et al. (2007), results showed that when one parent’s discipline becomes less strict, the other parent’s discipline seems to follow and can lead to an increase in adolescent substance use. There are many different combinations of parenting styles in society today, but by having both parents leaning towards a permissive parenting style, the door is open for the adolescent to break what few rules are set.
There is one characteristic of a permissive parent that has a positive influence on adolescents, which is the warmth that these types of parents give to their children. This warmth in the relationship between adolescent and parent can help keep adolescents out of the drug and alcohol focused environment that they may have become involved in otherwise. Parental openness and warmth are two of the most important variables in reducing, or avoiding, adolescent substance use (Mogro-Wilson 2008).

This point is further shown in a research study conducted by Pires and Jenkins (2006). They found in their study that the child’s perception of parental warmth by age 10 could affect their decisions regarding substance use later in life. That finding highlights the fact that parenting your child well at all ages is extremely important in the outcome of that child’s future morals and behaviors. It is not only important to set rules and expectations in adolescence, because by then it could be too late for them to be effective.

This information provided shows that permissive parents can have both negative and positive effects on their child’s substance use in a significant way. The two previous parenting styles discussed can be looked at in comparison to the final parenting style, which is authoritative.

AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING

The last parenting style that will be discussed in relation to adolescent substance use is authoritative parenting. As discussed by Baumrind (1966), authoritative parents balance high expectations with reasonable explanations of these expectations. These parents are very understanding, and balance discipline with a loving parent-child relationship.

Because of this ideal balance between strictness and warmth, adolescents with authoritative parents use significantly less substances than those of other parenting styles (Adalbjarnardottir and Hafsteinsson 2001). This is no surprise, as this parenting style brings the best characteristics of authoritarian parents and permissive parents, to make one productive style of childbearing. It makes sense that having that close parent-child relationship paired with clear rules and strict discipline really helps to decrease adolescent substance use.

A well-known theory that helps to explain this correlation between authoritative parents and reduced substance use is the Social Control Theory. This theory by Travis Hirschi says that when an individual feels connected to other individuals and society as a whole, that individual is less likely to participate in criminal activity (Rebellon 2010). When adolescents feel that they have a strong attachment and bond to their parents, they will not want to make poor decisions regarding drugs and alcohol (Dorius et al. 2004). By having less attachment, and less reason to behave, some adolescents from households with different parenting styles many use substances more because they do not feel that they have anything to lose. By having a close relationship coupled with a level of authority, parents instill a great amount of trust into their children and that trust is often reciprocated (Dorius et al. 2004). When an adolescent receives
love and guidance from their parents, but also are required to follow rules, they stay away from the temptation of trying substances (Coombs and Landsverk 1988).

When discussing the issue of providing guidance to adolescents, this does not mean parents should simply tell the adolescent what to do. It requires the parent to listen intently, give advice, and understand where the adolescent is coming from (Coombs and Landsverk 1988). Authoritative parents that really take the time to listen and comprehend the needs of their adolescent are going to be the parents that succeed the most at reducing use of substances (Broman et al. 2008).

There will always be obstacles in the way of even the most “perfect” parents. Adolescents have many other influences that come into play, even when examining the simple correlation between parenting style and substance use. A study conducted by Simon-Morton and Chen (2009) showed that in these situations, authoritative parents are best equipped to help adolescents steer away from negative influences, specifically peers who engage in substance use. A study looking specifically at tobacco use found that this good relationship not only deters adolescents from substance use, but also affects their peer association in a positive way. That is, adolescents with authoritative parents tend to behave better, and also tend to associate themselves with peers that are similar behavior (Adamczyk-Robinette et al. 2002).

Even though there is a significant relationship between parenting style and substance use, sometimes other variables can have a more considerable impact. For example, sometimes variables such as age and gender can provide explanations as to why patterns in substance use vary among adolescents (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2006). These variables can reveal interesting insights to their relationships with adolescent substance use, and do show that there is a possibility that maybe parenting style does not have the most significant effect and influence.

While it has been shown that a significant and positive relationship between authoritative parenting and adolescent substance use exists, it has also been mentioned that there are undoubtedly variables that could be even more significant. This parenting style does tend to be ideal, but it is no different from the other parenting styles in that it does have its negative aspects.

CONCLUSION

With the use of scholarly information, it has been discussed that authoritative parents have the most significant and positive effect on adolescent substance use when compared to the other parenting styles. Discussion clearly demonstrated the many positive and negative aspects of each of the three dominating parenting styles, while relating those aspects to the issue of adolescent substance use. One major limitation involved in many of these studies was that there were times when the adolescent was asked to discuss the parenting style used in their household. That fact could possibly affect both the validity and the reliability of the results in each study. Other limitations include temporal order and the fact that in many of the studies examined, it was difficult to tell if the delinquency caused the parenting style, or vice versa.
That important distinction should be made clearer in the research. Lastly, an additional limitation in some of the research is that differences in parenting style between mother and father is not always made clear, and that could have an effect on the result.

Researchers could take many directions to further study this fascinating topic. One direction could be to study parents’ past substance use and how those past experiences might play a role in how that parent acts in respect to drugs and alcohol in regards to their own child. Another possibility could be to analyze the parenting style of these adolescents’ grandparents in comparison to the parents’ style. It could be very interesting to see if the parents modeled their own parents, or if they went in a new direction for whatever reason that might be. Looking at that and comparing it to substance use could bring about new results. An additional interesting direction for future research would be to explore the social distribution of parenting styles, and how it could change based on geography. Lastly, by reversing this study we could ideally eliminate the problem of tentative temporal order mentioned earlier. It does seem that parenting style effects adolescent substance use, but further research could show that relationship even more if the researcher controlled to ensure it is not the other way around.

With or without further research exploration, the results found in studies conducted thus far do show that there is a significant relationship between parenting style and adolescent delinquency. This seems to be relevant for all parenting styles, but seems to be especially positive for those parents using authoritative styles of parenting with their children.

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How Do Social and Economic Factors Affect Academic Achievement among Adolescent Students?  
An observation of Community Social Capital, Peer Relationships and Economic Composition  

Kendall L. Clark  

ABSTRACT  

This literature review focuses on how specific social and economic factors affect adolescent academic achievement. Although there are numerous factors effecting academic achievement, this paper will solely evaluate three influences: peer relationships, community social capital, and the economic composition of the family and peers. The collection of quantitative research gathered for this review concluded that all three factors significantly impacted academic achievement, but to various extents. The results revealed that peer relationships were among the most influential social relationship during adolescence. Peer economic composition, which is the socioeconomic status of peer groups and their families, was also significant in the educational environment. The research further suggests that there is a direct correlation between economic composition and academic achievement during adolescence. There are larger implications to this research that may encourage policymakers to consider these social and economic factors when implementing future education policy.

INTRODUCTION  

This paper will examine the relationship between social and economic factors, and their effects on adolescent academic achievement. More specifically, I will focus on three factors: social capital resources, peer relationships, and economic composition. Although there are many social, political, and economic factors that affect all students, the body of research shows that social capital, peer relationships, and economic composition are among the most important variables that can either restrict or amplify a student’s potential academic success and perseverance.

I will begin by conceptually analyzing how social capital resources, peer relationships, and economic composition influence a student’s academic success by providing scholarly evidence that supports my thesis. I will continue to perform an in-depth analysis of the literature addressing the effects of these three social and economic factors on adolescents. The studies and the overall conclusion will present policy implications and suggestions for future research. This topic is sociologically relevant because the three proposed factors can either positively or negatively affect adolescent’s potential outcomes, and, therefore, affects greater
society. A focus on academic achievement has been exceedingly prevalent, especially during the current era when the rigor of collegiate competition has become so callous, and the importance of a well-rounded education is a crucial component for future success in the job market.

THEORECTICAL BACKGROUND

In 1966, James Coleman published the Coleman Report, which focused on the inequalities of opportunity in education across American schools. Coleman’s first finding discovered the disparities in educational funding between schools respectively attended by black and white students were far smaller than he projected. Coleman’s assumptions were that funding differences between black and white schools would be large, and that these unequal differences would provide a central explanation for the achievement gaps between blacks and whites (Kahlenberg 1996). The second finding of the report emphasized that funding was not closely related to achievement. However, achievement was highly influenced by family economic status. Coleman further acknowledged that peer relationships are quite influential in an individual’s academic process. The Coleman Report also provides empirical evidence suggesting that attending a school with a higher enrollment of middle-class or upper-class students is an advantage over going to school with a lower-class composition (Kahlenberg 1966).

The report also conveyed that educational resources provided by the family and community were more important for achievement than the resources provided by the schools (Kahlenberg, 2001). The importance of family and community social capital is evident in Coleman’s conclusions. A critic of the Coleman Report, Daniel Moynihan further embellishes that equality of academic achievement in American schools is relatively dependent on with whom you attend school and what kind of school in which you are enrolled. Moynihan points out that the biggest differences are within the social class and economic mix of schools, and has no correlation to facility resources (Kahlenberg, 2001).

The pressure of peer influence continues to be an important variable within sociological research. In the 1960’s Coleman performed a study and found that peers directly influence other student’s aspirations and achievement rates (Kahlenberg, 2001). Coleman argues that peers are the primary social influences, opposed to some who debate that teachers are the most influential tone in the classroom. In his research, he examined ten schools and found that students were fourteen times as likely to say it was harder to accept the disapproval of peers than of teachers (Kahlenberg, 2001). This finding demonstrates the significance of peer influences and associations during adolescence.

In later research, Coleman focused on the environment within private schools, mainly Catholic Schools. Coleman concluded that private schools did in fact provide students with a better education than public schools. Coleman and two other sociologists Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore compared private and public school students who had similar background. They found that students performed approximately one grade level higher in Catholic private schools.
than in public schools. The analysis further noted that low-income and minority students in particular did better in private Catholic schools than in public schools. Although many sociologists agree with this conclusion, they also criticize the findings because the study was conducted at one point in time as opposed to a longitudinal approach (Kahlenberg, 2001). The authors took this constructive criticism in stride and in 1987 published a book called *Public and Private High Schools: The Impacts of Communities*, which was based on their conclusions after they performed a longitudinal study. One of the main conclusions the authors found was that poor students performed better in private Catholic schools because of the peer effects that stemmed from the economically advantaged backgrounds of their classmates (Kahlenberg, 2001). The conclusions from the first study and the longitudinal study are similar. However, the results from the longitudinal test provide a more in-depth analysis of why disadvantage students perform at higher levels in private school compared to their public school counterparts.

Coleman made several policy implications, but the most apparent of these suggests that school integration across socioeconomic lines and racial lines will increase minority achievement (Kahlenberg, 2001). Coleman provided future policy implications encouraging policy makers to provide incentives and promote integration through programs such as magnet schools, urban-suburban school transfer programs, and portable funding which is weighted to the encouragement of integration in all areas (Kahlenberg, 2001). The factors Coleman observed to be issues influencing academic achievement will further be discussed in the review by focusing on multiple results and case studies conducted by sociologists.

**COMMUNITY SOCIAL CAPITAL**

For the purpose of this review, I will use Coleman’s definition of social capital, which is “anything that facilitates individual or collective action generated by networks of friendships, reciprocity, trust and social norms and the access to resources that such connection’s allow” (Kao 2004). In other words, social capital is an individual’s connection to people who then allow them to gain access to a broad range of resources. This paper will primarily focus on community social capital and how it contributes to a student’s academic success. Community social capital is similar to family social capital in that it allows individuals to derive social relationships and networks through the influence of community members. In the latter research, I will also show how family social capital challenges community social capital.

One theoretical perspective suggests that the increase in concentrations of poverty and unemployment in industrialized urban areas has created the dire need to evaluate the influences of community social capital on adolescent outcomes (Woolley et al. 2008). This perspective has led sociologists to recognize the importance in researching community social capital and its correlation to adolescent academic achievement. Woolley et al. presented a hypothesis that suggest higher levels of community social capital would be associated with higher levels of academic achievement in reading and math results among students in grades first through eighth (Woolley et al. 2008). Woolley et al. also noted that although this hypothesis has previously been discussed, there is no prior empirical evidence supporting this
thesis until their study. Although this study could potentially have limitations, it has practical implications and suggestions for future research.

Woolley et al. used a large sample consisting of approximately 100,000 to 150,000 predominately African American residents living in an industrial city in the Midwest. In 2000, twenty six percent of the population lived below the poverty line and thirty six percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. These statistics suggest this city experiences moderate levels of poverty (Woolley et al. 2008). The school district provided achievement data for the 2000-2001 school years. This data set contained student achievement scores on math and reading standardized tests, and also made available demographic factors of the student population. The researchers generated a pivotal question while observing this data. They were curious as to whether the relationship of community factors and children’s academic outcomes might fluctuate as children progress through school. With this question in mind, the researchers also observed whether the association of math and reading performance with community components altered with the student’s grade level in school.

The results show that community social capital became increasingly more significant in student achievement rates, measured by standardized test results as children progressed through school. Further evidence concluded that weak community interactions and poor physical conditions had an increasingly negative effect on student outcomes as children progressed in grade and therefore in age. The correlation between community, social capital, and age might seem evident because as a child becomes older, they tend to interact more with their neighbors and community members. Although there were many factors evaluated, the researchers concluded that a higher level of community social capital and the quality of the neighborhood atmosphere were directly related to higher levels of school achievement for children in grades first through eighth measured by both MAT evaluations. This evidence supports my thesis because the strength of the community’s interactions can either restrict or amplify potential adolescent academic success.

Although community social capital appears to have an influence on student academic achievement, research conducted by sociologists Ann Mullis, Bethanne Schlee, and Michael Shriner hypothesized that family social capital also has a great effect on student achievement. The researchers sought to discover to what extent parents’ social capital combined with resource capital influenced academic achievement in children. The researchers primarily looked at family social capital and capital resources, but also distinguished other socioeconomic factors influencing achievement, such as family structure, parental involvement, parent education, and income levels.

The results concluded that parent social capital has a significant impact on student academic achievement. More specifically, marital status was an influence when examining parent social capital and its impact on children’s academic performance. The researchers recognized some flaws within the study and have suggested future research to closely examine parental involvement in the school and it’s correlation to student academic achievement (Mullis, Schlee & Shriner 2008).
Addressing the educational gaps in achievement requires an approach that connects children’s learning to available social capital resources derived from either the family or the community. It is evident within these studies that academic achievement requires students to be provided with the necessary resources that will help them succeed and advance to the next stages of education. Also, recognizing a lack of crucial resources forces parents, community members, and teachers to work together to help their children succeed in academics by providing them with more support. Researchers have challenged future research to examine how adolescents can actively build their own social capital and networks from their own community and family social capital resources.

**PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

Peer influences have tremendous effects on an individual’s attitude towards academics. More specifically, peer influence has shown to have an increasing impact on adolescent attitudes during development stages. Studies have shown that adolescents tend to care more about the thoughts of their peers than those of their teachers and parents (Kahlenberg 2008). Peer influence is an essential factor to consider when investigating academic achievement among adolescents because these relations have been shown to exert the most influence over adolescents. Peer family social status will also be considered to show how significant peer impacts are when measuring individual academic achievement. Although peer family social status is not a social relationship, it has been shown to influence peer relationships between adolescents.

The influence of social support systems has led researchers to question and evaluate social support networks in conjuncture with educational attitudes and behaviors. In 2003, researcher Owens, Somers, and Piliawsky studied how social relationships and educational attitudes and behaviors affected African American students attending a large urban high school in the Midwest. The researchers sought to distinguish how social relationships shape individual educational attitudes and behaviors. The participant population in this study was quite small, only observing 118 African American students, 43 male and 75 female students in the ninth grade. The school would be considered a high-poverty school, determined by the sixty five percent of students qualifying for free and reduced lunches, and one third of the children living under the federal poverty level (Somers, Owens Piliawsky 2008). The researchers suggest that based off this percentage, the majority of the student population was economically disadvantaged and described the community surrounding the school as working-class.

Further studies have shown that African American students may not receive as much academic support from their peers compared to Caucasian students (Somers, Owens and Piliawsky 2008). One study found that African Americans students who excel academically may be perceived by their peers as “acting white” and may not perform to their fullest potential because they fear the disapproval of their peers (Somers, Owens Piliawsky 2008). If African American students do perceive their peers as “acting white” then these students could eventually be discouraged from working hard and excelling academically. The researchers recognized that cross-cultural research could have provided relevant information about if these
dynamics are unique to African American, urban populations however, this was not the primary focus of their study (Somers, Owens Piliawsky 2008). This is an example of how negative peer associations directly impact academic achievement levels. The component of race could potentially intrigue researchers to investigate how achievement levels among racial groups could be affected by peer relationships and influences.

Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky recognized this as a problem and suggested that schools should be more involved in breaking down these stereotypes (Somers, Owens Piliawsky 2008). In addition, the researchers also realized that it might be difficult to make positive behavioral recommendations to peer groups, especially at particular developmental stages. Therefore, the researchers merely focused on ways schools could facilitate and encourage strong networks between students. School and community organizations must develop strategies to broaden peer involvement in schools and community functions. Owens, Somers and Piliawsky (2003) also suggest that peer involvement in community organizations and clubs could foster positive peer relationships and attitudes among classmates.

Further research has shown that peer influences seem to have a relationship with the likelihood of school dropouts and academic competence. One report found that Hispanic adolescents at high risk for school dropout were more likely to have friends who had dropped out than those who were not at high risk of school dropout (LeCroy & Krysik 2008). There has been an array of previous research conducted on the influence of peers on academic achievement levels and dropout rates. Researchers LeCroy and Krysik decided to further investigate this research and hypothesized that an affiliation with pro-academic peers will result in higher grades among students. Overall, LeCroy and Krysik found that positive peer and parental affiliations impacted academic success and further affected Hispanic student’s GPA.

These studies all show that peer relationships whether positive or negative impact adolescent academic achievement rates. Race appears to be an important factor in several studies, which was not a primary focus for this paper. These studies also suggest that peer and parental relationships are both highly influential and therefore should be studied in conjunction with one another. The research focusing on peer relationships gives merit to my thesis and provides me with new variables to observe.

**ECONOMIC COMPOSITION**

There are many discourses revolving around economic composition of students enrolled in high school and it’s relation to public schools. Although most research focuses on economic composition in relation to racial composition, sociologists Salvatore Saporito and Deenesh Sohoni mainly discuss how the economic composition of a student’s family play an essential role in determining the choice of schools for families (Saporito & Sohoni 2007). Empirical evidence has suggested that private school enrollment percentages are primarily influenced by the economic composition of students. This reality further contributes to the economic segregation within school districts (Saporito & Sohoni 2007). Economic segregation within schools particularly public schools has contributed to the current large economic disparity
within educational institutions. There is also evidence suggesting peer family economic status has a significant effect on individual academic achievement (Saporito & Sohoni 2007). Although peer family economic status is slightly less significant than an individual’s own family economic status, it still greatly influences student academic achievement.

Although there are many socioeconomic factors that contribute to a student’s academic achievement, Saporito and Sohoni found that family and peer economic status were significant in determining a student’s future success. Peer family economic status is important to consider because, as noted before, peer influences strongly affect adolescents and academic achievement. James Coleman found in one study that the backgrounds of peers and family social capital resources affected adolescent academic achievement the most (Bankston & Caldas 1997). In this study, Coleman’s research on social capital never addressed the extent to which students acquire social capital for academic achievement at home versus the extent to which they acquire it from their peers (Bankston & Caldas 1997).

Stephen Caldas and Carl Bankston III from the University of Southwestern Louisiana identified many hypotheses within their studies regarding academic achievement (Bankston & Caldas 1997). One hypothesis focused on the influence of peer economic status on overall student achievement. The researchers agree with Saporito and Sohoni’s conclusions that family economic status is slightly more influential than peer economic status.

When economic status was introduced as a potential variable, the researchers found that the influence of family economic status on academic achievement was caused by the tendency of students with similar family socioeconomic status levels to attend the same schools (Bankston & Caldas 1997). One result found that the effects of poverty such as inadequate access to educational resources dropped fairly drastically when levels of high peer family economic status were added to the education atmosphere. This result provided evidence that peers of higher socioeconomic status promoted higher levels of academic achievement because they were more likely to bring resources associated with higher family educational and occupational status to the school environment (Bankston & Caldas 1997).

Bankston and Caldas concluded that attending school with classmates who come from higher socioeconomic background tends to positively rise under privileged student’s achievement level. These conclusions reemphasize the importance peer influences and peer economic statuses have on academic achievement. Researchers Bankston and Caldas (1990) further mention this result was their most significant finding in the study. They suggest that economically disadvantaged students would benefit from these resources that the more advantaged students would bring to the school’s atmosphere and economic diversity would be beneficial to those underprivileged students (Bankston & Caldas 1997). Although economic integration could be beneficial for disadvantaged students, there are speculations indicating this type of integration could have a negative effect on privileged students, specifically affecting academic achievement.
CONCLUSIONS

Although, there were some discrepancies within the studies, overall my thesis was supported by the research. All three factors focused on in this review: community social capital, peer relationships, and economic composition of student populations, have all been shown to influence adolescent academic achievement. However, all factors affect achievement differently, and depending on the situation and social context, these variables could have a positive or negative impact on achievement. Thus, the adolescent’s situation can either restrict or amplify their potential academic success. The implications of community social capital encourage researchers to focus on how community social capital and family social capital, when studied in conjuncture, could positively or negatively affect adolescent achievement. The evidence on the impact of peer relationships has strengthened prior research and has suggested that community organizations and clubs could help fostered positive peer relationships.

Future studies should focus on how these community organizations encourage positive peer relationships. As previously noted, peer social capital has positive and negative externalities; depending on the economic background a student derives from. Although economic integration is a positive influence for under privileged students, it could also negatively impact privileged students. This paper exhibits an underlying concentration on the impact of peer influences. Adolescent peer relationships and peer family economic composition clearly affects achievement rates, thus, a narrower focus on these factors is essential for future research.

Researchers have integrated future research and policy suggestions into their respective conclusions. A recommendation from sociologist James Coleman suggests that magnet and urban-suburban transfer programs would diversify a school’s population. Urban-suburban transfer programs and magnet schools would allow student’s from an array of socioeconomic backgrounds to study together in an environment conducive to learning. Hypothetically, this proposed theory would not only integrate respective backgrounds but peer relationships would also be highly diversified, especially in an urban-suburban transfer program.

A personal suggestion encourages policymakers to focus on the relations between peers and the active involvement within the community during adolescence, especially when implementing education policy. This suggestion is supported by the studies reviewed in this paper that have shown that these factors are more significant and influential than the associations between students and teachers. Currently, there are education policies that hold teachers and administrators accountable if students do not perform well on standardized tests. Exhibiting the message that teachers are liable for their student’s overall performances on tests should not be a focus for effective policy. An integration of social and economic factors, such as community social capital, peer relationships, and economic composition should be recognized and heavily weighed when discussing amendments to education policy.
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The Effect of Socioeconomic Status, Parental Involvement, and Self Esteem on the Education of African Americans

Kelby M. Mackell

ABSTRACT

This is a literature review that sets out to explore the effects of socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and self-esteem on the education of African Americans. The review takes information from ten different sociological studies that explore the effects of one or more of the above variables. The African American students that are studied range from elementary school through college education level. They are compared across gender, and to other racial groups. The sources compiled in this literature review use a variety of different studies including surveys, interviews, and results from past studies. The results of the studies show that socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and self-esteem are all directly correlated to the education of African Americans. Furthermore, the studies show that African Americans tend to fall short in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. Larger implications of this study show the importance of meeting the needs of African American students so they can excel in the educational realm.

INTRODUCTION

African American students have continuously been underrepresented in the educational world of today’s society (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). There are many factors that contribute to this underrepresentation, such as socioeconomic status, self-esteem, and family involvement. The low education rate of African Americans is a problem that has not been solved, and needs to be examined in more depth. This literature review will examine the way that education for African Americans is affected by socioeconomic status, self-esteem, and family involvement, as well as solutions to the problem of African American under-education.

The educational status of African Americans is of sociological interest because education is a large institution in the United States. Students of all races attend public school in the United States, but African American youths often perform less well in school than their Caucasian counterparts (Murry et al. 2009). This reveals an apparent problem in our educational system, especially if a race, as a whole, is having trouble succeeding in the currently established educational system.

African American educational attainment is also of sociological relevance because education is an important gateway to success in the United States; you can’t get very far
without it. Those without a high school or college degree are at greater risk for poverty due to the lack of job opportunities. Not having an education has also been linked to higher crime and deviance rates (Brunn & Kao 2008).

This topic is an important topic in sociology because it’s a question that has been explored in depth by many, but a solution still has not been found. There are countless papers written on African American education, some of which aided me in creating this literature review. Many other factors besides those listed above contribute to African-American education, but the three that will be discussed are the factors most able to be fixed, explored openly, and understood by the general public. With the understanding that I have regarding African-American education and the three variables I have chosen, I believe that socioeconomic status, self-esteem, and parental involvement are directly related to the education of African Americans.

This literature review does not only seek to explore how socioeconomic status, self-esteem, and parental involvement affect the education of African Americans, but it also addresses ways to change the under education of African Americans. Each section of this literature review will include the pros of each variable, the cons of each variable, and how each variable can be changed into a positive aspect on the education of African Americans.

**THE EFFECTS OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION**

“Three times as many African Americans as White children live in families below the United States poverty line, and low socioeconomic status youth are more likely to experience academic problems and fewer completed years of schooling” (Kerpelman and Mosher 2004). Through conducting a study using rural African American adolescents, Kerpelman and Mosher found that having a low SES was linked to a low educational outlook and vice versa (2004). One reason for this is the lack of resources available at home. Wealthier families are able to invest in tutors, have more time to meet with teachers, and they are able to buy things that students need, such as books and computers (Charles, Rocigno, and Torres 2007). Without the ability to invest in the resources needed, having an easy time getting an education is nearly impossible.

Murry, Berkel, Brody, Miller, and Chen (2009) did research on rural African American families and concluded that rural families have a limited amounts of jobs available to them, and they have to travel greater distances to their workplace. This is a problem because a lot of families do not have the resources to provide transportation, and there is not an abundance of public transportation in rural areas. If there are no available jobs and no way to get a job, it is difficult to make money, thus leaving the family in poverty.

Murry et al. (2009) also concluded that people of low socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to having a limited outlook on the future. This means that students in poverty do not look into their future, which may include going to college after they get out of high school. Many of them believe that their parents do not have the money to spend on college, so there is no way for them to attain a college education. Students who live in poorer families tend to not
discuss matters such as school, so there is no way to know if their parent wants them to continue their education, if their family has money for a student to go to college, or if their family knows the values of attaining a degree (Murry 2009).

Seeing their parents living in poverty and growing up in poverty, African American students may develop a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ogbu and Simons 1998). African American youth seeing poverty around them, as well as people looking in on their communities and thinking that everyone is poor, may in fact take the route to poverty, without even knowing it. This route is not seeking education.

Although many people primarily see the negative side of socioeconomic status on education, there are also positive aspects. Current research articles have addressed socioeconomic status, and tend to have the same ideas: poor children do badly in school, poor communities do not have the adequate resources to educate children correctly, and children who are part of poor families tend to fall into similar trends. There is another side of socioeconomic status that is not explored by most of the articles and needs to be addressed more often: the positive side. There are more negative outcomes, and the majority of children who live in poor communities do not rise above the poverty line, but more research should be done on the children that do. These children will help find a solution to the problem of low educational status among African-Americans.

Thankfully, there are students who see the stereotypes given to African Americans, and think of it as a challenge (Murry et al. 2009). Adolescents will turn the stereotypes around, do well in school, and continue on to complete their education, stopping the cycle of under-education.

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Socioeconomic status also influences parental involvement in the households of students. Honora (2002) conducted a study on gender and achievement of African American youth, and used family involvement as one of her variables. From that study, Honora concluded that the majority of parents who are less engaged in education are that way because they have to work long hours to support their family. Parents are trying to get their children out of poverty, but they do not have the time to encourage education and support their family, so they are doing what is best for their family in the present, and not taking much time to look into the future (Honera 2002).

“The family is the first unit to develop and nurture the [African American] student’s capacity for learning” (Herndon and Hirt 2004). Herndon and Hirt conducted their study on the families of African American students and found that Black students rely heavily on the support of their parents when they are attending major institutions. This may be due to growing up with parents who have been there to support their children through all levels of school, and without that support as young adult, Black college students may have trouble adapting. In this study, all African American students studied in an environment that consisted of mostly white
students, which may have impacted the results that were found. This is a limitation to the research presented in this section.

Having a good education is viewed very highly in the African American community. Education is viewed as a way to have intergenerational mobility and economic stability (Mason 2007). It is a parent’s job to instill the positive aspects of education early on in a child’s life so that they know what they are working toward, and they think about the future. Having the support of parents is essential in completing an education. There are many obstacles that need to be overcome, especially by African Americans, and support makes getting over these obstacles much easier (Herndon and Hirt:2004). Seeing the support of their parents, despite their parents lack of opportunities, makes it easier and pushes black students further, making getting a degree seem a lot more attainable.

“Nearly 60% of African-American children reside in non-traditional (usually single-parent) families, compared to roughly 20% of white children” (Charles, Roscigno, and Torres 2007). Jenkins (2006) also found that black children are more likely than white children to live with one parent, or to not live with either parent. Charles et al. (2006) conducted a study on racial inequality in college attendance and focused on the role of families. Charles, Roscigno, and Torres found that family structure has a lot to do with the achievement of students. Living in a single parent household, or a household that is different than the norm (the norm being two parents, biological mother and biological father), may create turmoil, may lack educational resources, and may have “an inconsistent socializing environment” (Charles, Roscigno, and Torres 2007). When comparing the percentage of African American students who live in non-traditional families to the educational attainment of African Americans, it is apparent that family has a great deal to do with the education of African Americans. Another study done by Herndon (2004) found that students who were raised by both parents had more than doubled the odds of earning a degree, in comparison with those students who did not live in a traditional family.

It is also very important to teach African American children the racial issues they may encounter when pursuing an education. “Teaching youth about both racial and ethnic issues facilitates high academic achievement by encouraging them to be strong and work hard” (Murry et al. 2009). This is a way to reverse the normal African American stereotypes, such as lack of education, and allow children to have the courage to go above and beyond. Instilling racial pride is a way to get rid of one of the biggest barriers that students encounter when pursuing education. Seeing other African Americans who are not educated would not stop other black students, it would push them further.

The factor of parental involvement is of great importance when using it to uncover the way that African Americans are educated. When dealing with a percentage of single African American parents, which is as high as 60 percent, there is major concern. Male role models are a big part of a child’s life, and introducing a child to a male role model adds balance to a child’s life, or a female role model if they are living with a single father (Herndon 2004). Programs can
be created, like the Big Brother Big Sister Program, which can give a young African American child a mentor who has received an education to help them prepare for college.

THE EFFECTS OF SELF ESTEEM ON AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Poor students as a whole have lower educational achievement, but a study done by Linda Strong-Leek found that, even within the poor community, African American students still fall far behind (Strong-Leek 2008). This may be due to stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is when a person belongs to a group that has a stereotype attached to it, low educational status in this instance, and they unknowingly conform to this stereotype (Thomas). Unfortunately, this has a lot to do with why African Americans are falling behind. They see their parents failing, see themselves failing, and with the abundance of failure in their lives, it is hard to continue education if there is no positive outcome (Kerpelman & Mosher 2004).

Seeing their parents living in poverty and growing up in poverty, African American students may develop a self-fulfilling prophecy. African American youth seeing poverty and the people around them in poverty, as well as people looking in on their communities and thinking that everyone is poor, may in fact take the route to poverty without knowing it (Murry et al. 2009). This route is not seeking education.

“Generations of social, political, economic, and personal hardship have conditioned many African Americans to believe that they, themselves, are indeed inferior to others” (Strong-Leek 2008). This has been shown in many works of literature, and is a common factor when talking to people of the black community; this is also where family involvement and self-esteem coincide. Instilling a sense of racial pride into a child is not only a way to boost their self-esteem, but also a way to make them proud of their heritage and where they come from. Having this pride and esteem for the African American race will give them the power to resist the negative stereotypes that are portrayed about them, allowing them to keep a high self-esteem, and make them want to do things that keep their esteem high, like achievement in the realm of education (Brunn and Kao 2008).

A study done by Honora (2002) found that African American students who had a more optimistic approach to self-image had a tendency to outperform pessimistic African American students. This study shows that self-esteem and education are indeed directly related. Someone who thinks highly of themselves is going to want to continue to do things that make them feel good. Considering education is thought of so highly in the Black community, doing well in school should increase a Black student’s self-esteem.

Murry et al. (2009) had similar findings as Honora (2002) when it came to self-esteem and education. African Americans children with high self-esteem engaged in proactive coping when it came to racial discrimination “whereas those with low self-esteem responded to stereotypic portrayals of their racial group” (Honora 2002). Students who have a low self-esteem are more likely to give in to the stereotype that African Americans are uneducated. This, in turn, ingrains the stereotype deeper into the African American race.
African American students who attend predominately white schools tend to shy away from showing their academic skills. “To gain acceptance and avoid criticism from their African American peers for “acting White,” youths may attempt to camouflage their academic ability and jeopardize their scholastic success” (Murry 2009). There have been many studies, including those done by Ogbo, bell hooks, and Carter G. Woodson, prominent researchers in the field of African American education, that have uncovered many of the same findings. African American students may shy away from school as a way to keep their collective identity and self-worth. In a way, this is to keep their self-esteem at a rather high level, because they have the support of other African American children whom they are trying to feel close to, but this hinders their academics.

Although self-esteem is an issue that affects all children, it is even harder on children with more difficult backgrounds, which many times tend to be African-American children. Socioeconomic status and parental influence also contribute to self-esteem factor. Children need praise, children need help, and children need to see that there is a payoff for doing well. This all leads to the development of a healthy self-esteem. Self-esteem is an important factor examine because there are multiple, easy steps that can be taken, such as praise from teachers and parents, or having someone show interest in helping a student, to change the way a child looks at themselves, and a lot of the time the resources just aren’t available to do so.

CONCLUSION

Present day societal trends show that socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and self-esteem affect the way that education is relayed to African American children. Low socioeconomic status leads to lack of resources, lack of jobs, and lack of generational mobility, whereas a high socioeconomic status leads to money to attend college, and to pay for educational tools like tutors. Lack of parental involvement leads to reduced family stability, and no one to teach racial pride, whereas having parental involvement leads to better grades, and someone to give a student encouragement. Low self-esteem leads to bad grades, and a tendency to give up, whereas high self-esteem has been linked to increased happiness, and a better education. All of these factors tend to have negative effects on education when they take negative turns. I have shown in this literature review that many sources support this. All of them give the same information in a different way and in a different study. More research needs to be done to fully understand the factors that affect African American educational success, but the research that is provided in this paper and the variables that are laid out do a good job briefly answering it.

The fact that these same factors are visited over and over again is good, because we get to see if any changes occur, and we get to see if the research is consistent. These articles do show consistency. They consistently show many African Americans live below the poverty line, and that a high self-esteem and racial pride is essential for a good education, and that parents are one, if not the biggest, factor in getting a good education. Another good thing about the research presented is that many different groups of people can be researched and we can learn
more about the African-American racial group as a whole, and with fewer generalizations made.

An apparent inconsistency was that all but one of the studies (Brunn and Kao 2008) suggested that when socioeconomic status was controlled for, African Americans tended to excel more than Whites did. Brunn and Kao suggested that Black boys lag behind whether or not you control socioeconomic status. I thought this was an interesting finding, but I did not include it in the body of my literature review because my main studies had conflicting views.

One limitation is that the majority of the research was conducted regarding rural African American samples. I would like to see more studies on urban African Americans. Although I am sure that there are many articles and much research out there about urban African Americans, it was not as easy to find as the information on the education of rural African Americans.

These articles tend to focus on the negative aspects of African American education, and they do not propose solutions. One thing that would strengthen a lot of the research would be to find or suggest a solution. Many people read these articles to find information about African American education, and after reading it they might want to know how to fix it. One of my main goals while doing this research was to find out ways to fix the problem. While the researchers make a step in the right direction by finding the information, many of them do not suggest how to fix the problem.

I learned a lot of new things from these articles, and it was helpful that they had a lot of the same information. It was helpful that they explained things in such detail and with such devotion, and I had no problem keeping my attention on them. Details were the best thing about all of them. The researchers go into such depth when writing their articles that it is hard to find questions to ask about them, and that is what made them so helpful with my paper. One question I have, which I mentioned earlier, is what are practical ways to help the growing problem of the lack of education of African Americans?

My paper has addressed ways to change things and it has addressed the variables of socioeconomic status, family involvement, and self-esteem when partnered with African American education. I felt the need to further explore this topic because it is one that affects me directly because I am half African American. I also have a cousin who grew up in an impoverished part of Maryland, and while so many around him failed, he has excelled tremendously. It is curious to me how some can excel where others fall short of their potential. I intend to continue to research this topic and further expand my knowledge of why the under-education of African Americans occurs, and ways that it can be changed.
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Factors Affecting Parental Involvement with Children’s Education: A Qualitative Study of Parent’s Socioeconomic Status, Level of Education, and Parent-School Relationship

Callen Rockwell

ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study on the factors affecting parent’s levels of involvement with their child’s education. Factors analyzed include socioeconomic status, parent’s level of education, and parent-school relationship. Results show that parents of low socioeconomic status are more focused on providing the basic, rather than academic, needs for their child. These parents often have non-traditional work hours that prevent them from attending school events. This causes parents of low socioeconomic status to have a weak relationship with their child’s school and teachers. Parents of high socioeconomic status are more involved with their child’s education by providing them with extra academic assistance. They are also more involved with their child’s school and often take their own initiative to become involved with school related events. Parents with higher levels of education are more confident in their ability to successfully help their child with schoolwork. However, parents with low levels of education rely more on teachers to assist their child with schoolwork since they are not confident in their own abilities.

INTRODUCTION

Being well educated has become extremely important in today’s society. Children are staying in school longer and college attendance has become the norm among students. Parents play a large role in shaping their child’s attitude and effort towards school. Therefore, parents must understand how to help improve their child’s school experience and academic achievement. In this paper, I explore the factors affecting and regulating the amount of parental involvement with children’s education. My hypothesis is that parents of lower socioeconomic status and lower levels of education will be less involved with their child’s education. I will investigate levels of parental involvement based on socioeconomic status, parent’s level of education, and parent’s relationship with the school.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a large role in the amount of time parents spend on their child’s educational activities. A study conducted by Drummond and Stipek (2004)
performed telephone interviews with 234 low-income families. Researchers asked respondents to rate the importance of helping their child with school work. These low-income parents felt the best way to help their child succeed in school was to provide for them, offer support, and teach social skills (Drummond and Stipek 2004). Parents of low socioeconomic status were more focused on providing basic needs for their children such as clothing, food and emotional support (Drummond and Stipek 2004).

Parents of high socioeconomic status confront their child’s school more often and have increased contact with teachers (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2008). These parents often seek extra help for their child or admittance to special academic programs. As a result, students of high SES displayed higher levels of school satisfaction and received better grades (Tan and Goldberg 2009). These students with more involved parents had more positive responses about school-related activities and academic achievement.

Schools with a greater number of low SES parents reported less parental attendance at school events. Parents of low SES strongly believe they should be involved with their child’s school, however, there are often many factors preventing them from doing so (Drummond and Stipek 2004). Due to these parents’ financial struggles, they often work long hours or night shifts. These nontraditional work hours limit a parent’s availability to attend their child’s school events. This conflict is best described through this quote from a parent at a low resource school in Maryland,

So the school needs to make a better effort at getting to those people who have that second job…and the school needs to know that to be a little bit more flexible to get the majority of those parents out there because what it looks like is that we don’t care. (Rowan-Kenyon 2008:575)

Parents of low SES often have jobs that do not allow them to take time off from working. This causes them to be unavailable during the evening hours when most schools hold meetings and extracurricular assemblies. This can include college financial aid meetings that would be beneficial to these parents.

A study conducted by Grodsky and Jones (2007) examined data from the 1999 National Household Education Survey. This data set included 9,147 parents who answered questions about the future of their child’s education. This included whether their child would attend a two or four year institution and how much it would cost. Researchers found that low SES parents were less likely to have money saved for their child’s college fund. Due to their low income, these parents were unable to put money aside and create savings. These financial problems caused parents to encourage their child to maintain good grades in order to obtain financial aid and scholarships. However, these parents often lacked information about what college aid options were available to them (Grodsky and Jones 2007).
High-income parents have a greater ability and willingness to pay for college (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2008). These parents often start saving money for their child’s college fund early in their education. High-income parents engage in college discussions more frequently with their child and take them on college visits (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2008). They are also more likely to hire private tutors and pay for college preparation courses for their child. By expressing their college expectations, children of high SES receive more parental encouragement to attend college compared to low SES children.

PARENTS’ LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Parents with higher levels of education are more confidence that being involved with their child’s education will have a positive effect on them (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2008). These parents are more involved with their child’s schooling by participating in classroom, volunteering and helping with educational activities. Less educated parents express lower confidence that their involvement will help their child (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). This feeling did not vary by sex of the parent.

College educated parents are able to encourage their child to attend college by talking about their own college experiences. Hearing these stories makes their children want to experience college for themselves and make their own memories (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2008). Having college-educated parents also caused kids to feel that they were expected to attend college. These parents were more aware of college tuition costs and the college system (Grodsky and Jones 2007). Helping their child with the college process was much easier since these parents had experienced it themselves.

Parents without a college education are unable to share their own college experiences with their child. These parents, especially immigrants, had less knowledge about the college system (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2008). Lower SES and minority parents had the least accurate estimation of college costs. Of these parents, 39% overestimated the cost of college (Grodsky and Jones 2007). They also lacked information about financial aid and other available options. As a result, these parents often assume college is not an option for their child. This can cause children of low SES to rely more on their own initiative when deciding to attend college.

PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP

Schools that increased their efforts to reach parents had a higher parental involvement rate (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2008). Children showed more school enjoyment and less school related anxiety when at least one parent was involved with their school (Tan and Goldberg 2009). Parental involvement can include volunteering at the school, helping with homework, or extracurricular activities.

Parents are more involved with younger children’s schoolwork for many reasons. Parents feel that children are learning and developing study habits during the younger grades (Drummond and Stipek 2004). Students are still adjusting to school so parents feel their help
will have a greater effect on their child’s education. Parents of younger children also have more opportunities to become involved with school activities. Schools offer parents chances to attend field trips, classroom activities, and school events. Classroom volunteering can help parents to develop a better relationship with the school and teachers. Parents most likely to volunteer are females, married parents, and unemployed parents (Hoover-Dempsey and Howard 1997). As children get older, parents have less of these school involvement opportunities. Parents feel older children have already developed study habits and adjusted to the school system and therefore do not need their guidance (Drummond and Stipek 2004).

Parents place more importance on helping their child with schoolwork when a teacher recommends they do so (Drummond and Stipek 2004). Encouragement from teachers helps parents to feel they are having a positive effect on their child’s education. Therefore, increased teacher to parent communication can help the child receive the assistance they need. By working together, parents and teachers can help children succeed academically.

CONCLUSION

An increase in parental involvement is beneficial to a child’s education; however, many factors affect the level that parents become involved. Increased communication between parents and the school is helpful to encourage parental participation. Activities such as classroom volunteering and homework help are some ways parents can help their children. Parents of high SES often take their own initiative to get involved with their child’s educational activities and school. Parents of low SES have a disadvantage due to untraditional work hours, which prevents involvement with certain school activities. Parent’s level of education affects their confidence in their ability to help their child with educational activities. Lower levels of education cause parents to be less confident in their ability to help their child. Therefore, these parents rely more on teachers to assist their children with schoolwork.

Schools can increase their communication with student’s families by publishing parent newsletters. Areas with a high minority rate could offer Spanish and English versions of parent information in order to accommodate all families. Schools need to offer a variety of times for school related meetings, including weekends. Offering more school information online will allow parents to access it at any time. This will accommodate all parents work schedules, including those who work nights and long hours. Requiring parents to pick up their child’s report card at school can also increase parent school contact.

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Mass Media and Socio-Cultural Pressures on Body Image and Eating Disorders among Adolescent Women

Shanon Farley

ABSTRACT

There have been many changes in the “ideal” body type as a result of mass media and its influence on American culture. With over eight million Americans suffering from eating disorders, the issue of body image among adolescent women is a great concern. This review of literature explores the social factors that influence an individual’s perception of body image, and the pressures of fulfilling the societal expectations of one’s physical appearance that is displayed within the media. With the media displaying unrealistic and unattainable body types, women are at great risk of developing a negative body image and an eating disorder. This literature review reviews the influences of socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity of women and how each influences the development of an eating disorder. It also explores future research and policy recommendations that can help to better understand the learning behavior and developments of women who develop eating disorders, and healthier living can be promoted within the mass media.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, there have been many changes in the “ideal body type” as a result of mass media and its influence on American culture its emphasis on a certain weight, size, and appearance (Grabe et al. 2008). With these changes, the issue of body image among adolescent women and its likelihood of causing an eating disorder is a result of mass media and sociocultural pressures and expectations.

This paper will provide background information on eating disorders, body image, and the media’s depiction of the “thin ideal.” It will also focus on several social factors and sociological theories that influence not only the media, but also an individual’s perception and societal expectations of them. Some of the important social factors to the discussion of the media’s relationship to eating disorders are gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. These variables and their influence on the media and a person’s self-image are crucial to the sociological relevance of this research on the effects of eating disorders among young adolescent women.

EATING DISORDERS AND BODY IMAGE

An eating disorder is a psychiatric condition involving extreme body dissatisfaction and a development of eating patterns that is detrimental to an individual’s health and well-being.
(Byrd-Byrd-benner et al. 2008). Studies concerning eating disorders and their relationship with mass media and sociocultural influences include anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. The National Institute of Mental Health (2009) distinguishes anorexia nervosa as a consistent pursuit to be thin and not maintain a healthy weight by means of extensive exercise, dieting, and misuse of dieting supplements. They describe bulimia nervosa as the frequent episodes of over eating followed by counteractive behaviors such as purging, fasting, and excessive exercise (National Institute of Mental Health 2009).

Body image, one’s personal perception of their body and the positive and negative emotions they associate it with, is a crucial mediating variable to this study (National Eating Disorders Association 2005). Because body image varies from person to person, it alters their vulnerability to images portrayed by the media and the effect it has on their body esteem and susceptibility to an eating disorder. It, therefore, serves as a direct link between media images and disordered eating, and is considered a limitation to the study because of the variety of individual opinions and perceptions of weight, size, and appearance. The more negative a woman’s view of her body is, the more likely she is to develop an eating disorder compared to a woman who has a more positive attitude.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When looking at the amount of people in the United States who are suffering from eating disorders and the factors that contribute to them, it is important to discuss the sociological relevance of the issue. The way that children in our society are brought up (oriented towards specific toys and accepted behaviors) has large implications for their future self-perceptions and susceptibility towards eating disorders. Through this type of gender socialization and learned behavior, we are instilling society’s expectations and ideals into our youth, which can be detrimental to their health.

Social factors play an important part in the prevalence of eating disorders among adolescents. One’s gender, race, ethnicity, and social status within society influence their susceptibility towards an eating disorder. Adolescents also face exposure to cultural demands through the media, such as television shows and movies, magazines, and pop culture celebrities. Through these forms of media, adolescents are exposed to the “ideal” body type that society desires, as well as many means and techniques to do accomplish this body type (Harrison 2006). Based on these factors, we see how adolescents are pliable to these social expectations, and suffer the most from eating disorders.

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that over eight million Americans suffer from these types of eating disorders, seven million being women. 90% of people affected from these disorders are between the ages of twelve and twenty-five. However, recent studies show an increase in the development of eating disorders in children under the age of twelve (National Institute of Mental Health 2009). Through these statistics, we are able to see the growing trends of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among adolescents within our society that are relevant to sociological research through sociological theories and factors.
SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Throughout childhood, children learn and observe gender appropriate behavior from their parents, guardians, and other adults that surround their upbringing. Their actions influence a child’s perception on what is considered acceptable behavior and what is expected of each sex in the social world (Pike and Jennings 2005). From the time when we were children, we were learning and observing gender appropriate behavior and what is acceptable and expected of each sex in society (Pike and Jennings 2005). Through this gender socialization, we differentiate what looks and behaviors are associated with each gender with regards to femininity or masculinity. By playing with Barbie, young girls are introduced to a figure that is desired by society, despite that her body type is similar to a woman with anorexia nervosa. Young boys, on the other hand, play with GI Joe action figures that show a muscular body associated with being strong and fearless. By exposing these depictions of slim females and muscular men to children at young ages, society is instilling a future desire to obtain these body types (Stice 1994).

Through this theory, we see its influence on how men and women are socialized differently. With an unrealistic expectation to become extremely skinny, women tend to suffer more from eating disorders then men (Leon et al. 1995). In a study done by Leon et al. (1995) research was conducted on a group of 7th to 10th grade students (both girls and boys), that proves that girls suffer more from body dissatisfaction, negative emotions, and poor interceptive awareness than men (Leon et al. 1995). They also discovered that because women suffer more from these factors, they are more likely to seek help than their male counterparts. The social learning and gender theories are applicable to this study because it is more acceptable for women to show their emotions and seek help, while men have to be strong and fix their problems on their own.

Through these theories, we see the importance of several social factors that are influential in the development of eating disorders. The media, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity play a part in everyday life and are important factors to incorporate in the research on social influences on eating disorders.

MEDIA

The mass media is a huge influence on an individual’s perception of weight, size, and appearance. Throughout history, the mass media has developed an “ideal body type” shown through magazine images, television shows, toys, and celebrities. This image has changed over time and has played a direct role in a woman’s self-perception (Tiggemann and Pickering 1996). For several decades, the ideal body image has changed from the curvy and beautiful Marilyn Monroe image, to a skinny body type like that of Victoria Beckham, which many women are not able to obtain.
Resulting from the changes in the “ideal body” from the mass media, there is a direct effect on young girls. Several statistics show how 42% of 1st to 3rd graders desire to be thinner, 81% are afraid of being fat, and 46% of 9 to 11 year olds have started dieting (The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness 2005). This shows that the ideal body that society presents and expects is increasingly affecting children of younger ages (Harrison and Hefner 2006).

When looking at these “ideal” bodies in the media (television in this case), research has proven that two-thirds of female actors in the United States weigh 15% less than the average American woman (Dittmar 2005). These thin women generally play roles associated with occupational success and love, while roles for average size women are displayed as less attractive figures, that have a difficult time obtaining a romantic relationship and/or partner (Dittmar 2005). The association between the ideal body type and occupational and romantic success portrayed by the media leaves many women struggling physically and psychologically to obtain these ideals.

When looking at these struggles and their effect on a woman’s dissatisfaction, we see the direct portrayals of these ideals in the media. In a study done by Polivy and Herman (2008), we see how constant reinforcement of thin body types threatens many women because it is unattainable for them to achieve that body type because of their biological build. As a result, it can cause them to alter their dietary patterns, making them susceptible to developing eating disorders. Their research also shows psychological problems of low self-esteem, negative emotions, and confidence issues within women that can result from body dissatisfaction (Polivy and Herman 2008).

Through the media’s depiction and promotion of “being thin” we see many social factors that have formed this “thin ideal,” that so many people in our society strive for. These factors have influenced how we view and interpret media images and, therefore, influenced body dissatisfaction that can increase the likelihood of disordered eating behavior.

**RACE, ETHNICITY, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS**

When studying the effects of the mass media on young adolescents and their eating behaviors, it is important to look at all races and ethnicities. With the United States becoming so ethnically diverse, we see an increase in pressure for thinness reaching all ethnic groups; however, Caucasian women are suffering the most (Shaw et al. 2004).

In a study done by Shaw et al. (2004) research shows how there are less socio-cultural pressures and internalization of the thin ideal among minority groups. Because of this, the results show that African American and Hispanic women therefore have lower rates of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa but are at higher risk of being obese or having an elevated weight than Caucasian women (2004).

By examining these minority groups, we see how they suffer less from body dissatisfaction and have heavier body ideals than white women. White women generally face
higher pressures from peers, family, and the media that make them more susceptible to developing eating disorders than racial minorities (Shaw 2004). However, with minority groups growing in the United States, they are now starting to join Caucasian women as targets of the media’s social pressures to be thin.

When looking at social expectations to achieve the “thin ideal,” it is also important to look at socioeconomic status and its relationship with race and ethnicity. In a study done by Sobal and Stunkard (1989), they concluded that there is a relationship between one’s socioeconomic status in society and their concern over body image. There is a direct association with having high socioeconomic status and body image dissatisfaction, while people of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to fulfill and worry about the thin ideal (1989). African American women, tend to be of lower social classes and face more challenges of obesity than white women in higher socioeconomic positions. With obesity being six times more likely in women of low socioeconomic status, we see its influence on differences between Caucasians and African American women. These differences are due to differences in body structure, access (or lack of access) to nutritious foods, and different cultural expectations (Sobal and Stunkard 1989). When looking at high socioeconomic classes, we see how white females associate social and cultural expectations with eating behaviors. Women are more concerned about body weight, food, and eating habits because our culture associates a woman’s attractiveness with success (Mori et al. 1987). By being sexually appealing, a woman gains status, popularity, and appropriate companions because it indicates femininity (Mori et al. 1987). Therefore, it can be argued that due to one’s high socioeconomic status, they are exposed to more expectations and ideals that society demands, making them more susceptible to eating disorders as a result of their desire to achieve the social success through attractiveness.

CONCLUSION

Through the media, society’s expectations and ideals of femininity, appearance, and roles of women are shown and have a great influence on the growing rate of eating disorder in women. By encouraging these unrealistic and unattainable body types, women begin to develop eating disorders from their negative body image because of the pressure of their socio-cultural environment (Dittmar 2005).

Research shows that the media has a great effect on young girls, influencing dietary behavior, dissatisfaction, and fear of being fat (The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness 2005). At the start of our childhood, we role-play our parents behavior of what is acceptable for each sex and watch shows and play games that help form our gender roles in society. Through these studies of examining woman’s gender role in society, we see the expectations that society has on maintaining a figure that is ideal to society (Stice 1994). Therefore, in order to fulfill socially set gender roles, women try to obtain this ideal body image through several means, and therefore, become susceptible to eating disorders.
This analysis also shows the influences of socioeconomic status and race on a woman’s body perception. By having higher high socioeconomic status, Caucasian women face more social pressures to achieve the “success” associated with thinness more so than women of lower economic status. African American women are also more apt to facing problems with obesity rather than anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa because of their different social influences (socioeconomic status, access to resources, etc.). However, because of the growth of minority groups in the United States, more minority women are facing sociocultural pressures that Caucasian women face (Shaw et al. 2004).

A major limitation of these studies concerning the relationship between the mass media and eating disorders is the mediating variable of body image. As addressed earlier, body image varies from person to person, which therefore alters their vulnerability to media images and the effect it has on their own body image and eating disorders. Research shows that women with a negative view of their body are more likely to develop an eating disorder compared to women with positive body attitudes (Fister and Smith 2004).

Measuring body image as a factor was another limitation of the surveys done by researchers. Although they had control over the set of questions and images displayed to the participants, interpretation of the results are influenced by one’s own perceptions, personal history, relationships, and position in society. Therefore, the severity of body dissatisfaction influencing eating disorders brought on by the media varies from person to person.

With this information, there are many areas for social policy implications regarding the prevalence of eating disorders. With the media being a predominant influence on our youth, the need for media literacy is crucial to help limit or prevent the internalization of the thin ideal. People watching media images need to be aware of the alterations, airbrushing, and other methods of portrayal on the characters to help prevent body dissatisfaction, which would further diminish eating disorders from the media. Because the majority of the ideals of thinness displayed by the media are associated with unrealistic body types, it instills negative behaviors and habits. Hence, if the media displays a more average size woman, it can provide healthier lifestyle habits to women (Fister 2004).

For future research on the relationship between media and eating disorders on adolescents, family influence and upbringing should be explored. Through this, researchers could understand the background learning behavior and development of adolescents with anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa and further comprehend how they interpret body image. Future researchers could also discover how parents educate their children on healthy lifestyles, eating habits, and self-esteem.
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The Effects of Violent Video Games on Adolescent Aggression and Behavior through the Perspective of Social Learning Theory

Mackenzie Colburn

ABSTRACT

This is a literature review of the research on the relationship between playing violent video games and aggression among adolescents through the perspective of Social Learning Theory. The research focused on what attracted adolescents to violent video games, learned aggressive behaviors among violent video game players, and potential future research on the positive use of video games. Results showed that adolescents that played violent video games were more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors compared to adolescents that played non-violent video games.

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes research concerning the effects of violent video games on adolescents. Before conducting research, it was predicted that playing violent video games was associated with learning aggressive behaviors among adolescents. In the recent years as the popularity of video gaming systems has increased, the popularity of violent video games has also increased (Piot 2003:351). Along with the popularity came the parental concerns that the games were too violent for their children, and that the exposure to violence could increase the chances of their children engaging in violent behavior as well. These concerns inspired sociologists and other researchers to study the effects of regularly playing violent video games on adolescent behavior. Some of the behaviors observed were overall aggression, trait hostility, unemotional traits, delinquency, and participation in physical fights. In order to understand the effects of regularly playing violent video games on adolescents, it is important to look at the reasons why they choose violent video games over non-violent video games. With this understanding, researchers can come up with solutions to the issue of learned aggressive behavior through the outlet of violent video game play.

The reasons why adolescents are attracted to violence in video games, the effects of it on their own behaviors, as well as possible solutions to the concerns will be evaluated in this literature review. The evaluation will be focused around the effects of violent video games on adolescents through the perspective of Social Learning Theory, which assumes that behaviors are learned through exposure (Akers 1994:214). Social Learning Theory continues to lead the debate on the relationship between violent video games and aggressive behaviors (Ferguson et al. 2010:99). The research illustrated in this paper supports the thesis that playing violent video games can lead to learning aggressive behavior.
BACKGROUND

The video game industry profits 10-13 billion dollars a year; this figure exceeds the profits of the movie industry. By 2003, over 50 percent of American households owned a video game system and another 10-20 percent rented one (Piot 2003:351). Furthermore, in 2005, among children ages 8 to 18, 49 percent of children had a video game system console in their bedroom, 31 percent had a computer and 20 percent had Internet access (Olsen, Kutner, and Warner 2008:55-56). These statistics indicate the prevalence of video game use in American society, as well as the lack of supervision from parents as a consequence of having consoles in their bedrooms rather than in family rooms. Video game systems provide enjoyment of a variety of genres including sports games, racing games, adventure games, educational games, non-violent action games, and violent games. It is the last of those genres that dominates the video game industry (Piot 2003:351). In fact, up to 89 percent of video games have violent content within the game, with about 50 percent of the violence potentially resulting in serious injury or death (Gentile and Gentile 2007:128). Due to the staggering popularity of violent video games and amount of violence in American culture (in particular among adolescents), parents, policy makers and researchers have become aware of the possible correlation between the two (Olsen et al. 2008:56). Many began to ask whether violent video games cause delinquent behavior such as violence.

Because of its popularity, the possible negative effects of video game use are worth looking at from a sociological standpoint. By pinpointing a possible cause for delinquency, sociologists and criminologists can assess the potential solutions for the cause. However, if sociologists and criminologists find a way to solve the causal relationship, their solutions would be limited. Video game play is a large part of adolescent culture in today’s society. Therefore, it would be difficult to get rid of.

The issue of exposure to inappropriate material in video games (i.e. violence, language and sexual-content) is continually being addressed by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (E.S.R.B). The board decides what content in a game is appropriate for particular age groups. They base their assumptions on what they believe parents would find appropriate for their children at that given age group. They separate the ratings into six categories: Early Childhood (ages 3 and up), Everyone (ages 6 and up), Everyone 10+ (ages 10 and up), Teen (ages 13 and up), Mature (ages 17 and up) and Adults Only (ages 18 and up). The E.S.R.B. also provides in-depth definitions of their content descriptions. Among the violent-related descriptions, intense violence includes, “graphic and realistic-looking depictions of physical conflict. May involve extreme and/or realistic blood, gore, weapons and depictions of human injury and death,” (E.S.R.B. 2010). Every video game is evaluated by the E.S.R.B. and is presented with a symbol on the front and back of the video game packaging in order to let consumers (parents in particular) know what guidelines the content of the game falls under (E.S.R.B. 2010).

Although there are ratings on each video game informing adolescents what games are appropriate for them, they will most likely disregard the ratings and play the games they are interested in. They will most likely want to play a particular game more if it is among the most
popular at that time. The ratings do not inhibit the desire to play the game, nor does the availability of it. Adolescents can easily get their hands on video games that are too mature for them from their friends, older siblings, or simply by purchasing them from a cashier who does not check to make sure they are the appropriate age. All they need is a lack of supervision to be exposed to the content. In short, the E.S.R.B. has made strides in making sure that younger children are not exposed to inappropriate material (violence being one of them), so that they will not duplicate the behavior without knowing the wrong in it. Nonetheless, there are adolescents are old enough to be exposed to the violence. Most of the research in this literature review examines whether or not exposure to violent video games instills aggressive behaviors in elementary to college age adolescents.

THE DESIRE FOR VIOLENT CONTENT

The research points out in the background section that American adolescents value video game play – especially violent video games. But why do adolescents find these games so attractive? With limited published research done on why adolescents are attracted to violent video games, a research team from Massachusetts General Hospital performed a qualitative study on boys ages 12 to 14 in order to figure out why. Olsen et al. (2008) asked the following research questions: “What do boys identify as the reasons they play violent video games? What attracts boys to particular games, or game characters? And can electronic games be fun without violent content?”

Olsen et al.’s study resulted in five reasons why adolescent boys were attracted to violent video games: fantasies of power and fame; mastery and challenge; an outlet for anger and stress; sociability and competiveness; and to learn new skills (in particular with sports games). Olsen et al. quoted several of the boys they interviewed to show the extent of why they liked to play video games. One particular boy stated, “I wish I could be stronger, so if someone’s afraid of me…they won’t try to start something with me. And I want to be famous,” (Olsen et al. 2008:63). Most of the boys agreed that the presence of violence in games made play more fun. For example, one boy said, “It’s stuff that you can’t do in real life, like kill people. So you could just, like, go crazy with the games,” (Olsen et al. 2008:64). The personal opinions from these adolescents display the desire for power that they normally would not have in real life. These desires are what make them want to engage in violent video game play.

It should be noted that this study is not flawless. Their methodology included holding focus groups as their interview. By having an open discussion with a group of teenage boys, they may not have gotten valid opinions. The boys may have answered a question a specific way in order to please their peers. The influence of having other boys around may have skewed their opinions. Also, in the group setting some boys may not have felt comfortable speaking in front of other boys. Their shyness could have held them back from expressing how they truly felt about video games.
BEHAVIORAL EFFECTS

The following studies illustrate the possible behavioral effects on adolescents from playing violent video games. These behavioral effects include violent behavior and aggression, hostile personality, and trait anger. These behavior effects are more likely to be learned by adolescents that play more than one violent video game, as well as those who play on a regular basis. The three studies that will be mentioned all affirm the thesis that playing violent video games are related to learning aggressive behavior. It is important to compare the results of these studies with the sociological theory of Social Learning Theory in order to fully understand its relationship with criminal behavior. Social Learning Theory suggests that all behavior is learned by an individual’s external environment. Therefore, criminal behavior is learned by through exposure to it in one’s surroundings (Akers 1994:214).

Boxer et al. (2008) conducted a study to determine the role and effect of violent media on antisocial behavior in youths. It should be noted that the study used the following media: movies, television shows, and video/computer games. This study reflects violent media, including violent video games. Their results support the theory that playing violent video games is related to learning aggressive behaviors by providing a significant relationship between childhood exposure to violent media and violent behavior and aggression (Boxer et al. 2008:422). The study found that there are other social factors that can contribute to aggressive behavior in adolescents. These social factors included exposure to violence in the community, family, and in peer groups. They also included difficulties in academic performance, psychopathic tendencies, and emotional problems (Boxer et al. 2008:418). Craig Anderson and Karen E. Dill’s (2000) study conducted on the effects of violence in video games on behavior also found that there was a positive relationship between violent video game play and aggressive thoughts. It was found that the relationship was stronger amongst players that were characteristically more aggressive and that were men (Anderson et al. 2000:772).

All of the above factors support Social Learning Theory. Adolescents learn criminal social behaviors from viewing violence in their communities, families, and peer groups. By playing a violent video game, one would be engaging in social learning. Gentile et al. claim that adolescents learn aggressive behaviors from being exposed to violent video games (Gentile and Gentile 2007:133). Knowing these other potential factors, Boxer et al. (2008) controlled their study by viewing the significance of the separate variables (social factors). They concluded that media violence risk had a significant influence over the other social risks for predicting violent behavior and aggression (Boxer et al. 2008:424). Therefore, the other social factors are independent to the risk from being exposed to violence in media.

Although Boxer et al.’s results support the hypothesis; their research question was too broad. Instead of focusing on media violence in general, they should have separated the three media they observed. By separating them, they could have found whether or not one media outlet had higher levels of influencing aggressive behavior.
Douglas A. Gentile and J. Ronald Gentile’s (2007) longitudinal research further supports the thesis by providing evidence that students who played a variety of violent video games on a regular basis were more likely than students who did not play a variety of violent video games or did, but not regularly, to have hostile personalities, trait anger, proactive physical aggression, reactive physical aggression or general physical aggression (Gentile and Gentile 2007:135). Their results also support Social Learning Theory because the students who played more violent video games, more regularly were more likely to learn aggressive behaviors than ones that did not play them. They measured this data from students from elementary school, middle school, and college by administering surveys multiple times throughout the school year. The surveys measured variables such as peer assessment of social adjustment, teacher ratings of aggressive behavior (provided only by elementary school teachers), self-reports of fights, exposure to violent video games and how often played in one week, trait hostility, trait anger, overall aggression, proactive aggression, and reactive aggression (Gentile and Gentile 2007:131-133).

However, Gentile et al. did not use sufficient definitions to express what they meant by aggression (specifically overall, proactive and reactive). Aggressive behavior can range anywhere from bullying, showing disrespect for authority figures, disrespect for public property, or physical fighting. If they had defined this specific behavior, there would be less confusion while reading the article. Also, by defining aggression for the respondents, there would be less confusion among them. Different children at different age groups would respond differently to the word aggression. Everyone has their own way of defining something, so it would be helpful if the researchers had defined what they had meant for their study’s purpose.

A review of research done by Lillian Bensley and Juliet Van Eenwyk (2001) also supported the idea that exposure to violent video games would make adolescents more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors. However, they found the most significant results in preschool and elementary aged children in comparison to middle/high school or college aged adolescents. The studies that Bensley et al. researched used experiments that measured aggressive behavior in children after they either played a violent video game or a non-violent video game (Bensley et al. 2001:253).

Kevin D. Williams (2009) conducted a study in order to focus on how frustration may contribute to violent video games and the trait hostility of the player. He did this by comparing the effects among male college students playing violent versus non-violent video game content. He used two popular video games, one violent and the other non-violent. He used the difficulty levels in the games to measure the frustration (Williams 2009:296). The two games he used were Mortal Kombat: Deception and Dance Dance Revolution Max 2. Mortal Kombat was the violent game and Dance Dance Revolution was the non-violent game (Williams 2009:297). His results compliment the thesis by finding that the main effects of violence and frustration were significant in causing trait hostility. He also found that the interaction of violent content and frustration was significant (playing a difficult level of the violent game) (Williams 2009:302). Williams’ research supports the thesis in that it provides further understanding of the influence of violent content and frustration on trait hostility.
FUTURE RESEARCH

As mentioned in the background section, there have been efforts to conceal exposure to young adolescents who may not be able to understand the rights and wrongs behind violent behaviors. The Entertainment Software Rating Board has evaluated every video game on the market in order to prevent children who are not mature enough from viewing inappropriate content. One might suggest that it is the parent’s responsibility to monitor their child’s video game play. However, that was not the approach of Gentile et al. Their approach was to acknowledge the power of video games as a learning tool. From their research, as stated in the previous section, they concluded that exposure to various and frequent violent video game play leads to the learning of aggressive behaviors which can be applied to Social Learning Theory. With that, they proposed using video games in schools in order to promote learning activity. Their theory predicts that using Social Learning Theory in conjunction with educational video games is projected to produce positive outcomes for students. They do not focus on eliminating the problem, but they provide a way to use the influence of video games in a positive way.

Gentile et al. established seven dimensions of video games that could contribute to educational success in adolescents. The dimensions include having clear objectives through difficulty levels. Having different levels would accommodate the wide range in ability and pace to learn in a classroom. Gentile et al. stated that the top third of any class learns three times faster than the bottom third of the class (Gentile and Gentile 2007:128). Therefore, incorporating the different difficulty levels in a classroom through video game simulation would work with the individual’s pace better than lecturing as a whole class. Second, video games would allow students to succeed and learn through practice. That is how adolescents get better at video games and learn violent behaviors (Gentile and Gentile 2007:129). Third, by playing the games over and over again the adolescents are committing the skills to memory by “overlearning,” (Gentile and Gentile 2007:129). Students would be able to process more new information by learning how to commit the skills they learn to their memory. Fourth, the objective of playing a video game is to advance through the different levels in order to win. By using this feature in school simulation, it would reinforce self-esteem by advancing to higher levels (Gentile and Gentile 2007:129). Fifth, Gentile et al. use the game Halo as an example to highlight learning skills through practice and receiving feedback. In the game, the first hour is dedicated to familiarizing the player with the different buttons by instructing them, letting them practice and giving them feedback on how to improve (Gentile and Gentile 2007:129). Letting the student practice and providing specific feedback at the individual level would improve the student’s learning. Sixth, video games show progress as a player advances through the game. One way games do this is by showing the points they accumulate. This encourages massed and distributed practice that leads to the mastering of skills (Gentile and Gentile 2007:130). Finally, by using video games to teach a child a skill by using a variety of ways rather than just one, they will be more likely to engage the student and commit the skill to their memory (Gentile and Gentile 2007:130). By incorporating these seven dimensions into a classroom simulation of video game play in order to promote learning, the teachers will be able to reach the students at an individual level. The reinforcement and repetition of practicing
these skills would allow the children to learn more skills at a faster pace. Future research should be conducted on these seven dimensions of playing video games in a school setting in order to evaluate video games as a learning tool through the perspective of Social Learning Theory.

CONCLUSION

The research found and evaluated in this paper has supported the thesis that playing violent video games are associated with learning aggressive behavior through Social Learning Theory. The studies done by Boxer et al., Gentile et al., Anderson et al., Bensley et al. and Williams have all affirmed the effects of violent video games on aggressive behaviors in adolescents. The studies varied in their measurements, methods and age of the respondents, but they all are in agreement. They not only agree but they complement each other as well. For example, the Boxer et al. study shows that there is a significant relationship between childhood exposure to violent media and aggression, while the Gentile et al. study further shows that playing multiple violent video games on a regular basis makes an adolescent more likely to be more aggressive.

The research found not only supports the thesis, but gives a more in depth look at why adolescents are attracted to video games as well as possible solutions. As Olsen et al. found in their qualitative study in Boston, Massachusetts, boys were drawn to violent video games for their pursuit of power, fame, competitiveness, increase in skills, sense of adventure and to relieve stress. As Gentile et al. suggested, schools might find an increase in learning potential among their students if they incorporated the use of video game play with educational means. This does not eliminate the problem of adolescent aggression, but it used the video games as a learning tool to better society. Future research done on the seven dimensions of video game play and how they affect learning in a school setting would allow researchers to know if the idea would be successful. If successful, it would revolutionize how children learn by using the necessary technology that brings reinforcement and repetition to an individual level. Again, this does not eliminate the issue at hand, but from the collected research this is the most unique solution.

Furthermore, the research incorporates Social Learning Theory and how it is important to the field of sociology. Social Learning Theory supports the idea that an individual can learn social behaviors by being exposed to them in their everyday surroundings. This theory compliments the research by suggesting that adolescents that play more violent video games on a regular basis are more likely to learn aggressive behaviors than adolescents who do not play violent video games.

In conclusion, from the research done on the effects of violent video games on adolescent behaviors through the perspective of Social Learning Theory, the thesis is supported in that playing violent video games does influence the learning of aggressive behaviors among adolescents.
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The Effects of Consuming Pornography: Men's Attitudes toward Violence against Women, Dominance over and Objectification of Women, and Sexual Expectations of Women

Danielle Hernandez

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief review of the literature concerning the effects of the consumption of pornography on men's attitudes toward women. Several theories, including feminist theories, social learning theory, and aggression models are employed to help explain the effects of pornography among consumers and explore the connection between pornography consumption and gender discrimination. The research cited suggests that a relationship exists between consuming pornography and attitudes that are supportive of violence against women, men's dominance over women, and objectification of women. It also suggests that a relationship exists between consuming pornography and the expectation that, in a sexual setting, most women hold the same desires and behave in the same manner as the women featured in pornography. These findings specifically hold significance for feminist and humanist groups examining gender stereotypes and gender discrimination. They can also be used to support further research on male entitlement, sexual exploitation, the abuse of women, and the role that the media plays in facilitating inequalities.

INTRODUCTION

The content in pornography and its possible effects on consumers have been two highly controversial and debated topics in recent decades. It is evident that sexual content in the media in general has increased in the past few decades, as records indicate that the number of sexual scenes in television alone has nearly doubled between 1998 and 2005 (Peter and Valkenburg 2007). Many movements and organizations for and against the pornography industry have emerged to state their arguments. In 1970, President Johnson's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography examined the effects of a variety of sexually explicit materials. It was concluded that they were not harmful to either individuals or society, but could actually be educational (Rainwater 1974). The Commission recommended the repeal of anti-pornography statutes, and both feminist and humanist groups have been working to change the minds of the public since (Rainwater 1974). Feminist groups argue that pornographic images have infiltrated our mass media, and with the recent dramatic growth of the internet, the number of pornographic websites has increased by one-thousand eight-hundred percent between 1998 and 2004 (Peter and Valkenburg 2007). Anti-pornography feminists argue that consuming pornography produces negative attitudes toward women due to of the aggressive, degrading,
and violent behaviors toward women in pornographic media (Peter and Valkenburg 2007). They also believe that pornography is used as a tool for validating a deeper anger toward women, and that it causes greater sexual aggression among men, including acceptance of rape myths. In addition, anti-pornography feminists have stated that pornography may lead male and female consumers to believe that the behaviors depicted in pornography are normal or expected, and their attitudes toward the behavior will be favorable, especially since the films generally reward this behavior and depict it as appropriate and pleasing.

For this literature review, pornography is defined as hardcore and softcore portrayals of explicit sex which may include aggression, violence, or domination. Erotica is described as depictions of mutually satisfying sexual activity. Objectification of women is identified as “the reduction of women to their sexual appeal in terms of their outer appearance and a focus on their body (parts). It also entails a “strong concern with women's sexual activities as the main criterion of their attractiveness and the depiction of women as sexual playthings waiting to please men's sexual desires” (Peter and Valkenburg 2007:383).

**DOMINANCE AND OBJECTIFICATION**

While it is debatable how or whether pornography affects consumers, it has been suggested that the dominance, degradation, objectification, humiliation, and dehumanization of women in pornography has negative effects on consumers, reflected in personal attitudes or behaviors (Mulac et al. 2002). Mulac et al. found that the male participants in the study who viewed degrading sexual films experienced less anxiety, but more dominance than men who viewed non-degrading sexual films. This indicates that anxiety may be directly correlated to the sexual aspect of the film, and dominance may be related to the degrading portion of the film. The association between dominance and degradation provides an interesting concept: the degradation of women in the media allows male consumers to conceive a sense of acceptable male dominance over women. Similarly, Busch et al. (2002) concluded that perceived entitlement to power and control in mixed gendered social interactions may be influenced by several factors, including frequent pornography use. Since many factors contribute to a single outcome, a direct causal relationship between pornography consumption and negative attitudes and behaviors cannot be determined. However, in the Busch et al. (2002) study, frequent pornography use is significantly related to the perception of entitlement to power and control over women. This suggests that male consumers may internalize the dominance portrayed in pornography and develop attitudes consistent with male dominance.

Power and control are often linked to objectification; the media's reduction of women to sexual appeal and mere body parts tends to hold as justification for power and control over women. As evidence of objectification, Peter and Valkenburg’s (2007) study of 674 Dutch girls and boys between 13 and 18 years of age revealed the consumption of online pornographic films to be significantly related to beliefs that women are sex objects. The study measured the respondents' reaction to consumption of non-explicit, semi-explicit, and explicit films. The data, collected through an online survey, was shown to follow a hierarchical pattern; the data indicates that the degree of sexually explicit content in each film was directly correlated with
the significance of the belief that women are sex objects. By watching extremely sexually explicit and degrading films, people are at risk of developing the belief that women are sex objects and, consequently, potentially acting on those beliefs in a dominating or aggressive manner. In the overall societal perspective, men’s beliefs that women are sex objects and men’s dominating and aggressive behavior towards women only reinforce gender stereotypes and discrimination.

**Feminist Theory**

The feminist perspective can be used to help explain how consuming pornography can affect dominating or objective attitudes toward women. It has been a long-standing argument of feminist theology that pornography is a medium in which women are constantly debased, made out to be sex objects, and seen as inferior to male power (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005). Further, Emmers-Sommer and Burns (2005) state that under feminist theory “all pornography promotes a belief system of social inferiority of women, male supremacy and misogynistic attitudes.” The foundation of this theory is rooted in the reality that (Western) society is founded on a patriarchal structure, and that women have historically been seen as submissive to men as they once held all of the power and decision making competence (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005). Feminist theory recognizes the inequalities between men and women and also the desire in modern culture to be “sexy”. Feminist theory connects them by arguing that pornography is the medium that sexualizes and masks these gender inequalities and makes them acceptable (even desired) in society (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005).

**Inconsistencies**

As with any controversial topic, there are many different views that can be explored and researched regarding the social effects of pornography on consumers. As such, there were a few inconsistencies with the research findings gathered. A study by Padgett, Brislin-Slütz, and Neal (1989) had findings inconsistent with much of the other literature. Padgett et al. (1989) found no evidence that pornography or erotica consumers had less favorable attitudes toward women or women’s issues than non-consumers. Further, Padgett et al. (1989) stated that male pornography theater patrons in the second part of their study had more favorable attitudes toward women and women’s issues than the college women in the first part of their study. This research suggests that pornography does not have negative effects on how women are viewed in society. This study has questionable findings because it compared patrons of an adult movie theater to college-level psychology students who did not have the same backgrounds. In other words, there may be other factors, such as age, education, and amount of previous exposure to pornography, which can have a misleading effect on the outcome of the study. As findings from this study may not be reliable or consistent with much of the other literature, this study is not held in high regard in terms of the effects of pornography consumption.
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE

Just as a direct causal relationship between pornography consumption and adopting dominating, and objective attitudes toward women cannot be proven, a direct causal relationship that indicates pornography causes every consumer to commit some form of violence against women, or that all consumers have a supportive attitude toward rape cannot be proven either. However, there is scholarly literature that suggests the content in pornography may induce attitudes that are more favorable of violence against women and foster greater acceptance of rape myths. For example, the meta-analysis of Hald et al. (2010), reports that the correlation between pornography consumption and attitudes supporting violence against women is significant. The study also yields evidence that violent pornography is more likely than nonviolent pornography to have an effect on attitudes supporting violence against women (Hald et al., 2010). One study that looks at three different types of pornography (softcore pornography, hardcore pornography, and coercive pornography), found a significant relationship between consumption of coercive pornography and rape myth acceptance (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005). These studies suggest that the violence and coercion in pornography may lead consumers to have more favorable views of violence against women and rape myth acceptance.

Golde et al. (2000) conducted a study to observe the effects of sexually explicit and/or degrading films on consumers. It was found that men who watched a degrading film, as opposed to a non-degrading film, had a higher acceptance of rape-supportive attitudes regardless of if the film was sexually explicit or not. These findings suggest rape-supportive attitudes may have less to do with sexual desire and more to do with degradation of the woman in order to satisfy the man. In concurrence, Susan H. Gray (1982) reported a positive relationship between sexual arousal from audiotapes depicting rape and the self-reported likelihood of committing a rape. In addition, undergraduate men reported the greatest arousal when the victim of rape experienced pain and orgasm, rather than no pain and/or no orgasm. This may indicate an internal connection or confusion between violence or aggression and sexual desire (Gray 1982: 390).

Aggression Models

The aggression perspective argues that aggression is learned through observed behavior with favorable outcomes (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005). The aggressive behavior in pornography is often rewarded by the submission of women for the sexual pleasure of men (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005). Based on aggression models, the harmful effects of pornography are due to the violence, coercion, and aggression in the material, and it is necessary for these stimuli to be present in order to produce aggression in consumers (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005). In other words, sexual stimuli alone (such as in erotica or non-violent pornography) is not enough to induce violent behaviors or rape-supportive attitudes in consumers; violence, aggression, or coercion must be present for such results (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005).
Inconsistencies

Inconsistencies in research of the effects of violence and aggression in pornography are made apparent by Gray (1982). Much of the research cited in this review suggests that violence and aggression in pornography facilitates favorable attitudes toward these behaviors in consumers. However, Gray (1982) found that aggression levels in previously angered males may be raised from exposure to hardcore pornography, but aggression is not produced in non-angered males. Gray concludes that anger is a greater social problem than pornography. These findings are also inconsistent with aggression models because Gray states that any hardcore pornography can increase existing anger in men, and the aggression model suggests only violent pornography can have this result. Despite the inconsistencies, an overwhelming amount of research data suggests that aggressive and violent attitudes are in fact facilitated by its presence in pornography, which can lead to violence against women.

SEXUAL EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN

Related to sexual violence and rape myth acceptance is the question of whether male consumers of pornographic material have different sexual expectations of women than non-consumers. There is not a great deal of literature concerning sexual expectations of women derived from pornography, but there was a study done by Laramie D. Taylor (2006) that looks at the relationship between pornographic magazines and the beliefs and attitudes that are consistent with their content. The pornographic magazines that Taylor used in the study included Playboy and Penthouse magazines. Taylor reported a positive relationship between pornographic content and the beliefs and attitudes of consumers (Taylor 2006: 697). Taylor specifically found that consumers of both Playboy and Penthouse magazines held expectations of greater sexual variety for their own sex life, as well as permissive sexual attitudes with sexual partners. These findings may suggest that consumers of pornography may view the content as educational material and believe that what they are viewing in pornography is the reality of most sexual relationships and, in turn, hold their sexual partners to pornographic expectations.

Social Learning Theory

A way to facilitate the understanding of this concept is to consider social learning theory. With regard to pornography, social learning theory claims that “individuals learn about sexual behavior from the sexual stimuli to which they are exposed” (Emmers-Sommer and Burns 2005). In application, this means that if men are exposed to pornography and find it sexually stimulating, then this is the sexual behavior that they will learn to find most favorable, and will desire it in sexual partners of their own. The modeled behavior becomes even more favorable to the observer if it is positively rewarded in the modeled situation (e.g. forcing women to have sex, being violent toward women, and sexually dominating women leads to arousal and orgasm for men). Pornography only shows this behavior in a positive light, and does not show the consequences of this behavior. The viewer, therefore, does not find any disadvantages or reasons not to behave similarly to the men in pornography. In sum, social learning theory
explains how some consumers of pornography hold certain sexual expectations of women after viewing the material.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature reviewed, it can be concluded that a relationship exists between consuming pornography and attitudes that are supportive of violence against women and men's dominance over women and the objectification of women. This review also provides evidence that suggests a positive correlation between the content in pornography and consumers' beliefs and attitudes about such content. This thesis has been demonstrated throughout the review using several theories and models in order to explore sociological implications on the topic. As discussed by Peter and Valkenberg (2007), “due to its easy accessibility, sexual content on the internet may play a crucial role in the sexual socialization of adolescents” (394). Content that is deemed acceptable in pornography can influence the dynamics of everyday social interactions between men and women, and can also affect attitudes and beliefs of the general public. In 1977, Judge Archie Simonson sentenced a man convicted of rape one year of court supervision stating that “current norms of sexual permissiveness were so arousing and women's clothing styles so provocative that some men are not able to control themselves” (Gray 1982). It may also be suggested that pornography could be used as a tool for validating male anger toward women because of the violent, aggressive, and coercive nature of some pornography. Gray (1982) suggests that if pornography does facilitate deeper anger in some cases where aggression may already exist, then pornography is probably more dangerous than most people believe (394). Several perspectives, including feminist theory, social learning theory, and aggression models, are used to help understand or explain these effects of pornography consumption.

Policy Suggestions and Application

Any policy suggestions for addressing the issue of negative effects of pornography consumption would be mostly ideal at this point because the pornography industry is so large and, in many cases, it would require a complete change in personal values (for both producers and consumers). As with any multi-billion dollar industry, it would be nearly impossible to persuade pornography producers to modify the content of the films or magazines they produce, or to stop producing them altogether. Regardless, with all of the possible negative effects made apparent here, pornography should be addressed as a public health issue at the very least. I suggest organizing a national public awareness campaign to inform the public about the risk factors associated with consuming pornography. A formal public service announcement issued by the government would be ideal because it might be more likely to be taken seriously than independent efforts, and would also reach the maximum number of people via television, radio, print, and other media. On a smaller scale, as more people are being educated on the negative effects of pornography, I suggest integrating education about pornography into sex education classes in public schools. It would be beneficial for children to learn that situations in pornography often times will not mirror experiences that they will have in their own lives.
Limitations

There are several limitations with the research that has been conducted on this topic. The biggest limitation lies in the fact that there cannot be a distinct answer to whether one variable, such as consuming pornography, directly causes another variable, such as negative attitudes and behaviors toward women. Outside factors must be taken into consideration as well, such as level of education, income, geographic area, gender, race, community involvement, childhood events, etc. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to classify a cause and effect relationship. A limitation in providing a review of the literature is the fact that different researchers incorporated different types of pornography (hardcore, softcore, coercive, violent, sexually explicit, non-explicit, sexually degrading, non-degrading, etc.) in their study as well as different mediums of pornography (magazines, films, websites, audio, etc.). For future research I suggest defining terms such as pornographic material, erotica, obscenity, objectification, degradation, or any other concept that is relevant to that study so it is clear how to interpret the data based on those definitions. I also suggest focusing on specific topics, such as violence in the media, rather than “pornography” as a whole.

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Affluence, Loss, and the Ethos of the American Dream: The Impact of Tragedy on Upper-Class Suburban Identity

Barret Mueller

ABSTRACT

Communities often base their identity off the American Dream, valuing wealth and affluence (Rifkin 2004). Rifkin (2004:13) defines the American Dream as attaining autonomy, wealth, and exclusivity. This ideal affects the community, as well as the nature of change. Some adjustment is natural and gradual, while other is rapid and forced. Between the Fall of 2006 and the Summer of 2007, the suburban town of Deerfield, Illinois went through a significant identity crisis during the deaths of five teenagers. Social pressure and a culture of drinking influenced risky behavior involving alcohol and drugs, leading to their deaths. In order to learn how Deerfield’s identity changed, I interviewed key figures in the community, such as law enforcement officers, school administrators, parent organization leaders, and local government officials. Using the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu’s habitus and Durkheim’s social anomie, I analyzed how social pressure in a homogenous community produced risky behavior that ultimately culminated in tragic events. In my research, I found adolescents had trouble dealing with the immense pressure placed on them. They sought an outlet, healthy or unhealthy. These pressures ruptured with the accidents, and the community did not know how to challenge the culture of drinking. The traumatic events currently seem to have faded out of community dialogue. The persistence of deviance will continue to be a problem unless the larger issue of social inclusion and homogeneity are addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The suburbs played a vital role during the expansion of cities in the twentieth century, but suburban communities have transformed over time. Currently, upper class suburbs represent a certain way of life. Residents created their identity by using the American Dream as a template. Hochschild (1995:15) describes the American Dream as being based upon success and having “a home in the suburbs” (Hochschild 1995:15). In many ways, suburban life epitomizes the American Dream.

Upper class suburban communities treasure economic and social standing, whether it is through a powerful job, material items, or a “perfect” family. This identity is constantly threatened by communal shifts. Often, trends are incremental due to natural progressions in the community. Other times, this change is sudden, manifesting overnight, forcing the
community to adapt. The second type can present itself in many different ways, but I will be looking at fatal events forcing change. This study examines how tragedy affects the internal group dynamic, public image, and collective identity within upper middle class suburban communities. I define internal group dynamic as how community members interact with each other as a whole, and public image is what identity the community chooses to portray to the outside world. Collective identity is how the community members relate and find solidarity with one another. It argues that while these communities chase the façade of the American Dream, structural and cultural deficiencies arise. These eventually rupture in the form of tragic events.

This study will be looking at Deerfield, Illinois, a town north of Chicago, as a case study. It is a wealthy community where individuals are economically and socially successful. This atmosphere does not always allow for self-reflection; therefore, towns such as Deerfield have trouble adjusting to events that affect it. Naturally, it has dealt with both types of normal and rapid change, but it had to deal with drastic transformation when tragedy struck the town during the Fall of 2006 to the Summer of 2007, when five teenagers died. The communal identity was questioned throughout this time, starting with an accident occurring on Homecoming weekend.

The first accident involved Ross Trace, a senior in high school, and Daniel Bell, a graduate in the class of 2006. Trace and Bell first consumed alcohol at a friend’s house and drove off intoxicated. Both died in a car crash, leading to two police investigations, one involving where the alcohol came from, as well as the crash itself. Subsequently, Jeffrey and Sarah Hutsell, the owners of the house, were brought to trial for “five misdemeanors, including endangering the health of a child and attempting to obstruct justice” (CBS News Chicago, December 27, 2006). The allowance and consumption of alcohol by underage teens sparked community debate.

Later that fall, Bernard Soya, a D.H.S. graduate of 2006, was involved in a fatal event. He met with another individual with the intent to sell drugs, and as the altercation took a turn for the worse, was shot and killed. Again, the event shocked the community, as they did not expect this type of deviant behavior.

Deerfield’s community witnessed other tragic events during the spring and summer months. Jessica Savin, a former D.H.S. student, drank on the roof of an apartment, stepped through a skylight, and fell to her death. That summer, Gina Bronge, a D.H.S. student, was killed in a car accident. While this did not involve any alcohol or drugs, it did resurrect discussion about the other more deviant mishaps.

The repercussions of the events lasted for years, including the Hutsell’s trial and the conviction of Soya’s murderer. State Representative Karen May sponsored legislation making it a felony for parents to host a party that ultimately resulted in injury, but the impact of this policy was difficult to gauge. These events spotlighted the community’s shortcomings when it was initially thought they attained the American Dream. Tragic events forced community
members to examine their own flaws and to reevaluate the community culture. This research will offer an extensive analysis of how upper class suburban communities are affected by trauma, and how the notions of this affluent lifestyle are changed by such affairs. It will also identify underlying problems in the community and how they contributed to the deaths.

The current literature of the field suggests there are many factors that shape communal identity. The American Dream plays an integral role in shaping the aspirations of upper class communities, and many individuals use this ideal as a guideline for living. There are shortcomings in chasing this dream, such as alienating oneself from the community. Isolation can lead to anomie and deviant behavior as one becomes less influenced by the cultural practices of the community. These theories help to illustrate a more nuanced sociological analysis of the data.

In order to understand how tragedy affected upper class suburban communities like Deerfield, this study analyzed the collective identity and public image before, during, and after the tragic events. While the events impacted the community and many individuals wanted reform, the culture of underage drinking and parent group factions prevented this from happening. The purpose of this study is to shed light on an often-overlooked population. Because these communities are thought to live the American Dream, their flaws are neglected, ignoring the structural deficiencies within them. The goal of the research is to understand how tragedy affects the identity within, and the public image of upper-middle class suburban communities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to understand the different influences that shape communal identity, it is necessary to first clarify the definition of community. Warren (1972:21) defines community as, “the dynamic that takes place between the individual and the larger society.” This “larger society” includes institutions such as family, religious groups, schools and law enforcement. There are multiple characteristics that ultimately define a community because its identity draws on all groups.

In the suburban community, there are different subcultures such as, “occupations, social classes, ethnicities, lifestyles, organizational memberships, [and] age groups” (Warren 1972:5) that all contribute to the formation of a communal identity. These groups influence suburbia by combining, “transiency with homogeneity, and autonomy and independence with a relative absence of strangers. It entails a diffuse kind of interpersonal association, marked by considerable fluidity and distance in relationships” (Kling, Olin, and Poster 1991:10). The identity of suburban culture does not emphasize close relationships with one another. The competing subgroups focus on an exclusive culture based on isolation. The values of the American Dream began to manifest itself in these suburban communities, emphasizing individualism.
Rifkin (2004:13) describes the American Dream as, “[being] associated with autonomy…the more wealth one amasses, the more independent one is in the world. One is free by becoming self-reliant and an island unto oneself. With wealth comes exclusivity, and with exclusivity comes security.” The American Dream teaches individuals to value independence through wealth and economic status. Similarly, Hochschild (1995:16) chronicles the tenets of the American Dream as “equal participation…reasonable anticipation of success…success results from actions and traits under one’s own control…[and equate] failure with evil and success with virtue.” Again, people buy into the pillars of autonomy and independence the Dream supposedly brings.

The American Dream stresses achievements such as, “economic growth, personal wealth…[it] pays homage to work ethic…[and] to protect what we perceive to be our vital self-interests” (Rifkin 2004:14). The idea of “self-reliance” and working hard are crucial aspects that people are expected to live up to. This can quickly lead to a “sense of entitlement [and] over-empowerment” (Rifkin 2004:31). “Over-empowerment” causes competition between community members. One way to compare status is through material items.

There has been an increase in spending in private consumption to maintain the façade of, “keeping up with the Joneses” (Schor 2000:12). In order to show one’s material success, individuals are consuming at a higher rate (Schor 2000:12). Success then becomes “relative and competitive” (Hochschild 1995:16-17) in order to flaunt one’s gains. It is measurable against other things or people, and can get to the point where “my success implies your failure” (Hochschild 1995:17). Consuming practices become part of a community’s identity in order to maintain one’s social status against others.

The competitive aspect of a suburban community further isolates its members, shaping the interactions between residents. The spatial makeup of suburbs enhances this notion of isolation with, “privatopias, in which the dominant ideology is privatism…where homogeneity, exclusiveness, and exclusion are the foundation of social organization” (Knox 2008:112). Wealth, autonomy, and self-reliance are the pillars of the American Dream, which lead to isolation in a community. The spatial landscape only encourages this idea, as there are bigger houses and yards to avoid interactions. While these theories contribute to understanding the overall makeup of suburban communities, how residents act and internalize them is equally important.

Theoretical Framework

Norms and values are instilled in children from an early age. Socialization and social groups are key facets in shaping these values. Berger and Luckmann (1966) develop the theory of socialization and describe how society constructs knowledge in individuals’ lives. Both primary and secondary socialization play a role in influencing a person’s identity. Primary socialization is more influential, such as parents raising a child. Secondary socialization occurs at school, for example, when teachers educate children about cultural norms. There is some continuity in the types of things that are learned.
When society consents to the same habitualized actions, they classify them as practice, and institutionalization occurs. Members legitimize these practices, bringing meaning to the knowledge learned from different institutions. It provides order and shapes how individuals perceive society. Bourdieu theorizes about the socialization of individuals through habitus. He describes habitus as how “types of behavior can be directed towards certain ends without being consciously directed to these ends, or determined by them” (Bouveresse 1999:52). In this sense, people are not aware of why they have certain tastes because habitus’ goal is to mask its influence.

Throughout this foundation of creating and sustaining knowledge, a relationship between the individual and the community emerges. Habitus penetrates our thoughts without us even knowing it. Habitus is then able to “generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious...” (Margolis 1999:77). Habitus creates a certain way of thinking for almost all members in the community to conform to, most of the time unconsciously.

An identity is created through habitus and sustained by the dialectic between the individual and society. Socially constructed knowledge facilitates selfhood, and is maintained through interactions with other institutions and individuals in society. In this sense, “identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations” (Berger and Luckmann 1966:173). The social structure, and everyone acting within it, influence an individual’s identity. However, successful socialization does not always transpire. Unsuccessful socialization is when there is “asymmetry between objective and subjective reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1966:163). Unsuccessful socialization occurs when one’s identity is not consistent with society’s interpretation of it, causing disconnect between the individual and the community. Although completely unsuccessful socialization is highly unlikely, there is no perfectly successful socialization either, causing individuals to fall somewhere in between.

There will be individuals that reject the status quo in all communities. Durkheim (1951) notes some outliers do not conform to societal norms. He calls this, “anomie, or normlessness.” According to Durkheim (1951:258), “society’s influence is lacking in the basically individual passions, thus leaving them without a check-rein.” The state and individual do not share the same goals and there is a breakdown. Society cannot utilize social control. Individuals are “transformed into a state of normlessness or anomie” (Warren 1972:55). Three challenges communities face when trying to solve social problems are “lack of accessibility of many problems to solution[s] on the community level, lack of community autonomy, and lack of identification with the community” (Warren 1972:19). The differing value systems strain the community because they obstruct individuals from seeking legitimate goals.

Merton (Ritzer 2004) adopts the theories of anomie and deviance, but goes on to further explore them by looking at culture and the social structure. Merton (Ritzer 2004) describes culture as the normative values, and social structure as social relationships. Anomie
arises when there is disconnect between social norms and the ability to act in society (Ritzer 2004). According to Merton (Sztompka 1986:150), the explanation of deviant behavior “rests on locating various types of deviants in differing planes of the social structure...some of these pressures originate in the normative structure, directing people toward certain goals...[and] blocking...access to the legitimate means for seeking these goals.” Culture emphasizes certain goals that should be attained, but the means to reach them are deterred by the structure. Merton (1973:321) describes how social structure debilitates the opportunity for some individuals to achieve cultural goals because it, “…[gave] emphasis to aspirations for all, aspirations which cannot be realized by many, exerts a pressure for deviant behavior and for cynicism, for rejection of the reigning moralities and the rules of the game.” Once members in society realize they are unable to reach these goals, they turn to deviant behavior as a way to achieve the community’s definition of success.

The theoretical framework helps define the complicated issue of how a community forms and interacts and the potential problems that could arise. The literature illuminates aspects that describe the American Dream and the dynamics communities. These concepts work to complement each other, and help to fully understand the depth of the research. The theoretical framework sets up a base of broad theories that have been established in examining communities, relationships, and influences of cultural norms. The current debate of the literature seeks to investigate the dynamic of upper-middle class suburban communities and the factors that affect the shaping of a community, particularly the American Dream.

**METHODOLOGY**

I conducted a total of fourteen interviews, eleven were transcribed, and the other three were detailed in field notes. The transcribed interviews are also coded using SPSS. Before starting the interview process, I went through Kalamazoo College’s Institutional Review Board. The interview guide, consent forms, and confidentiality agreements were all approved for this study. The interviewees’ names were pseudonyms and broader job titles were used to ensure confidentiality. Throughout the process, I interviewed people with different perspectives in the town to get a complete picture of the incidents that occurred. I gathered data from individuals working at D.H.S.; School District 113 administrators; affiliated parent organizations; parent groups; locally elected officials; and religious leaders. It was important to fully understand how the residents of the community identified with one another, how they interacted on a daily basis, and the type of image they portrayed to the outside world.

The sample size was not representative of the greater population, so there was not a picture of the town from absolutely all perspectives. However, the interviewees were community leaders and usually represented a group of townspeople in the village. I chose to interview these people because they were involved in different aspects of the community, as well as being involved with adolescents. In some cases, they knew the victims on a personal level. I reached internal validity by interviewing multiple people in the same field of work. I foresaw the potential issue of bias in the analytical process of the research, due to my personal connection with this community. This problem was recognized as a potential hazard and
instead, used to relate with the interviewees. They were then able to share their honest opinions and thoughts throughout the interview because I was a member of the community.

RESULTS

A community’s culture ultimately structures a common identity. This study gathered data about Deerfield’s image and perception of the town before and after a series of tragedies. Themes to note are communal identity and dynamics before and after the events. The various viewpoints showed an open depiction of the town and events, and provided a foundation for uncovering the reasons why they occurred. Undercurrents of structural issues were present, especially among adolescents. These problems came to fruition when the accidents uncovered these often-ignored community issues.

Deerfield Pre-Tragedies

Deerfield’s affluence affected how group members distinguished themselves from other communities. Meredith, a past Parent Teacher Organization (P.T.O.) President, noted that Deerfield was “very much a suburban bedroom community.” She commented that Deerfield had some typical elements of suburbia: high quality schools and “safe places to raise their kids.” In this sense, Meredith believed, Deerfield was a “classic suburb.” Heather, a village board member, also agreed and emphasized the safe neighborhoods and strong schools. Kenneth, a D.H.S. administrator, observed the exceptional circumstances students enjoy, such as “opportunities and life experiences [because] families are relatively well off.” The wealth families accumulated allowed their children unique experiences.

Deerfield’s residents got along with each other and had pleasant exchanges on a day-to-day basis, as noted by a few interviewees. Bailey, a village board member, recalled, “people interact quite well and are sympathetic to each other’s needs.” While people were not outwardly hostile to one another, Madeline, a Lake County Board Member, saw that Deerfield parents tended to “shelter” their children. However, all of the interviewees mentioned positive aspects about Deerfield’s community in terms of services and opportunities.

Interviewees recognized the friendly neighborhoods and surface-level pleasantries, but identified some deeper issues within the community. Terry, a religious leader in Deerfield, observed the somewhat surface-level connection between residents and how “the community works to get along the best it can...because everybody does their own thing.” While he thought the community was still able to thrive, the concern of maintaining an image took precedence over forming meaningful relationships. Caroline, a guidance counselor at D.H.S., observed how “people are caring, yet sometimes I see it being very surface, and people will be far more concerned with image here, I see a very big protection about image and wanting to have things look a certain way.” The “surface” level of interaction and image preservation contributed to the underlying problems.
Competition added another layer to complicate relationships. Meredith noticed parents using their children’s success as “bragging rights.” She saw how “parents tend to compete with each other... and that kind of status is very important to most people here.” Children were surrounded by a competitive atmosphere and were under stress to succeed academically, with the end goal of acceptance to a “great college.” Caroline remarked how kids became another item for parents to show off, “I think parents put so much into being able to brag about what their kids are doing and their accomplishments, so they are putting pressure on the kids to be able to give them their bragging rights.” While the pressure could benefit children by breeding driven students, the opposite could also take effect; individuals feeling disconnected and crack under pressure.

Gossip was another element that presided within the community, but was not always acknowledged. Kristen, a health educator, recognized the fact that “parents love to gossip, and they love to see other people fall [because] they’re glad it’s not them, and they realize everyone is vulnerable, but it’s huge.” The fact that people “love to see others fall” spoke to cutthroat nature within the community. Terry echoed Kristen’s thoughts about gossip and how it damaged relationships. He observed, “there is a lot of gossip, everybody knowing everybody else’s business, and wanting to...spread it. Here there are no single stories.” People circulated gossip, which led to many contrived perspectives of a single situation. It then became hard to decipher the difference between truth and hearsay. Gossip allowed mistrust to build and reside within the community.

Rife competition and gossip also affected schools and educators. Andrew, a former administrator at D.H.S., talked about his experiences dealing with upset parents and how “a parent [can have] unrealistic expectations of what their child can do in the classroom, or what the school can do for that child.” The “unrealistic expectations” can intimidate children and the competitive nature of the community was not always conducive for adolescent development. Meredith discussed how it affected children. She stated that adolescents were negatively affected by, “parents [being] competitive with each other, and I think most kids do not benefit from that, I think most kids find it scary.” Children could have faltered under pressure or looked for an escape because of unreasonable expectations. Sarah, an Assistant Superintendent for the school district, talked about some subtle pressures on children to do better than one’s parents: “I think as the bar gets higher, it’s hard to accomplish the same as your parents, but [children] seek to exceed that. So I think there’s a great deal of stress related to succeeding in school.” Students pressured themselves to perform to exceedingly higher standards. The unachievable standard caused many to fall into a state of “normlessness,” unable to find a steady support system.

Deerfield Experiencing Tragedy

When students initially heard about the accident, many did not know how to cope and administrators struggled to respond. The community fractured even more after the emotional shock cemented. The most frustrating part for administrators and community leaders were the students’ responses to the tragedies. While they were emotionally traumatized, their reaction
did not appropriately match. Terry recounted the effect the car accident had on the student community and how “…everybody felt terrible, [but] I don’t think anything changed. That very night [of the service], some of the kids were talking about going out and partying in [their] honor.” Andrew remembered the irritation the staff had about the student’s reaction to the crash because “it didn’t have any lasting impact.” The tragedies did not seem to bear any significance on the risky choices students continued to make. The administration had personal relationships with the students, and losing them was hard for teachers. The drinking and drug use was still prevalent, and was evident through the numerous alcohol violations in the high school that school year.

The aftermath of the tragedies left the school scrambling to react, but parent groups became frustrated at the supposed inaction. Community involvement started strong, but lost momentum after initial meetings. Kristen went to town gatherings after the accidents and recounted how “the community [was] looking for easy solutions… and some of the conversations I heard around me amongst parents was that same denial.” The problems stemming from these traumatic events were multifaceted, and the solutions were just as complicated. Many parents lost stamina after weak initial results. Andrew recalled some motivated parents, but the lack of manpower limited the effectiveness of their ideas. Some of the attempts to curb teen drinking were genuine efforts, but the lack of community-wide involvement did not allow for an impact on all teens or families.

The community was devastated by the tragic events, but the lack of organization occluded teens from internalizing what happened. The initial momentum had potential to influence significant social change in curbing risky behavior, but arguing between subgroups quelled any energy the movement had. After the momentum faded and the tragedies started to become distant memories, things seemed to settle down in Deerfield.

*Deerfield in the Present Day, Post-Trauma*

Although Deerfield remembered the tragedies as having an overall impact on the community, the importance will be in the lasting influence they could potentially have. Due to the high turnover rate of students – losing a senior class and gaining a new one every year – memories could become less vivid and relationships more distant in a short amount of time. Every “four year turnover” meant a completely new student population, which allowed “things to fade from memory.” Many correspondents were hesitant to substantiate claims of a lasting impact in the community.

While the accidents have become diluted for many teenagers, parents seemed to have internalized the consequences to a greater extent. Fewer parents were willing host parties for their teenage son or daughter, at the very least fearing legal ramifications. Bailey observed that people may “not have learned a lot” from the traumatic events, but noted some have “changed their ways because of the consequences of permitting a gathering where they might get in trouble with the law.” Parents now had “an excuse not to [host a party], maybe they didn’t want to in the first place.” It empowered them to say, “we can’t do this, we’ll get in trouble.”
Parents were then able to take an active stance in saying no to hosting parties, which is an important message to send.

Most interviewees agreed that change had to start with parents. They needed to be the ones to take the first step in setting up guidelines about underage drinking. Terry recounted that many kids in the town have “seen their parents drunk, or know parents who smoke weed.” Drinking was a “mentality” that was part of Deerfield’s culture. It was up to adults to set the example because of the overwhelming influence parents had over their children. Terry went on to support active parenting, especially when they “feel them [their children] slipping away, you don’t say well they must be old enough to be on their own, that’s the time to start questions, be involved in their life.” Adults needed to continue to take the “initiative” with their children and keep being “responsible and involved.”

The inordinate amount of pressure on teenagers catalyzed deviant behavior, but this fact only emerged in the aftermath of the accidents. Adolescents had a specific mold of how success manifested itself. The homogeneous atmosphere enhanced these views and placed more stress on teenagers. For the most part, teenagers did not internalize the dangerous outcomes of underage drinking even with the emotional trauma they went through. Although the tragic events devastated the community, the personal connection to the events was beginning to fade due to new generation of students and parents in the high school.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

For the most part, the communal identity remained consistent throughout and after the period of tragic events. Many of the same positive qualities and values remained in the wake of the accidents. As time passed, many community members became less affected and moved on. People failed to realize that the underlying pressure was not eliminated.

The Deerfield community would typically be seen as an example of the American Dream. The economic wealth and independence were clearly illustrated within the community. Rifkin (2004) describes the American Dream as being comprised of many parts, but was centered on autonomy. Wealth is accumulated to ensure autonomy is attainable. One could obtain security and status through the acquisition of wealth. This sense of entitlement provides initial economic and social gain, allowing people to feel a part of the community, but ultimately leads to a distorted view of reality. The events that transpired ultimately forced the community to reevaluate their social values.

The achievement-oriented goals within Deerfield created tension between different members in the community. The pressure placed on children to reach these goals intensified a subculture of deviant behavior because adolescents were in a state of “normlessness.” Durkheim (1951) observes that anomie occurs when society cannot influence individuals, creating a breakdown. The homogenous nature of the community did not allow for diversity. This sense of inclusion and exclusion created social anomie, which led to deviant behavior.
Society is then unable to control the deviant individual because they do not hold the same values as the community (Durkheim 1951). These people do not see themselves fitting into society at all because they lack a specific function within it, which many teenagers felt. Meredith recounted that Bell had special needs and stated, “you have to define yourself somehow…well, being really good at being a party animal is a way to define yourself.” Bell felt a sense of social anomie because he did not conform to the successful student model, so he turned to deviant means to create and sustain an identity.

The divide between the cultural norms and the societal relationships further promotes deviant behavior (Sztompka 1986). The lack of success in the classroom or social groups can cause teenagers to engage in risky decisions. Merton (1973) states anomie occurs when there is a difference in the normative values (culture) and the social relationships (social structure) in a community, such as in Deerfield when a family cannot achieve the high standard of living. When the structural means to accomplish cultural norms become unattainable, people turn to deviant methods. Culture emphasizes certain values and beliefs, but do not always allow appropriate access to achieve them. The social structure inhibits individuals in attaining cultural goals, but places importance on those achievements (Merton 1973). Deviant behavior becomes a way to attain cultural goals because individuals feel pressure from the community to achieve them at all costs (Sztompka 1986). Drinking was a deviant method to achieve at least one form of social success. Deviant behavior is an alternative means to attain societal goals (Ritzer 2004:112). The subculture of drinking was a subculture and though it did not surface often, the issue remained within the community.

The economic gains that drove people to achieve did not necessarily correspond to happiness. Durkheim (1972:15) concludes, “there is no direct and necessary correlation between human ‘happiness’ and the advance of economic prosperity.” Instead of providing for peoples’ needs, economic growth is used for wants, further distancing “desires and satisfaction...[It] has not been reduced by this advance, but perhaps even widened” (Durkheim 1972:15). The economic wealth gained only further divides “need” and “want,” allowing people to yearn for more, never being satisfied.

The community believed in the values of success and affluence, but ignored underlying problems of anomie. This created a tension between community members and deviant actors. Some people used deviant behavior to reach a form of social success. If adolescents could not achieve academic success, risky behavior was a way to reach social popularity. The distorted reality, combined with limited paths to fulfill the norms, caused some adolescents to engage in deviant behavior. Whether it was to achieve social standing, or as a way to alleviate pressure from parents, the deviant subculture had a much stronger grip on the community than they knew.

**CONCLUSION**

The American Dream is an ideal that is especially salient among upper-class suburbs. Individuals try to achieve the positive image the American Dream brings, and as a result, hide
the negative aspects in their lives. Economic and social success is highly valued and pushes children to excel. In some instances, this pressure can have unintended consequences. Tragic events in Deerfield exposed these underpinnings within the community.

Currently, the individualistic attitudes in the community are hindering the use of education and local government as social controls. Either the institutions are not asserting themselves in the community, or individuals are discrediting them, resulting in a loss of legitimacy. These institutions are not being fully utilized, and when they are, lack power because adults in the community do not follow those rules.

In order to attempt reform, the town must engage more in communal dialogue. The more open lines of communication there are between different institutions and individuals, the less isolated people will feel. Civic engagement will placate the competitive attitudes within the community. Individuals are isolated from one another, and the more discussion between community members will enhance relationships.

Observing upper-class communities can help deconstruct the American Dream. This research also illustrates upper-class suburban groups in a new light and is vital to expose the American Dream as unrealistic. The American Dream is unattainable, and should be seen as such. This research lends itself for further exploration of upper-class suburbs and adolescent experience. These communities need to be scrutinized because deviant problems are just as prevalent, and possibly dangerous, when brought to the surface. The community will benefit from being humbled, and to critically reflect on the accidents, so the deaths of the five teenagers will not be forgotten.

REFERENCES


Author Biographies

Valerie Barthell is a graduating Sociology and Justices Studies dual major with a minor in Political Science. While an undergraduate at UNH, Valerie pursued a number of interests in criminal justice, and in doing so, spent a year as an intern at the Strafford County Attorney’s Office. Following her years at UNH, Valerie will be attending law school to pursue a career in Criminal Law. With interests lying in justice as well as human behavior, this is her third paper published in the Sociology Perspectives Journal.

Kendall L. Clark is entering her senior year at the University of New Hampshire. She is a Sociology and International Affairs dual major with a minor in Spanish. Her essay was completed in Professor Karen Van Gundy’s Sociological Analysis course during the fall of 2010. She is interested in education policy and the study of racial inequality. After graduating from UNH, she plans to attend graduate school to focus on international relations.
Ashley Clark is a senior at the University of New Hampshire dual majoring in Sociology and Justice Studies. Her family has three generations of UNH graduates, and Ashley and her brother, Brett, have continued that tradition. Like many UNH legacies, the Clark family bleeds blue and has been die-hard UNH hockey fans for decades. Ashley spent the fall semester studying abroad in Budapest, Hungary, where she learned about justice systems of the world, and how they relate to the United States. In her time abroad, she traveled to several countries including Croatia, Poland, Austria, Romania, Egypt, and Holland. She has specific interests in criminology and violent crimes, specifically homicide. Her literature review on the effects of the characteristics of violent crime and its offenders on recidivism rates was completed for Professor Catherine Moran’s Sociological Analysis course. After graduation, Ashley hopes to pursue a career in the criminology field, but does not have a specific career in mind.

Mackenzie Colburn is from Weare, New Hampshire and a junior at the University of New Hampshire. Her research interests are social change, deviant behaviors, and how sociology affects law. She chose to research the relationship between violent video games and aggressive behavior because of recent debates on the issue, and because it is her brother’s favorite past time. Her future plans include going to law school.
Ashley Charron is a senior graduating in spring of 2011 at the University of New Hampshire where she is double majoring in Psychology and Sociology. She is originally from Manchester, New Hampshire, but has lived in the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Thus, she credits her extensive experience abroad as fueling an interest in travelling as well as in social justice issues. She is a student member of numerous UNH organizations, including STAND (A Student Anti-Genocide Coalition) and SMiLE (Sustainable MicroLending and Enterprise). Also, Ashley has taken part in two UNH Alternative Break Challenge trips, one to Kansas City, MO and another to Waveland, MS as a volunteer. This summer will be her second working as a camp counselor for Crossroads for Kids, a Boston-based non-profit organization that serves at-risk youth. Her plans for post-graduation include entering the workforce before eventually applying to graduate school.

Shanon Farley is a junior at the University of New Hampshire. She is majoring in Sociology and minoring in both Spanish and Elementary Education. She is participating in the University of New Hampshire honors program and is an active member in the Sociology Undergraduate Committee. She is also a recent member of the Golden Key National Honors Society. After graduation in 2012, Shanon plans to attend graduate school for elementary education. Shanon’s areas of interest in the field of sociology regard the influences of race, class, and family on a child’s education and education policy in the United States. She is also interested in the effects of mass media and sociocultural pressures and expectations on body image and self-esteem.
Danielle Hernandez is a fifth year senior, double majoring in Sociology and Women's Studies with minors in Business Administration, Computer Information and Technology and Queer Studies. Academically, Danielle has a strong interest in exploring feminist and queer politics and theory. She hopes to continue in academia, seeking admission to a master's program in social work or gender studies, or a law school program concentrating on social justice and public policy. Danielle is looking to conduct research on a specialized topic in the fields of Women's Studies and Queer Studies. Danielle's passion lies in education and service, as she is also interested in working with LGBT youth or battered women and children seeking refuge and support. Her involvement in campus organizations include Delta Xi Phi Multicultural Sorority, Sigma Alpha Pi National Society of Leadership and Success, TransGender New Hampshire, and student employment in both the Women's Studies Department and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs.

Isabelle MacDonald is a sociology major in her third year at the University of New Hampshire. She is originally from Hampton, NH and grew up the oldest of five children. Isabelle has taken a great interest in sociology in the past year; she is especially interested in the stratifying effects of society as they relate to Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of various capital. She intends to graduate from the University of New Hampshire in 2012, and she hopes to continue her journeys through Teach for America, ultimately pursuing a career in education. A few of Isabelle’s interests are biking, collecting records, and social media.
Kelby Mackell is in her second year at the University of New Hampshire. She is currently a sociology major, and is completing courses to fulfill medical school requirements. When not in school, Kelby works at a local grocery store, and has been doing so since her sophomore year of college. She currently lives with her family in Somersworth, NH. Kelby is unaware of where she would like to go after her undergraduate work is complete, but she wishes to do something that combines her love for sociology and her love of medicine. Her junior year, she plans to study abroad, and hopefully come closer to figuring out what she wants to devote her life to.

Dana Magane is a senior Sociology major. While studying at UNH, she discovered her interest in both Justice Studies and Women's Studies. She hopes to attain an internship that will give her some experience within these interests. She grew up in Portsmouth NH, where she developed her passion of working with individuals.
Celie Morin is a senior at the University of New Hampshire. She graduates in May 2011 with a B.A. in Sociology and minors in Psychology and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Studies. Celie has greatly enjoyed her four years as an undergrad at UNH. She is a member of Maiden Harmony, an all-female A Cappella group, and also a member of the Sociology Club. She has played intramural tennis, softball, and broomball at UNH. In her free time, she loves to work out, read, spend time with friends, and cheer on her favorite sports teams, the Boston Celtics and the Red Sox. After graduation, Celie will move back to her home state of Rhode Island, where she plans to work at Citizens Bank. Her long-term goal is to become a nutritionist or dietician, and educate people about the many physical, mental, and social benefits of eating clean and healthy foods.

Barret Mueller graduated from Kalamazoo College in June 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology/Sociology and Political Science. While at Kalamazoo, Barret served as Departmental Student Advisor for the Anthropology/Sociology department. He also received the Raymond L. Hightower award for Anthropology/Sociology in his senior year. His paper, “Affluence, Loss, and the Ethos of the American Dream” is a condensed version of his senior thesis, which he also presented to the Midwest Sociological Society in March of 2010. Barret also spent much time in the pool; he swam collegiately for four years and is a two time All American. Currently, he is the assistant swim coach at Ohio Wesleyan University, but would like to go back to graduate school in the next few years.
Ryan Rafford is a lifelong New Hampshire resident. Born in Keene, New Hampshire on March 28, 1989, Ryan soon moved to the Seacoast area and has lived in nearby Dover for the majority of his life. He graduated from Dover High School in 2007, and chose to continue his education at UNH, where both of his parents were graduates. He is now pursuing Bachelor’s Degrees in sociology and justice studies. After completing his undergraduate education, Ryan hopes to travel and then continue his education by pursuing a Master’s Degree in Urban Planning.

Bethany Schmidt is currently in her senior year at the University of New Hampshire, majoring in sociology with a minor in psychology. Her study on student attitudes toward male inmate sexual violence was completed for Professor Rebecca Glauber’s Social Research Methods class last fall. Bethany continues to pursue her interests in race, crime, and prison reform and after graduating from UNH this spring, she plans to attend graduate school to further her studies in these areas.
Samantha Story is currently a junior Sociology major, and hopes to pursue a graduate degree in Elementary Education at UNH. Her paper published in Perspectives was written for the course Sociological Analysis with Professor Karen Van Gundy. While Samantha’s long term goals include becoming an elementary school teacher, she would love to pursue sociological research in her primary interests of parenting styles and the family.

Victoria Vinciguerra is a Senior Sociology major. She has a minor in both Justice Studies and Education. In addition to finishing her Bachelor’s degree in Sociology, Victoria is currently enrolled in graduate school for Education. Teaching elementary school is her top priority. She is from Portsmouth New Hampshire, and hopes to stay in New Hampshire to pursue her teaching career.
Editor Biographies

**Christa Cavallaro**, a twenty-one year old Long Island, New York native, is a graduating senior of the class of 2011 at the University of New Hampshire. She is graduating with honors with a major in sociology and a minor in psychology. Christa’s interests include seeing live music, travelling, exploring new cultures, and being in good company. During the spring semester of Christa’s junior year, she went abroad to Rome which gave her the opportunity to see many parts of Italy and numerous areas of Europe. After graduation, Christa plans to backpack overseas for several months and upon her return to the United States, she hopes to work in the field of advertising and marketing. Christa’s interests in sociology pertain to research regarding racial ethnic background, sexuality, and risky behaviors during adolescence. While she conducted research on these topics during her fall semester of her senior year, she hopes to one day perform ethnographic research outside of the United States.

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**Reid Huyssen** graduated from the University of New Hampshire in May 2011 with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and minors in English, Justice Studies, and Cinema Studies. In the past, Reid has contributed a weekly film review column to The New Hampshire. Reid pursues his sociological interests in law and justice, jury research, and film. Reid spends most of his free time writing, reading, and watching movies. His favorite food and drink are Sour Patch Kids and Arnold Palmer. Reid will move to Washington, D.C. following graduation, where he hopes to work in publishing or market research. Reid plans to continue his education sometime in the future, and pursue a career in law.
Jessica LeBlanc is graduating in May 2011 with a dual major in Sociology and International Affairs (with a language concentration/minor in Spanish). As one of the editors of this year’s edition of Perspectives, she has strong interest in writing and editing, and has enjoyed working as part of the editorial team. This past semester she also pursued this interest interning at a small, independent publishing company. Academically, Jessica’s main interests include public health, gender-role and family dynamics, cross-cultural comparisons, and quantitative research. Although Jessica is currently searching for full-time employment, her dream is to return to Spain to teach English as a second language someday. Other future plans include obtaining her third degree black belt in Taekwondo and eventually returning to graduate school.

Lyssa Wilson will graduate in May 2011 with a major in Sociology and minors in Art, and the interdisciplinary Race, Culture, and Power. During her four years at UNH she has been involved in multiple student organizations, most prominently heading UNH STAND, a Student Anti-Genocide Coalition, and acting as the design editor for Main Street Magazine. Lyssa’s sociological interests lie in globalization, inequality, and theory. Although she hoped to be attending graduate school right after graduating, life is unpredictable. So at the moment she plans to road trip to San Diego and see where it takes her.

Michael Staley and Andrew Schaefer provided oversight for this journal. Michael and Andrew are second year Master’s Students in Sociology at the University of New Hampshire and both intend to earn PhDs.

Lynn Beaver is an administrative assistant, who, without her guidance, this project would not be possible. Lynn was recently recognized by the University of New Hampshire’s President, Mark Huddleston, for her excellent service to the Sociology Department and to the University.

Dr. Rebecca Glauber, PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of New Hampshire. She provided valuable guidance and direction as this year’s Perspectives journal took form.